The Books of Earthsea

URSULA K. LE GUIN

ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES VESS

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Artist's Note
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Map

Introduction

Earthsea had its beginning in 1964 in two stories that I wrote and published. They are slight; more like a sailor's chance sighting of a couple of islands than the discovery of a new world. Earthsea exists in them, though, as the Americas existed in 1492 in Watlings Island, now known as San Salvador Island.

These stories speak of *the Islands*, of *the Outer Reach*, of *the great rich islands of the Archipelago, the Inner Lanes, the roadsteads white with ships, and the golden roofs of Havnor*. Earthsea is there, though unexplored. Some things mentioned—trolls, black magic—will never appear again. But one element in each story will turn out to be part of the deep fabric of Earthsea. "The Rule of Names" shows a magic that works through name and knowledge, and "The Word of Unbinding" gives a first glimpse of the shadow world of the dead.

The rest of Earthsea waited, then, till 1968, when the editor of Parnassus Press in Berkeley asked me if I'd write a fantasy novel for younger readers. After I'd gotten over the panic, and a big story about a young wizard began to sketch itself in my head, the first thing I did was sit down and draw a map. I saw and named Earthsea and all its islands. I knew almost nothing about them, but I knew their names. In the name is the magic.

The original map was on a very large sheet—probably butcher paper, which I had rolls of for my kids to draw on. That big map vanished years ago, but I'd made a careful copy on a smaller, handier scale, the original of the map in this book. And that provided the model for the many professional illustrators of various editions of the books in many countries to draw as carefully and more skillfully than I.

Its use to me was practical. A navigator needs a chart. As my characters sailed about, I needed to know how far apart the islands lay and in which direction one from another. The first book followed a kind of spiral from Gont to Roke and on round again to Astowell, all within the Archipelago. For the second book, the map gave me the Kargish land of Atuan. And after that, there was always an island or place I hadn't visited yet, and a story in it. What island lay farthest to the west?

Selidor . . . Look at Havnor: big enough that there might be people living inland who'd never seen the sea. What sort of magic did they really do on Paln? What about the big Kargish land of Hur-at-Hur, way out there as far east as Astowell and quite unknown to the Archipelagans—were there ever dragons there?

The last story of Earthsea I wrote, "The Daughter of Odren," came from idly looking at the map and wondering what life was like on O back in the old days. It turned out to have some curious resemblances to life on Mycenae.

Beyond the elegant chapter headings by Ruth Robbins for the Parnassus's edition of *A Wizard of Earthsea*, and Gail Garraty's fine woodcut-like art in the same style for the early Atheneum editions, until very recently, the books of Earthsea had no illustrations. This was partly by my own decision. After Ruth's unique wraparound jacket for the first edition of *A Wizard of Earthsea*—with its splendidly stylized, copper-brown portrait face—cover art for the books mostly went out of my control. The results could be ghastly—the droopy, lily-white wizard of the first Puffin UK paperback; the silly man with sparks shooting out of his fingers that replaced him. Some covers were quite pretty in themselves, but delicate medieval persons on twee islands with castles with pointy towers had nothing to do with my earthy, salty Earthsea. And as for copper or brown or black skin, forget it! Earthsea was bathed in bleach.

I was ashamed of the covers that gave the reader every wrong idea about the people and the place. I resented publishers' art departments that met any suggestion that the cover might resemble something or someone in the book by rejecting it, informing me loftily that they Knew what would Sell (a mystery no honest cover designer would ever claim to know). Paperback houses wanted commercial, all-purpose fantasy covers; YA departments wanted no suggestion of adult concerns. So I discouraged all suggestions of illustration.

As the reputation of the books grew, I began to be granted, however grudgingly, more input on the cover art. From that period, 1991, Margaret Chodos-Irvine's four beautiful jacket paintings for the first four books (Atheneum), and the gorgeous metallic covers of the last two (Harcourt). These last were thanks to my editor Michael Kandel, who fought long and fiercely for me. Years later, Michael let me see the first draft the cover department sent him: a fat green dragon, clearly modelled from one of those cute wind-up dinosaurs that spit sparks, sitting up like a dog begging, in a cloud of pink steam. St. Michael fought that dragon and defeated it, but it took him months.

Some real artists have painted covers for foreign editions of the books. My favorite of them all is Inger Edelfeldt's grave, subtle portrait of Tenar and Therru on the Swedish *Tehanu*.

The first fully illustrated *A Wizard of Earthsea* is the Folio Society edition of 2015, with paintings by David Lupton. I was given free voice in choosing the artist, and David most generously sent me his sketches, let me respond and advise, and heeded what he could use of what I said. The combination of our temperaments produced a very grim Earthsea. I like its dark and troubled young protagonist, and in some of its paintings, I feel a great strangeness, as of magic actually happening.

And now, with this first fully illustrated, complete Earthsea, I can let Charles Vess's art speak for itself.

I have written so often of how and why it took me so long to write the six books of Earthsea that the story has become like the book you have to read to your four-year-old every night for weeks—You *really* want to hear it *again*? Oh well, okay, here goes!

I wrote the first three books in five years: '68, '70, '72. I was on a roll. None of them was closely plotted or planned before writing; in each of them much of the story came to me as I followed what I wrote where it inevitably led. I started confidently on the fourth book. The central character was Tenar again, of course, to balance it out. I knew she hadn't stayed and studied wizardry with Ogion, but had married a farmer and had children, and that the story was going to bring her and Ged back together. But by the middle of the first chapter, I realized that I didn't know who she was—now. I didn't know why she'd done what she'd done or what she had to do. I didn't know her story, or Ged's. I couldn't plot or plan it. I couldn't write it. It took me eighteen years to learn how.

I was forty-two in 1972; in 1990, I was sixty. During those years, the way of understanding society that we're obliged to call feminism (despite the glaring absence of its opposite term masculism) had grown and flourished. At the same time an increasing sense of something missing in my own writing, which I could not identify, had begun to paralyze my storytelling ability. Without the feminist writers and thinkers of the 1970s and '80s, I don't know if I ever could have identified this absence as the absence of women at the center.

Why was I, a woman, writing almost entirely about what men did?

Why because I was a reader who read, loved, and learned from the books my culture provided me; and they were almost entirely about what men did. The

women in them were seen in relation to men, essentially having no existence unrelated to male existence. I knew what men did, in books, and how one wrote about them. But when it came to what women did, or how to write about it, all I had to call on was my own experiences—uncertified, unapproved by the great Consensus of Criticism, lacking the imprimatur of the Canon of Literature, piping up solo against the universally dominant and almost unison chorus of the voices of men talking about men.

Oh, well, now, was that true? Hadn't I read Jane Austen? Emily Brontë? Charlotte Brontë? Elizabeth Gaskell? George Eliott? Virginia Woolf? Other, long-silenced voices of women writing about both women and men were being brought back into print, into life. And my contemporary women writers were showing me the way. It was high time I learned to write of and from my own body, my own gender, in my own voice.

The central character of *The Tombs of Atuan* is female, the point of view is hers. But Tenar is just coming out of adolescence, not yet fully a woman. I had had no problem in 1970 writing out of my own experience of what it is to be a girl-child, an adolescent girl. What I couldn't do then, and hadn't yet done in 1990, was write a fully mature woman at the center of a novel.

Strangely enough, it took a child to show me the way into the fourth book of Earthsea. A girl-child, born in poverty, abused, maimed, abandoned, Therru led me back to Tenar, so that I could see the woman she had become. And through Tenar I could see Earthsea, unchanged, the same Earthsea as eighteen years earlier—but seeming almost a different world, for the viewpoint was no longer from a position of power or among men of power. Tenar was seeing it all from below, through the eyes of the marginal, the voiceless, the powerless.

The essay "Earthsea Revisioned," reprinted in this edition, discusses that change in viewpoint. When *Tehanu* came out, a good many critics and readers saw it as mere gender politics and resented it as a betrayal of the romantic tradition of heroism. As I tried to say in the essay, not to change viewpoint would, for me, have been the betrayal. By including women fully in my story, I gained a larger understanding of what heroism is and found a true and longed-for way back into my Earthsea—now a very much greater, stranger, more mysterious place than it had ever appeared before.

Though *Tehanu* is named for the child character, neither it nor the two books after it are books "for children" or definable as "young adult." I had abandoned any attempt to suit my vision of Earthsea to a publisher's category or a critic's

prejudice. The notion that fantasy is only for the immature rises from an obstinate misunderstanding of both maturity and the imagination. So, as my protagonists grew older, I trusted my younger readers to follow them or not, as and when they chose. In the PR-driven world of publishing, that constituted a real risk, and I am very grateful to the editors who took that risk with me.

But there was one thing about *Tehanu* that I myself completely misunderstood when I wrote and published it. I thought my long-sought fourth volume (my private title for it was *Better Late than Never*) was the end of Ged and Tenar's story. And I said so right on the title page: *The Last Book of Earthsea*.

Never say never; never say last!

For nearly ten years I believed I could leave the two of them there in peace and contentment in Ogion's house on Gont. But then I was asked to write a short story set in Earthsea. I wondered if I could, and took a look at Earhsea. As soon as I did, I realized I had to go back.

Between the third and fourth books there's no time jump at all; after *Tehanu* catches us up on the years of Tenar's life on Gont, the dragon carries Ged straight into the book from the end of *The Farthest Shore*. But now, time had passed there as well as here. Things had changed. I had to go find out what had happened since Lebannen was crowned. Who had been named Archmage? What had become of the child Tehanu? These questions opened up larger ones—about who could and couldn't work magic, about the afterlife, about the dragons—things the four books didn't explain, things I wanted to know, unfinished business.

As I wrote in the introduction to *Tales from Earthsea*, "The way one does research into nonexistent history is to tell the story and find out what happened." I did that in five stories, the most historical of which is "The Finder," plus a description of Earthsea, a brief geography, history, and descriptive anthro-draconology. This fifth book has been treated as marginal, but it's integral. The long last story, "Dragonfly," is a key part of the whole story of Ged and Tenar. It is the link between *Tehanu* and *The Other Wind*. It foreshadows the material of that book—what has gone wrong on Roke Island, at the very heart of wizardry and wisdom; why the afterlife bargained for by wizardry is meaningless; who and what the dragons are.

Soon after I wrote that story, I began to write the sixth novel. *The Other Wind* presented itself to me without explaining itself, urgent, imperative, final. If a dragon comes to you and says, *"Arw sobriost!"* you don't ask questions. You do what it says. There is a great taloned foot, set like a step in front of you; and above it, the

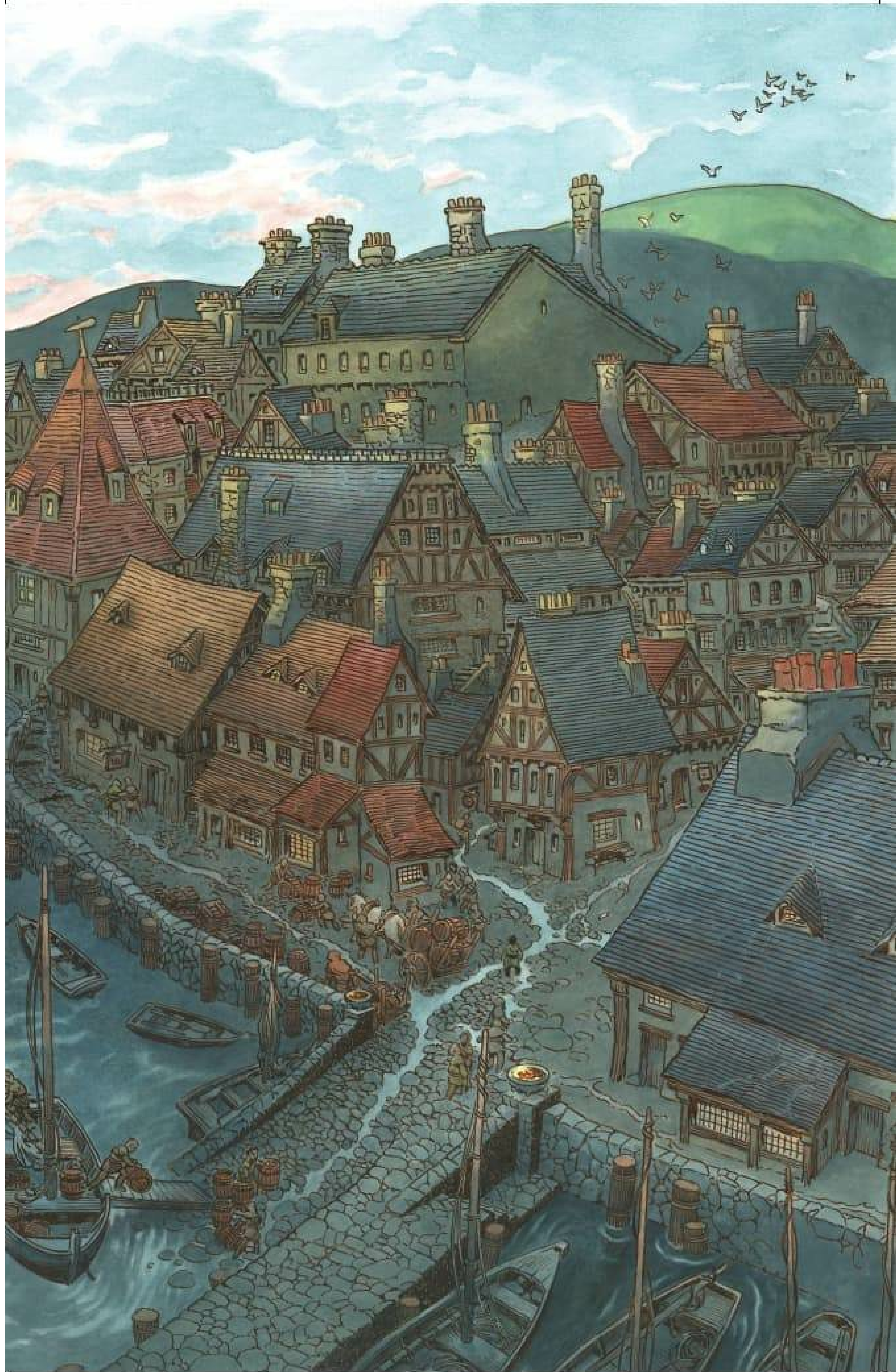
crook of the elbow joint; and above that, the jutting shoulder blade: a stairway. You clamber up that stairway, feeling the fiery inner heat of the dragon's body. You settle yourself between the vast wings, take hold of the big spine-thorn before you. And the dragon lifts, takes off, takes you where you and it must go, flying on the other wind, flying free.

—Ursula K. Le Guin, February 2016

A Wizard of Earthsea

To my brothers

Clifton, Ted, Karl



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Only in silence the word,
only in dark the light,
only in dying life:
bright the hawk's flight
on the empty sky.

—The Creation of Éa

Chapter 1

Warriors in the Mist

The island of Gont, a single mountain that lifts its peak a mile above the storm-racked Northeast Sea, is a land famous for wizards. From the towns in its high valleys and the ports on its dark narrow bays many a Gontishman has gone forth to serve the Lords of the Archipelago in their cities as wizard or mage, or, looking for adventure, to wander working magic from isle to isle of all Earthsea. Of these some say the greatest, and surely the greatest voyager, was the man called Sparrowhawk, who in his day became both dragonlord and Archmage. His life is told of in the *Deed of Ged* and in many songs, but this is a tale of the time before his fame, before the songs were made.

He was born in a lonely village called Ten Alders, high on the mountain at the head of the Northward Vale. Below the village the pastures and plowlands of the Vale slope downward level below level towards the sea, and other towns lie on the bends of the River Ar; above the village only forest rises ridge behind ridge to the stone and snow of the heights.

The name he bore as a child, Duny, was given him by his mother, and that and his life were all she could give him, for she died before he was a year old. His father, the bronze-smith of the village, was a grim unspeaking man, and since Duny's six brothers were older than he by many years and went one by one from home to farm the land or sail the sea or work as smith in other towns of the Northward Vale, there was no one to bring the child up in tenderness. He grew wild, a thriving weed, a tall, quick boy, loud and proud and full of temper. With the few other children of the village he herded goats on the steep meadows above the river-springs; and when he was strong enough to push and pull the long bellows-sleeves, his father made him work as smith's boy, at a high cost in blows and whippings. There was not much work to be got out of Duny. He was always off and away; roaming deep in the forest, swimming in the pools of the River Ar

that like all Gontish rivers runs very quick and cold, or climbing by cliff and scarp to the heights above the forest, from which he could see the sea, that broad northern ocean where, past Perregal, no islands are.

A sister of his dead mother lived in the village. She had done what was needful for him as a baby, but she had business of her own and once he could look after himself at all she paid no more heed to him. But one day when the boy was seven years old, untaught and knowing nothing of the arts and powers that are in the world, he heard his aunt crying out words to a goat which had jumped up onto the thatch of a hut and would not come down: but it came jumping when she cried a certain rhyme to it. Next day herding the longhaired goats on the meadows of High Fall, Duny shouted to them the words he had heard, not knowing their use or meaning or what kind of words they were:

Noth hierth malk man
hiolk han merth han!

He yelled the rhyme aloud, and the goats came to him. They came very quickly, all of them together, not making any sound. They looked at him out of the dark slot in their yellow eyes.

Duny laughed and shouted it out again, the rhyme that gave him power over the goats. They came closer, crowding and pushing round him. All at once he felt afraid of their thick, ridged horns and their strange eyes and their strange silence. He tried to get free of them and to run away. The goats ran with him keeping in a knot around him, and so they came charging down into the village at last, all the goats going huddled together as if a rope were pulled tight round them, and the boy in the midst of them weeping and bellowing. Villagers ran from their houses to swear at the goats and laugh at the boy. Among them came the boy's aunt, who did not laugh. She said a word to the goats, and the beasts began to bleat and browse and wander, freed from the spell.

"Come with me," she said to Duny.

She took him into her hut where she lived alone. She let no child enter there usually, and the children feared the place. It was low and dusky, windowless, fragrant with herbs that hung drying from the crosspole of the roof, mint and moly and thyme, yarrow and rushwash and paramal, kingsfoil, clovenfoot, tansy and bay. There his aunt sat cross-legged by the firepit, and looking sidelong at the boy

through the tangles of her black hair she asked him what he had said to the goats, and if he knew what the rhyme was. When she found that he knew nothing, and yet had spell-bound the goats to come to him and follow him, then she saw that he must have in him the makings of power.

As her sister's son he had been nothing to her, but now she looked at him with a new eye. She praised him, and told him she might teach him rhymes he would like better, such as the word that makes a snail look out of its shell, or the name that calls a falcon down from the sky.

"Aye, teach me that name!" he said, being clear over the fright the goats had given him, and puffed up with her praise of his cleverness.

The witch said to him, "You will not ever tell that word to the other children, if I teach it to you."

"I promise."

She smiled at his ready ignorance. "Well and good. But I will bind your promise. Your tongue will be stilled until I choose to unbind it, and even then, though you can speak, you will not be able to speak the word I teach you where another person can hear it. We must keep the secrets of our craft."

"Good," said the boy, for he had no wish to tell the secret to his playmates, liking to know and do what they knew not and could not.

He sat still while his aunt bound back her uncombed hair, and knotted the belt of her dress, and again sat cross-legged throwing handfuls of leaves into the firepit, so that a smoke spread and filled the darkness of the hut. She began to sing. Her voice changed sometimes to low or high as if another voice sang through her, and the singing went on and on until the boy did not know if he waked or slept, and all the while the witch's old black dog that never barked sat by him with eyes red from the smoke. Then the witch spoke to Duny in a tongue he did not understand, and made him say with her certain rhymes and words until the enchantment came on him and held him still.

"Speak!" she said to test the spell.

The boy could not speak, but he laughed.

Then his aunt was a little afraid of his strength, for this was as strong a spell as she knew how to weave: she had tried not only to gain control of his speech and silence, but to bind him at the same time to her service in the craft of sorcery. Yet even as the spell bound him, he had laughed. She said nothing. She threw clear water on the fire till the smoke cleared away, and gave the boy water to drink, and when the air was clear and he could speak again she taught him the true name of

the falcon, to which the falcon must come.

This was Duny's first step on the way he was to follow all his life, the way of magery, the way that led him at last to hunt a shadow over land and sea to the lightless coasts of death's kingdom. But in those first steps along the way, it seemed a broad, bright road.

When he found that the wild falcons stooped down to him from the wind when he summoned them by name, lighting with a thunder of wings on his wrist like the hunting-birds of a prince, then he hungered to know more such names and came to his aunt begging to learn the name of the sparrowhawk and the osprey and the eagle. To earn the words of power he did all the witch asked of him and learned of her all she taught, though not all of it was pleasant to do or know. There is a saying on Gont, *Weak as woman's magic*, and there is another saying, *Wicked as woman's magic*. Now the witch of Ten Alders was no black sorceress, nor did she ever meddle with the high arts or traffic with Old Powers; but being an ignorant woman among ignorant folk, she often used her crafts to foolish and dubious ends. She knew nothing of the Balance and the Pattern which the true wizard knows and serves, and which keep him from using his spells unless real need demands. She had a spell for every circumstance, and was forever weaving charms. Much of her lore was mere rubbish and humbug, nor did she know the true spells from the false. She knew many curses, and was better at causing sickness, perhaps, than at curing it. Like any village witch she could brew up a love-potion, but there were other, uglier brews she made to serve men's jealousy and hate. Such practices, however, she kept from her young prentice, and as far as she was able she taught him honest craft.

At first all his pleasure in the art-magic was, childlike, the power it gave him over bird and beast, and the knowledge of these. And indeed that pleasure stayed with him all his life. Seeing him in the high pastures often with a bird of prey about him, the other children called him Sparrowhawk, and so he came by the name that he kept in later life as his use-name, when his true-name was not known.

As the witch kept talking of the glory and the riches and the great power over men that a sorcerer could gain, he set himself to learn more useful lore. He was very quick at it. The witch praised him and the children of the village began to fear him, and he himself was sure that very soon he would become great among men. So he went on from word to word and from spell to spell with the witch till he was twelve years old and had learned from her a great part of what she knew: not much, but enough for the witchwife of a small village, and more than enough for a boy of twelve. She had taught him all her lore in herbals and healing, and all she knew of the crafts of finding, binding, mending, unsealing and revealing. What she knew of chanters' tales and the great Deeds she had sung him, and all the words of the True Speech that she had learned from the sorcerer that taught her, she taught again to Duny. And from weatherworkers and wandering jugglers who went from town to town of the Northward Vale and the East Forest he had learned various tricks and pleasantries, spells of Illusion. It was with one of these light spells that he first proved the great power that was in him.

In those days the Kargad Empire was strong. Those are four great lands that lie between the Northern and the Eastern Reaches: Karego-At, Atuan, Hur-at-Hur, Atnini. The tongue they speak there is not like any spoken in the Archipelago or the other Reaches, and they are a savage people, white-skinned, yellow-haired, and fierce, liking the sight of blood and the smell of burning towns. Last year they had attacked the Torikles and the strong island Torheven, raiding in great force in fleets of red-sailed ships. News of this came north to Gont, but the Lords of Gont were busy with their piracy and paid small heed to the woes of other lands. Then Spevy fell to the Kargs and was looted and laid waste, its people taken as slaves, so that even now it is an isle of ruins. In lust of conquest the Kargs sailed next to Gont, coming in a host, thirty great longships, to East Port. They fought through that town, took it, burned it; leaving their ships under guard at the mouth of the River Ar they went up the Vale wrecking and looting, slaughtering cattle and men. As they went they split into bands, and each of these bands plundered where it chose. Fugitives brought warning to the villages of the heights. Soon the people of Ten Alders saw smoke darken the eastern sky, and that night those who climbed the

High Fall looked down on the Vale all hazed and red-streaked with fires where fields ready for harvest had been set ablaze, and orchards burned, the fruit roasting on the blazing boughs, and barns and farmhouses smoldered in ruin.

Some of the villagers fled up the ravines and hid in the forest, and some made ready to fight for their lives, and some did neither but stood about lamenting. The witch was one who fled, hiding alone in a cave up on the Kapperding Scarp and sealing the cave-mouth with spells. Duny's father the bronze-smith was one who stayed, for he would not leave his smelting-pit and forge where he had worked for fifty years. All that night he labored beating up what ready metal he had there into spear-points, and others worked with him binding these to the handles of hoes and rakes, there being no time to make sockets and shaft them properly. There had been no weapons in the village but hunting bows and short knives, for the mountain folk of Gont are not warlike; it is not warriors they are famous for, but goat-thieves, sea-pirates, and wizards.

With sunrise came a thick white fog, as on many autumn mornings in the heights of the island. Among their huts and houses down the straggling street of Ten Alders the villagers stood waiting with their hunting bows and new-forged spears, not knowing whether the Kargs might be far off or very near, all silent, all peering into the fog that hid shapes and distances and dangers from their eyes.

With them was Duny. He had worked all night at the forge-bellows, pushing and pulling the two long sleeves of goathide that fed the fire with a blast of air. Now his arms so ached and trembled from that work that he could not hold out the spear he had chosen. He did not see how he could fight or be of any good to himself or the villagers. It rankled at his heart that he should die, spitted on a Kargish lance, while still a boy: that he should go into the dark land without ever having known his own name, his true name as a man. He looked down at his thin arms, wet with cold fog-dew, and raged at his weakness, for he knew his strength. There was power in him, if he knew how to use it, and he sought among all the spells he knew for some device that might give him and his companions an advantage, or at least a chance. But need alone is not enough to set power free: there must be knowledge.

The fog was thinning now under the heat of the sun that shone bare above on the peak in a bright sky. As the mists moved and parted in great drifts and smoky wisps, the villagers saw a band of warriors coming up the mountain. They were armored with bronze helmets and greaves and breastplates of heavy leather and shields of wood and bronze, and armed with swords and the long Kargish lance. Winding up along the steep bank of the Ar they came in a plumed, clanking,

straggling line, near enough already that their white faces could be seen, and the words of their jargon heard as they shouted to one another. In this band of the invading horde there were about a hundred men, which is not many; but in the village were only eighteen men and boys.

Now need called knowledge out: Duny, seeing the fog blow and thin across the path before the Kargs, saw a spell that might avail him. An old weatherworker of the Vale, seeking to win the boy as prentice, had taught him several charms. One of these tricks was called fogweaving, a binding-spell that gathers the mists together for a while in one place; with it one skilled in illusion can shape the mist into fair ghostly seemings, which last a little and fade away. The boy had no such skill, but his intent was different, and he had the strength to turn the spell to his own ends. Rapidly and aloud he named the places and the boundaries of the village, and then spoke the fogweaving charm, but in among its words he enlaced the words of a spell of concealment, and last he cried the word that set the magic going.

Even as he did so his father coming up behind him struck him hard on the side of the head, knocking him right down. "Be still, fool! keep your blattering mouth shut, and hide if you can't fight!"

Duny got to his feet. He could hear the Kargs now at the end of the village, as near as the great yew-tree by the tanner's yard. Their voices were clear, and the clink and creak of their harness and arms, but they could not be seen. The fog had closed and thickened all over the village, greying the light, blurring the world till a man could hardly see his own hands before him.

"I've hidden us all," Duny said, sullenly, for his head hurt from his father's blow, and the working of the doubled incantation had drained his strength. "I'll keep up this fog as long as I can. Get the others to lead them up to High Fall."

The smith stared at his son who stood wraithlike in that weird, dank mist. It took him a minute to see Duny's meaning, but when he did he ran at once, noiselessly, knowing every fence and corner of the village, to find the others and tell them what to do. Now through the grey fog bloomed a blur of red, as the Kargs set fire to the thatch of a house. Still they did not come up into the village, but waited at the lower end till the mist should lift and lay bare their loot and prey.

The tanner, whose house it was that burned, sent a couple of boys skipping right under the Kargs' noses, taunting and yelling and vanishing again like smoke into smoke. Meantime the older men, creeping behind fences and running from house to house, came close on the other side and sent a volley of arrows and spears at the warriors, who stood all in a bunch. One Karg fell writhing with a spear, still warm

from its forging, right through his body. Others were arrow-bitten, and all enraged. They charged forward then to hew down their puny attackers, but they found only the fog about them, full of voices. They followed the voices, stabbing ahead into the mist with their great, plumed, bloodstained lances. Up the length of the street they came shouting, and never knew they had run right through the village, as the empty huts and houses loomed and disappeared again in the writhing grey fog. The villagers ran scattering, most of them keeping well ahead since they knew the ground; but some, boys or old men, were slow. The Kargs stumbling on them drove their lances or hacked with their swords, yelling their war-cry, the names of the White Godbrothers of Atuan:

"Wuluah! Atwah!"

Some of the band stopped when they felt the land grow rough underfoot, but others pressed right on, seeking the phantom village, following dim wavering shapes that fled just out of reach before them. All the mist had come alive with these fleeting forms, dodging, flickering, fading on every side. One group of the Kargs chased the wraiths straight to the High Fall, the cliff's edge above the springs of Ar, and the shapes they pursued ran out onto the air and there vanished in a thinning of the mist, while the pursuers fell screaming through fog and sudden sunlight a hundred feet sheer to the shallow pools among the rocks. And those that came behind and did not fall stood at the cliff's edge, listening.

Now dread came into the Kargs' hearts and they began to seek one another, not the villagers, in the uncanny mist. They gathered on the hillside, and yet always there were wraiths and ghost-shapes among them, and other shapes that ran and stabbed from behind with spear or knife and vanished again. The Kargs began to run, all of them, downhill, stumbling, silent, until all at once they ran out from the grey blind mist and saw the river and the ravines below the village all bare and bright in morning sunlight. Then they stopped, gathering together, and looked back. A wall of wavering, writhing grey lay blank across the path, hiding all that lay behind it. Out from it burst two or three stragglers, lunging and stumbling along, their long lances rocking on their shoulders. Not one Karg looked back more than that once. All went down, in haste, away from the enchanted place.

Farther down the Northward Vale those warriors got their fill of fighting. The towns of the East Forest, from Ovark to the coast, had gathered their men and sent them against the invaders of Gont. Band after band they came down from the hills, and that day and the next the Kargs were harried back down to the beaches above East Port, where they found their ships burnt; so they fought with their backs to

the sea till every man of them was killed, and the sands of Armouth were brown with blood until the tide came in.

But on that morning in Ten Alders village and up on the High Fall, the dank grey fog had clung a while, and then suddenly it blew and drifted and melted away. This man and that stood up in the windy brightness of the morning, and looked about him wondering. Here lay a dead Karg with yellow hair long, loose, and bloody; there lay the village tanner, killed in battle like a king.

Down in the village the house that had been set afire still blazed. They ran to put the fire out, since their battle had been won. In the street, near the great yew, they found Duny the bronze-smith's son standing by himself, bearing no hurt, but speechless and stupid like one stunned. They were well aware of what he had done, and they led him into his father's house and went calling for the witch to come down out of her cave and heal the lad who had saved their lives and their property, all but four who were killed by the Kargs, and the one house that was burnt.

No weapon-hurt had come to the boy, but he would not speak nor eat nor sleep; he seemed not to hear what was said to him, not to see those who came to see him. There was none in those parts wizard enough to cure what ailed him. His aunt said, "He has over-spent his power," but she had no art to help him.

While he lay thus dark and dumb, the story of the lad who wove the fog and scared off Kargish swordsmen with a mess of shadows was told all down the Northward Vale, and in the East Forest, and high on the mountain and over the mountain even in the Great Port of Gont. So it happened that on the fifth day after the slaughter at Armouth a stranger came into Ten Alders village, a man neither young nor old, who came cloaked and bareheaded, lightly carrying a great staff of oak that was as tall as himself. He did not come up the course of the Ar like most people, but down, out of the forests of the higher mountainside. The village goodwives saw well that he was a wizard, and when he told them that he was a healall, they brought him straight to the smith's house. Sending away all but the boy's father and aunt the stranger stooped above the cot where Duny lay staring into the dark, and did no more than lay his hand on the boy's forehead and touch his lips once.

Duny sat up slowly looking about him. In a little while he spoke, and strength and hunger began to come back into him. They gave him a little to drink and eat, and he lay back again, always watching the stranger with dark wondering eyes.

The bronze-smith said to that stranger, "You are no common man."

"Nor will this boy be a common man," the other answered. "The tale of his deed with the fog has come to Re Albi, which is my home. I have come here to give him his name, if as they say he has not yet made his passage into manhood."

The witch whispered to the smith, "Brother, this must surely be the Mage of Re Albi, Ogion the Silent, that one who tamed the earthquake—"

"Sir," said the bronze-smith who would not let a great name daunt him, "my son will be thirteen this month coming, but we thought to hold his Passage at the feast of Sunreturn this winter."

"Let him be named as soon as may be," said the mage, "for he needs his name. I have other business now, but I will come back here for the day you choose. If you see fit I will take him with me when I go thereafter. And if he prove apt I will keep him as prentice, or see to it that he is schooled as fits his gifts. For to keep dark the mind of the mageborn, that is a dangerous thing."

Very gently Ogion spoke, but with certainty, and even the hardheaded smith assented to all he said.

On the day the boy was thirteen years old, a day in the early splendor of autumn while still the bright leaves are on the trees, Ogion returned to the village from his rovings over Gont Mountain, and the ceremony of Passage was held. The witch took from the boy his name Duny, the name his mother had given him as a baby. Nameless and naked he walked into the cold springs of the Ar where it rises among rocks under the high cliffs. As he entered the water clouds crossed the sun's face and great shadows slid and mingled over the water of the pool about him. He crossed to the far bank, shuddering with cold but walking slow and erect as he should through that icy, living water. As he came to the bank Ogion, waiting, reached out his hand and clasping the boy's arm whispered to him his true name: Ged.

Thus was he given his name by one very wise in the uses of power.

The feasting was far from over, and all the villagers were making merry with plenty to eat and beer to drink and a chanter from down the Vale singing the *Deed of the Dragonlords*, when the mage spoke in his quiet voice to Ged: "Come, lad. Bid your people farewell and leave them feasting."

Ged fetched what he had to carry, which was the good bronze knife his father had forged him, and a leather coat the tanner's widow had cut down to his size, and an alder-stick his aunt had becharmed for him: that was all he owned besides his shirt and breeches. He said farewell to them, all the people he knew in all the world, and looked about once at the village that straggled and huddled there under

the cliffs, over the riversprings. Then he set off with his new master through the steep slanting forests of the mountain isle, through the leaves and shadows of bright autumn.

Chapter 2

The Shadow

Ged had thought that as the prentice of a great mage he would enter at once into the mystery and mastery of power. He would understand the language of the beasts and the speech of the leaves of the forest, he thought, and sway the winds with his word, and learn to change himself into any shape he wished. Maybe he and his master would run together as stags, or fly to Re Albi over the mountain on the wings of eagles.

But it was not so at all. They wandered, first down into the Vale and then gradually south and westward around the mountain, given lodging in little villages or spending the night out in the wilderness, like poor journeyman-sorcerers, or tinkers, or beggars. They entered no mysterious domain. Nothing happened. The mage's oaken staff that Ged had watched at first with eager dread was nothing but a stout staff to walk with. Three days went by and four days went by and still Ogion had not spoken a single charm in Ged's hearing, and had not taught him a single name or rune or spell.

Though a very silent man he was so mild and calm that Ged soon lost his awe of him, and in a day or two more he was bold enough to ask his master, "When will my apprenticeship begin, Sir?"

"It has begun," said Ogion.

There was a silence, as if Ged was keeping back something he had to say. Then he said it: "But I haven't learned anything yet!"

"Because you haven't found out what I am teaching," replied the mage, going on at his steady, long-legged pace along their road, which was the high pass between Ovark and Wiss. He was a dark man, like most Gontishmen, dark copper-brown; grey-haired, lean and tough as a hound, tireless. He spoke seldom, ate little, slept less. His eyes and ears were very keen, and often there was a listening look on his face.

Ged did not answer him. It is not always easy to answer a mage.

"You want to work spells," Ogion said presently, striding along. "You've drawn too much water from that well. Wait. Manhood is patience. Mastery is nine times patience. What is that herb by the path?"

"Strawflower."

"And that?"

"I don't know."

"Fourfoil, they call it." Ogion had halted, the coppershod foot of his staff near the little weed, so Ged looked closely at the plant, and plucked a dry seedpod from it, and finally asked, since Ogion said nothing more, "What is its use, Master?"

"None I know of."

Ged kept the seedpod a while as they went on, then tossed it away.

"When you know the fourfoil in all its seasons root and leaf and flower, by sight and scent and seed, then you may learn its true name, knowing its being: which is more than its use. What, after all, is the use of you? or of myself? Is Gont Mountain useful, or the Open Sea?" Ogion went on a half mile or so, and said at last, "To hear, one must be silent."

The boy frowned. He did not like to be made to feel a fool. He kept back his resentment and impatience, and tried to be obedient, so that Ogion would consent at last to teach him something. For he hungered to learn, to gain power. It began to seem to him, though, that he could have learned more walking with any herb-gatherer or village sorcerer, and as they went round the mountain westward into the lonely forests past Wiss he wondered more and more what was the greatness and the magic of this great Mage Ogion. For when it rained Ogion would not even say the spell that every weatherworker knows, to send the storm aside. In a land where sorcerers come thick, like Gont or the Enlades, you may see a raincloud blundering slowly from side to side and place to place as one spell shunts it on to the next, till at last it is buffeted out over the sea where it can rain in peace. But Ogion let the rain fall where it would. He found a thick fir-tree and lay down beneath it. Ged crouched among the dripping bushes wet and sullen, and wondered what was the good of having power if you were too wise to use it, and wished he had gone as prentice to that old weatherworker of the Vale, where at least he would have slept dry. He did not speak any of his thoughts aloud. He said not a word. His master smiled, and fell asleep in the rain.

Along towards Sunreturn when the first heavy snows began to fall in the heights of Gont they came to Re Albi, Ogion's home. It is a town on the edge of the high

rocks of Overfell, and its name means Falcon's Nest. From it one can see far below the deep harbor and the towers of the Port of Gont, and the ships that go in and out the gate of the bay between the Armed Cliffs, and far to the west across the sea one may make out the blue hills of Oranéa, easternmost of the Inward Isles.

The mage's house, though large and soundly built of timber, with hearth and chimney rather than a firepit, was like the huts of Ten Alders village: all one room, with a goatshed built onto one side. There was a kind of alcove in the west wall of the room, where Ged slept. Over his pallet was a window that looked out on the sea, but most often the shutters must be closed against the great winds that blew all winter from the west and north. In the dark warmth of that house Ged spent the winter, hearing the rush of rain and wind outside or the silence of snowfall, learning to write and read the Six Hundred Runes of Hardic. Very glad he was to learn this lore, for without it no mere rote-learning of charms and spells will give a man true mastery. The Hardic tongue of the Archipelago, though it has no more magic power in it than any other tongue of men, has its roots in the Old Speech, that language in which things are named with their true names: and the way to the understanding of this speech starts with the Runes that were written when the islands of the world first were raised up from the sea.

Still no marvels and enchantments occurred. All winter there was nothing but the heavy pages of the Runebook turning, and the rain and the snow falling; and Ogion would come in from roaming the icy forests or from looking after his goats, and stamp the snow off his boots, and sit down in silence by the fire. And the mage's long, listening silence would fill the room, and fill Ged's mind, until sometimes it seemed he had forgotten what words sounded like: and when Ogion spoke at last it was as if he had, just then and for the first time, invented speech. Yet the words he spoke were no great matters but had to do only with simple things, bread and water and weather and sleep.

As the spring came on, quick and bright, Ogion often sent Ged forth to gather herbs on the meadows above Re Albi, and told him to take as long as he liked about it, giving him freedom to spend all day wandering by rain-filled streams and through the woods and over wet green fields in the sun. Ged went with delight each time, and stayed out till night; but he did not entirely forget the herbs. He kept an eye out for them, while he climbed and roamed and waded and explored, and always brought some home. He came on a meadow between two streams where the flower called white hallows grew thick, and as these blossoms are rare and prized by healers, he came back again next day. Someone else was there before

him, a girl, whom he knew by sight as the daughter of the old Lord of Re Albi. He would not have spoken to her, but she came to him and greeted him pleasantly: "I know you, you are the Sparrowhawk, our mage's adept. I wish you would tell me about sorcery!"

He looked down at the white flowers that brushed against her white skirt, and at first he was shy and glum and hardly answered. But she went on talking, in an open, careless, willful way that little by little set him at ease. She was a tall girl of about his own age, very sallow, almost white-skinned; her mother, they said in the village, was from Osskil or some such foreign land. Her hair fell long and straight like a fall of black water. Ged thought her very ugly, but he had a desire to please her, to win her admiration, that grew on him as they talked. She made him tell all the story of his tricks with the mist that had defeated the Kargish warriors, and she listened as if she wondered and admired, but she spoke no praise. And soon she was off on another tack: "Can you call the birds and beasts to you?" she asked.

"I can," said Ged.

He knew there was a falcon's nest in the cliffs above the meadow, and he summoned the bird by its name. It came, but it would not light on his wrist, being put off no doubt by the girl's presence. It screamed and struck the air with broad barred wings, and rose up on the wind.

"What do you call that kind of charm, that made the falcon come?"

"A spell of Summoning."

"Can you call the spirits of the dead to come to you, too?"

He thought she was mocking him with this question, because the falcon had not fully obeyed his summons. He would not let her mock him. "I might if I chose," he said in a calm voice.

"Is it not very difficult, very dangerous, to summon a spirit?"

"Difficult, yes. Dangerous?" He shrugged.

This time he was almost certain there was admiration in her eyes.

"Can you make a love-charm?"

"That is no mastery."

"True," says she, "any village witch can do it. Can you do Changing spells? Can you change your own shape, as wizards do, they say?"

Again he was not quite sure that she did not ask the question mockingly, and so again he replied, "I might if I chose."

She began to beg him to transform himself into anything he wished—a hawk, a bull, a fire, a tree. He put her off with short secretive words such as his master

used, but he did not know how to refuse flatly when she coaxed him; and besides he did not know whether he himself believed his boast, or not. He left her, saying that his master the mage expected him at home, and he did not come back to the meadow the next day. But the day after he came again, saying to himself that he should gather more of the flowers while they bloomed. She was there, and together they waded barefoot in the boggy grass, pulling the heavy white hallow-blooms. The sun of spring shone, and she talked with him as merrily as any goat-herd lass of his own village. She asked him again about sorcery, and listened wide-eyed to all he told her, so that he fell to boasting again. Then she asked him if he would not work a Changing spell, and when he put her off, she looked at him, putting back the black hair from her face, and said, "Are you afraid to do it?"

"No, I am not afraid."

She smiled a little disdainfully and said, "Maybe you are too young."

That he would not endure. He did not say much, but he resolved that he would prove himself to her. He told her to come again to the meadow tomorrow, if she liked, and so took leave of her, and came back to the house while his master was still out. He went straight to the shelf and took down the two Lore-Books, which Ogion had never yet opened in his presence.

He looked for a spell of self-transformation, but being slow to read the runes yet and understanding little of what he read, he could not find what he sought. These books were very ancient, Ogion having them from his own master Heleth Farseer, and Heleth from his master the Mage of Perregal, and so back into the times of myth. Small and strange was the writing, overwritten and interlined by many hands, and all those hands were dust now. Yet here and there Ged understood something of what he tried to read, and with the girl's questions and her mockery always in his mind, he stopped on a page that bore a spell of summoning up the spirits of the dead.

As he read it, puzzling out the runes and symbols one by one, a horror came over him. His eyes were fixed, and he could not lift them till he had finished reading all the spell.

Then raising his head he saw it was dark in the house. He had been reading without any light, in the darkness. He could not now make out the runes when he looked down at the book. Yet the horror grew in him, seeming to hold him bound in his chair. He was cold. Looking over his shoulder he saw that something was crouching beside the closed door, a shapeless clot of shadow darker than the darkness. It seemed to reach out towards him, and to whisper, and to call to him in

a whisper: but he could not understand the words.

The door was flung wide. A man entered with a white light flaming about him, a great bright figure who spoke aloud, fiercely and suddenly. The darkness and the whispering ceased and were dispelled.

The horror went out of Ged, but still he was mortally afraid, for it was Ogion the Mage who stood there in the doorway with a brightness all about him, and the oaken staff in his hand burned with a white radiance.

Saying no word the mage came past Ged, and lighted the lamp, and put the books away on their shelf. Then he turned to the boy and said, "You will never work that spell but in peril of your power and your life. Was it for that spell you opened the books?"

"No, Master," the boy murmured, and shamefully he told Ogion what he had sought, and why.

"You do not remember what I told you, that that girl's mother, the Lord's wife, is an enchantress?"

Indeed Ogion had once said this, but Ged had not paid much attention, though he knew by now that Ogion never told him anything that he had not good reason to tell him.

"The girl herself is half a witch already. It may be the mother who sent the girl to talk to you. It may be she who opened the book to the page you read. The powers she serves are not the powers I serve: I do not know her will, but I know she does not will me well. Ged, listen to me now. Have you never thought how danger must surround power as shadow does light? This sorcery is not a game we play for pleasure or for praise. Think of this: that every word, every act of our Art is said and is done either for good, or for evil. Before you speak or do you must know the price that is to pay!"

Driven by his shame Ged cried, "How am I to know these things, when you teach me nothing? Since I lived with you I have done nothing, seen nothing—"

"Now you have seen something," said the mage. "By the door, in the darkness, when I came in."

Ged was silent.

Ogion knelt down and built the fire on the hearth and lit it, for the house was cold. Then still kneeling he said in his quiet voice, "Ged, my young falcon, you are not bound to me or to my service. You did not come to me, but I to you. You are very young to make this choice, but I cannot make it for you. If you wish, I will send you to Roke Island, where all high arts are taught. Any craft you undertake to

learn you will learn, for your power is great. Greater even than your pride, I hope. I would keep you here with me, for what I have is what you lack, but I will not keep you against your will. Now choose between Re Albi and Roke."

Ged stood dumb, his heart bewildered. He had come to love this man Ogion who had healed him with a touch, and who had no anger: he loved him, and had not known it until now. He looked at the oaken staff leaning in the chimney-corner, remembering the radiance of it that had burned out evil from the dark, and he yearned to stay with Ogion, to go wandering through the forests with him, long and far, learning how to be silent. Yet other cravings were in him that would not be stilled, the wish for glory, the will to act. Ogion's seemed a long road towards mastery, a slow bypath to follow, when he might go sailing before the seawinds straight to the Inmost Sea, to the Isle of the Wise, where the air was bright with enchantments and the Archmage walked amidst wonders.

"Master," he said, "I will go to Roke."

So a few days later on a sunny morning of spring Ogion strode beside him down the steep road from the Overfell, fifteen miles to the Great Port of Gont. There at the landgate between carven dragons the guards of the City of Gont, seeing the mage, knelt with bared swords and welcomed him. They knew him and did him honor by the Prince's order and their own will, for ten years ago Ogion had saved the city from earthquake that would have shaken the towers of the rich down to the ground and closed the channel of the Armed Cliffs with avalanche. He had spoken to the Mountain of Gont, calming it, and had stilled the trembling precipices of the Overfell as one soothes a frightened beast. Ged had heard some talk of this, and now, wondering to see the armed guardsmen kneel to his quiet master, he remembered it. He glanced up almost in fear at this man who had stopped an earthquake; but Ogion's face was quiet as always.

They went down to the quays, where the Harbormaster came hastening to welcome Ogion and ask what service he might do. The mage told him, and at once he named a ship bound for the Inmost Sea aboard which Ged might go as passenger. "Or they will take him as windbringer," he said, "if he has the craft. They have no weatherworker aboard."

"He has some skill with mist and fog, but none with seawinds," the mage said, putting his hand lightly on Ged's shoulder. "Do not try any tricks with the sea and the winds of the sea, Sparrowhawk; you are a landsman still. Harbormaster, what is the ship's name?"

"*Shadow*, from the Andrades, bound to Hort Town with furs and ivories. A

good ship, Master Ogion."

The mage's face darkened at the name of the ship, but he said, "So be it. Give this writing to the Warder of the School on Roke, Sparrowhawk. Go with a fair wind. Farewell!"

That was all his parting. He turned away, and went striding up the street away from the quays. Ged stood forlorn and watched his master go.

"Come along, lad," said the Harbormaster, and took him down the waterfront to the pier where *Shadow* was making ready to sail.

It might seem strange that on an island fifty miles wide, in a village under cliffs that stare out forever on the sea, a child may grow to manhood never having stepped in a boat or dipped his finger in salt water, but so it is. Farmer, goatherd, cattleherd, hunter or artisan, the landsman looks at the ocean as at a salt unsteady realm that has nothing to do with him at all. The village two days' walk from his village is a foreign land, and the island a day's sail from his island is a mere rumor, misty hills seen across the water, not solid ground like that he walks on.

So to Ged who had never been down from the heights of the mountain, the Port of Gont was an awesome and marvellous place, the great houses and towers of cut stone and waterfront of piers and docks and basins and moorages, the seaport where half a hundred boats and galleys rocked at quayside or lay hauled up and overturned for repairs or stood out at anchor in the roadstead with furled sails and closed oarports, the sailors shouting in strange dialects and the longshoremen running heavy-laden amongst barrels and boxes and coils of rope and stacks of oars, the bearded merchants in furred robes conversing quietly as they picked their way along the slimy stones above the water, the fishermen unloading their catch, coopers pounding and shipmakers hammering and clamsellers singing and shipmasters bellowing, and beyond all the silent, shining bay. With eyes and ears and mind bewildered he followed the Harbormaster to the broad dock where *Shadow* was tied up, and the Harbormaster brought him to the master of the ship.

With few words spoken the ship's master agreed to take Ged as passenger to Roke, since it was a mage that asked it; and the Harbormaster left the boy with him. The master of the *Shadow* was a big man, and fat, in a red cloak trimmed with pellawi-fur such as Andradean merchants wear. He never looked at Ged but asked him in a mighty voice, "Can you work weather, boy?"

"I can."

"Can you bring the wind?"

He had to say he could not, and with that the master told him to find a place out

of the way and stay in it.

The oarsmen were coming aboard now, for the ship was to go out into the roadstead before night fell, and sail with the ebbtide near dawn. There was no place out of the way, but Ged climbed up as well as he could onto the bundled, lashed, and hide-covered cargo in the stern of the ship, and clinging there watched all that passed. The oarsmen came leaping aboard, sturdy men with great arms, while longshoremen rolled water barrels thundering out the dock and stowed them under the rowers' benches. The well-built ship rode low with her burden, yet danced a little on the lapping shore-waves, ready to be gone. Then the steersman took his place at the right of the sternpost, looking forward to the ship's master, who stood on a plank let in at the jointure of the keel with the stem, which was carved as the Old Serpent of Andrad. The master roared his orders hugely, and *Shadow* was untied and towed clear of the docks by two laboring rowboats. Then the master's roar was "Open ports!" and the great oars shot rattling out, fifteen to a side. The rowers bent their strong backs while a lad up beside the master beat the stroke on a drum. Easy as a gull oared by her wings the ship went now, and the noise and hurlyburly of the City fell away suddenly behind. They came out in the silence of the waters of the bay, and over them rose the white peak of the Mountain, seeming to hang above the sea. In a shallow creek in the lee of the southern Armed Cliff the anchor was thrown over, and there they rode the night.

Of the seventy crewmen of the ship some were like Ged very young in years, though all had made their passage into manhood. These lads called him over to share food and drink with them, and were friendly though rough and full of jokes and jibes. They called him Goatherd, of course, because he was Gontish, but they did not go further than that. He was as tall and strong as the fifteen-year-olds, and quick to return either a good word or a jeer; so he made his way among them and even that first night began to live as one of them and learn their work. This suited the ship's officers, for there was no room aboard for idle passengers.

There was little enough room for the crew, and no comfort at all, in an undecked galley crowded with men and gear and cargo; but what was comfort to Ged? He lay that night among corded rolls of pelts from the northern isles and watched the stars of spring above the harbor waters and the little yellow lights of the City astern, and he slept and waked again full of delight. Before dawn the tide turned. They raised anchor and rowed softly out between the Armed Cliffs. As sunrise reddened the Mountain of Gont behind them they raised the high sail and ran southwestward over the Gontish Sea.

Between Barnisk and Torheven they sailed with a light wind, and on the second day came in sight of Havnor, the Great Island, heart and hearth of the Archipelago. For three days they were in sight of the green hills of Havnor as they worked along its eastern coast, but they did not come to shore. Not for many years did Ged set foot on that land or see the white towers of Havnor Great Port at the center of the world.

They lay over one night at Kembermouth, the northern port of Way Island, and the next at a little town on the entrance of Felkway Bay, and the next day passed the northern cape of O and entered the Ebavnor Straits. There they dropped sail and rowed, always with land on either side and always within hail of other ships, great and small, merchants and traders, some bound in from the Outer Reaches with strange cargo after a voyage of years and others that hopped like sparrows from isle to isle of the Inmost Sea. Turning southward out of the crowded Straits they left Havnor astern and sailed between the two fair islands Ark and Ilien, towered and terraced with cities, and then through rain and rising wind began to beat their way across the Inmost Sea to Roke Island.

In the night as the wind freshened to a gale they took down both sail and mast, and the next day, all day, they rowed. The long ship lay steady on the waves and went gallantly, but the steersman at the long steering-sweep in the stern looked into the rain that beat the sea and saw nothing but the rain. They went southwest by the pointing of the magnet, knowing how they went, but not through what waters. Ged heard men speak of the shoal waters north of Roke, and of the Borilous Rocks to the east; others argued that they might be far out of course by now, in the empty waters south of Kamery. Still the wind grew stronger, tearing the edges of the great waves into flying tatters of foam, and still they rowed southwest with the wind behind them. The stints at the oars were shortened, for the labor was very hard; the younger lads were set two to an oar, and Ged took his turn with the others as he had since they left Gont. When they did not row they bailed, for the seas broke heavy on the ship. So they labored among the waves that ran like smoking mountains under the wind, while the rain beat hard and cold on their backs, and the drum thumped through the noise of the storm like a heart thumping.

A man came to take Ged's place at the oar, sending him to the ship's master in the bow. Rainwater dripped from the hem of the master's cloak, but he stood stout as a winebarrel on his bit of decking and looking down at Ged he asked, "Can you abate this wind, lad?"

"No, sir."

"Have you craft with iron?"

He meant, could Ged make the compass-needle point their way to Roke, making the magnet follow not its north but their need. That skill is a secret of the Seamasters, and again Ged must say no.

"Well then," the master bellowed through the wind and rain, "you must find some ship to take you back to Roke from Hort Town. Roke must be west of us now, and only wizardry could bring us there through this sea. We must keep south."

Ged did not like this, for he had heard the sailors talk of Hort Town, how it was a lawless place, full of evil traffic, where men were often taken and sold into slavery in the South Reach. Returning to his labor at the oar he pulled away with his companion, a sturdy Andradean lad, and heard the drum beat the stroke and saw the lantern hung on the stern bob and flicker as the wind plucked it about, a tormented fleck of light in the rain-lashed dusk. He kept looking to westward, as often as he could in the heavy rhythm of pulling the oar. And as the ship rose on a high swell he saw for a moment over the dark smoking water a light between clouds, as it might be the last gleam of sunset: but this was a clear light, not red.

His oar-mate had not seen it, but he called it out. The steersman watched for it on each rise of the great waves, and saw it as Ged saw it again, but shouted back that it was only the setting sun. Then Ged called to one of the lads that was bailing to take his place on the bench a minute, and made his way forward again along the encumbered aisle between the benches, and catching hold of the carved prow to keep from being pitched overboard he shouted up to the master, "Sir! that light to the west is Roke Island!"

"I saw no light," the master roared, but even as he spoke Ged flung out his arm pointing, and all saw the light gleam clear in the west over the heaving scud and tumult of the sea.

Not for his passenger's sake, but to save his ship from the peril of the storm, the master shouted at once to the steersman to head westward toward the light. But he said to Ged, "Boy, you speak like a Seamaster, but I tell you if you lead us wrong in this weather I will throw you over to swim to Roke!"

Now instead of running before the storm they must row across the wind's way, and it was hard: waves striking the ship abeam pushed her always south of their new course, and rolled her, and filled her with water so that bailing must be ceaseless, and the oarsmen must watch lest the ship rolling should lift their oars out of water as they pulled and so pitch them down among the benches. It was nearly

dark under the stormclouds, but now and again they made out the light to the west, enough to set course by, and so struggled on. At last the wind dropped a little, and the light grew broad before them. They rowed on, and they came as it were through a curtain, between one oarstroke and the next running out of the storm into a clear air, where the light of after-sunset glowed in the sky and on the sea. Over the foamcrested waves they saw not far off a high, round, green hill, and beneath it a town built on a small bay where boats lay at anchor, all in peace.

The steersman leaning on his long sweep turned his head and called, "Sir! is this true land or a witchery?"

"Keep her as she goes, you witless woodenhead! Row, you spineless slave-sons! That's Thwil Bay and the Knoll of Roke, as any fool could see! Row!"

So to the beat of the drum they rowed wearily into the bay. There it was still, so that they could hear the voices of people up in the town, and a bell ringing, and only far off the hiss and roaring of the storm. Clouds hung dark to north and east and south a mile off all about the island. But over Roke stars were coming out one by one in a clear and quiet sky.

Chapter 3

The School for Wizards

Ged slept that night aboard *Shadow*, and early in the morning parted with those first sea-comrades of his, they shouting good wishes cheerily after him as he went up the docks. The town of Thwil is not large, its high houses huddling close over a few steep narrow streets. To Ged, however, it seemed a city, and not knowing where to go he asked the first townsman of Thwil he met where he would find the Warder of the School on Roke. The man looked at him sidelong a while and said, "The wise don't need to ask, the fool asks in vain," and so went on along the street. Ged went uphill till he came out into a square, rimmed on three sides by the houses with their sharp slate roofs and on the fourth side by the wall of a great building whose few small windows were higher than the chimneytops of the houses: a fort or castle it seemed, built of mighty grey blocks of stone. In the square beneath it market-booths were set up and there was some coming and going of people. Ged asked his question of an old woman with a basket of mussels, and she replied, "You cannot always find the Warder where he is, but sometimes you find him where he is not," and went on crying her mussels to sell.

In the great building, near one corner, there was a mean little door of wood. Ged went to this and knocked loud. To the old man who opened the door he said, "I bear a letter from the Mage Ogion of Gont to the Warder of the School on this island. I want to find the Warder, but I will not hear more riddles and scoffing!"

"This is the School," the old man said mildy. "I am the doorkeeper. Enter if you can."

Ged stepped forward. It seemed to him that he had passed through the doorway: yet he stood outside on the pavement where he had stood before.

Once more he stepped forward, and once more he remained standing outside the door. The doorkeeper, inside, watched him with mild eyes.

Ged was not so much baffled as angry, for this seemed like a further mockery to

him. With voice and hand he made the Opening spell which his aunt had taught him long ago; it was the prize among all her stock of spells, and he wove it well now. But it was only a witch's charm, and the power that held this doorway was not moved at all.

When that failed Ged stood a long while there on the pavement. At last he looked at the old man who waited inside. "I cannot enter," he said unwillingly, "unless you help me."

The doorkeeper answered, "Say your name."

Then again Ged stood still a while; for a man never speaks his own name aloud, until more than his life's safety is at stake.

"I am Ged," he said aloud. Stepping forward then he entered the open doorway. Yet it seemed to him that though the light was behind him, a shadow followed him in at his heels.

He saw also as he turned that the doorway through which he had come was not plain wood as he had thought, but ivory without joint or seam: it was cut, as he knew later, from a tooth of the Great Dragon. The door that the old man closed behind him was of polished horn, through which the daylight shone dimly, and on its inner face was carved the Thousand-Leaved Tree.

"Welcome to this house, lad," the doorkeeper said, and without saying more led him through halls and corridors to an open court far inside the walls of the building. The court was partly paved with stone, but was roofless, and on a grassplot a fountain played under young trees in the sunlight. There Ged waited alone some while. He stood still, and his heart beat hard, for it seemed to him that he felt presences and powers at work unseen about him here, and he knew that this place was built not only of stone but of magic stronger than stone. He stood in the innermost room of the House of the Wise, and it was open to the sky. Then suddenly he was aware of a man clothed in white who watched him through the falling water of the fountain.

As their eyes met, a bird sang aloud in the branches of the tree. In that moment Ged understood the singing of the bird, and the language of the water falling in the basin of the fountain, and the shape of the clouds, and the beginning and end of the wind that stirred the leaves: it seemed to him that he himself was a word spoken by the sunlight.

Then that moment passed, and he and the world were as before, or almost as before. He went forward to kneel before the Archmage, holding out to him the letter written by Ogion.

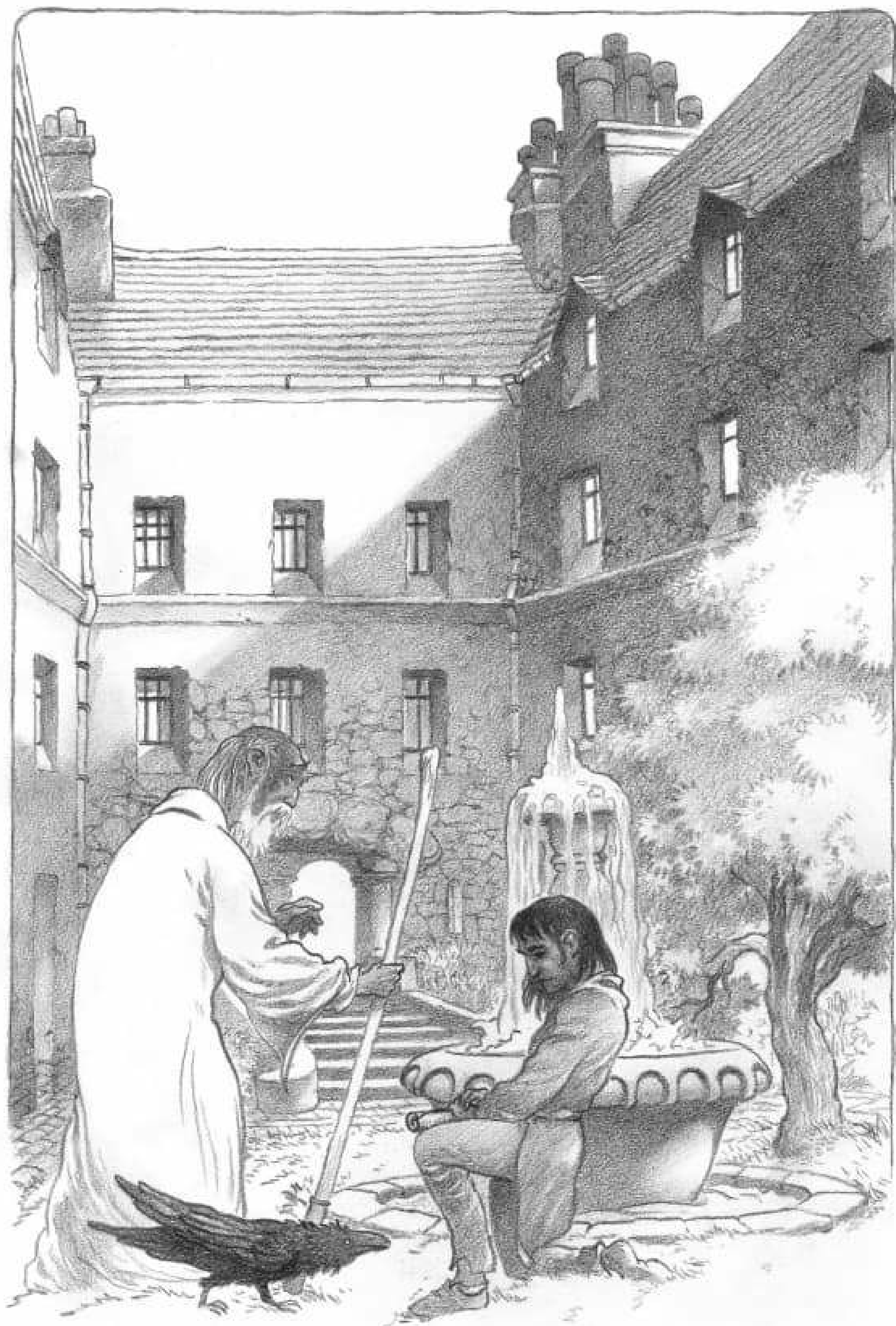
The Archmage Nemmerle, Warder of Roke, was an old man, older it was said than any man then living. His voice quavered like the bird's voice when he spoke, welcoming Ged kindly. His hair and beard and robe were white, and he seemed as if all darkness and heaviness had been leached out of him by the slow usage of the years, leaving him white and worn as driftwood that has been a century adrift. "My eyes are old, I cannot read what your master writes," he said in his quavering voice. "Read me the letter, lad."

So Ged made out and read aloud the writing, which was in Hardic runes, and said no more than this: *Lord Nemmerle! I send you one who will be greatest of the wizards of Gont, if the wind blow true*. This was signed, not with Ogion's true name which Ged had never yet learned, but with Ogion's rune, the Closed Mouth.

"He who holds the earthquake on a leash has sent you, for which be doubly welcome. Young Ogion was dear to me, when he came here from Gont. Now tell me of the seas and portents of your voyage, lad."

"A fair passage, Lord, but for the storm yesterday."

"What ship brought you here?"



"*Shadow*, trading from the Andrades."

"Whose will sent you here?"

"My own."

The Archmage looked at Ged and looked away, and began to speak in a tongue that Ged did not understand, mumbling as will an old old man whose wits go wandering among the years and islands. Yet in among his mumbling there were words of what the bird had sung and what the water had said falling. He was not laying a spell and yet there was a power in his voice that moved Ged's mind so that the boy was bewildered, and for an instant seemed to behold himself standing in a strange vast desert place alone among shadows. Yet all along he was in the sunlit court, hearing the fountain fall.

A great black bird, a raven of Osskil, came walking over the stone terrace and the grass. It came to the hem of the Archmage's robe and stood there all black with its dagger beak and eyes like pebbles, staring sidelong at Ged. It pecked three times on the white staff Nemmerle leaned on, and the old wizard ceased his muttering, and smiled. "Run and play, lad," he said at last as to a little child. Ged knelt again on one knee to him. When he rose, the Archmage was gone. Only the raven stood eyeing him, its beak outstretched as if to peck the vanished staff.

It spoke, in what Ged guessed might be the speech of Osskil. "Terrenon ussbuk!" it said croaking. "Terrenon ussbuk orrek!" And it strutted off as it had come.

Ged turned to leave the courtyard, wondering where he should go. Under the archway he was met by a tall youth who greeted him very courteously, bowing his head. "I am called Jasper, Enwit's son of the Domain of Eolg on Havnor Isle. I am at your service today, to show you about the Great House and answer your questions as I can. How shall I call you, Sir?"

Now it seemed to Ged, a mountain villager who had never been among the sons of rich merchants and noblemen, that this fellow was scoffing at him with his "service" and his "Sir" and his bowing and scraping. He answered shortly, "Sparrowhawk, they call me."

The other waited a moment as if expecting some more mannerly response, and getting none straightened up and turned a little aside. He was two or three years older than Ged, very tall, and he moved and carried himself with stiff grace, posing (Ged thought) like a dancer. He wore a grey cloak with hood thrown back. The first place he took Ged was the wardrobe room, where as a student of the school Ged might find himself another such cloak that fitted him, and any other clothing

he might need. He put on the dark-grey cloak he had chosen, and Jasper said, "Now you are one of us."

Jasper had a way of smiling faintly as he spoke which made Ged look for a jeer hidden in his polite words. "Do clothes make the mage?" he answered, sullen.

"No," said the older boy. "Though I have heard that manners make the man . . . Where now?"

"Where you will. I do not know the house."

Jasper took him down the corridors of the Great House showing him the open courts and the roofed halls, the Room of Shelves where the books of lore and rune-tomes were kept, the great Hearth Hall where all the school gathered on festival days, and upstairs, in the towers and under the roofs, the small cells where the students and Masters slept. Ged's was in the South Tower, with a window looking down over the steep roofs of Thwil town to the sea. Like the other sleeping-cells it had no furnishing but a straw-filled mattress in the corner. "We live very plain here," said Jasper. "But I expect you won't mind that."

"I'm used to it." Presently, trying to show himself an equal of this polite disdainful youth, he added, "I suppose you weren't, when you first came."

Jasper looked at him, and his look said without words, "What could you possibly know about what I, son of the Lord of the Domain of Eolg on the Isle of Havnor, am or am not used to?" What Jasper said aloud was simply, "Come on this way."

A gong had been rung while they were upstairs, and they came down to eat the noon meal at the Long Table of the refectory, along with a hundred or more boys and young men. Each waited on himself, joking with the cooks through the window-hatches of the kitchen that opened into the refectory, loading his plate from great bowls of food that steamed on the sills, sitting where he pleased at the Long Table. "They say," Jasper told Ged, "that no matter how many sit at this table, there is always room." Certainly there was room both for many noisy groups of boys talking and eating mightily, and for older fellows, their grey cloaks clasped with silver at the neck, who sat more quietly by pairs or alone, with grave, pondering faces, as if they had much to think about. Jasper took Ged to sit with a heavyset fellow called Vetch, who said nothing much but shoveled in his food with a will. He had the accent of the East Reach, and was very dark of skin, not red-brown like Ged and Jasper and most folk of the Archipelago, but black-brown. He was plain, and his manners were not polished. He grumbled about the dinner when he had finished it, but then turning to Ged said, "At least it's not illusion, like so

much around here; it sticks to your ribs." Ged did not know what he meant, but he felt a certain liking for him, and was glad when after the meal he stayed with them.

They went down into the town, that Ged might learn his way about it. Few and short as were the streets of Thwil, they turned and twisted curiously among the high-roofed houses, and the way was easy to lose. It was a strange town, and strange also its people, fishermen and workmen and artisans like any others, but so used to the sorcery that is ever at play on the Isle of the Wise that they seemed half sorcerers themselves. They talked (as Ged had learned) in riddles, and not one of them would blink to see a boy turn into a fish or a house fly up into the air, but knowing it for a schoolboy prank would go on cobbling shoes or cutting up mutton, unconcerned.

Coming up past the Back Door and around through the gardens of the Great House, the three boys crossed the clear-running Thwilburn on a wooden bridge and went on northward among woods and pastures. The path climbed and wound. They passed oak-groves where shadows lay thick for all the brightness of the sun. There was one grove not far away to the left that Ged could never quite see plainly. The path never reached it, though it always seemed to be about to. He could not even make out what kind of trees they were. Vetch, seeing him gazing, said softly, "That is the Immanent Grove. We can't come there, yet . . ."

In the hot sunlit pastures yellow flowers bloomed. "Sparkweed," said Jasper. "They grow where the wind dropped the ashes of burning Ilien, when Erreth-Akbe defended the Inward Isles from the Firelord." He blew on a withered flowerhead, and the seeds shaken loose went up on the wind like sparks of fire in the sun.

The path led them up and around the base of a great green hill, round and treeless, the hill that Ged had seen from the ship as they entered the charmed waters of Roke Island. On the hillside Jasper halted. "At home in Havnor I heard much about Gontish wizardry, and always in praise, so that I've wanted for a long time to see the manner of it. Here now we have a Gontishman; and we stand on the slopes of Roke Knoll, whose roots go down to the center of the earth. All spells are strong here. Play us a trick, Sparrowhawk. Show us your style."

Ged, confused and taken aback, said nothing.

"Later on, Jasper," Vetch said in his plain way. "Let him be a while."

"He has either skill or power, or the doorkeeper wouldn't have let him in. Why shouldn't he show it, now as well as later? Right, Sparrowhawk?"

"I have both skill and power," Ged said. "Show me what kind of thing you're

talking about."

"Illusions, of course—tricks, games of seeming. Like this!"

Pointing his finger Jasper spoke a few strange words, and where he pointed on the hillside among the green grasses a little thread of water trickled, and grew, and now a spring gushed out and the water went running down the hill. Ged put his hand in the stream and it felt wet, drank of it and it was cool. Yet for all that it would quench no thirst, being but illusion. Jasper with another word stopped the water, and the grasses waved dry in the sunlight. "Now you, Vetch," he said with his cool smile.

Vetch scratched his head and looked glum, but he took up a bit of earth in his hand and began to sing tunelessly over it, molding it with his dark fingers and shaping it, pressing it, stroking it: and suddenly it was a small creature like a bumble-bee or furry fly, that flew humming off over Roke Knoll, and vanished.

Ged stood staring, crestfallen. What did he know but mere village witchery, spells to call goats, cure warts, move loads or mend pots?

"I do no such tricks as these," he said. That was enough for Vetch, who was for going on; but Jasper said, "Why don't you?"

"Sorcery is not a game. We Gontishmen do not play it for pleasure or praise," Ged answered haughtily.

"What do you play it for," Jasper inquired, "—money?"

"No!—" But he could not think of anything more to say that would hide his ignorance and save his pride. Jasper laughed, not ill-humoredly, and went on, leading them on around Roke Knoll. And Ged followed, sullen and sore-hearted, knowing he had behaved like a fool, and blaming Jasper for it.

That night as he lay wrapped in his cloak on the mattress in his cold unlit cell of stone, in the utter silence of the Great House of Roke, the strangeness of the place and the thought of all the spells and sorceries that had been worked there began to come over him heavily. Darkness surrounded him, dread filled him. He wished he were anywhere else but Roke. But Vetch came to the door, a little bluish ball of werelight nodding over his head to light the way, and asked if he could come in and talk a while. He asked Ged about Gont, and then spoke fondly of his own home isles of the East Reach, telling how the smoke of village hearthfires is blown across that quiet sea at evening between the small islands with funny names: Korp, Kopp, and Holp, Venway and Vemish, Iffish, Koppish, and Sneg. When he sketched the shapes of those lands on the stones of the floor with his finger to show Ged how they lay, the lines he drew shone dim as if drawn with a stick of silver for a while

before they faded. Vetch had been three years at the School, and soon would be made sorcerer; he thought no more of performing the lesser arts of magic than a bird thinks of flying. Yet a greater, unlearned skill he possessed, which was the art of kindness. That night, and always from then on, he offered and gave Ged friendship, a sure and open friendship which Ged could not help but return.

Yet Vetch was also friendly to Jasper, who had made Ged into a fool that first day on Roke Knoll. Ged would not forget this, nor, it seemed, would Jasper, who always spoke to him with a polite voice and a mocking smile. Ged's pride would not be slighted or condescended to. He swore to prove to Jasper, and to all the rest of them among whom Jasper was something of a leader, how great his power really was—someday. For none of them, for all their clever tricks, had saved a village by wizardry. Of none of them had Ogion written that he would be the greatest wizard of Gont.

So bolstering up his pride, he set all his strong will on the work they gave him, the lessons and crafts and histories and skills taught by the grey-cloaked Masters of Roke, who were called the Nine.

Part of each day he studied with the Master Chanter, learning the Deeds of heroes and the Lays of wisdom, beginning with the oldest of all songs, *The Creation of Éa*. Then with a dozen other lads he would practice with the Master Windkey at arts of wind and weather. Whole bright days of spring and early summer they spent out in Roke Bay in light catboats, practicing steering by word, and stilling waves, and speaking to the world's wind, and raising up the magewind. These are very intricate skills, and frequently Ged's head got whacked by the swinging boom as the boat jibed under a wind suddenly blowing backwards, or his boat and another collided though they had the whole bay to navigate in, or all three boys in his boat went swimming unexpectedly as the boat was swamped by a huge, unintended wave. There were quieter expeditions ashore, other days, with the Master Herbal who taught the ways and properties of things that grow; and the Master Hand taught sleight and jugglery and the lesser arts of Changing.

At all these studies Ged was apt, and within a month was bettering lads who had been a year at Roke before him. Especially the tricks of illusion came to him so easily that it seemed he had been born knowing them and needed only to be reminded. The Master Hand was a gentle and light-hearted old man, who had endless delight in the wit and beauty of the crafts he taught; Ged soon felt no awe of him, but asked him for this spell and that spell, and always the Master smiled and showed him what he wanted. But one day, having it in mind to put Jasper to shame

at last, Ged said to the Master Hand in the Court of Seeming, "Sir, all these charms are much the same; knowing one, you know them all. And as soon as the spell-weaving ceases, the illusion vanishes. Now if I make a pebble into a diamond"—and he did so with a word and a flick of his wrist—"what must I do to make that diamond remain diamond? How is the changing-spell locked, and made to last?"

The Master Hand looked at the jewel that glittered on Ged's palm, bright as the prize of a dragon's hoard. The old Master murmured one word, *"Tolk,"* and there lay the pebble, no jewel but a rough grey bit of rock. The Master took it and held it out on his own hand. "This is a rock; *tolk* in the True Speech," he said, looking mildly up at Ged now. "A bit of the stone of which Roke Isle is made, a little bit of the dry land on which men live. It is itself. It is part of the world. By the Illusion-Change you can make it look like a diamond—or a flower or a fly or an eye or a flame—" The rock flickered from shape to shape as he named them, and returned to rock. "But that is mere seeming. Illusion fools the beholder's senses; it makes him see and hear and feel that the thing is changed. But it does not change the thing. To change this rock into a jewel, you must change its true name. And to do that, my son, even to so small a scrap of the world, is to change the world. It can be done. Indeed it can be done. It *is* the art of the Master Changer, and you will learn it, when you are ready to learn it. But you must not change one thing, one pebble, one grain of sand, until you know what good and evil will follow on that act. The world is in balance, in Equilibrium. A wizard's power of Changing and of Summoning can shake the balance of the world. It is dangerous, that power. It is most perilous. It must follow knowledge, and serve need. To light a candle is to cast a shadow . . ."

He looked down at the pebble again. "A rock is a good thing, too, you know," he said, speaking less gravely. "If the Isles of Earthsea were all made of diamond, we'd lead a hard life here. Enjoy illusions, lad, and let the rocks be rocks." He smiled, but Ged left dissatisfied. Press a mage for his secrets and he would always talk, like Ogion, about balance, and danger, and the dark. But surely a wizard, one who had gone past these childish tricks of illusion to the true arts of Summoning and Change, was powerful enough to do what he pleased, and balance the world as seemed best to him, and drive back darkness with his own light.

In the corridor he met Jasper, who, since Ged's accomplishments began to be praised about the School, spoke to him in a way that seemed more friendly, but was more scoffing. "You look gloomy, Sparrowhawk," he said now, "did your juggling-charms go wrong?"

Seeking as always to put himself on equal footing with Jasper, Ged answered the question ignoring its ironic tone. "I'm sick of juggling," he said, "sick of these illusion-tricks, fit only to amuse idle lords in their castles and Domains. The only true magic they've taught me yet on Roke is making werelight, and some weatherworking. The rest is mere foolery."

"Even foolery is dangerous," said Jasper, "in the hands of a fool."

At that Ged turned as if he had been slapped, and took a step towards Jasper; but the older boy smiled as if he had not intended any insult, nodded his head in his stiff, graceful way, and went on.

Standing there with rage in his heart, looking after Jasper, Ged swore to himself to outdo his rival, and not in some mere illusion-match but in a test of power. He would prove himself, and humiliate Jasper. He would not let the fellow stand there looking down at him, graceful, disdainful, hateful.

Ged did not stop to think why Jasper might hate him. He only knew why he hated Jasper. The other prentices had soon learned they could seldom match themselves against Ged either in sport or in earnest, and they said of him, some in praise and some in spite, "He's a wizard born, he'll never let you beat him." Jasper alone neither praised him nor avoided him, but simply looked down at him, smiling slightly. And therefore Jasper stood alone as his rival, who must be put to shame.

He did not see, or would not see, that in this rivalry, which he clung to and fostered as part of his own pride, there was anything of the danger, the darkness, of which the Master Hand had mildly warned him.

When he was not moved by pure rage, he knew very well that he was as yet no match for Jasper, or any of the older boys, and so he kept at his work and went on as usual. At the end of summer the work was slackened somewhat, so there was more time for sport: spell-boat races down in the harbor, feats of illusion in the courts of the Great House, and in the long evenings, in the groves, wild games of hide-and-seek where hiders and seeker were both invisible and only voices moved laughing and calling among the trees, following and dodging the quick, faint werelights. Then as autumn came they set to their tasks afresh, practicing new magic. So Ged's first months at Roke went by fast, full of passions and wonders.

In winter it was different. He was sent with seven other boys across Roke Island to the farthest north-most cape, where stands the Isolate Tower. There by himself lived the Master Namer, who was called by a name that had no meaning in any language, Kurremkarmerruk. No farm or dwelling lay within miles of the Tower.

Grim it stood above the northern cliffs, grey were the clouds over the seas of winter, endless the lists and ranks and rounds of names that the Namer's eight pupils must learn. Amongst them in the Tower's high room Kurremkarmerruk sat on a high seat, writing down lists of names that must be learned before the ink faded at midnight leaving the parchment blank again. It was cold and half-dark and always silent there except for the scratching of the Master's pen and the sighing, maybe, of a student who must learn before midnight the name of every cape, point, bay, sound, inlet, channel, harbor, shallows, reef and rock of the shores of Lossow, a little islet of the Pelnish Sea. If the student complained the Master might say nothing, but lengthen the list; or he might say, "He who would be Seamaster must know the true name of every drop of water in the sea."

Ged sighed sometimes, but he did not complain. He saw that in this dusty and fathomless matter of learning the true name of every place, thing, and being, the power he wanted lay like a jewel at the bottom of a dry well. For magic consists in this, the true naming of a thing. So Kurremkarmerruk had said to them, once, their first night in the Tower; he never repeated it, but Ged did not forget his words. "Many a mage of great power," he had said, "has spent his whole life to find out the name of one single thing—one single lost or hidden name. And still the lists are not finished. Nor will they be, till world's end. Listen, and you will see why. In the world under the sun, and in the other world that has no sun, there is much that has nothing to do with men and men's speech, and there are powers beyond our power. But magic, true magic, is worked only by those beings who speak the Hardic tongue of Earthsea, or the Old Speech from which it grew.

"That is the language dragons speak, and the language Segoy spoke who made the islands of the world, and the language of our lays and songs, spells, enchantments, and invocations. Its words lie hidden and changed among our Hardic words. We call the foam on waves *sukien*: that word is made from two words of the Old Speech, *suk*, feather, and *inien*, the sea. Feather of the sea is foam. But you cannot charm the foam calling it *sukien*; you must use its own true name in the Old Speech, which is *essa*. Any witch knows a few of these words in the Old Speech, and a mage knows many. But there are many more, and some have been lost over the ages, and some have been hidden, and some are known only to dragons and to the Old Powers of Earth, and some are known to no living creature; and no man could learn them all. For there is no end to that language.

"Here is the reason. The sea's name is *inien*, well and good. But what we call the Inmost Sea has its own name also in the Old Speech. Since no thing can have two

true names, *inien* can mean only 'all the sea except the Inmost Sea.' And of course it does not mean even that, for there are seas and bays and straits beyond counting that bear names of their own. So if some Mage-Seamaster were mad enough to try to lay a spell of storm or calm over all the ocean, his spell must say not only that word *inien*, but the name of every stretch and bit and part of the sea through all the Archipelago and all the Outer Reaches and beyond to where names cease. Thus, that which gives us the power to work magic sets the limits of that power. A mage can control only what is near him, what he can name exactly and wholly. And this is well. If it were not so, the wickedness of the powerful or the folly of the wise would long ago have sought to change what cannot be changed, and Equilibrium would fail. The unbalanced sea would overwhelm the islands where we perilously dwell, and in the old silence all voices and all names would be lost."

Ged thought long on these words, and they went deep in his understanding. Yet the majesty of the task could not make the work of that long year in the Tower less hard and dry; and at the end of the year Kurremkarmerruk said to him, "You have made a good beginning." But no more. Wizards speak truth, and it was true that all the mastery of Names that Ged had toiled to win that year was the mere start of what he must go on learning all his life. He was let go from the Isolate Tower sooner than those who had come with him, for he had learned quicker; but that was all the praise he got.

He walked south across the island alone in the early winter, along townless empty roads. As night came on it rained. He said no charm to keep the rain off him, for the weather of Roke was in the hands of the Master Windkey and might not be tampered with. He took shelter under a great pendick-tree, and lying there wrapped in his cloak he thought of his old master Ogion, who might still be on his autumn wanderings over the heights of Gont, sleeping out with leafless branches for a roof and falling rain for house-walls. That made Ged smile, for he found the thought of Ogion always a comfort to him. He fell asleep with a peaceful heart, there in the cold darkness full of the whisper of water. At dawn waking he lifted his head; the rain had ceased; he saw, sheltered in the folds of his cloak, a little animal curled up asleep which had crept there for warmth. He wondered, seeing it, for it was a rare strange beast, an otak.

These creatures are found only on four southern isles of the Archipelago, Roke, Ensmer, Pody and Wathort. They are small and sleek, with broad faces, and fur dark brown or brindle, and great bright eyes. Their teeth are cruel and their temper fierce, so they are not made pets of. They have no call or cry or any voice. Ged

stroked this one, and it woke and yawned, showing a small brown tongue and white teeth, but it was not afraid. "Otak," he said, and then remembering the thousand names of beasts he had learned in the Tower he called it by its true name in the Old Speech, "Hoeg! Do you want to come with me?"

The otak sat itself down on his open hand, and began to wash its fur.

He put it up on his shoulder in the folds of his hood, and there it rode. Sometimes during the day it jumped down and darted off into the woods, but it always came back to him, once with a wood-mouse it had caught. He laughed and told it to eat the mouse, for he was fasting, this night being the Festival of Sunreturn. So he came in the wet dusk past Roke Knoll, and saw bright werelights playing in the rain over the roofs of the Great House, and he entered there and was welcomed by his Masters and companions in the firelit hall.

It was like a homecoming to Ged, who had no home to which he could ever return. He was happy to see so many faces he knew, and happiest to see Vetch come forward to greet him with a wide smile on his dark face. He had missed his friend this year more than he knew. Vetch had been made sorcerer this fall and was a prentice no more, but that set no barrier between them. They fell to talking at once, and it seemed to Ged that he said more to Vetch in that first hour than he had said during the whole long year at the Isolate Tower.

The otak still rode his shoulder, nestling in the fold of his hood as they sat at dinner at long tables set up for the festival in the Hearth Hall. Vetch marveled at the little creature, and once put up his hand to stroke it, but the otak snapped its sharp teeth at him. He laughed. "They say, Sparrowhawk, that a man favored by a wild beast is a man to whom the Old Powers of stone and spring will speak in human voice."

"They say Gontish wizards often keep familiars," said Jasper, who sat on the other side of Vetch. "Our Lord Nemmerle has his raven, and songs say the Red Mage of Ark led a wild boar on a gold chain. But I never heard of any sorcerer keeping a rat in his hood!"

At that they all laughed, and Ged laughed with them. It was a merry night and he was joyful to be there in the warmth and merriment, keeping festival with his companions. But, like all Jasper ever said to him, the jest set his teeth on edge.

That night the Lord of O was a guest of the school, himself a sorcerer of renown. He had been a pupil of the Archmage, and returned sometimes to Roke for the Winter Festival or the Long Dance in summer. With him was his lady, slender and young, bright as new copper, her black hair crowned with opals. It was seldom that

any woman sat in the halls of the Great House, and some of the old Masters looked at her sidelong, disapproving. But the young men looked at her with all their eyes.

"For such a one," said Vetch to Ged, "I could work vast enchantments . . ." He sighed, and laughed.

"She's only a woman," Ged replied.

"The Princess Elfarran was only a woman," said Vetch, "and for her sake all Enlad was laid waste, and the Hero-Mage of Havnor died, and the island Soléa sank beneath the sea."

"Old tales," says Ged. But then he too began to look at the Lady of O, wondering if indeed this was such mortal beauty as the old tales told of.

The Master Chanter had sung the *Deed of the Young King*, and all together had sung the Winter Carol. Now when there was a little pause before they all rose from the tables, Jasper got up and went to the table nearest the hearth, where the Archmage and the guests and Masters sat, and he spoke to the Lady of O. Jasper was no longer a boy but a young man, tall and comely, with his cloak clasped at the neck with silver; for he also had been made sorcerer this year, and the silver clasp was the token of it. The lady smiled at what he said and the opals shone in her black hair, radiant. Then, the Masters nodding benign consent, Jasper worked an illusion-charm for her. A white tree he made spring up from the stone floor. Its branches touched the high roofbeams of the hall, and on every twig of every branch a golden apple shone, each a sun, for it was the Year-Tree. A bird flew among the branches suddenly, all white with a tail like a fall of snow, and the golden apples dimming turned to seeds, each one a drop of crystal. These falling from the tree with a sound like rain, all at once there came a sweet fragrance, while the tree, swaying, put forth leaves of rosy fire and white flowers like stars. So the illusion faded. The Lady of O cried out with pleasure, and bent her shining head to the young sorcerer in praise of his mastery. "Come with us, live with us in O-tokne—can he not come, my lord?" she asked, childlike, of her stern husband. But Jasper said only, "When I have learned skills worthy of my Masters here and worthy of your praise, my lady, then I will gladly come, and serve you ever gladly."

So he pleased all there, except Ged. Ged joined his voice to the praises, but not his heart. "I could have done better," he said to himself, in bitter envy; and all the joy of the evening was darkened for him, after that.

Chapter 4

The Loosing of the Shadow

That spring Ged saw little of either Vetch or Jasper, for they being sorcerers studied now with the Master Patterner in the secrecy of the Immanent Grove, where no prentice might set foot. Ged stayed in the Great House, working with the Masters at all the skills practiced by sorcerers, those who work magic but carry no staff: windbringing, weatherworking, finding and binding, and the arts of spell-smiths and spell-wrights, tellers, chanters, healalls and herbalists. At night alone in his sleeping-cell, a little ball of werelight burning above the book in place of lamp or candle, he studied the Further Runes and the Runes of Éa, which are used in the Great Spells. All these crafts came easy to him, and it was rumored among the students that this Master or that had said that the Gontish lad was the quickest student that had ever been at Roke, and tales grew up concerning the otak, which was said to be a disguised spirit who whispered wisdom in Ged's ear, and it was even said that the Archmage's raven had hailed Ged at his arrival as "Archmage to be." Whether or not they believed such stories, and whether or not they liked Ged, most of his companions admired him, and were eager to follow him when the rare wild mood came over him and he joined them to lead their games on the lengthening evenings of spring. But for the most part he was all work and pride and temper, and held himself apart. Among them all, Vetch being absent, he had no friend, and never knew he wanted one.

He was fifteen, very young to learn any of the High Arts of wizard or mage, those who carry the staff; but he was so quick to learn all the arts of illusion that the Master Changer, himself a young man, soon began to teach him apart from the others, and to tell him about the true Spells of Shaping. He explained how, if a thing is really to be changed into another thing, it must be renamed for as long as the spell lasts, and he told how this affects the names and natures of things surrounding the transformed thing. He spoke of the perils of changing, above all

when the wizard transforms his own shape and thus is liable to be caught in his own spell. Little by little, drawn on by the boy's sureness of understanding, the young Master began to do more than merely tell him of these mysteries. He taught him first one and then another of the Great Spells of Change, and he gave him the Book of Shaping to study. This he did without knowledge of the Archmage, and unwisely, yet he meant no harm.

Ged worked also with the Master Summoner now, but that Master was a stern man, aged and hardened by the deep and somber wizardry he taught. He dealt with no illusion, only true magic, the summoning of such energies as light, and heat, and the force that draws the magnet, and those forces men perceive as weight, form, color, sound: real powers, drawn from the immense fathomless energies of the universe, which no man's spells or uses could exhaust or unbalance. The weatherworker's and seamaster's calling upon wind and water were crafts already known to his pupils, but it was he who showed them why the true wizard uses such spells only at need, since to summon up such earthly forces is to change the earth of which they are a part. "Rain on Roke may be drouth in Osskil," he said, "and a calm in the East Reach may be storm and ruin in the West, unless you know what you are about."

As for the calling of real things and living people, and the raising up of spirits of the dead, and the invocations of the Unseen, those spells which are the height of the Summoner's art and the mage's power, those he scarcely spoke of to them. Once or twice Ged tried to lead him to talk a little of such mysteries, but the Master was silent, looking at him long and grimly, till Ged grew uneasy and said no more.

Sometimes indeed he was uneasy working even such lesser spells as the Summoner taught him. There were certain runes on certain pages of the Lore-Book that seemed familiar to him, though he did not remember in what book he had ever seen them before. There were certain phrases that must be said in spells of Summoning that he did not like to say. They made him think, for an instant, of shadows in a dark room, of a shut door and shadows reaching out to him from the corner by the door. Hastily he put such thoughts or memories aside and went on. These moments of fear and darkness, he said to himself, were the shadows merely of his ignorance. The more he learned, the less he would have to fear, until finally in his full power as Wizard he needed fear nothing in the world, nothing at all.

In the second month of that summer all the school gathered again at the Great House to celebrate the Moon's Night and the Long Dance, which that year fell together as one festival of two nights, which happens but once in fifty-two years. All

the first night, the shortest night of full moon of the year, flutes played out in the fields, and the narrow streets of Thwil were full of drums and torches, and the sound of singing went out over the moonlit waters of Roke Bay. As the sun rose next morning the Chanters of Roke began to sing the long *Deed of Erreth-Akbe*, which tells how the white towers of Havnor were built, and of Erreth-Akbe's journeys from the Old Island, Éa, through all the Archipelago and the Reaches, until at last in the uttermost West Reach on the edge of the Open Sea he met the dragon Orm; and his bones in shattered armor lie among the dragon's bones on the shore of lonely Selidor, but his sword set atop the highest tower of Havnor still burns red in the sunset above the Inmost Sea. When the chant was finished the Long Dance began. Townsfolk and Masters and students and farmers all together, men and women, danced in the warm dust and dusk down all the roads of Roke to the sea-beaches, to the beat of drums and drone of pipes and flutes. Straight out into the sea they danced, under the moon one night past full, and the music was lost in the breakers' sound. As the east grew light they came back up the beaches and the roads, the drums silent and only the flutes playing soft and shrill. So it was done on every island of the Archipelago that night: one dance, one music binding together the sea-divided lands.

When the Long Dance was over most people slept the day away, and gathered again at evening to eat and drink. There was a group of young fellows, prentices and sorcerers, who had brought their supper out from the refectory to hold a private feast in a courtyard of the Great House: Vetch, Jasper, and Ged were there, and six or seven others, and some young lads released briefly from the Isolate Tower, for this festival had brought even Kurremkarmerruk out. They were all eating and laughing and playing such tricks out of pure frolic as might be the marvel of a king's court. One boy had lighted the court with a hundred stars of werelight, colored like jewels, that swung in a slow netted procession between them and the real stars; and a pair of boys were playing bowls with balls of green flame and bowling-pins that leaped and hopped away as the ball came near; and all the while Vetch sat cross-legged, eating roast chicken, up in mid-air. One of the younger boys tried to pull him down to earth, but Vetch merely drifted up a little higher, out of reach, and sat calmly smiling on the air. Now and then he tossed away a chicken bone, which turned to an owl and flew hooting among the netted star-lights. Ged shot breadcrumb arrows after the owls and brought them down, and when they touched the ground there they lay, bone and crumb, all illusion gone. Ged also tried to join Vetch up in the middle of the air, but lacking the key of

the spell he had to flap his arms to keep aloft, and they were all laughing at his flights and flaps and bumps. He kept up his foolishness for the laughter's sake, laughing with them, for after those two long nights of dance and moonlight and music and magery he was in a fey and wild mood, ready for whatever might come.

He came lightly down on his feet just beside Jasper at last, and Jasper, who never laughed aloud, moved away saying, "The Sparrowhawk that can't fly . . ."

"Is jasper a precious stone?" Ged returned, grinning. "O Jewel among sorcerers, O Gem of Havnor, sparkle for us!"

The lad that had set the lights dancing sent one down to dance and glitter about Jasper's head. Not quite as cool as usual, frowning, Jasper brushed the light away and snuffed it out with one gesture. "I am sick of boys and noise and foolishness," he said.

"You're getting middle-aged, lad," Vetch remarked from above.

"If silence and gloom is what you want," put in one of the younger boys, "you could always try the Tower."

Ged said to him, "What is it you want, then, Jasper?"

"I want the company of my equals," Jasper said. "Come on, Vetch. Leave the prentices to their toys."

Ged turned to face Jasper. "What do sorcerers have that prentices lack?" he inquired. His voice was quiet, but all the other boys suddenly fell still, for in his tone as in Jasper's the spite between them now sounded plain and clear as steel coming out of a sheath.

"Power," Jasper said.

"I'll match your power act for act."

"You challenge me?"

"I challenge you."

Vetch had dropped down to the ground, and now he came between them, grim of face. "Duels in sorcery are forbidden to us, and well you know it. Let this cease!"

Both Ged and Jasper stood silent, for it was true they knew the law of Roke, and they also knew that Vetch was moved by love, and themselves by hate. Yet their anger was balked, not cooled. Presently, moving a little aside as if to be heard by Vetch alone, Jasper spoke, with his cool smile: "I think you'd better remind your goatherd friend again of the law that protects him. He looks sulky. I wonder, did he really think I'd accept a challenge from him? a fellow who smells of goats, a prentice who doesn't know the First Change?"

"Jasper," said Ged, "what do you know of what I know?"

For an instant, with no word spoken that any heard, Ged vanished from their sight, and where he had stood a great falcon hovered, opening its hooked beak to scream: for one instant, and then Ged stood again in the flickering torchlight, his dark gaze on Jasper.

Jasper had taken a step backward, in astonishment; but now he shrugged and said one word: "Illusion."

The others muttered. Vetch said, "That was not illusion. It was true change. And enough. Jasper, listen—"

"Enough to prove that he sneaked a look in the Book of Shaping behind the Master's back: what then? Go on, Goatherd. I like this trap you're building for yourself. The more you try to prove yourself my equal, the more you show yourself for what you are."

At that, Vetch turned from Jasper, and said very softly to Ged, "Sparrowhawk, will you be a man and drop this now—come with me—"

Ged looked at his friend and smiled, but all he said was, "Keep Hoeg for me a little while, will you?" He put into Vetch's hands the little otak, which as usual had been riding on his shoulder. It had never let any but Ged touch it, but it came to Vetch now, and climbing up his arm cowered on his shoulder, its great bright eyes always on its master.

"Now," Ged said to Jasper, quietly as before, "what are you going to do to prove yourself my superior, Jasper?"

"I don't have to do anything, Goatherd. Yet I will. I will give you a chance—an opportunity. Envy eats you like a worm in an apple. Let's let out the worm. Once by Roke Knoll you boasted that Gontish wizards don't play games. Come to Roke Knoll now and show us what it is they do instead. And afterward, maybe I will show you a little sorcery."

"Yes, I should like to see that," Ged answered. The younger boys, used to seeing his black temper break out at the least hint of slight or insult, watched him in wonder at his coolness now. Vetch watched him not in wonder, but with growing fear. He tried to intervene again, but Jasper said, "Come, keep out of this, Vetch. What will you do with the chance I give you, Goatherd? Will you show us an illusion, a fireball, a charm to cure goats with the mange?"

"What would you like me to do, Jasper?"

The older lad shrugged, "Summon up a spirit from the dead, for all I care!"

"I will."

"You will not." Jasper looked straight at him, rage suddenly flaming out over his

disdain. “You will not. You cannot. You brag and brag—”

“By my name, I will do it!”

They all stood utterly motionless for a moment.

Breaking away from Vetch who would have held him back by main force, Ged strode out of the courtyard, not looking back. The dancing werelights overhead died out, sinking down. Jasper hesitated a second, then followed after Ged. And the rest came straggling behind, in silence, curious and afraid.

The slopes of Roke Knoll went up dark into the darkness of summer night before moonrise. The presence of that hill where many wonders had been worked was heavy, like a weight in the air about them. As they came onto the hillside they thought of how the roots of it were deep, deeper than the sea, reaching down even to the old, blind, secret fires at the world’s core. They stopped on the east slope. Stars hung over the black grass above them on the hill’s crest. No wind blew.

Ged went a few paces up the slope away from the others and turning said in a clear voice, “Jasper! Whose spirit shall I call?”

“Call whom you like. None will listen to you.” Jasper’s voice shook a little, with anger perhaps. Ged answered him softly, mockingly, “Are you afraid?”

He did not even listen for Jasper’s reply, if he made one. He no longer cared about Jasper. Now that they stood on Roke Knoll, hate and rage were gone, replaced by utter certainty. He need envy no one. He knew that his power, this night, on this dark enchanted ground, was greater than it had ever been, filling him till he trembled with the sense of strength barely kept in check. He knew now that Jasper was far beneath him, had been sent perhaps only to bring him here tonight, no rival but a mere servant of Ged’s destiny. Under his feet he felt the hillroots going down and down into the dark, and over his head he saw the dry, far fires of the stars. Between, all things were his to order, to command. He stood at the center of the world.

“Don’t be afraid,” he said, smiling. “I’ll call a woman’s spirit. You need not fear a woman. Elfarran I will call, the fair lady of the *Deed of Enlad*.”

“She died a thousand years ago, her bones lie afar under the Sea of Éa, and maybe there never was such a woman.”

“Do years and distances matter to the dead? Do the Songs lie?” Ged said with the same gentle mockery, and then saying, “Watch the air between my hands,” he turned away from the others and stood still.

In a great slow gesture he stretched out his arms, the gesture of welcome that

opens an invocation. He began to speak.

He had read the runes of this Spell of Summoning in Ogion's book, two years and more ago, and never since had seen them. In darkness he had read them then. Now in this darkness it was as if he read them again on the page open before him in the night. But now he understood what he read, speaking it aloud word after word, and he saw the markings of how the spell must be woven with the sound of the voice and the motion of body and hand.

The other boys stood watching, not speaking, not moving unless they shivered a little: for the great spell was beginning to work. Ged's voice was soft still, but changed, with a deep singing in it, and the words he spoke were not known to them. He fell silent. Suddenly the wind rose roaring in the grass. Ged dropped to his knees and called out aloud. Then he fell forward as if to embrace earth with his outstretched arms, and when he rose he held something dark in his straining hands and arms, something so heavy that he shook with effort getting to his feet. The hot wind whined in the black tossing grasses on the hill. If the stars shone now none saw them.

The words of the enchantment hissed and mumbled on Ged's lips, and then he cried out aloud and clearly, "Elfarran!"

Again he cried the name, "Elfarran!"

And the third time, "Elfarran!"

The shapeless mass of darkness he had lifted split apart. It sundered, and a pale spindle of light gleamed between his opened arms, a faint oval reaching from the ground up to the height of his raised hands. In the oval of light for a moment there moved a form, a human shape: a tall woman looking back over her shoulder. Her face was beautiful, and sorrowful, and full of fear.

Only for a moment did the spirit glimmer there. Then the sallow oval between Ged's arms grew bright. It widened and spread, a rent in the darkness of the earth and night, a ripping open of the fabric of the world. Through it blazed a terrible brightness. And through that bright misshapen breach clambered something like a clot of black shadow, quick and hideous, and it leaped straight out at Ged's face.

Staggering back under the weight of the thing, Ged gave a short, hoarse scream. The little otak watching from Vetch's shoulder, the animal that had no voice, screamed aloud also and leaped as if to attack.

Ged fell, struggling and writhing, while the bright rip in the world's darkness above him widened and stretched. The boys that watched fled, and Jasper bent down to the ground hiding his eyes from the terrible light. Vetch alone ran forward

to his friend. So only he saw the lump of shadow that clung to Ged, tearing at his flesh. It was like a black beast, the size of a young child, though it seemed to swell and shrink; and it had no head or face, only the four taloned paws with which it gripped and tore. Vetch sobbed with horror, yet he put out his hands to try to pull the thing away from Ged. Before he touched it, he was bound still, unable to move.

The intolerable brightness faded, and slowly the torn edges of the world closed together. Nearby a voice was speaking as softly as a tree whispers or a fountain plays.

Starlight began to shine again, and the grasses of the hillside were whitened with the light of the moon just rising. The night was healed. Restored and steady lay the balance of light and dark. The shadow-beast was gone. Ged lay sprawled on his back, his arms flung out as if they yet kept the wide gesture of welcome and invocation. His face was blackened with blood and there were great black stains on his shirt. The little otak cowered by his shoulder, quivering. And above him stood an old man whose cloak glimmered pale in the moonrise: the Archmage Nemmerle.

The end of Nemmerle's staff hovered silvery above Ged's breast. Once gently it touched him over the heart, once on the lips, while Nemmerle whispered. Ged stirred, and his lips parted gasping for breath. Then the old Archmage lifted the staff, and set it to earth, and leaned heavily on it with bowed head, as if he had scarcely strength to stand.

Vetch found himself free to move. Looking around, he saw that already others were there, the Masters Summoner and Changer. An act of great wizardry is not worked without arousing such men, and they had ways of coming very swiftly when need called, though none had been so swift as the Archmage. They now sent for help, and some who came went with the Archmage, while others, Vetch among them, carried Ged to the chambers of the Master Herbal.

All night long the Summoner stayed on Roke Knoll, keeping watch. Nothing stirred there on the hillside where the stuff of the world had been torn open. No shadow came crawling through moonlight seeking the rent through which it might clamber back into its own domain. It had fled from Nemmerle, and from the mighty spell-walls that surround and protect Roke Island, but it was in the world now. In the world, somewhere, it hid. If Ged had died that night it might have tried to find the doorway he had opened, and follow him into death's realm, or slip back into whatever place it had come from; for this the Summoner waited on Roke Knoll. But Ged lived.

They had laid him abed in the healing-chamber, and the Master Herbal tended

the wounds he had on his face and throat and shoulder. They were deep, ragged, and evil wounds. The black blood in them would not stanch, welling out even under the charms and the cobweb-wrapped perriot leaves laid upon them. Ged lay blind and dumb in fever like a stick in a slow fire, and there was no spell to cool what burned him.

Not far away, in the unroofed court where the fountain played, the Archmage lay also unmoving, but cold, very cold: only his eyes lived, watching the fall of moonlit water and the stir of moonlit leaves. Those with him said no spells and worked no healing. Quietly they spoke among themselves from time to time, and then turned again to watch their Lord. He lay still, hawk nose and high forehead and white hair bleached by moonlight all to the color of bone. To check the ungoverned spell and drive off the shadow from Ged, Nemmerle had spent all his power, and with it his bodily strength was gone. He lay dying. But the death of a great mage, who has many times in his life walked on the dry steep hillsides of death's kingdom, is a strange matter: for the dying man goes not blindly, but surely, knowing the way. When Nemmerle looked up through the leaves of the tree, those with him did not know if he watched the stars of summer fading in daybreak, or those other stars, which never set above the hills that see no dawn.

The raven of Osskil that had been his pet for thirty years was gone. No one had seen where it went. "It flies before him," the Master Patterner said, as they kept vigil.

The day came warm and clear. The Great House and the streets of Thwil were hushed. No voice was raised, until along towards noon iron bells spoke out aloud in the Chanter's Tower, harshly tolling.

On the next day the Nine Masters of Roke gathered in a place somewhere under the dark trees of the Immanent Grove. Even there they set nine walls of silence about them, that no person or power might speak to them or hear them as they chose from amongst the mages of all Earthsea him who would be the new Archmage. Gensher of Way was chosen. A ship was sent forth at once across the Inmost Sea to Way Island to bring the Archmage back to Roke. The Master Windkey stood in the stern and raised up the magewind into the sail, and quickly the ship departed, and was gone.

Of these events Ged knew nothing. For four weeks of that hot summer he lay blind, and deaf, and mute, though at times he moaned and cried out like an animal. At last, as the patient crafts of the Master Herbal worked their healing, his wounds began to close and the fever left him. Little by little he seemed to hear again, though

he never spoke. On a clear day of autumn the Master Herbal opened the shutters of the room where Ged lay. Since the darkness of that night on Roke Knoll he had known only darkness. Now he saw daylight, and the sun shining. He hid his scarred face in his hands and wept.

Still when winter came he could speak only with a stammering tongue, and the Master Herbal kept him there in the healing-chambers, trying to lead his body and mind gradually back to strength. It was early spring when at last the Master released him, sending him first to offer his fealty to the Archmage Gensher. For he had not been able to join all the others of the School in this duty when Gensher came to Roke.

None of his companions had been allowed to visit him in the months of his sickness, and now as he passed some of them asked one another, "Who is that?" He had been light and lithe and strong. Now, lamed by pain, he went hesitantly, and did not raise his face, the left side of which was white with scars. He avoided those who knew him and those who did not, and made his way straight to the court of the Fountain. There where once he had awaited Nemmerle, Gensher awaited him.

Like the old Archmage the new one was cloaked in white; but like most men of Way and the East Reach Gensher was black-skinned, and his look was black, under thick brows.

Ged knelt and offered him fealty and obedience. Gensher was silent a while.

"I know what you did," he said at last, "but not what you are. I cannot accept your fealty."

Ged stood up, and set his hand on the trunk of the young tree beside the fountain to steady himself. He was still very slow to find words. "Am I to leave Roke, my lord?"

"Do you want to leave Roke?"

"No."

"What do you want?"

"To stay. To learn. To undo . . . the evil . . ."

"Nemmerle himself could not do that. No, I would not let you go from Roke. Nothing protects you but the power of the Masters here and the defenses laid upon this island that keep the creatures of evil away. If you left now, the thing you loosed would find you at once, and enter into you, and possess you. You would be no man but a *gebbeth*, a puppet doing the will of that evil shadow which you raised up into the sunlight. You must stay here, until you gain strength and wisdom enough to

defend yourself from it—if ever you do. Even now it waits for you. Assuredly it waits for you. Have you seen it since that night?"

"In dreams, lord." After a while Ged went on, speaking with pain and shame, "Lord Gensher, I do not know what it was—the thing that came out of the spell and cleaved to me—"

"Nor do I know. It has no name. You have great power inborn in you, and you used that power wrongly, to work a spell over which you had no control, not knowing how that spell affects the balance of light and dark, life and death, good and evil. And you were moved to do this by pride and by hate. Is it any wonder the result was ruin? You summoned a spirit from the dead, but with it came one of the Powers of unlife. Uncalled it came from a place where there are no names. Evil, it wills to work evil through you. The power you had to call it gives it power over you: you are connected. It is the shadow of your arrogance, the shadow of your ignorance, the shadow you cast. Has a shadow a name?"

Ged stood sick and haggard. He said at last, "Better I had died."

"Who are you to judge that, you for whom Nemmerle gave his life?—You are safe here. You will live here, and go on with your training. They tell me you were clever. Go on and do your work. Do it well. It is all you can do."

So Gensher ended, and was suddenly gone, as is the way of mages. The fountain leaped in the sunlight, and Ged watched it a while and listened to its voice, thinking of Nemmerle. Once in that court he had felt himself to be a word spoken by the sunlight. Now the darkness also had spoken: a word that could not be unsaid.

He left the court, going to his old room in the South Tower, which they had kept empty for him. He stayed there alone. When the gong called to supper he went, but he would hardly speak to the other lads at the Long Table, or raise his face to them, even those who greeted him most gently. So after a day or two they all left him alone. To be alone was his desire, for he feared the evil he might do or say unwittingly.

Neither Vetch nor Jasper was there, and he did not ask about them. The boys he had led and lorded over were all ahead of him now, because of the months he had lost, and that spring and summer he studied with lads younger than himself. Nor did he shine among them, for the words of any spell, even the simplest illusion-charm, came halting from his tongue, and his hands faltered at their craft.

In autumn he was to go once again to the Isolate Tower to study with the Master Namer. This task which he had once dreaded now pleased him, for silence was

what he sought, and long learning where no spells were wrought, and where that power which he knew was still in him would never be called upon to act.

The night before he left for the Tower a visitor came to his room, one wearing a brown traveling-cloak and carrying a staff of oak shod with iron. Ged stood up at sight of the wizard's staff.

"Sparrowhawk—"

At the sound of the voice, Ged raised his eyes: it was Vetch standing there, solid and foursquare as ever, his black blunt face older but his smile unchanged. On his shoulder crouched a little beast, brindle-furred and bright-eyed.

"He stayed with me while you were sick, and now I'm sorry to part with him. And sorrier to part with you, Sparrowhawk. But I'm going home. Here, hoeg! go to your true master!" Vetch patted the otak and set it down on the floor. It went and sat on Ged's pallet, and began to wash its fur with a dry brown tongue like a little leaf. Vetch laughed, but Ged could not smile. He bent down to hide his face, stroking the otak.

"I thought you wouldn't come to me, Vetch," he said.

He did not mean any reproach, but Vetch answered, "I couldn't come to you. The Master Herbal forbade me; and since winter I've been with the Master in the Grove, locked up myself. I was not free, until I earned my staff. Listen: when you too are free, come to the East Reach. I will be waiting for you. There's good cheer in the little towns there, and wizards are well received."

"Free . . ." Ged muttered, and shrugged a little, trying to smile.

Vetch looked at him, not quite as he had used to look, with no less love but more wizardry, perhaps. He said gently, "You won't stay bound on Roke forever."

"Well . . . I have thought, perhaps I may come to work with the Master in the Tower, to be one of those who seek among the books and the stars for lost names, and so . . . so do no more harm, if not much good . . ."

"Maybe," said Vetch. "I am no seer, but I see before you, not rooms and books, but far seas, and the fire of dragons, and the towers of cities, and all such things a hawk sees when he flies far and high."

"And behind me—what do you see behind me?" Ged asked, and stood up as he spoke, so that the werelight that burned overhead between them sent his shadow back against the wall and floor. Then he turned his face aside and said, stammering, "But tell me where you will go, what you will do."

"I will go home, to see my brothers and the sister you have heard me speak of. I left her a little child and soon she'll be having her Naming—it's strange to think of!

And so I'll find me a job of wizardry somewhere among the little isles. Oh, I would stay and talk with you, but I can't, my ship goes out tonight and the tide is turned already. Sparrowhawk, if ever your way lies East, come to me. And if ever you need me, send for me, call on me by my name: Estarriol."

At that Ged lifted his scarred face, meeting his friend's eyes.

"Estarriol," he said, "my name is Ged."

Then quietly they bade each other farewell, and Vetch turned and went down the stone hallway, and left Roke.

Ged stood still a while, like one who has received great news, and must enlarge his spirit to receive it. It was a great gift that Vetch had given him, the knowledge of his true name.

No one knows a man's true name but himself and his namer. He may choose at length to tell it to his brother, or his wife, or his friend, yet even those few will never use it where any third person may hear it. In front of other people they will, like other people, call him by his use-name, his nickname—such a name as Sparrowhawk, and Vetch, and Ogion, which means "fircone." If plain men hide their true name from all but a few they love and trust utterly, so much more must wizardly men, being more dangerous, and more endangered. Who knows a man's name, holds that man's life in his keeping. Thus to Ged, who had lost faith in himself, Vetch had given that gift only a friend can give, the proof of unshaken, unshakable trust.

Ged sat down on his pallet and let the globe of werelight die, giving off as it faded a faint whiff of marsh-gas. He petted the otak, which stretched comfortably and went to sleep on his knee as if it had never slept anywhere else. The Great House was silent. It came to Ged's mind that this was the eve of his own Passage, the day on which Ogion had given him his name. Four years were gone since then. He remembered the coldness of the mountain spring through which he had walked naked and unnamed. He fell to thinking of other bright pools in the River Ar, where he had used to swim; and of Ten Alders village under the great slanting forests of the mountain; of the shadows of morning across the dusty village street, the fire leaping under bellows-blast in the smith's smelting-pit on a winter afternoon, the witch's dark fragrant hut where the air was heavy with smoke and wreathing-spells. He had not thought of these things for a long time. Now they came back to him, on this night he was seventeen years old. All the years and places of his brief broken life came within mind's reach and made a whole again. He knew once more, at last, after this long, bitter, wasted time, who he was and where he

was.

But where he must go in the years to come, that he could not see; and he feared to see it.

Next morning he set out across the island, the otak riding on his shoulder as it had used to. This time it took him three days, not two, to walk to the Isolate Tower, and he was bone-weary when he came in sight of the Tower above the spitting, hissing seas of the northern cape. Inside, it was dark as he remembered, and cold as he remembered, and Kurremkarmerruk sat on his high seat writing down lists of names. He glanced at Ged and said without welcome, as if Ged had never been away, "Go to bed; tired is stupid. Tomorrow you may open the Book of the Undertakings of the Makers, learning the names therein."

At winter's end he returned to the Great House. He was made sorcerer then, and the Archmage Gensher accepted at that time his fealty. Thenceforth he studied the high arts and enchantments, passing beyond arts of illusion to the works of real magery, learning what he must know to earn his wizard's staff. The trouble he had had in speaking spells wore off over the months, and skill returned into his hands: yet he was never so quick to learn as he had been, having learned a long hard lesson from fear. Yet no ill portents or encounters followed on his working even of the Great Spells of Making and Shaping, which are most perilous. He came to wonder at times if the shadow he had loosed might have grown weak, or fled somehow out of the world, for it came no more into his dreams. But in his heart he knew such hope was folly.

From the Masters and from ancient Lore-Books Ged learned what he could about such beings as this shadow he had loosed; little was there to learn. No such creature was described or spoken of directly. There were at best hints here and there in the old books of things that might be like the shadow-beast. It was not a ghost of human man, nor was it a creature of the Old Powers of Earth, and yet it seemed it might have some link with these. In the *Matter of the Dragons*, which Ged read very closely, there was a tale of an ancient Dragonlord who had come under the sway of one of the Old Powers, a speaking stone that lay in a far northern land. *"At the Stone's command,"* said the book, *"he did speak to raise up a dead spirit out of the realm of the dead, but his wizardry being bent awry by the Stone's will there came with the dead spirit also a thing not summoned, which did devour him out from within and in his shape walked, destroying men."* But the book did not say what the thing was, nor did it tell the end of the tale. And the Masters did not know where such a shadow might come from: from unlife, the Archmage had

said; from the wrong side of the world, said the Master Changer; and the Master Summoner said, "I do not know." The Summoner had come often to sit with Ged in his illness. He was grim and grave as ever, but Ged knew now his compassion, and loved him well. "I do not know. I know of the thing only this: that only a great power could have summoned up such a thing, and perhaps only one power—only one voice—your voice. But what in turn that means, I do not know. You will find out. You must find out, or die, and worse than die . . ." He spoke softly and his eyes were somber as he looked at Ged. "You thought, as a boy, that a mage is one who can do anything. So I thought, once. So did we all. And the truth is that as a man's real power grows and his knowledge widens, ever the way he can follow grows narrower: until at last he chooses nothing, but does only and wholly what he *must do* . . ."

The Archmage sent Ged, after his eighteenth birthday, to work with the Master Patterner. What is learned in the Immanent Grove is not much talked about elsewhere. It is said that no spells are worked there, and yet the place itself is an enchantment. Sometimes the trees of that Grove are seen, and sometimes they are not seen, and they are not always in the same place and part of Roke Island. It is said that the trees of the Grove themselves are wise. It is said that the Master Patterner learns his supreme magery there within the Grove, and if ever the trees should die so shall his wisdom die, and in those days the waters will rise and drown the islands of Earthsea which Segoy raised from the deeps in the time before myth, all the lands where men and dragons dwell.

But all this is hearsay; wizards will not speak of it.

The months went by, and at last on a day of spring Ged returned to the Great House, and he had no idea what would be asked of him next. At the door that gives on the path across the fields to Roke Knoll an old man met him, waiting for him in the doorway. At first Ged did not know him, and then putting his mind to it recalled him as the one who had let him into the School on the day of his coming, five years ago.

The old man smiled, greeting him by name, and asked, "Do you know who I am?"

Now Ged had thought before of how it was always said, the Nine Masters of Roke, although he knew only eight: Windkey, Hand, Herbal, Chanter, Changer, Summoner, Namer, Patterner. It seemed that people spoke of the Archmage as the ninth. Yet when a new Archmage was chosen, nine Masters met to choose him.

"I think you are the Master Doorkeeper," said Ged.

"I am. Ged, you won entrance to Roke by saying your name. Now you may win your freedom of it by saying mine." So said the old man smiling, and waited. Ged stood dumb.

He knew a thousand ways and crafts and means for finding out names of things and of men, of course; such craft was a part of everything he had learned at Roke, for without it there could be little useful magic done. But to find out the name of a Mage and Master was another matter. A mage's name is better hidden than a herring in the sea, better guarded than a dragon's den. A prying charm will be met with a stronger charm, subtle devices will fail, devious inquiries will be deviously thwarted, and force will be turned ruinously back upon itself.

"You keep a narrow door, Master," said Ged at last. "I must sit out in the fields here, I think, and fast till I grow thin enough to slip through."

"As long as you like," said the Doorkeeper, smiling.

So Ged went off a little way and sat down under an alder on the banks of the Thwilburn, letting his otak run down to play in the stream and hunt the muddy banks for creek-crabs. The sun went down, late and bright, for spring was well along. Lights of lantern and were-light gleamed in the windows of the Great House, and down the hill the streets of Thwil town filled with darkness. Owls hooted over the roofs and bats flitted in the dusk air above the stream, and still Ged sat thinking how he might, by force, ruse, or sorcery, learn the Doorkeeper's name. The more he pondered the less he saw, among all the arts of witchcraft he had learned in these five years on Roke, any one that would serve to wrest such a secret from such a mage.

He lay down in the field and slept under the stars, with the otak nestling in his pocket. After the sun was up he went, still fasting, to the door of the House and knocked. The Doorkeeper opened.

"Master," said Ged, "I cannot take your name from you, not being strong enough, and I cannot trick your name from you, not being wise enough. So I am content to stay here, and learn or serve, whatever you will: unless by chance you will answer a question I have."

"Ask it."

"What is your name?"

The Doorkeeper smiled, and said his name: and Ged, repeating it, entered for the last time into that House.

When he left it again he wore a heavy dark-blue cloak, the gift of the township of Low Torning, whereto he was bound, for they wanted a wizard there. He carried

also a staff of his own height, carved of yew-wood, bronze-shod. The Doorkeeper bade him farewell opening the back door of the Great House for him, the door of horn and ivory, and he went down the streets of Thwil to a ship that waited for him on the bright water in the morning.

Chapter 5

The Dragon of Pendor

West of Roke in a crowd between the two great lands Hosk and Ensmer lie the Ninety Isles. The nearest to Roke is Serd, and the farthest is Seppish, which lies almost in the Pelnish Sea; and whether the sum of them is ninety is a question never settled, for if you count only isles with freshwater springs you might have seventy, while if you count every rock you might have a hundred and still not be done; and then the tide would change. Narrow run the channels between the islets, and there the mild tides of the Inmost Sea, chafed and baffled, run high and fall low, so that where at high tide there might be three islands in one place, at low there might be one. Yet for all that danger of the tide, every child who can walk can paddle, and has his little rowboat; housewives row across the channel to take a cup of rushwash tea with the neighbor; peddlers call their wares in rhythm with the stroke of their oars. All roads there are salt water, blocked only by nets strung from house to house across the straits to catch the small fish called turbies, the oil of which is the wealth of the Ninety Isles. There are few bridges, and no great towns. Every islet is thick with farms and fishermen's houses, and these are gathered into townships each of ten or twenty islets. One such was Low Torning, the westernmost, looking not on the Inmost Sea but outward to empty ocean, that lonely corner of the Archipelago where only Pendor lies, the dragon-spoiled isle, and beyond it the waters of the West Reach, desolate.

A house was ready there for the township's new wizard. It stood on a hill among green fields of barley, sheltered from the west wind by a grove of pendick-trees that now were red with flowers. From the door one looked out on other thatched roofs and groves and gardens, and other islands with their roofs and fields and hills, and amongst them all the many bright winding channels of the sea. It was a poor house, windowless, with earthen floor, yet a better house than the one Ged was born in. The Isle-Men of Low Torning, standing in awe of the wizard from Roke, asked

pardon for its humbleness. “We have no stone to build with,” said one, “We are none of us rich, though none starve,” said another, and a third, “It will be dry at least, for I saw to the thatching myself, Sir.” To Ged it was as good as any palace. He thanked the leaders of the township frankly, so that the eighteen of them went home, each in his own rowboat to his home isle, to tell the fishermen and housewives that the new wizard was a strange young grim fellow who spoke little, but he spoke fairly, and without pride.

There was little cause, perhaps, for pride in this first magistry of Ged’s. Wizards trained on Roke went commonly to cities or castles, to serve high lords who held them in high honor. These fishermen of Low Torning in the usual way of things would have had among them no more than a witch or a plain sorcerer, to charm the fishing-nets and sing over new boats and cure beasts and men of their ailments. But in late years the old Dragon of Pendor had spawned: nine dragons, it was said, now laired in the ruined towers of the Sealords of Pendor, dragging their scaled bellies up and down the marble stairs and through the broken doorways there. Wanting food on that dead isle, they would be flying forth some year when they were grown and hunger came upon them. Already a flight of four had been seen over the southwest shores of Hosk, not alighting but spying out the sheepfolds, barns, and villages. The hunger of a dragon is slow to wake, but hard to sate. So the Isle-Men of Low Torning had sent to Roke begging for a wizard to protect their folk from what boded over the western horizon, and the Archmage had judged their fear well founded.

“There is no comfort in this place,” the Archmage had said to Ged on the day he made him wizard, “no fame, no wealth, maybe no risk. Will you go?”

“I will go,” Ged had replied; not from obedience only. Since the night on Roke Knoll his desire had turned as much against fame and display as once it had been set on them. Always now he doubted his strength and dreaded the trial of his power. Yet also the talk of dragons drew him with a great curiosity. In Gont there have been no dragons for many hundred years; and no dragon would ever fly within scent or sight or spell of Roke, so that there also they are a matter of tales and songs only, things sung of but not seen. Ged had learned all he could of dragons at the School, but it is one thing to read about dragons and another to meet them. The chance lay bright before him, and heartily he answered, “I will go.”

The Archmage Gensher had nodded his head, but his look was somber. “Tell me,” he said at last, “do you fear to leave Roke? or are you eager to be gone?”

"Both, my lord."

Again Gensher nodded. "I do not know if I do right to send you from your safety here," he said very low. "I cannot see your way. It is all in darkness. And there is a power in the North, something that would destroy you, but what it is and where, whether in your past or on your forward way, I cannot tell: it is all shadowed. When the men from Low Torning came here, I thought at once of you, for it seemed a safe place and out of the way, where you might have time to gather your strength. But I do not know if any place is safe for you, or where your way goes. I do not want to send you out into the dark . . ."

It seemed a bright enough place to Ged at first, the house under the flowering trees. There he lived, and watched the western sky often, and kept his wizard's ear tuned for the sound of scaly wings. But no dragon came. Ged fished from his jetty, and tended his garden patch. He spent whole days pondering a page or a line or a word in the Lore-Books he had brought from Roke, sitting out in the summer air under the pendick-trees, while the otak slept beside him or went hunting mice in the forests of grass and daisies. And he served the people of Low Torning as healall and weatherworker whenever they asked him. It did not enter his head that a wizard might be ashamed to perform such simple crafts, for he had been a witch-child among poorer folk than these. They, however, asked little of him, holding him in awe, partly because he was a wizard from the Isle of the Wise, and partly on account of his silence and his scarred face. There was that about him, young as he was, that made men uneasy with him.

Yet he found a friend, a boatmaker who dwelt on the next islet eastward. His name was Pechvarry. They had met first on his jetty, where Ged stopped to watch him stepping the mast of a little cat-boat. He had looked up at the wizard with a grin and said, "Here's a month's work nearly finished. I guess you might have done it in a minute with a word, eh, Sir?"

"I might," said Ged, "but it would likely sink the next minute, unless I kept the spells up. But if you like . . ." He stopped.

"Well, Sir?"

"Well, that is a lovely little craft. She needs nothing. But if you like, I could set a binding-spell on her, to help keep her sound; or a finding-spell, to help bring her home from the sea."

He spoke hesitantly, not wanting to offend the craftsman, but Pechvarry's face shone. "The little boat's for my son, Sir, and if you would lay such charms on her, it would be a mighty kindness and a friendly act." And he climbed up onto the jetty

to take Ged's hand then and there and thank him.

After that they came to work together often, Ged interweaving his spell-crafts with Pechvarry's handwork on the boats he built or repaired, and in return learning from Pechvarry how a boat was built, and also how a boat was handled without aid of magic: for this skill of plain sailing had been somewhat scanted on Roke. Often Ged and Pechvarry and his little son Ioeth went out into the channels and lagoons, sailing or rowing one boat or another, till Ged was a fair sailor, and the friendship between him and Pechvarry was a settled thing.

Along in late autumn the boatmaker's son fell sick. The mother sent for the witch-woman of Tesk Isle, who was a good hand at healing, and all seemed well for a day or two. Then in the middle of a stormy night came Pechvarry hammering at Ged's door, begging him to come save the child. Ged ran down to the boat with him and they rowed in all haste through dark and rain to the boatmaker's house. There Ged saw the child on his pallet-bed, and the mother crouching silent beside him, and the witchwoman making a smoke of corly-root and singing the Nagian Chant, which was the best healing she had. But she whispered to Ged, "Lord Wizard, I think this fever is the red-fever, and the child will die of it tonight."

When Ged knelt and put his hands on the child, he thought the same, and he drew back a moment. In the latter months of his own long sickness the Master Herbal had taught him much of the healer's lore, and the first lesson and the last of all that lore was this: Heal the wound and cure the illness, but let the dying spirit go.

The mother saw his movement and the meaning of it, and cried out aloud in despair. Pechvarry stooped down by her saying, "The Lord Sparrowhawk will save him, wife. No need to cry! He's here now. He can do it."

Hearing the mother's wail, and seeing the trust Pechvarry had in him, Ged did not know how he could disappoint them. He mistrusted his own judgment, and thought perhaps the child might be saved, if the fever could be brought down. He said, "I'll do my best, Pechvarry."

He set to bathing the little boy with cold rainwater that they brought new-fallen from out of doors, and he began to say one of the spells of feverstay. The spell took no hold and made no whole, and suddenly he thought the child was dying in his arms.

Summoning his power all at once and with no thought for himself, he sent his spirit out after the child's spirit, to bring it back home. He called the child's name, "Ioeth!" Thinking some faint answer came in his inward hearing he pursued,

calling once more. Then he saw the little boy running fast and far ahead of him down a dark slope, the side of some vast hill. There was no sound. The stars above the hill were no stars his eyes had ever seen. Yet he knew the constellations by name: the Sheaf, the Door, the One Who Turns, the Tree. They were those stars that do not set, that are not paled by the coming of any day. He had followed the dying child too far.

Knowing this he found himself alone on the dark hillside. It was hard to turn back, very hard.

He turned slowly. Slowly he set one foot forward to climb back up the hill, and then the other. Step by step he went, each step willed. And each step was harder than the last.

The stars did not move. No wind blew over the dry steep ground. In all the vast kingdom of the darkness only he moved, slowly, climbing. He came to the top of the hill, and saw the low wall of stones there. But across the wall, facing him, there was a shadow.

The shadow did not have the shape of man or beast. It was shapeless, scarcely to be seen, but it whispered at him, though there were no words in its whispering, and it reached out towards him. And it stood on the side of the living, and he on the side of the dead.

Either he must go down the hill into the desert lands and lightless cities of the dead, or he must step across the wall back into life, where the formless evil thing waited for him.

His spirit-staff was in his hand, and he raised it high. With that motion, strength came into him. As he made to leap the low wall of stones straight at the shadow, the staff burned suddenly white, a blinding light in that dim place. He leaped, felt himself fall, and saw no more.

Now what Pechvarry and his wife and the witch saw was this: the young wizard had stopped midway in his spell, and held the child a while motionless. Then he had laid little Ioeth gently down on the pallet, and had risen, and stood silent, staff in hand. All at once he raised the staff high and it blazed with white fire as if he held the lightning-bolt in his grip, and all the household things in the hut leaped out strange and vivid in that momentary fire. When their eyes were clear from the dazzlement they saw the young man lying huddled forward on the earthen floor, beside the pallet where the child lay dead.

To Pechvarry it seemed that the wizard also was dead. His wife wept, but he was utterly bewildered. But the witch had some hearsay knowledge concerning magery

and the ways a true wizard may go, and she saw to it that Ged, cold and lifeless as he lay, was not treated as a dead man but as one sick or tranced. He was carried home, and an old woman was left to watch and see whether he slept to wake or slept forever.

The little otak was hiding in the rafters of the house, as it did when strangers entered. There it stayed while the rain beat on the walls and the fire sank down and the night wearing slowly along left the old woman nodding beside the hearthpit. Then the otak crept down and came to Ged where he lay stretched stiff and still upon the bed. It began to lick his hands and wrists, long and patiently, with its dry leaf-brown tongue. Crouching beside his head it licked his temple, his scarred cheek, and softly his closed eyes. And very slowly under that soft touch Ged roused. He woke, not knowing where he had been or where he was or what was the faint grey light in the air about him, which was the light of dawn coming to the world. Then the otak curled up near his shoulder as usual, and went to sleep.

Later, when Ged thought back upon that night, he knew that had none touched him when he lay thus spirit-lost, had none called him back in some way, he might have been lost for good. It was only the dumb instinctive wisdom of the beast who licks his hurt companion to comfort him, and yet in that wisdom Ged saw something akin to his own power, something that went as deep as wizardry. From that time forth he believed that the wise man is one who never sets himself apart from other living things, whether they have speech or not, and in later years he strove long to learn what can be learned, in silence, from the eyes of animals, the flight of birds, the great slow gestures of trees.

He had now made unscathed, for the first time, that crossing-over and return which only a wizard can make with open eyes, and which not the greatest mage can make without risk. But he had returned to a grief and a fear. The grief was for his friend Pechvarry, the fear was for himself. He knew now why the Archmage had feared to send him forth, and what had darkened and clouded even the mage's foreseeing of his future. For it was darkness itself that had awaited him, the unnamed thing, the being that did not belong in the world, the shadow he had loosed or made. In spirit, at the boundary wall between death and life, it had waited for him these long years. It had found him there at last. It would be on his track now, seeking to draw near to him, to take his strength into itself, and suck up his life, and clothe itself in his flesh.

Soon after, he dreamed of the thing like a bear with no head or face. He thought it went fumbling about the walls of the house, searching for the door. Such a dream

he had not dreamed since the healing of the wounds the thing had given him. When he woke he was weak and cold, and the scars on his face and shoulder drew and ached.

Now began a bad time. When he dreamed of the shadow or so much as thought of it, he felt always that same cold dread: sense and power drained out of him, leaving him stupid and astray. He raged at his cowardice, but that did no good. He sought for some protection, but there was none: the thing was not flesh, not alive, not spirit, unnamed, having no being but what he himself had given it—a terrible power outside the laws of the sunlit world. All he knew of it was that it was drawn to him and would try to work its will through him, being his creature. But in what form it could come, having no real form of its own as yet, and how it would come, and when it would come, this he did not know.

He set up what barriers of sorcery he could about his house and about the isle where he lived. Such spell-walls must be ever renewed, and soon he saw that if he spent all his strength on these defenses, he would be of no use to the islanders. What could he do, between two enemies, if a dragon came from Pendor?

Again he dreamed, but this time in the dream the shadow was inside his house, beside the door, reaching out to him through the darkness and whispering words he did not understand. He woke in terror, and sent the werelight flaming through the air, lighting every corner of the little house till he saw no shadow anywhere. Then he put wood on the coals of his firepit, and sat in the firelight hearing the autumn wind fingering at the thatch roof and whining in the great bare trees above; and he pondered long. An old anger had awakened in his heart. He would not suffer this helpless waiting, this sitting trapped on a little island muttering useless spells of lock and ward. Yet he could not simply flee the trap: to do so would be to break his trust with the islanders and to leave them to the imminent dragon, undefended. There was but one way to take.

The next morning he went down among the fishermen in the principal moorage of Low Torning, and finding the Head Isle-Man there said to him, "I must leave this place. I am in danger, and I put you in danger. I must go. Therefore I ask your leave to go out and do away with the dragons on Pendor, so that my task for you will be finished and I may leave freely. Or if I fail, I should fail also when they come here, and that is better known now than later."

The Isle-Man stared at him all dropjawed. "Lord Sparrowhawk," he said, "there are nine dragons out there!"

"Eight are still young, they say."

“But the old one—”

“I tell you, I must go from here. I ask your leave to rid you of the dragon-peril first, if I can do so.”

“As you will, Sir,” the Isle-Man said gloomily. All that listened there thought this a folly or a crazy courage in their young wizard, and with sullen faces they saw him go, expecting no news of him again. Some hinted that he meant merely to sail back by Hosk to the Inmost Sea, leaving them in the lurch; others, among them Pechvarry, held that he had gone mad, and sought death.

For four generations of men all ships had set their course to keep far from the shores of Pendor Island. No mage had ever come to do combat with the dragon there, for the island was on no traveled sea road, and its lords had been pirates, slavetakers, war-makers, hated by all that dwelt in the southwest parts of Earthsea. For this reason none had sought to revenge the Lord of Pendor, after the dragon came suddenly out of the west upon him and his men where they sat feasting in the tower, and smothered them with the flames of his mouth, and drove all the townsfolk screaming into the sea. Unavenged, Pendor had been left to the dragon, with all its bones, and towers, and jewels stolen from long-dead princes of the coasts of Paln and Hosk.

All this Ged knew well, and more, for ever since he came to Low Torning he had held in mind and pondered over all he had ever learned of dragons. As he guided his small boat westward—not rowing now nor using the seaman’s skill Pechvarry had taught him, but sailing wizardry with the magewind in his sail and a spell set on prow and keel to keep them true—he watched to see the dead isle rise on the rim of the sea. Speed he wanted, and therefore used the magewind, for he feared what was behind him more than what was before him. But as the day passed, his impatience turned from fear to a kind of glad fierceness. At least he sought this danger of his own will; and the nearer he came to it the more sure he was that, for this time at least, for this hour perhaps before his death, he was free. The shadow dared not follow him into a dragon’s jaws. The waves ran white-tipped on the grey sea, and grey clouds streamed overhead on the north wind. He went west with the quick magewind in his sail, and came in sight of the rocks of Pendor, the still streets of the town, and the gutted, falling towers.

At the entrance of the harbor, a shallow crescent bay, he let the wind-spell drop and stilled his little boat so it lay rocking on the waves. Then he summoned the dragon: “Usurper of Pendor, come defend your hoard!”

His voice fell short in the sound of breakers beating on the ashen shores; but

dragons have keen ears. Presently one flitted up from some roofless ruin of the town like a vast black bat, thin-winged and spiny-backed, and circling into the north wind came flying towards Ged. His heart swelled at the sight of the creature that was a myth to his people, and he laughed and shouted, "Go tell the Old One to come, you wind-worm!"

For this was one of the young dragons, spawned there years ago by a she-dragon from the West Reach, who had set her clutch of great leathern eggs, as they say she-dragons will, in some sunny broken room of the tower and had flown away again, leaving the Old Dragon of Pendor to watch the young when they crawled like baneful lizards from the shell.

The young dragon made no answer. He was not large of his kind, maybe the length of a forty-oared ship, and was wormthin for all the reach of his black membranous wings. He had not got his growth yet, nor his voice, nor any dragon-cunning. Straight at Ged in the small rocking boat he came, opening his long, toothed jaws as he slid down arrowy from the air: so that all Ged had to do was bind his wings and limbs stiff with one sharp spell and send him thus hurtling aside into the sea like a stone falling. And the grey sea closed over him.

Two dragons like the first rose up from the base of the highest tower. Even as the first one they came driving straight at Ged, and even so he caught both, hurled both down, and drowned them; and he had not yet lifted up his wizard's staff.

Now after a little time there came three against him from the island. One of these was much greater, and fire spewed curling from its jaws. Two came flying at him rattling their wings, but the big one came circling from behind, very swift, to burn him and his boat with its breath of fire. No binding-spell would catch all three, because two came from north and one from south. In the instant that he saw this, Ged worked a spell of Changing, and between one breath and the next flew up from his boat in dragon-form.

Spreading broad wings and reaching talons out, he met the two head on, withering them with fire, and then turned to the third, who was larger than he and armed also with fire. On the wind over the grey waves they doubled, snapped, swooped, lunged, till smoke roiled about them red-lit by the glare of their fiery mouths. Ged flew suddenly upward and the other pursued, below him. In midflight the dragon-Ged raised wings, stopped, and stooped as the hawk stoops, talons outstretched downward, striking and bearing the other down by neck and flank. The black wings flurried and black dragon-blood dropped in thick drops into the sea. The Pendor dragon tore free and flew low and lamely to the island,

where it hid, crawling into some well or cavern in the ruined town.

At once Ged took his form and place again on the boat, for it was most perilous to keep that dragon-shape longer than need demanded. His hands were black with the scalding wormblood, and he was scorched about the head with fire, but this was no matter now. He waited only till he had his breath back and then called, "Six I have seen, five slain, nine are told of: come out, worms!"

No creature moved nor voice spoke for a long while on the island, but only the waves beat loudly on the shore. Then Ged was aware that the highest tower slowly changed its shape, bulging out on one side as if it grew an arm. He feared dragon-magic, for old dragons are very powerful and guileful in a sorcery like and unlike the sorcery of men: but a moment more and he saw this was no trick of the dragon, but of his own eyes. What he had taken for a part of the tower was the shoulder of the Dragon of Pendor as he uncurled his bulk and lifted himself slowly up.

When he was all afoot his scaled head, spike-crowned and triple-tongued, rose higher than the broken tower's height, and his taloned forefeet rested on the rubble of the town below. His scales were grey-black, catching the daylight like broken stone. Lean as a hound he was and huge as a hill. Ged stared in awe. There was no song or tale could prepare the mind for this sight. Almost he stared into the dragon's eyes and was caught, for one cannot look into a dragon's eyes. He glanced away from the oily green gaze that watched him, and held up before him his staff, that looked now like a splinter, like a twig.

"Eight sons I had, little wizard," said the great dry voice of the dragon. "Five died, one dies: enough. You will not win my hoard by killing them."

"I do not want your hoard."

The yellow smoke hissed from the dragon's nostrils: that was his laughter.

"Would you not like to come ashore and look at it, little wizard? It is worth looking at."

"No, dragon." The kinship of dragons is with wind and fire, and they do not fight willingly over the sea. That had been Ged's advantage so far and he kept it; but the strip of sea-water between him and the great grey talons did not seem much of an advantage, anymore.

It was hard not to look into the green, watching eyes.

"You are a very young wizard," the dragon said, "I did not know men came so young into their power." He spoke, as did Ged, in the Old Speech, for that is the tongue of dragons still. Although the use of the Old Speech binds a man to truth, this is not so with dragons. It is their own language, and they can lie in it, twisting

the true words to false ends, catching the unwary hearer in a maze of mirrorwords each of which reflects the truth and none of which leads anywhere. So Ged had been warned often, and when the dragon spoke he listened with an untrustful ear, all his doubts ready. But the words seemed plain and clear: "Is it to ask my help that you have come here, little wizard?"

"No, dragon."

"Yet I could help you. You will need help soon, against that which hunts you in the dark."

Ged stood dumb.

"What is it that hunts you? Name it to me."

"If I could name it—" Ged stopped himself.

Yellow smoke curled above the dragon's long head, from the nostrils that were two round pits of fire.

"If you could name it you could master it, maybe, little wizard. Maybe I could tell you its name, when I see it close by. And it will come close, if you wait about my isle. It will come wherever you come. If you do not want it to come close you must run, and run, and keep running from it. And yet it will follow you. Would you like to know its name?"

Ged stood silent again. How the dragon knew of the shadow he had loosed, he could not guess, nor how it might know the shadow's name. The Archmage had said that the shadow had no name. Yet dragons have their own wisdom; and they are an older race than man. Few men can guess what a dragon knows and how he knows it, and those few are the Dragonlords. To Ged, only one thing was sure: that, though the dragon might well be speaking truth, though he might indeed be able to tell Ged the nature and name of the shadow-thing and so give him power over it—even so, even if he spoke truth, he did so wholly for his own ends.

"It is very seldom," the young man said at last, "that dragons ask to do men favors."

"But it is very common," said the dragon, "for cats to play with mice before they kill them."

"But I did not come here to play, or to be played with. I came to strike a bargain with you."

Like a sword in sharpness but five times the length of any sword, the point of the dragon's tail arched up scorpion-wise over his mailed back, above the tower. Dryly he spoke: "I strike no bargains. I take. What have you to offer that I cannot take from you when I like?"

"Safety. Your safety. Swear that you will never fly eastward of Pendor, and I will swear to leave you unharmed."

A grating sound came from the dragon's throat like the noise of an avalanche far off, stones falling among mountains. Fire danced along his three-forked tongue. He raised himself up higher, looming over the ruins. "You offer me safety! You threaten me! With what?"

"With your name, Yevaud."

Ged's voice shook as he spoke the name, yet he spoke it clear and loud. At the sound of it, the old dragon held still, utterly still. A minute went by, and another; and then Ged, standing there in his rocking chip of a boat, smiled. He had staked this venture and his life on a guess drawn from old histories of dragon-lore learned on Roke, a guess that this Dragon of Pendor was the same that had spoiled the west of Osskil in the days of Elfarran and Morred, and had been driven from Osskil by a wizard, Elt, wise in names. The guess had held.

"We are matched, Yevaud. You have the strength: I have your name. Will you bargain?"

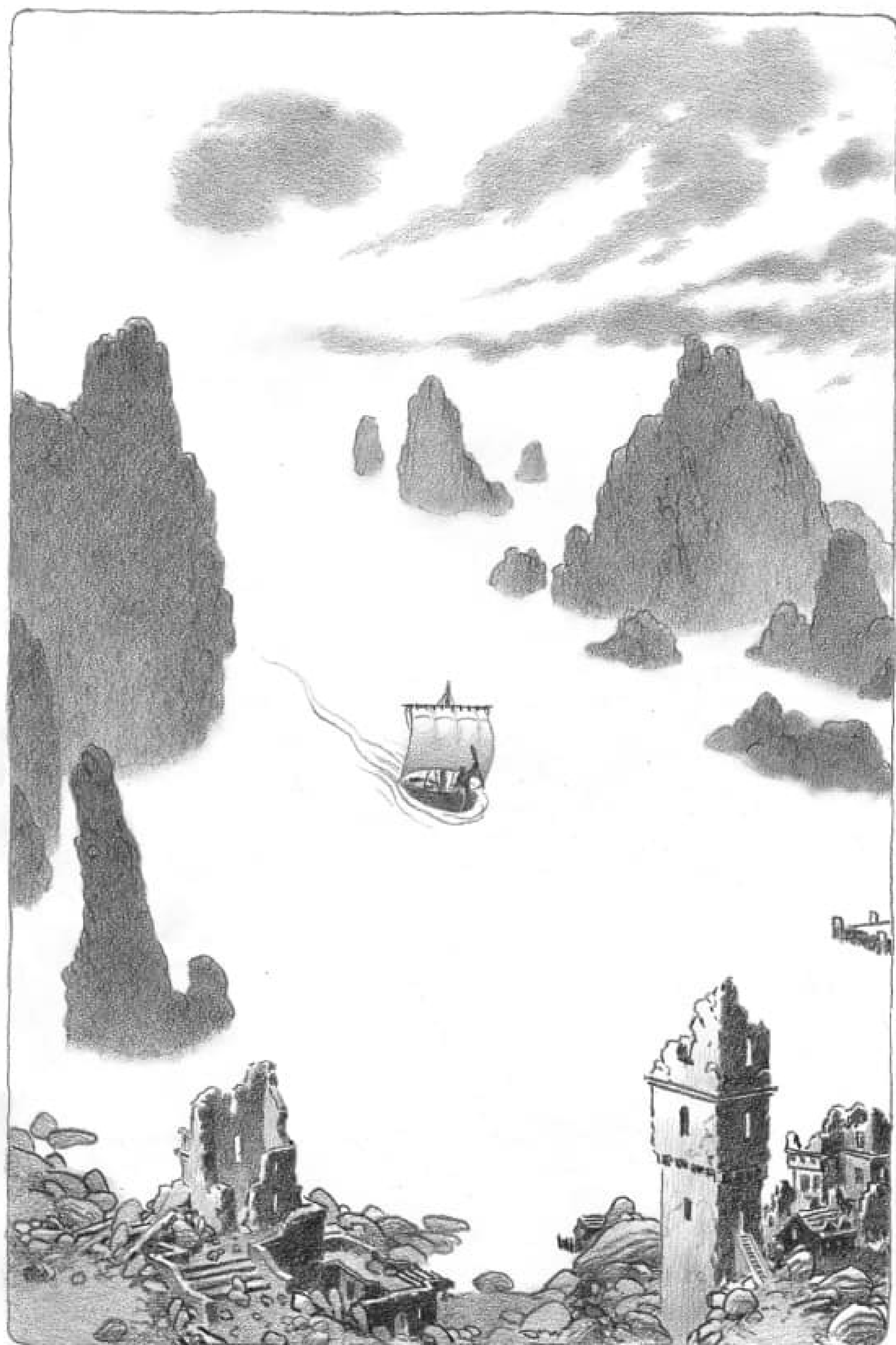
Still the dragon made no reply.

Many years had the dragon sprawled on the island where golden breastplates and emeralds lay scattered among dust and bricks and bones; he had watched his black lizard-brood play among crumbling houses and try their wings from the cliffs; he had slept long in the sun, unwaked by voice or sail. He had grown old. It was hard now to stir, to face this mage-lad, this frail enemy, at the sight of whose staff Yevaud, the old dragon, winced.

"You may choose nine stones from my hoard," he said at last, his voice hissing and whining in his long jaws. "The best: take your choice. Then go!"

"I do not want your stones, Yevaud."

"Where is men's greed gone? Men loved bright stones in the old days in the North . . . I know what it is you want, wizard. I, too, can offer you safety, for I know what can save you. I know what alone can save you. There is a horror follows you. I will tell you its name."



Ged's heart leaped in him, and he clutched his staff, standing as still as the dragon stood. He fought a moment with sudden, startling hope.

It was not his own life that he bargained for. One mastery, and only one, could he hold over the dragon. He set hope aside and did what he must do.

"That is not what I ask for, Yevaud."

When he spoke the dragon's name it was as if he held the huge being on a fine, thin leash, tightening it on his throat. He could feel the ancient malice and experience of men in the dragon's gaze that rested on him, he could see the steel talons each as long as a man's forearm, and the stone-hard hide, and the withering fire that lurked in the dragon's throat: and yet always the leash tightened, tightened.

He spoke again: "Yevaud! Swear by your name that you and your sons will never come to the Archipelago."

Flames broke suddenly bright and loud from the dragon's jaws, and he said, "I swear it by my name!"

Silence lay over the isle then, and Yevaud lowered his great head.

When he raised it again and looked, the wizard was gone, and the sail of the boat was a white fleck on the waves eastward, heading towards the fat bejeweled islands of the inner seas. Then in rage the old Dragon of Pendor rose up breaking the tower with the writhing of his body, and beating his wings that spanned the whole width of the ruined town. But his oath held him, and he did not fly, then or ever, to the Archipelago.

Chapter 6

Hunted

As soon as Pendor had sunk under the sea-rim behind him, Ged looking eastward felt the fear of the shadow come into his heart again; and it was hard to turn from the bright danger of the dragons to that formless, hopeless horror. He let the magewind drop, and sailed on with the world's wind, for there was no desire for speed in him now. He had no clear plan even of what he should do. He must run, as the dragon had said; but where? To Roke, he thought, since there at least he was protected, and might find counsel among the wise.

First, however, he must come to Low Torning once more and tell his tale to the Isle-Men. When word went out that he had returned, five days from his setting forth, they and half the people of the township came rowing and running to gather round him, and stare at him, and listen. He told his tale, and one man said, "But who saw this wonder of dragons slain and dragons baffled? What if he—"

"Be still!" the Head Isle-Man said roughly, for he knew, as did most of them, that a wizard may have subtle ways of telling the truth, and may keep the truth to himself, but that if he says a thing the thing is as he says. For that is his mastery. So they wondered, and began to feel that their fear was lifted from them, and then they began to rejoice. They pressed round their young wizard and asked for the tale again. More islanders came, and asked for it again. By nightfall he no longer had to tell it. They could do it for him, better. Already the village chanters had fitted it to an old tune, and were singing the *Song of the Sparrowhawk*. Bonfires were burning not only on the isles of Low Torning but in townships to the south and east. Fishermen shouted the news from boat to boat, from isle to isle it went: Evil is averted, the dragons will never come from Pendor!

That night, that one night, was joyous for Ged. No shadow could come near him through the brightness of those fires of thanksgiving that burned on every hill and beach, through the circles of laughing dancers that ringed him about, singing his

praise, swinging their torches in the gusty autumn night so that sparks rose thick and bright and brief upon the wind.

The next day he met with Pechvarry, who said, "I did not know you were so mighty, my lord." There was fear in that because he had dared make Ged his friend, but there was reproach in it also. Ged had not saved a little child, though he had slain dragons. After that, Ged felt afresh the unease and impatience that had driven him to Pendor, and drove him now from Low Torning. The next day, though they would have kept him gladly the rest of his life to praise and boast of, he left the house on the hill, with no baggage but his books, his staff, and the otak riding on his shoulder.

He went in a rowboat with a couple of young fishermen of Low Torning, who wanted the honor of being his boatmen. Always as they rowed on among the craft that crowd the eastern channels of the Ninety Isles, under the windows and balconies of houses that lean out over the water, past the wharves of Nesh, the rainy pastures of Dromgan, the malodorous oil-sheds of Geath, word of his deed had gone ahead of him. They whistled the *Song of the Sparrowhawk* as he went by, they vied to have him spend the night and tell his dragon-tale. When at last he came to Serd, the ship's master of whom he asked passage out to Roke bowed as he answered, "A privilege to me, Lord Wizard, and an honor to my ship!"

So Ged turned his back on the Ninety Isles; but even as the ship turned from Serd Inner Port and raised sail, a wind came up hard from the east against her. It was strange, for the wintry sky was clear and the weather had seemed settled mild that morning. It was only thirty miles from Serd to Roke, and they sailed on; and when the wind still rose, they still sailed on. The little ship, like most traders of the Inmost Sea, bore the high fore-and-aft sail that can be turned to catch a headwind, and her master was a handy seaman, proud of his skill. So tacking now north now south they worked eastward. Clouds and rain came up on the wind, which veered and gusted so wildly that there was considerable danger of the ship jibing. "Lord Sparrowhawk," said the ship's master to the young man, whom he had beside him in the place of honor in the stern, though small dignity could be kept up under that wind and rain that wet them all to a miserable sleekness in their sodden cloaks —"Lord Sparrowhawk, might you say a word to this wind, maybe?"

"How near are we to Roke?"

"Better than halfway. But we've made no headway at all this past hour, Sir."

Ged spoke to the wind. It blew less hard, and for a while they went on fairly enough. Then sudden great gusts came whistling out of the south, and meeting

these they were driven back westward again. The clouds broke and boiled in the sky, and the ship's master roared out ragefully, "This fool's gale blows all ways at once! Only a magewind will get us through this weather, Lord."

Ged looked glum at that, but the ship and her men were in danger for him, so he raised up the magewind into her sail. At once the ship began to cleave straight to the east, and the ship's master began to look cheerful again. But little by little, though Ged kept up the spell, the magewind slackened, growing feebler, until the ship seemed to hang still on the waves for a minute, her sail drooping, amid all the tumult of the rain and gale. Then with a thundercrack the boom came swinging round and she jibed and jumped northward like a scared cat.

Ged grabbed hold of a stanchion, for she lay almost over on her side, and shouted out, "Turn back to Serd, master!"

The master cursed and shouted that he would not: "A wizard aboard, and I the best seaman of the Trade, and this the handiest ship I ever sailed—turn back?"

Then, the ship turning again almost as if a whirlpool had caught her keel, he too grabbed hold of the sternpost to keep aboard, and Ged said to him, "Leave me at Serd and sail where you like. It's not against your ship this wind blows, but against me."

"Against you, a wizard of Roke?"

"Have you never heard of the Roke-wind, master?"

"Aye, that keeps off evil powers from the Isle of the Wise, but what has that to do with you, a Dragontamer?"

"That is between me and my shadow," Ged answered shortly, as a wizard will; and he said no more as they went swiftly, with a steady wind and under clearing skies, back over the sea to Serd.

There was a heaviness and a dread in his heart as he went up from the wharves of Serd. The days were shortening into winter, and dusk came soon. With dusk Ged's uneasiness always grew, and now the turning of each street seemed a threat to him, and he had to steel himself not to keep looking back over his shoulder at what might be coming behind him. He went to the Sea-House of Serd, where travelers and merchants ate together of good fare provided by the township, and might sleep in the long raftered hall: such is the hospitality of the thriving islands of the Inmost Sea.

He saved a bit of meat from his dinner, and by the firepit afterward he coaxed the otak out of the fold of his hood where it had cowered all that day, and tried to get it to eat, petting it and whispering to it, "Hoeg, hoeg, little one, silent one . . ."

But it would not eat, and crept into his pocket to hide. By that, by his own dull uncertainty, by the very look of the darkness in the corners of the great room, he knew that the shadow was not far from him.

No one in this place knew him: they were travelers, from other isles, who had not heard the *Song of the Sparrowhawk*. None spoke to him. He chose a pallet at last and lay down, but all night long he lay with open eyes there in the raftered hall among the sleep of strangers. All night he tried to choose his way, to plan where he should go, what he should do: but each choice, each plan was blocked by a foreboding of doom. Across each way he might go lay the shadow. Only Roke was clear of it: and to Roke he could not go, forbidden by the high, enwoven, ancient spells that kept the perilous island safe. That the Roke-wind had risen against him was proof the thing that hunted him must be very close upon him now.

That thing was bodiless, blind to sunlight, a creature of a lightless, placeless, timeless realm. It must grope after him through the days and across the seas of the sunlit world, and could take visible shape only in dream and darkness. It had as yet no substance or being that the light of the sun would shine on; and so it is sung in the *Deed of Hode*, "Daybreak makes all earth and sea, from shadow brings forth form, driving dream to the dark kingdom." But if once the shadow caught up with Ged it could draw his power out of him, and take from him the very weight and warmth and life of his body and the will that moved him.

That was the doom he saw lying ahead on every road. And he knew that he might be tricked toward that doom; for the shadow, growing stronger always as it was nearer him, might even now have strength enough to put evil powers or evil men to its own use—showing him false portents, or speaking with a stranger's voice. For all he knew, in one of these men who slept in this corner or that of the raftered hall of the Sea-House tonight, the dark thing lurked, finding a foothold in a dark soul and there waiting and watching Ged and feeding, even now, on his weakness, on his uncertainty, on his fear.

It was past bearing. He must trust to chance, and run wherever chance took him. At the first cold hint of dawn he got up and went in haste under the dimming stars down to the wharves of Serd, resolved only to take the first ship outward bound that would have him. A galley was loading turbie-oil; she was to sail at sunrise, bound for Havnor Great Port. Ged asked passage of her master. A wizard's staff is passport and payment on most ships. They took him aboard willingly, and within that hour the ship set forth. Ged's spirits lifted with the first lifting of the forty long oars, and the drumbeat that kept the stroke made a brave music to him.

And yet he did not know what he would do in Havnor, or where he would run from there. Northward was as good as any direction. He was a Northerner himself; maybe he would find some ship to take him on to Gont from Havnor, and he might see Ogion again. Or he might find some ship going far out into the Reaches, so far the shadow would lose him and give up the hunt. Beyond such vague ideas as these, there was no plan in his head, and he saw no one course that he must follow. Only he must run . . .

Those forty oars carried the ship over a hundred and fifty miles of wintry sea before sunset of the second day out from Serd. They came in to port at Orrimy on the east shore of the great land Hosk, for these trade-galleys of the Inmost Sea keep to the coasts and lie overnight in harbor whenever they can. Ged went ashore, for it was still daylight, and he roamed the steep streets of the port-town, aimless and brooding.

Orrimy is an old town, built heavily of stone and brick, walled against the lawless lords of the interior of Hosk Island; the warehouses on the docks are like forts, and the merchants' houses are towered and fortified. Yet to Ged wandering through the streets those ponderous mansions seemed like veils, behind which lay an empty dark; and people who passed him, intent on their business, seemed not real men but voiceless shadows of men. As the sun set he came down to the wharves again, and even there in the broad red light and wind of the day's end, sea and land alike to him seemed dim and silent.

"Where are you bound, Lord Wizard?"

So one hailed him suddenly from behind. Turning he saw a man dressed in grey, who carried a staff of heavy wood that was not a wizard's staff. The stranger's face was hidden by his hood from the red light, but Ged felt the unseen eyes meet his. Starting back he raised his own yew-staff between him and the stranger.

Mildly the man asked, "What do you fear?"

"What follows behind me."

"So? But I'm not your shadow."

Ged stood silent. He knew that indeed this man, whatever he was, was not what he feared: he was no shadow or ghost or gebbeth-creature. Amidst the dry silence and shadowiness that had come over the world, he even kept a voice and some solidity. He put back his hood now. He had a strange, seamed, bald head, a lined face. Though age had not sounded in his voice, he looked to be an old man.

"I do not know you," said the man in grey, "yet I think perhaps we do not meet by chance. I heard a tale once of a young man, a scarred man, who won through

darkness to great dominion, even to kingship. I do not know if that is your tale. But I will tell you this: go to the Court of the Terrenon, if you need a sword to fight shadows with. A staff of yew-wood will not serve your need."

Hope and mistrust struggled in Ged's mind as he listened. A wizardly man soon learns that few indeed of his meetings are chance ones, be they for good or for ill.

"In what land is the Court of the Terrenon?"

"In Osskil."

At the sound of that name Ged saw for a moment, by a trick of memory, a black raven on green grass who looked up at him sidelong with an eye like polished stone, and spoke; but the words were forgotten.

"That land has something of a dark name," Ged said, looking ever at the man in grey, trying to judge what kind of man he was. There was a manner about him that hinted of the sorcerer, even of the wizard; and yet boldly as he spoke to Ged, there was a queer beaten look about him, the look almost of a sick man, or a prisoner, or a slave.

"You are from Roke," he answered. "The wizards of Roke give a dark name to wizardries other than their own."

"What man are you?"

"A traveler; a trader's agent from Osskil: I am here on business," said the man in grey. When Ged asked him no more he quietly bade the young man good night, and went off up the narrow stepped street above the quays.

Ged turned, irresolute whether to heed this sign or not, and looked to the north. The red light was dying out fast from the hills and from the windy sea. Grey dusk came, and on its heels the night.

Ged went in sudden decision and haste along the quays to a fisherman who was folding his nets down in his dory, and hailed him: "Do you know any ship in this port bound north—to Semel, or the Enlades?"

"The longship yonder's from Osskil, she might be stopping at the Enlades."

In the same haste Ged went on to the great ship the fisherman had pointed to, a long-ship of sixty oars, gaunt as a snake, her high bent prow carven and inlaid with disks of loto-shell, her oarport-covers painted red, with the rune Sifl sketched on each in black. A grim, swift ship she looked, and all in sea-trim, with all her crew aboard. Ged sought out the ship's master and asked passage to Osskil of him.

"Can you pay?"

"I have some skill with winds."

"I am a weatherworker myself. You have nothing to give? no money?"

In Low Torning the Isle-Men had paid Ged as best they could with the ivory pieces used by traders in the Archipelago; he would take only ten pieces, though they wanted to give him more. He offered these now to the Osskilian, but he shook his head. "We do not use those counters. If you have nothing to pay, I have no place aboard for you."

"Do you need arms? I have rowed in a galley."

"Aye, we're short two men. Find your bench then," said the ship's master, and paid him no more heed.

So, laying his staff and his bag of books under the rowers' bench, Ged became for ten bitter days of winter an oarsman of that Northern ship. They left Orrimy at daybreak, and that day Ged thought he could never keep up his work. His left arm was somewhat lamed by the old wounds in his shoulder, and all his rowing in the channels about Low Torning had not trained him for the relentless pull and pull and pull at the long galley-oar to the beat of the drum. Each stint at the oars was of two or three hours, and then a second shift of oarsmen took the benches, but the time of rest seemed only long enough for all Ged's muscles to stiffen, and then it was back to the oars. And the second day of it was worse; but after that he hardened to the labor, and got on well enough.

There was no such comradeship among this crew as he had found aboard *Shadow* when he first went to Roke. The crewmen of Andradean and Gontish ships are partners in the trade, working together for a common profit, whereas traders of Osskil use slaves and bondsmen or hire men to row, paying them with small coins of gold. Gold is a great thing in Osskil. But it is not a source of good fellowship there, or amongst the dragons, who also prize it highly. Since half this crew were bondsmen, forced to work, the ship's officers were slavemasters, and harsh ones. They never laid their whips on the back of an oarsman who worked for pay or passage; but there will not be much friendliness in a crew of whom some are whipped and others are not. Ged's fellows said little to one another, and less to him. They were mostly men from Osskil, speaking not the Hardic tongue of the Archipelago but a dialect of their own, and they were dour men, pale-skinned with black drooping mustaches and lank hair. *Kelub*, the red one, was Ged's name among them. Though they knew he was a wizard they showed him no regard, but rather a kind of cautious spitefulness. And he himself was in no mood for making friends. Even on his bench, caught up in the mighty rhythm of the rowing, one oarsman among sixty in a ship racing over void grey seas, he felt himself exposed, defenseless. When they came into strange ports at nightfall and he rolled himself in

his cloak to sleep, weary as he was he would dream, wake, dream again: evil dreams, that he could not recall waking, though they seemed to hang about the ship and the men of the ship, so that he mistrusted each one of them.

All the Osskilian freemen wore a long knife at the hip, and one day as his oar-shift shared their noon meal one of these men asked Ged, "Are you slave or oathbreaker, Kelub?"

"Neither."

"Why no knife, then? Afraid to fight?" said the man, Skiorh, jeering.

"No."

"Your little dog fight for you?"

"Otak," said another who listened. "No dog, that is otak," and he said something in Osskilian that made Skiorh scowl and turn away. Just as he turned Ged saw a change in his face, a slurring and shifting of the features, as if for a moment something had changed him, used him, looking out through his eyes sidelong at Ged. Yet the next minute Ged saw him full-face, and he looked as usual, so that Ged told himself that what he had seen was his own fear, his own dread reflected in the other's eyes. But that night as they lay in port in Esen he dreamed, and Skiorh walked in his dream. Afterwards he avoided the man as best he could, and it seemed also that Skiorh kept away from him, and no more words passed between them.

The snow-crowned mountains of Havnor sank away behind them southward, blurred by the mists of early winter. They rowed on past the mouth of the Sea of Éa where long ago Elfarran was drowned, and past the Enlades. They lay two days in port at Berila, the City of Ivory, white above its bay in the west of myth-haunted Enlad. At all ports they came to, the crewmen were kept aboard the ship, and set no foot on land. Then as a red sun rose they rowed out on the Osskil Sea, into the northeast winds that blow unhindered from the islandless vastness of the North Reach. Through that bitter sea they brought their cargo safe, coming the second day out of Berila into port at Neshum, the trade-city of Eastern Osskil.

Ged saw a low coast lashed by rainy wind, a grey town crouching behind the long stone breakwaters that made its harbor, and behind the town treeless hills under a snow-darkened sky. They had come far from the sunlight of the Inmost Sea.

Longshoremen of the Sea-Guild of Neshum came aboard to unload the cargo—gold, silver, jewelry, fine silks and Southern tapestries, such precious stuff as the lords of Osskil hoard—and the freemen of the crew were dismissed. Ged stopped

one of them to ask his way; up until now the distrust he felt of all of them had kept him from saying where he was bound, but now, afoot and alone in a strange land, he must ask for guidance. The man went on impatiently saying he did not know, but Skiorh, overhearing, said, “The Court of the Terrenon? On the Keksemt Moors. I go that road.”

Skiorh’s was no company Ged would have chosen, but knowing neither the language nor the way he had small choice. Nor did it much matter, he thought; he had not chosen to come here. He had been driven, and now was driven on. He pulled his hood up over his head, took up his staff and bag, and followed the Osskilian through the streets of the town and upward into the snowy hills. The little otak would not ride on his shoulder, but hid in the pocket of his sheepskin tunic, under his cloak, as was its wont in cold weather. The hills stretched out into bleak rolling moorlands as far as the eye could see. They walked in silence and the silence of winter lay on all the land.

“How far?” Ged asked after they had gone some miles, seeing no sight of village or farm in any direction, and thinking that they had no food with them. Skiorh turned his head a moment, pulling up his own hood, and said, “Not far.”

It was an ugly face, pale, coarse, and cruel, but Ged feared no man, though he might fear where such a man would guide him. He nodded, and they went on. Their road was only a scar through the waste of thin snow and leafless bushes. From time to time other tracks crossed it or branched from it. Now that the chimney-smoke of Neshum was hidden behind the hills in the darkening afternoon there was no sign at all of what way they should go, or had gone. Only the wind blew always from the east. And when they had walked for several hours Ged thought he saw, away off on the hills in the northwest where their way tended, a tiny scratch against the sky, like a tooth, white. But the light of the short day was fading, and on the next rise of the road he could make out the thing, tower or tree or whatever, no more clearly than before.

“Do we go there?” he asked, pointing.

Skiorh made no answer but plodded on, muffled in his coarse cloak with its peaked, furred Osskilian hood. Ged strode on beside him. They had come far, and he was drowsy with the steady pace of their walking and with the long weariness of hard days and nights in the ship. It began to seem to him that he had walked forever and would walk forever beside this silent being through a silent darkening land. Caution and intention were dulled in him. He walked as in a long, long dream, going no place.

The otak stirred in his pocket, and a little vague fear also woke and stirred in his mind. He forced himself to speak. "Darkness comes, and snow. How far, Skiorh?"

After a pause the other answered, without turning, "Not far."

But his voice sounded not like a man's voice, but like a beast, hoarse and lipless, that tries to speak.

Ged stopped. All around stretched empty hills in the late, dusk light. Sparse snow whirled a little falling. "Skiorh!" he said, and the other halted, and turned. There was no face under the peaked hood.

Before Ged could speak spell or summon power, the gebbeth spoke, saying in its hoarse voice, "Ged!"

Then the young man could work no transformation, but was locked in his true being, and must face the gebbeth thus defenseless. Nor could he summon any help in this alien land, where nothing and no one was known to him and would come at his call. He stood alone, with nothing between him and his enemy but the staff of yew-wood in his right hand.

The thing that had devoured Skiorh's mind and possessed his flesh made the body take a step towards Ged, and the arms came groping out towards him. A rage of horror filled Ged and he swung up and brought down his staff whistling on the hood that hid the shadow-face. Hood and cloak collapsed down nearly to the ground under that fierce blow as if there was nothing in them but wind, and then writhing and flapping stood up again. The body of a gebbeth has been drained of true substance and is something like a shell or a vapor in the form of a man, an unreal flesh clothing the shadow which is real. So jerking and billowing as if blown on the wind the shadow spread its arms and came at Ged, trying to get hold of him as it had held him on Roke Knoll: and if it did it would cast aside the husk of Skiorh and enter into Ged, devouring him out from within, owning him, which was its whole desire. Ged struck at it again with his heavy, smoking staff, beating it off, but it came again and he struck again, and then dropped the staff that blazed and smoldered, burning his hand. He backed away, then all at once turned and ran.

He ran, and the gebbeth followed a pace behind him, unable to outrun him yet never dropping behind. Ged never looked back. He ran, he ran, through that vast dusk land where there was no hiding place. Once the gebbeth in its hoarse whistling voice called him again by name, but though it had taken his wizard's power thus, it had no power over his body's strength, and could not make him stop. He ran.

Night thickened about the hunter and the hunted, and snow blew fine across the

path that Ged could no longer see. The pulse hammered in his eyes, the breath burned in his throat, he was no longer really running but stumbling and staggering ahead: and yet the tireless pursuer seemed unable to catch up, coming always just behind him. It had begun to whisper and mumble at him, calling to him, and he knew that all his life that whispering had been in his ears, just under the threshold of hearing, but now he could hear it, and he must yield, he must give in, he must stop. Yet he labored on, struggling up a long, dim slope. He thought there was a light somewhere before him, and he thought he heard a voice in front of him, above him somewhere, calling, "Come! Come!"

He tried to answer but he had no voice. The pale light grew certain, shining through a gateway straight before him: he could not see the walls, but he saw the gate. At the sight of it he halted, and the gebbeth snatched at his cloak, fumbled at his sides trying to catch hold of him from behind. With the last strength in him Ged plunged through that faint-shining door. He tried to turn to shut it behind him against the gebbeth, but his legs would not hold him up. He staggered, reaching for support. Lights swam and flashed in his eyes. He felt himself falling, and he felt himself caught even as he fell; but his mind, utterly spent, slid away into the dark.

Chapter 7

The Hawk's Flight

Ged woke, and for a long time he lay, aware only that it was pleasant to wake, for he had not expected to wake again, and very pleasant to see light, the large plain light of day all about him. He felt as if he were floating on that light, or drifting in a boat on very quiet waters. At last he made out that he was in bed, but no such bed as he had ever slept in. It was set up on a frame held by four tall carven legs, and the mattresses were great silk sacks of down, which was why he thought he was floating, and over it all a crimson canopy hung to keep out drafts. On two sides the curtain was tied back, and Ged looked out at a room with walls of stone and floor of stone. Through three high windows he saw the moorland, bare and brown, snow-patched here and there, in the mild sunlight of winter. The room must be high above the ground, for it looked a great way over the land.

A coverlet of downfilled satin slid aside as Ged sat up, and he saw himself clothed in a tunic of silk and cloth-of-silver like a lord. On a chair beside the bed, boots of glove-leather and a cloak lined with pellawi-fur were laid ready for him. He sat a while, calm and dull as one under an enchantment, and then stood up, reaching for his staff. But he had no staff.

His right hand, though it had been salved and bound, was burned on palm and fingers. Now he felt the pain of it, and the soreness of all his body.

He stood without moving a while again. Then he whispered, not aloud and not hopefully, "Hoeg . . . hoeg . . ." For the little fierce loyal creature too was gone, the little silent soul that once had led him back from death's dominion. Had it still been with him last night when he ran? Was that last night, was it many nights ago? He did not know. It was all dim and obscure in his mind, the gebbeth, the burning staff, the running, the whispering, the gate. None of it came back clearly to him. Nothing even now was clear. He whispered his pet's name once more, but without hope of answer, and tears rose in his eyes.

A little bell rang somewhere far away. A second bell rang in a sweet jangle just outside the room. A door opened behind him, across the room, and a woman came in. "Welcome, Sparrowhawk," she said, smiling.

She was young and tall, dressed in white and silver, with a net of silver crowning her hair that fell straight down like a fall of black water.

Stiffly Ged bowed.

"You don't remember me, I think."

"Remember you, Lady?"

He had never seen a beautiful woman dressed to match her beauty but once in his life: that Lady of O who had come with her Lord to the Sunreturn festival at Roke. She had been like a slight, bright candle-flame, but this woman was like the white new moon.

"I thought you would not," she said smiling. "But forgetful as you may be, you're welcome here as an old friend."

"What place is this?" Ged asked, still stiff and slow-tongued. He found it hard to speak to her and hard to look away from her. The princely clothes he wore were strange to him, the stones he stood on were unfamiliar, the very air he breathed was alien; he was not himself, not the self he had been.

"This keep is called the Court of the Terrenon. My lord, who is called Benderesk, is sovereign of this land from the edge of the Keksemt Moors north to the Mountains of Os, and keeper of the precious stone called Terrenon. As for myself, here in Osskil they call me Serret, Silver in their language. And you, I know, are sometimes called Sparrowhawk, and were made wizard in the Isle of the Wise."

Ged looked down at his burned hand and said presently, "I do not know what I am. I had power, once. I have lost it, I think."

"No! you have not lost it, or only to regain it tenfold. You are safe here from what drove you here, my friend. There are mighty walls about this tower and not all of them are built of stone. Here you can rest, finding your strength again. Here you may also find a different strength, and a staff that will not burn to ashes in your hand. An evil way may lead to a good end, after all. Come with me now, let me show you our domain."

She spoke so sweetly that Ged hardly heard her words, moved by the promise of her voice alone. He followed her.

His room was high up indeed in the tower that rose like a sharp tooth from its hilltop. Down winding stairs of marble he followed Serret, through rich rooms and

halls, past high windows that looked north, west, south, east over the low brown hills that went on, houseless and treeless and changeless, clear to the sunwashed winter sky. Only far to the north small white peaks stood sharp against the blue, and southward one could guess the shining of the sea.

Servants opened doors and stood aside for Ged and the lady; pale, dour Osskilians they were all. She was light of skin, but unlike them she spoke Hardic well, even, it seemed to Ged, with the accent of Gont. Later that day she brought him before her husband Benderesk, Lord of the Terrenon. Thrice her age, bone-white, bone-thin, with clouded eyes, Lord Benderesk greeted Ged with grim cold courtesy, bidding him stay as guest however long he would. Then he had little more to say, asking Ged nothing of his voyages or of the enemy that had hunted him here; nor had the Lady Serret asked anything of these matters.

If this was strange, it was only part of the strangeness of this place and of his presence in it. Ged's mind never seemed quite to clear. He could not see things plainly. He had come to this tower-keep by chance, and yet the chance was all design; or he had come by design and yet all the design had merely chanced to come about. He had set out northward; a stranger in Orrimy had told him to seek help here; an Osskilian ship had been waiting for him; Skiorh had guided him. How much of this was the work of the shadow that hunted him? Or was none of it; had he and his hunter both been drawn here by some other power, he following that lure and the shadow following him, and seizing on Skiorh for its weapon when the moment came? That must be it, for certainly the shadow was, as Serret had said, barred from the Court of the Terrenon. He had felt no sign or threat of its lurking presence since he wakened in the tower. But what then had brought him here? For this was no place one came to by chance; even in the dullness of his thoughts he began to see that. No other stranger came to these gates. The tower stood aloof and remote, its back turned on the way to Neshum that was the nearest town. No man came to the keep, none left it. Its windows looked down on desolation.

From these windows Ged looked out, as he kept by himself in his high tower room, day after day, dull and heartsick and cold. It was always cold in the tower, for all the carpets and the tapestried hangings and the rich furred clothing and the broad marble fireplaces they had. It was a cold that got into the bone, into the marrow, and would not be dislodged. And in Ged's heart a cold shame settled also and would not be dislodged, as he thought always how he had faced his enemy and been defeated and had run. In his mind all the Masters of Roke gathered, Gensher

the Archmage frowning in their midst, and Nemmerle was with them, and Ogion, and even the witch who had taught him his first spell: all of them gazed at him and he knew he had failed their trust in him. He would plead, saying, "If I had not run away the shadow would have possessed me: it had already all Skiorh's strength, and part of mine, and I could not fight it: it knew my name. I had to run away. A wizard-gebbeth would be a terrible power for evil and ruin. I had to run away." But none of those who listened in his mind would answer him. And he would watch the snow falling, thin and ceaseless, on the empty lands below the window, and feel the dull cold grow within him, till it seemed no feeling was left to him except a kind of weariness.

So he kept to himself for many days out of sheer misery. When he did come down out of his room, he was silent and stiff. The beauty of the Lady of the Keep confused his mind, and in this rich, seemly, orderly, strange Court, he felt himself to be a goatherd born and bred.

They let him alone when he wanted to be alone, and when he could not stand to think his thoughts and watch the falling snow any longer, often Serret met with him in one of the curving halls, tapestried and firelit, lower in the tower, and there they would talk. There was no merriment in the Lady of the Keep, she never laughed though she often smiled; yet she could put Ged at ease almost with one smile. With her he began to forget his stiffness and his shame. Before long they met every day to talk, long, quietly, idly, a little apart from the serving-women who always accompanied Serret, by the fireplace or at the window of the high rooms of the tower.

The old lord kept mostly in his own apartments, coming forth mornings to pace up and down the snowy inner courtyards of the castle-keep like an old sorcerer who has been brewing spells all night. When he joined Ged and Serret for supper he sat silent, looking up at his young wife sometimes with a hard, covetous glance. Then Ged pitied her. She was like a white deer caged, like a white bird wing-clipped, like a silver ring on an old man's finger. She was an item of Benderesk's hoard. When the Lord of the Keep left them Ged stayed with her, trying to cheer her solitude as she had cheered his.

"What is this jewel that gives your keep its name?" he asked her as they sat talking over their emptied gold plates and gold goblets in the carvernous, candle-lit dining-hall.

"You have not heard of it? It is a famous thing."

"No. I know only that the lords of Osskil have famous treasuries."

"Ah, this jewel outshines them all. Come, would you like to see it?"

She smiled, with a look of mockery and daring, as if a little afraid of what she did, and led the young man from the hall, out through the narrow corridors of the base of the tower, and down stairs underground to a locked door he had not seen before. This she unlocked with a silver key, looking up at Ged with that same smile as she did so, as if she dared him to come on with her. Beyond the door was a short passage and a second door, which she unlocked with a gold key, and beyond that again a third door, which she unlocked with one of the Great Words of unbinding. Within that last door her candle showed them a small room like a dungeon-cell: floor, walls, ceiling all rough stone, unfurnished, blank.

"Do you see it?" Serret asked.

As Ged looked round the room his wizard's eye caught one stone of those that made the floor. It was rough and dank as the rest, a heavy unshapen paving stone: yet he felt the power of it as if it spoke to him aloud. And his breath caught in his throat, and a sickness came over him for a moment. This was the founding-stone of the tower. This was the central place, and it was cold, bitter cold; nothing could ever warm the little room. This was a very ancient thing: an old and terrible spirit was prisoned in that block of stone. He did not answer Serret yes or no, but stood still, and presently, with a quick curious glance at him, she pointed out the stone. "That is the Terrenon. Do you wonder that we keep so precious a jewel locked away in our deepest hoardroom?"

Still Ged did not answer, but stood dumb and wary. She might almost have been testing him; but he thought she had no notion of the stone's nature, to speak of it so lightly. She did not know enough of it to fear it. "Tell me of its powers," he said at last.

"It was made before Segoy raised the islands of the world from the Open Sea. It was made when the world itself was made, and will endure until the end of the world. Time is nothing to it. If you lay your hand upon it and ask a question of it, it will answer, according to the power that is in you. It has a voice, if you know how to listen. It will speak of things that were, and are, and will be. It told of your coming, long before you came to this land. Will you ask a question of it now?"

"No."

"It will answer you."

"There is no question I would ask it."

"It might tell you," Serret said in her soft voice, "how you will defeat your enemy."

Ged stood mute.

"Do you fear the stone?" she asked as if unbelieving; and he answered, "Yes."

In the deadly cold and silence of the room encircled by wall after wall of spell-work and of stone, in the light of the one candle she held, Serret glanced at him again with gleaming eyes. "Sparrowhawk," she said, "you are not afraid."

"But I will not speak with that spirit," Ged replied, and looking full at her spoke with a grave boldness: "My lady, that spirit is sealed in a stone, and the stone is locked by binding-spell and blinding-spell and charm of lock and ward and triple fortress-walls in a barren land, not because it is precious, but because it can work great evil. I do not know what they told you of it when you came here. But you who are young and gentle-hearted should never touch the thing, or even look on it. It will not work you well."

"I have touched it. I have spoken to it, and heard it speak. It does me no harm."

She turned away and they went out through the doors and passages till in the torchlight of the broad stairs of the tower she blew out her candle. They parted with few words.

That night Ged slept little. It was not the thought of the shadow that kept him awake; rather that thought was almost driven from his mind by the image, ever returning, of the Stone on which this tower was founded, and by the vision of Serret's face bright and shadowy in the candle-light, turned to him. Again and again he felt her eyes on him, and tried to decide what look had come into those eyes when he refused to touch the Stone, whether it had been disdain or hurt. When he lay down to sleep at last the silken sheets of the bed were cold as ice, and ever he wakened in the dark thinking of the Stone and of Serret's eyes.

Next day he found her in the curving hall of grey marble, lit now by the westering sun, where often she spent the afternoon at games or at the weaving-loom with her maids. He said to her, "Lady Serret, I affronted you. I am sorry for it."

"No," she said musingly, and again, "No . . ." She sent away the serving-women who were with her, and when they were alone she turned to Ged. "My guest, my friend," she said, "you are very clear-sighted, but perhaps you do not see all that is to be seen. In Gont, in Roke, they teach high wizardries. But they do not teach all wizardries. This is Osskil, Ravenland: it is not a Hardic land: mages do not rule it, nor do they know much of it. There are happenings here not dealt with by the loremasters of the South, and things here not named in the Namers' lists. What one does not know, one fears. But you have nothing to fear here in the Court of the Terrenon. A weaker man would, indeed. Not you. You are one born with the

power to control that which is in the sealed room. This I know. It is why you are here now."

"I do not understand."

"That is because my lord Benderesk has not been wholly frank with you. I will be frank. Come, sit by me here."

He sat down beside her on the deep, cushioned window-ledge. The dying sunlight came level through the window, flooding them with a radiance in which there was no warmth; on the moorlands below, already sinking into shadow, last night's snow lay unmelted, a dull white pall over the earth.

She spoke now very softly. "Benderesk is Lord and Inheritor of the Terrenon, but he cannot use the thing, he cannot make it wholly serve his will. Nor can I, alone or with him. Neither he nor I has the skill and power. You have both."

"How do you know that?"

"From the Stone itself! I told you that it spoke of your coming. It knows its master. It has waited for you to come. Before ever you were born it waited for you, for the one who could master it. And he who can make the Terrenon answer what he asks and do what he wills, has power over his own destiny: strength to crush any enemy, mortal or of the other world: foresight, knowledge, wealth, dominion, and a wizardry at his command that could humble the Archmage himself! As much of that, as little of that as you choose, is yours for the asking."

Once more she lifted her strange bright eyes to him, and her gaze pierced him so that he trembled as if with cold. Yet there was fear in her face, as if she sought his help but was too proud to ask it. Ged was bewildered. She had put her hand on his as she spoke; its touch was light, it looked narrow and fair on his dark, strong hand. He said, pleading, "Serret! I have no such power as you think—what I had once, I threw away. I cannot help you, I am no use to you. But I know this: the Old Powers of earth are not for men to use. They were never given into our hands, and in our hands they work only ruin. Ill means, ill end. I was not drawn here, but driven here, and the force that drove me works to my undoing. I cannot help you."

"He who throws away his power is filled sometimes with a far greater power," she said, smiling, as if his fears and scruples were childish ones. "I may know more than you of what brought you here. Did not a man speak to you in the streets of Orrimy? He was a messenger, a servant of the Terrenon. He was a wizard once himself, but he threw away his staff to serve a power greater than any mage's. And you came to Osskil, and on the moors you tried to fight a shadow with your wooden staff; and almost we could not save you, for that thing that follows you is

more cunning than we deemed, and had taken much strength from you already . . . Only shadow can fight shadow. Only darkness can defeat the dark. Listen, Sparrowhawk! what do you need, then, to defeat that shadow, which waits for you outside these walls?"

"I need what I cannot know. Its name."

"The Terrenon, that knows all births and deaths and beings before and after death, the unborn and the undying, the bright world and the dark one, will tell you that name."

"And the price?"

"There is no price. I tell you it will obey you, serve you as your slave."

Shaken and tormented, he did not answer. She held his hand now in both of hers, looking into his face. The sun had fallen into the mists that dulled the horizon, and the air too had grown dull, but her face grew bright with praise and triumph as she watched him and saw his will shaken within him. Softly she whispered, "You will be mightier than all men, a king among men. You will rule, and I will rule with you—"

Suddenly Ged stood up, and one step forward took him where he could see, just around the curve of the long room's wall, beside the door, the Lord of the Terrenon who stood listening and smiling a little.

Ged's eyes cleared, and his mind. He looked down at Serret. "It is light that defeats the dark," he said stammering,—"light."

As he spoke he saw, as plainly as if his own words were the light that showed him, how indeed he had been drawn here, lured here, how they had used his fear to lead him on, and how they would, once they had him, have kept him. They had saved him from the shadow, indeed, for they did not want him to be possessed by the shadow until he had become a slave of the Stone. Once his will was captured by the power of the Stone, then they would let the shadow into the walls, for a gebbeth was a better slave even than a man. If he had once touched the Stone, or spoken to it, he would have been utterly lost. Yet, even as the shadow had not quite been able to catch up with him and seize him, so the Stone had not been able to use him—not quite. He had almost yielded, but not quite. He had not consented. It is very hard for evil to take hold of the unconsenting soul.

He stood between the two who had yielded, who had consented, looking from one to the other as Benderesk came forward.

"I told you," the Lord of the Terrenon said dry-voiced to his lady, "that he would slip from your hands, Serret. They are clever fools, your Gontish sorcerers.

And you are a fool too, woman of Gont, thinking to trick both him and me, and rule us both by your beauty, and use the Terrenon to your own ends. But I am the Lord of the Stone, I, and this I do to the disloyal wife: *Ekavroe ai oelwantar—*" It was a spell of Changing, and Benderesk's long hands were raised to shape the cowering woman into some hideous thing, swine or dog or driveling hag. Ged stepped forward and struck the lord's hands down with his own, saying as he did so only one short word. And though he had no staff, and stood on alien ground and evil ground, the domain of a dark power, yet his will prevailed. Benderesk stood still, his clouded eyes fixed hateful and unseeing upon Serret.

"Come," she said in a shaking voice, "Sparrowhawk, come, quick, before he can summon the Servants of the Stone—"

As if in echo a whispering ran through the tower, through the stones of the floor and walls, a dry trembling murmur, as if the earth itself should speak.

Seizing Ged's hand Serret ran with him through the passages and halls, down the long twisted stairs. They came out into the courtyard where a last silvery daylight still hung above the soiled, trodden snow. Three of the castle-servants barred their way, sullen and questioning, as if they had been suspecting some plot of these two against their master. "It grows dark, Lady," one said, and another, "You cannot ride out now."

"Out of my way, filth!" Serret cried, and spoke in the sibilant Osskilian speech. The men fell back from her and crouched down to the ground, writhing, and one of them screamed aloud.

"We must go out by the gate, there is no other way out. Can you see it? can you find it, Sparrowhawk?"

She tugged at his hand, yet he hesitated. "What spell did you set on them?"

"I ran hot lead in the marrow of their bones, they will die of it. Quick, I tell you, he will loose the Servants of the Stone, and I cannot find the gate—there is a great charm on it. Quick!"

Ged did not know what she meant, for to him the enchanted gate was as plain to see as the stone archway of the court through which he saw it. He led Serret through the one, across the untrodden snow of the forecourt, and then, speaking a word of Opening, he led her through the gate of the wall of spells.

She changed as they passed through that doorway out of the silvery twilight of the Court of the Terrenon. She was not less beautiful in the drear light of the moors, but there was a fierce witch-look to her beauty; and Ged knew her at last—the daughter of the Lord of the Re Albi, daughter of a sorceress of Osskil, who had

mocked him in the green meadows above Ogion's house, long ago, and had sent him to read that spell which loosed the shadow. But he spent small thought on this, for he was looking about him now with every sense alert, looking for that enemy, the shadow, which would be waiting for him somewhere outside the magic walls. It might be gebbeth still, clothed in Skiorh's death, or it might be hidden in the gathering darkness, waiting to seize him and merge its shapelessness with his living flesh. He sensed its nearness, yet did not see it. But as he looked he saw some small dark thing half buried in snow, a few paces from the gate. He stooped, and then softly picked it up in his two hands. It was the otak, its fine short fur all clogged with blood and its small body light and stiff and cold in his hands.

"Change yourself! Change yourself, they are coming!" Serret shrieked, seizing his arm and pointing to the tower that stood behind them like a tall white tooth in the dusk. From slit windows near its base dark creatures were creeping forth, flapping long wings, slowly beating and circling up over the walls towards Ged and Serret where they stood on the hillside, unprotected. The rattling whisper they had heard inside the keep had grown louder, a tremor and moaning in the earth under their feet.

Anger welled up in Ged's heart, a hot rage of hate against all the cruel deathly things that tricked him, trapped him, hunted him down. "Change yourself!" Serret screamed at him, and she with a quick-gasped spell shrank into a grey gull, and flew. But Ged stooped and plucked a blade of wild grass that poked up dry and frail out of the snow where the otak had lain dead. This blade he held up, and as he spoke aloud to it in the True Speech it lengthened, and thickened, and when he was done he held a great staff, a wizard's staff, in his hand. No banefire burned red along it when the black, flapping creatures from the Court of the Terrenon swooped over him and he struck their wings with it: it blazed only with the white magefire that does not burn but drives away the dark.

The creatures returned to the attack: botched beasts, belonging to ages before bird or dragon or man, long since forgotten by the daylight but recalled by the ancient, malign, unforgetful power of the Stone. They harried Ged, swooping at him. He felt the scythe-sweep of their talons about him and sickened in their dead stench. Fiercely he parried and struck, fighting them off with the fiery staff that was made of his anger and a blade of wild grass. And suddenly they all rose up like ravens frightened from carrion and wheeled away, flapping, silent, in the direction that Serret in her gull-shape had flown. Their vast wings seemed slow, but they flew fast, each downbeat driving them mightily through the air. No gull could long

outmatch that heavy speed.

Quick as he had once done at Roke, Ged took the shape of a great hawk: not the sparrowhawk they called him but the Pilgrim Falcon that flies like an arrow, like thought. On barred, sharp, strong wings he flew, pursuing his pursuers. The air darkened and among the clouds stars shone brightening. Ahead he saw the black ragged flock all driving down and in upon one point in mid-air. Beyond that black clot the sea lay, pale with the last ashy gleam of day. Swift and straight the hawk-Ged shot towards the creatures of the Stone, and they scattered as he came amongst them as waterdrops scatter from a cast pebble. But they had caught their prey. Blood was on the beak of this one and white feathers stuck to the claws of another, and no gull skimmed beyond them over the pallid sea.

Already they were turning on Ged again, coming quick and ungainly with iron beaks stretched out agape. He, wheeling once above them, screamed the hawk's scream of defiant rage, and then shot on across the low beaches of Osskil, out over the breakers of the sea.

The creatures of the Stone circled a while croaking, and one by one beat back ponderously inland over the moors. The Old Powers will not cross over the sea, being bound each to an isle, a certain place, cave or stone or welling spring. Back went the black emanations to the tower-keep, where maybe the Lord of the Terrenon, Benderesk, wept at their return, and maybe laughed. But Ged went on, falcon-winged, falcon-mad, like an unfailing arrow, like an unforgotten thought, over the Osskil Sea and eastward into the wind of winter and the night.

Ogion the Silent had come home late to Re Albi from his autumn wanderings. More silent, more solitary than ever he had become as the years went on. The new Lord of Gont down in the city below had never got a word out of him, though he had climbed clear up to the Falcon's Nest to seek the help of the mage in a certain piratic venture towards the Andrades. Ogion who spoke to spiders on their webs and had been seen to greet trees courteously never said a word to the Lord of the Isle, who went away discontented. There was perhaps some discontent or unease also in Ogion's mind, for he had spent all summer and autumn alone up on the mountain, and only now near Sunreturn was come back to his hearthside.

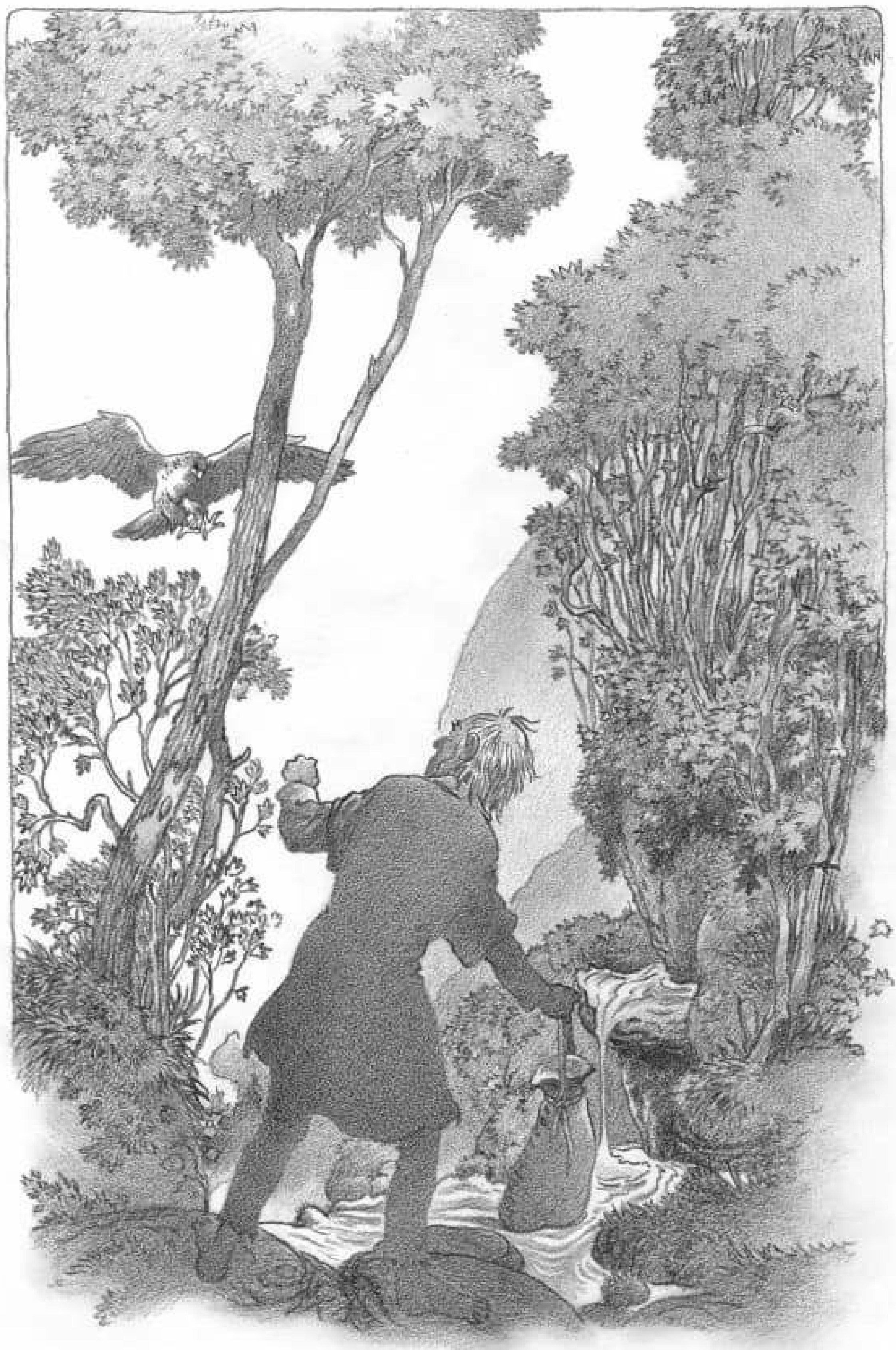
The morning after his return he rose late, and wanting a cup of rushwash tea he went out to fetch water from the spring that ran a little way down the hillside from his house. The margins of the spring's small lively pool were frozen, and the sere moss among the rocks was traced with flowers of frost. It was broad daylight, but

the sun would not clear the mighty shoulder of the mountain for an hour yet: all western Gont, from sea-beaches to the peak, was sunless, silent, and clear in the winter morning. As the mage stood by the spring looking out over the falling lands and the harbor and the grey distances of the sea, wings beat above him. He looked up, raising one arm a little. A great hawk came down with loud-beating wings and lighted on his wrist. Like a trained hunting-bird it clung there, but it wore no broken leash, no band or bell. The claws dug hard in Ogion's wrist; the barred wings trembled; the round, gold eye was dull and wild.

"Are you messenger or message?" Ogion said gently to the hawk. "Come on with me—" As he spoke the hawk looked at him. Ogion was silent a minute. "I named you once, I think," he said, and then strode to his house and entered, bearing the bird still on his wrist. He made the hawk stand on the hearth in the fire's heat, and offered it water. It would not drink. Then Ogion began to lay a spell, very quietly, weaving the web of magic with his hands more than with words. When the spell was whole and woven he said softly,—"Ged,"—not looking at the falcon on the hearth. He waited some while, then turned, and got up, and went to the young man who stood trembling and dull-eyed before the fire.

Ged was richly and outlandishly dressed in fur and silk and silver, but the clothes were torn and stiff with sea-salt, and he stood gaunt and stooped, his hair lank about his scarred face.

Ogion took the soiled, princely cloak off his shoulders, led him to the alcove-room where his prentice once had slept and made him lie down on the pallet there, and so with a murmured sleep-charm left him. He had said no word to him, knowing that Ged had no human speech in him now.



As a boy, Ogion like all boys had thought it would be a very pleasant game to take by art-magic whatever shape one liked, man or beast, tree or cloud, and so to play at a thousand beings. But as a wizard he had learned the price of the game, which is the peril of losing one's self, playing away the truth. The longer a man stays in a form not his own, the greater this peril. Every prentice-sorcerer learns the tale of the wizard Bordger of Way, who delighted in taking bear's shape, and did so more and more often until the bear grew in him and the man died away, and he became a bear, and killed his own little son in the forests, and was hunted down and slain. And no one knows how many of the dolphins that leap in the waters of the Inmost Sea were men once, wise men, who forgot their wisdom and their name in the joy of the restless sea.

Ged had taken hawk-shape in fierce distress and rage, and when he flew from Osskil there had been but one thought in his mind: to outfly both Stone and shadow, to escape the cold treacherous lands, to go home. The falcon's anger and wildness were like his own, and had become his own, and his will to fly had become the falcon's will. Thus he had passed over Enlad, stooping down to drink at a lonely forest pool, but on the wing again at once, driven by fear of the shadow that came behind him. So he had crossed the great sea-lane called the Jaws of Enlad, and gone on and on, east by south, the hills of Oranéa faint to his right and the hills of Andrad fainter to his left, and before him only the sea; until at last, ahead, there rose up out of the waves one unchanging wave, towering always higher, the white peak of Gont. In all the sunlight and the dark of that great flight he had worn the falcon's wings, and looked through the falcon's eyes, and forgetting his own thoughts he had known at last only what the falcon knows: hunger, the wind, the way he flies.

He flew to the right haven. There were few on Roke and only one on Gont who could have made him back into a man.

He was savage and silent when he woke. Ogion never spoke to him, but gave him meat and water and let him sit hunched by the fire, grim as a great, weary, sulking hawk. When night came he slept. On the third morning he came in to the fireside where the mage sat gazing at the flames, and said, "Master . . ."

"Welcome, lad," said Ogion.

"I have come back to you as I left: a fool," the young man said, his voice harsh and thickened. The mage smiled a little and motioned Ged to sit across the hearth from him, and set to brewing them some tea.

Snow was falling, the first of the winter here on the lower slopes of Gont.

Ogion's windows were shuttered fast, but they could hear the wet snow as it fell soft on the roof, and the deep stillness of snow all about the house. A long time they sat there by the fire, and Ged told his old master the tale of the years since he had sailed from Gont aboard the ship called *Shadow*. Ogion asked no questions, and when Ged was done he kept silent for a long time, calm, pondering. Then he rose, and set out bread and cheese and wine on the table, and they ate together. When they had done and had set the room straight, Ogion spoke.

"Those are bitter scars you bear, lad," he said.

"I have no strength against the thing," Ged answered.

Ogion shook his head but said no more for a time. At length, "Strange," he said: "You had strength enough to outspell a sorcerer in his own domain, there in Osskil. You had strength enough to withstand the lures and fend off the attack of the servants of an Old Power of Earth. And at Pendor you had strength enough to stand up to a dragon."

"It was luck I had in Osskil, not strength," Ged replied, and he shivered again as he thought of the dreamlike deathly cold of the Court of the Terrenon. "As for the dragon, I knew his name. The evil thing, the shadow that hunts me, has no name."

"*All* things have a name," said Ogion, so certainly that Ged dared not repeat what the Archmage Gensher had told him, that such evil forces as he had loosed were nameless. The Dragon of Pendor, indeed, had offered to tell him the shadow's name, but he put little trust in the truth of that offer, nor did he believe Serret's promise that the Stone would tell him what he needed to know.

"If the shadow has a name," he said at last, "I do not think it will stop and tell it to me . . ."

"No," said Ogion. "Nor have you stopped and told it your name. And yet it knew it. On the moors in Osskil it called you by your name, the name I gave you. It is strange, strange . . ."

He fell to brooding again. At last Ged said, "I came here for counsel, not for refuge, Master. I will not bring this shadow upon you, and it will soon be here if I stay. Once you drove it from this very room—"

"No; that was but the foreboding of it, the shadow of a shadow. I could not drive it forth, now. Only you could do that."

"But I am powerless before it. Is there any place . . ." His voice died away before he had asked the question.

"There is no safe place," Ogion said gently. "Do not transform yourself again, Ged. The shadow seeks to destroy your true being. It nearly did so, driving you

into hawk's being. No, where you should go, I do not know. Yet I have an idea of what you should do. It is a hard thing to say to you."

Ged's silence demanded truth, and Ogion said at last, "You must turn around."

"Turn around?"

"If you go ahead, if you keep running, wherever you run you will meet danger and evil, for it drives you, it chooses the way you go. You must choose. You must seek what seeks you. You must hunt the hunter."

Ged said nothing.

"At the spring of the River Ar I named you," the mage said, "a stream that falls from the mountain to the sea. A man would know the end he goes to, but he cannot know it if he does not turn, and return to his beginning, and hold that beginning in his being. If he would not be a stick whirled and whelmed in the stream, he must be the stream itself, all of it, from its spring to its sinking in the sea. You returned to Gont, you returned to me, Ged. Now turn clear round, and seek the very source, and that which lies before the source. There lies your hope of strength."

"There, Master?" Ged said with terror in his voice—"Where?"

Ogion did not answer.

"If I turn," Ged said after some time had gone by, "if as you say I hunt the hunter, I think the hunt will not be long. All its desire is to meet me face to face. And twice it has done so, and twice defeated me."

"Third time is the charm," said Ogion.

Ged paced the room up and down, from fireside to door, from door to fireside. "And if it defeats me wholly," he said, arguing perhaps with Ogion, perhaps with himself, "it will take my knowledge and my power, and use them. It threatens only me, now. But if it enters into me and possesses me, it will work great evil through me."

"That is true. If it defeats you."

"Yet if I run again, it will as surely find me again . . . And all my strength is spent in the running." Ged paced on a while, and then suddenly turned, and kneeling down before the mage he said, "I have walked with great wizards and have lived on the Isle of the Wise, but you are my true master, Ogion." He spoke with love, and with a somber joy.

"Good," said Ogion. "Now you know it. Better now than never. But you will be my master, in the end." He got up, and built up the fire to a good blaze, and hung the kettle over it to boil, and then pulling on his sheepskin coat said, "I must go look after my goats. Watch the kettle for me, lad."

When he came back in, all snow-powdered and stamping snow from his goatskin boots, he carried a long, rough shaft of yew-wood. All the end of the short afternoon, and again after their supper, he sat working by lampfire on the shaft with knife and rubbing-stone and spell-craft. Many times he passed his hands along the wood as if seeking any flaw. Often as he worked he sang softly. Ged, still weary, listened, and as he grew sleepy he thought himself a child in the witch's hut in Ten Alders village, on a snowy night in the firelit dark, the air heavy with herb-scent and smoke, and his mind all adrift on dreams as he listened to the long soft singing of spells and deeds of heroes who fought against dark powers and won, or lost, on distant islands long ago.

"There," said Ogion, and handed the finished staff to him. "The Archmage gave you yew-wood, a good choice and I kept to it. I meant the shaft for a long-bow, but it's better this way. Good night, my son."

As Ged, who found no words to thank him, turned away to his alcove-room, Ogion watched him and said, too soft for Ged to hear, "O my young falcon, fly well!"

In the cold dawn when Ogion woke, Ged was gone. Only he had left in wizardry fashion a message of silver-scrawled runes on the hearthstone, that faded even as Ogion read them: "Master, I go hunting."

Chapter 8

Hunting

Ged had set off down the road from Re Albi in the winter dark before sunrise, and before noon he came to the Port of Gont. Ogion had given him decent Gontish leggings and shirt and vest of leather and linen to replace his Osskilian finery, but Ged had kept for his winter journey the lordly cloak lined with pellawi-fur. So cloaked, empty-handed but for the dark staff that matched his height, he came to the Land Gate, and the soldiers lounging against the carven dragons there did not have to look twice at him to see the wizard. They drew aside their lances and let him enter without question, and watched him as he went on down the street.

On the quays and in the House of the Sea-Guild he asked of ships that might be going out north or west to Enlad, Andrad, Oranéa. All answered him that no ship would be leaving Gont Port now, so near Sunreturn, and at the Sea-Guild they told him that even fishingboats were not going out through the Armed Cliffs in the untrusty weather.

They offered him dinner at the buttery there in the Sea-Guild; a wizard seldom has to ask for his dinner. He sat a while with those longshoremen, shipwrights, and weather-workers, taking pleasure in their slow, sparse conversation, their grumbling Gontish speech. There was a great wish in him to stay here on Gont, and forgoing all wizardry and venture, forgetting all power and horror, to live in peace like any man on the known, dear ground of his home land. That was his wish; but his will was other. He did not stay long in the Sea-Guild, nor in the city, after he found there would be no ships out of port. He set out walking along the bay shore till he came to the first of the small villages that lie north of the City of Gont, and there he asked among the fishermen till he found one that had a boat to sell.

The fisherman was a dour old man. His boat, twelve foot long and clinker-built, was so warped and sprung as to be scarce seaworthy, yet he asked a high price for

her: the spell of sea-safety for a year laid on his own boat, himself, and his son. For Gontish fishermen fear nothing, not even wizards, only the sea.

That spell of sea-safety which they set much store by in the Northern Archipelago never saved a man from storm-wind or storm-wave, but, cast by one who knows the local seas and the ways of a boat and the skills of the sailor, it weaves some daily safety about the fisherman. Ged made the charm well and honestly, working on it all that night and the next day, omitting nothing, sure and patient, though all the while his mind was strained with fear and his thoughts went on dark paths seeking to imagine how the shadow would appear to him next, and how soon, and where. When the spell was made whole and cast, he was very weary. He slept that night in the fisherman's hut in a whale-gut hammock, and got up at dawn smelling like a dried herring, and went down to the cove under Cutnorth Cliff where his new boat lay.

He pushed it into the quiet water by the landing, and water began to well softly into it at once. Stepping into the boat light as a cat Ged set straight the warped boards and rotten pegs, working both with tools and incantations, as he had used to do with Pechvarry in Low Torning. The people of the village gathered in silence, not too close, to watch his quick hands and listen to his soft voice. This job too he did well and patiently until it was done and the boat was sealed and sound. Then he set up his staff that Ogion had made him for a mast, stayed it with spells, and fixed across it a yard of sound wood. Downward from this yard he wove on the wind's loom a sail of spells, a square sail white as the snows on Gont peak above. At this the women watching sighed with envy. Then standing by the mast Ged raised up the magewind lightly. The boat moved out upon the water, turning towards the Armed Cliffs across the great bay. When the silent watching fishermen saw that leaky rowboat slip out under sail as quick and neat as a sandpiper taking wing, then they raised a cheer, grinning and stamping in the cold wind on the beach; and Ged looking back a moment saw them there cheering him on, under the dark jagged bulk of Cutnorth Cliff, above which the snowy fields of the Mountain rose up into cloud.

He sailed across the bay and out between the Armed Cliffs onto the Gontish Sea, there setting his course northwestwards to pass north of Oranéa, returning as he had come. He had no plan or strategy in this but the retracing of his course. Following his falcon-flight across the days and winds from Osskil, the shadow might wander or might come straight, there was no telling. But unless it had withdrawn again wholly into the dream-realm, it should not miss Ged coming

openly, over open sea, to meet it.

On the sea he wished to meet it, if meet it he must. He was not sure why this was, yet he had a terror of meeting the thing again on dry land. Out of the sea there rise storms and monsters, but no evil powers: evil is of earth. And there is no sea, no running of river or spring, in the dark land where once Ged had gone. Death is the dry place. Though the sea itself was a danger to him in the hard weather of the season, that danger and change and instability seemed to him a defense and chance. And when he met the shadow in this final end of his folly, he thought, maybe at least he could grip the thing even as it gripped him, and drag it with the weight of his body and the weight of his own death down into the darkness of the deep sea, from which, so held, it might not rise again. So at least his death would put an end to the evil he had loosed by living.

He sailed a rough chopping sea above which clouds drooped and drifted in vast mournful veils. He raised no magewind now but used the world's wind, which blew keen from the northwest; and so long as he maintained the substance of his spell-woven sail often with a whispered word, the sail itself set and turned itself to catch the wind. Had he not used that magic he would have been hard put to keep the crank little boat on such a course, on that rough sea. On he went, and kept keen lookout on all sides. The fisherman's wife had given him two loaves of bread and a jar of water, and after some hours, when he was first in sight of Kameber Rock, the only isle between Gont and Oranéa, he ate and drank, and thought gratefully of the silent Gontishwoman who had given him the food. On past the dim glimpse of land he sailed, tacking more westerly now, in a faint dank drizzle that over land might be a light snow. There was no sound at all but the small creaking of the boat and light slap of waves on her bow. No boat or bird went by. Nothing moved but the ever-moving water and the drifting clouds, the clouds that he remembered dimly as flowing all about him as he, a falcon, flew east on this same course he now followed to the west; and he had looked down on the grey sea then as now he looked up at the grey air.

Nothing was ahead when he looked around. He stood up, chilled, weary of this gazing and peering into empty murk. "Come then," he muttered, "come on, what do you wait for, Shadow?" There was no answer, no darker motion among the dark mists and waves. Yet he knew more and more surely now that the thing was not far off, seeking blindly down his cold trail. And all at once he shouted out aloud, "I am here, I Ged the Sparrowhawk, and I summon my shadow!"

The boat creaked, the waves lisped, the wind hissed a little on the white sail.

The moments went by. Still Ged waited, one hand on the yew-wood mast of his boat, staring into the icy drizzle that slowly drove in ragged lines across the sea from the north. The moments went by. Then, far off in the rain over the water, he saw the shadow coming.

It had done with the body of the Osskilian oarsman Skiorh, and not as gebbeth did it follow him through the winds and over sea. Nor did it wear that beast-shape in which he had seen it on Roke Knoll, and in his dreams. Yet it had a shape now, even in the daylight. In its pursuit of Ged and in its struggle with him on the moors it had drawn power from him, sucking it into itself: and it may be that his summoning of it, aloud in the light of day, had given to it or forced upon it some form and semblance. Certainly it had now some likeness to a man, though being shadow it cast no shadow. So it came over the sea, out of the Jaws of Enlad towards Gont, a dim ill-made thing pacing uneasy on the waves, peering down the wind as it came; and the cold rain blew through it.

Because it was half blinded by the day, and because he had called it, Ged saw it before it saw him. He knew it, as it knew him, among all beings, all shadows.

In the terrible solitude of the winter sea Ged stood and saw the thing he feared. The wind seemed to blow it farther from the boat, and the waves ran under it bewildering his eye, and ever and again it seemed closer to him. He could not tell if it moved or not. It had seen him, now. Though there was nothing in his mind but horror and fear of its touch, the cold black pain that drained his life away, yet he waited, unmoving. Then all at once speaking aloud he called the magewind strong and sudden into his white sail, and his boat leapt across the grey waves straight at the lowering thing that hung upon the wind.

In utter silence the shadow, wavering, turned and fled.

Upwind it went, northward. Upwind Ged's boat followed, shadow-speed against mage-craft, the rainy gale against them both. And the young man yelled to his boat, to the sail and the wind and the waves ahead, as a hunter yells to his hounds when the wolf runs in plain sight before them, and he brought into that spell-woven sail a wind that would have split any sail of cloth and that drove his boat over the sea like a scud of blown foam, closer always to the thing that fled.

Now the shadow turned, making a half-circle, and appearing all at once more loose and dim, less like a man, more like mere smoke blowing on the wind, it doubled back and ran downwind with the gale, as if it made for Gont.

With hand and spell Ged turned his boat, and it leaped like a dolphin from the water, rolling, in that quick turn. Faster than before he followed, but the shadow

grew ever fainter to his eyes. Rain, mixed with sleet and snow, came stinging across his back and his left cheek, and he could not see more than a hundred yards ahead. Before long, as the storm grew heavier, the shadow was lost to sight. Yet Ged was sure of its track as if he followed a beast's track over snow, instead of a wraith fleeing over water. Though the wind blew his way now he held the singing magewind in the sail, and flake-foam shot from the boat's blunt prow, and she slapped the water as she went.

For a long time hunted and hunter held their weird, fleet course, and the day was darkening fast. Ged knew that at the great pace he had gone these past hours he must be south of Gont, heading past it towards Spevy or Torheven, or even past these islands out into the open Reach. He could not tell. He did not care. He hunted, he followed, and fear ran before him.

All at once he saw the shadow for a moment not far from him. The world's wind had been sinking, and the driving sleet of the storm had given way to a chill, ragged, thickening mist. Through this mist he glimpsed the shadow, fleeing somewhat to the right of his course. He spoke to wind and sail and turned the tiller and pursued, though again it was a blind pursuit: the fog thickened fast, boiling and tattering where it met with the spell-wind, closing down all round the boat, a featureless pallor that deadened light and sight. Even as Ged spoke the first word of a clearing-charm, he saw the shadow again, still to the right of his course but very near, and going slowly. The fog blew through the faceless vagueness of its head, yet it was shaped like a man, only deformed and changing, like a man's shadow. Ged veered the boat once more, thinking he had run his enemy to ground: in that instant it vanished, and it was his boat that ran aground, smashing up on shoal rocks that the blowing mist had hidden from his sight. He was pitched nearly out, but grabbed hold on the mast-staff before the next breaker struck. This was a great wave, which threw the little boat up out of water and brought her down on a rock, as a man might lift up and crush a snail's shell.

Stout and wizardly was the staff Ogion had shaped. It did not break, and buoyant as a dry log it rode the water. Still grasping it Ged was pulled back as the breakers streamed back from the shoal, so that he was in deep water and saved, till the next wave, from battering on the rocks. Salt-blinded and choked, he tried to keep his head up and to fight the enormous pull of the sea. There was sand beach a little aside of the rocks, he glimpsed this a couple of times as he tried to swim free of the rising of the next breaker. With all his strength and with the staff's power aiding him he struggled to make for that beach. He got no nearer. The surge and

recoil of the swells tossed him back and forth like a rag, and the cold of the deep sea drew warmth fast from his body, weakening him till he could not move his arms. He had lost sight of rocks and beach alike, and did not know what way he faced. There was only a tumult of water around him, under him, over him, blinding him, strangling him, drowning him.

A wave swelling in under the ragged fog took him and rolled him over and over and flung him up like a stick of driftwood on the sand.

There he lay. He still clutched the yew-wood staff with both hands. Lesser waves dragged at him, trying to tug him back down the sand in their outgoing rush, and the mist parted and closed above him, and later a sleety rain beat on him.

After a long time he moved. He got up on hands and knees, and began slowly crawling up the beach, away from the water's edge. It was black night now, but he whispered to the staff, and a little werelight clung about it. With this to guide him he struggled forward, little by little, up toward the dunes. He was so beaten and broken and cold that this crawling through the wet sand in the whistling, sea-thundering dark was the hardest thing he had ever had to do. And once or twice it seemed to him that the great noise of the sea and the wind all died away and the wet sand turned to dust under his hands, and he felt the unmoving gaze of strange stars on his back: but he did not lift his head, and he crawled on, and after a while he heard his own gasping breath, and felt the bitter wind beat the rain against his face.

The moving brought a little warmth back into him at last, and after he had crept up into the dunes, where the gusts of rainy wind came less hard, he managed to get up on his feet. He spoke a stronger light out of the staff, for the world was utterly black, and then leaning on the staff he went on, stumbling and halting, half a mile or so inland. Then on the rise of a dune he heard the sea, louder again, not behind him but in front: the dunes sloped down again to another shore. This was no island he was on but a mere reef, a bit of sand in the midst of the ocean.

He was too worn out to despair, but he gave a kind of sob and stood there, bewildered, leaning on his staff, for a long time. Then doggedly he turned to the left, so the wind would be at his back at least, and shuffled down the high dune, seeking some hollow among the ice-rimed, bowing sea-grass where he could have a little shelter. As he held up the staff to see what lay before him, he caught a dull gleam at the farthest edge of the circle of were-light: a wall of rain-wet wood.

It was a hut or shed, small and rickety as if a child had built it. Ged knocked on the low door with his staff. It remained shut. Ged pushed it open and entered, stooping nearly double to do so. He could not stand up straight inside the hut.

Coals lay red in the firepit, and by their dim glow Ged saw a man with white, long hair, who crouched in terror against the far wall, and another, man or woman he could not tell, peering from a heap of rags or hides on the floor.

"I won't hurt you," Ged whispered.

They said nothing. He looked from one to the other. Their eyes were blank with terror. When he laid down his staff, the one under the pile of rags hid whimpering. Ged took off his cloak that was heavy with water and ice, stripped naked and huddled over the firepit. "Give me something to wrap myself in," he said. He was hoarse, and could hardly speak for the chattering of his teeth and the long shudders that shook him. If they heard him, neither of the old ones answered. He reached out and took a rag from the bed-heap—a goat-hide, it might have been years ago, but it was now all tatters and black grease. The one under the bed-heap moaned with fear, but Ged paid no heed. He rubbed himself dry and then whispered, "Have you wood? Build up the fire a little, old man. I come to you in need, I mean you no harm."

The old man did not move, watching him in a stupor of fear.

"Do you understand me? Do you speak no Hardic?" Ged paused, and then asked, "Kargad?"

At that word, the old man nodded all at once, one nod, like a sad old puppet on strings. But as it was the only word Ged knew of the Kargish language, it was the end of their conversation. He found wood piled by one wall, built up the fire himself, and then with gestures asked for water, for swallowing sea-water had sickened him and now he was parched with thirst. Cringing, the old man pointed to a great shell that held water, and pushed towards the fire another shell in which were strips of smoke-dried fish. So, cross-legged close by the fire, Ged drank, and ate a little, and as some strength and sense began to come back into him, he wondered where he was. Even with the magewind he could not have sailed clear to the Kargad Lands. This islet must be out in the Reach, east of Gont but still west of Karego-At. It seemed strange that people dwelt on so small and forlorn a place, a mere sandbar; maybe they were castaways; but he was too weary to puzzle his head about them then.

He kept turning his cloak to the heat. The silvery pellawi-fur dried fast, and as soon as the wool of the facing was at least warm, if not dry, he wrapped himself in it and stretched out by the firepit. "Go to sleep, poor folk," he said to his silent hosts, and laid his head down on the floor of sand, and slept.

Three nights he spent on the nameless isle, for the first morning when he woke

he was sore in every muscle and feverish and sick. He lay like a log of driftwood in the hut by the firepit all that day and night. The next morning he woke still stiff and sore, but recovered. He put back on his salt-crusted clothes, for there was not enough water to wash them, and going out into the grey windy morning looked over this place whereto the shadow had tricked him.

It was a rocky sandbar a mile wide at its widest and a little longer than that, fringed all about with shoals and rocks. No tree or bush grew on it, no plant but the bowing sea-grass. The hut stood in a hollow of the dunes, and the old man and woman lived there alone in the utter desolation of the empty sea. The hut was built, or piled up rather, of driftwood planks and branches. Their water came from a little brackish well beside the hut; their food was fish and shellfish, fresh or dried, and rockweed. The tattered hides in the hut, and a little store of bone needles and fishhooks, and the sinew for fishlines and firedrill, came not from goats as Ged had thought at first, but from spotted seal; and indeed this was the kind of place where the seal will go to raise their pups in summer. But no one else comes to such a place. The old ones feared Ged not because they thought him a spirit, and not because he was a wizard, but only because he was a man. They had forgotten that there were other people in the world.

The old man's sullen dread never lessened. When he thought Ged was coming close enough to touch him, he would hobble away, peering back with a scowl around his bush of dirty white hair. At first the old woman had whimpered and hidden under her rag-pile whenever Ged moved, but as he had lain dozing feverishly in the dark hut, he saw her squatting to stare at him with a strange, dull, yearning look; and after a while she had brought him water to drink. When he sat up to take the shell from her she was scared and dropped it, spilling all the water, and then she wept, and wiped her eyes with her long whitish-grey hair.

Now she watched him as he worked down on the beach, shaping driftwood and planks from his boat that had washed ashore into a new boat, using the old man's crude stone adze and a binding-spell. This was neither a repair nor a boat-building, for he had not enough proper wood, and must supply all his wants with pure wizardry. Yet the old woman did not watch his marvelous work so much as she watched him, with that same craving look in her eyes. After a while she went off, and came back presently with a gift: a handful of mussels she had gathered on the rocks. Ged ate them as she gave them to him, sea-wet and raw, and thanked her. Seeming to gain courage, she went to the hut and came back with something again in her hands, a bundle wrapped up in a rag. Timidly, watching his face all the

while, she unwrapped the thing and held it up for him to see.

It was a little child's dress of silk brocade stiff with seed-pearls, stained with salt, yellow with years. On the small bodice the pearls were worked in a shape Ged knew: the double arrow of the God-Brothers of the Kargad Empire, surmounted by a king's crown.

The old woman, wrinkled, dirty, clothed in an ill-sewn sack of sealskin, pointed at the little silken dress and at herself, and smiled: a sweet, unmeaning smile, like a baby's. From some hidingplace sewn in the skirt of the dress she took a small object, and this was held out to Ged. It was a bit of dark metal, a piece of broken jewelry perhaps, the half-circle of a broken ring. Ged looked at it, but she gestured that he take it, and was not satisfied until he took it; then she nodded and smiled again; she had made him a present. But the dress she wrapped up carefully in its greasy rag-coverings, and she shuffled back to the hut to hide the lovely thing away.

Ged put the broken ring into his tunic-pocket with almost the same care, for his heart was full of pity. He guessed now that these two might be children of some royal house of the Kargad Empire; a tyrant or usurper who feared to shed kingly blood had sent them to be cast away, to live or die, on an uncharted islet far from Karego-At. One had been a boy of eight or ten, maybe, and the other a stout baby princess in a dress of silk and pearls; and they had lived, and lived on alone, forty years, fifty years, on a rock in the ocean, prince and princess of Desolation.

But the truth of this guess he did not learn until, years later, the quest of the Ring of Erreth-Akbe led him to the Kargad Lands, and to the Tombs of Atuan.

His third night on the isle lightened to a calm, pale sunrise. It was the day of Sunreturn, the shortest day of the year. His little boat of wood and magic, scraps and spells, was ready. He had tried to tell the old ones that he would take them to any land, Gont or Spevy or the Torikles; he would have left them even on some lonely shore of Karego-At, had they asked it of him, though Kargish waters were no safe place for an Archipelagan to venture. But they would not leave their barren isle. The old woman seemed not to understand what he meant with his gestures and quiet words; the old man did understand, and refused. All his memory of other lands and other men was a child's nightmare of blood and giants and screaming: Ged could see that in his face, as he shook his head and shook his head.

So Ged that morning filled up a sealskin pouch with water at the well, and since he could not thank the old ones for their fire and food, and had no present for the old woman as he would have liked, he did what he could, and set a charm on that salty unreliable spring. The water rose up through the sand as sweet and clear as

any mountain spring in the heights of Gont, nor did it ever fail. Because of it, that place of dunes and rocks is charted now and bears a name; sailors call it Springwater Isle. But the hut is gone, and the storms of many winters have left no sign of the two who lived out their lives there and died alone.

They kept hidden in the hut, as if they feared to watch, when Ged ran his boat out from the sandy south end of the isle. He let the world's wind, steady from the north, fill his sail of spell-cloth, and went speedily forth over the sea.

Now this sea-quest of Ged's was a strange matter, for as he well knew, he was a hunter who knew neither what the thing was that he hunted, nor where in all Earthsea it might be. He must hunt it by guess, by hunch, by luck, even as it had hunted him. Each was blind to the other's being, Ged as baffled by impalpable shadows as the shadow was baffled by daylight and by solid things. One certainty only Ged had: that he was indeed the hunter now and not the hunted. For the shadow, having tricked him onto the rocks, might have had him at its mercy all the while he lay half-dead on the shore and blundered in darkness in the stormy dunes; but it had not waited for that chance. It had tricked him and fled away at once, not daring now to face him. In this he saw that Ogion had been right: the shadow could not draw on his power, so long as he was turned against it. So he must keep against it, keep after it, though its track was cold across these wide seas, and he had nothing at all to guide him but the luck of the world's wind blowing southward, and a dim guess or notion in his mind that south or east was the right way to follow.

Before nightfall he saw away off on his left hand the long, faint shoreline of a great land, which must be Karego-At. He was in the very sea-roads of those white barbaric folk. He kept a sharp watch out for any Kargish longship or galley; and he remembered, as he sailed through red evening, that morning of his boyhood in Ten Alders village, the plumed warriors, the fire, the mist. And thinking of that day he saw all at once, with a qualm at his heart, how the shadow had tricked him with his own trick, bringing that mist about him on the sea as if bringing it out of his own past, blinding him to danger and fooling him to his death.

He kept his course to the southeast, and the land sank out of sight as night came over the eastern edge of the world. The hollows of the waves all were full of darkness while the crests shone yet with a clear ruddy reflection of the west. Ged sang aloud the Winter Carol, and such cantos of the *Deed of the Young King* as he remembered, for those songs are sung at the Festival of Sunreturn. His voice was clear, but it fell to nothing in the vast silence of the sea. Darkness came quickly, and the winter stars.

All that longest night of the year he waked, watching the stars rise upon his left hand and wheel overhead and sink into far black waters on the right, while always the long wind of winter bore him southward over an unseen sea. He could sleep for only a moment now and then, with a sharp awakening. This boat he sailed was in truth no boat but a thing more than half charm and sorcery, and the rest of it mere planks and driftwood which, if he let slack the shaping-spells and the binding-spell upon them, would soon enough lapse and scatter and go drifting off as a little flotsam on the waves. The sail too, woven of magic and the air, would not long stay against the wind if he slept, but would turn to a puff of wind itself. Ged's spells were cogent and potent, but when the matter on which such spells works is small, the power that keeps them working must be renewed from moment to moment: so he slept not that night. He would have gone easier and swifter as falcon or dolphin, but Ogion had advised him not to change his shape, and he knew the value of Ogion's advice. So he sailed southward under the west-going stars, and the long night passed slowly, until the first day of the new year brightened all the sea.

Soon after the sun rose he saw land ahead, but he was making little way towards it. The world's wind had dropped with daybreak. He raised a light magewind into his sail, to drive him towards that land. At the sight of it, fear had come into him again, the sinking dread that urged him to turn away, to run away. And he followed that fear as a hunter follows the signs, the broad, blunt, clawed tracks of the bear, that may at any moment turn on him from the thickets. For he was close now: he knew it.

It was a queer-looking land that loomed up over the sea as he drew nearer and nearer. What had from afar seemed to be one sheer mountainwall was split into several long steep ridges, separate isles perhaps, between which the sea ran in narrow sounds or channels. Ged had pored over many charts and maps in the Tower of the Master Namer on Roke, but those had been mostly of the Archipelago and the inner seas. He was out in the East Reach now, and did not know what this island might be. Nor had he much thought for that. It was fear that lay ahead of him, that lurked hiding from him or waiting for him among the slopes and forests of the island, and straight for it he steered.

Now the dark forest-crowned cliffs gloomed and towered high over his boat, and spray from the waves that broke against the rocky headlands blew spattering against his sail, as the magewind bore him between two great capes into a sound, a sea-lane that ran on before him deep into the island, no wider than the length of two galleys. The sea, confined, was restless and fretted at the steep shores. There

were no beaches, for the cliffs dropped straight down into the water that lay darkened by the cold reflection of their heights. It was windless, and very silent.

The shadow had tricked him out onto the moors in Osskil, and tricked him in the mist onto the rocks, and now would there be a third trick? Had he driven the thing here, or had it drawn him here, into a trap? He did not know. He knew only the torment of dread, and the certainty that he must go ahead and do what he had set out to do: hunt down the evil, follow his terror to its source. Very cautiously he steered, watching before him and behind him and up and down the cliffs on either hand. He had left the sunlight of the new day behind him on the open sea. All was dark here. The opening between the headlands seemed a remote, bright gateway when he glanced back. The cliffs loomed higher and ever higher overhead as he approached the mountain-root from which they sprang, and the lane of water grew narrower. He peered ahead into the dark cleft, and left and right up the great, cavern-pocked, boulder-tumbled slopes where trees crouched with their roots half in air. Nothing moved. Now he was coming to the end of the inlet, a high blank wrinkled mass of rock against which, narrowed to the width of a little creek, the last sea-waves lapped feebly. Fallen boulders and rotten trunks and the roots of gnarled trees left only a tight way to steer. A trap: a dark trap under the roots of the silent mountain, and he was in the trap. Nothing moved before him or above him. All was deathly still. He could go no further.

He turned the boat around, working her carefully round with spell and with makeshift oar lest she knock up against the underwater rocks or be entangled in the outreaching roots and branches, till she faced outward again; and he was about to raise up a wind to take him back as he had come, when suddenly the words of the spell froze on his lips, and his heart went cold within him. He looked back over his shoulder. The shadow stood behind him in the boat.

Had he lost one instant, he had been lost; but he was ready, and lunged to seize and hold the thing which wavered and trembled there within arm's reach. No wizardry would serve him now, but only his own flesh, his life itself, against the unliving. He spoke no word, but attacked, and the boat plunged and pitched from his sudden turn and lunge. And a pain ran up his arms into his breast, taking away his breath, and an icy cold filled him, and he was blinded: yet in his hands that seized the shadow there was nothing—darkness, air.

He stumbled forward, catching the mast to stay his fall, and light came shooting back into his eyes. He saw the shadow shudder away from him and shrink together, then stretch hugely up over him, over the sail, for an instant. Then like

black smoke on the wind it recoiled and fled, formless, down the water towards the bright gate between the cliffs.

Ged sank to his knees. The little spell-patched boat pitched again, rocked itself to stillness, drifting on the uneasy waves. He crouched in it, numb, unthinking, struggling to draw breath, until at last cold water welling under his hands warned him that he must see to his boat, for the spells binding it were growing weak. He stood up, holding on to the staff that made the mast, and rewove the binding-spell as best he could. He was chilled and weary; his hands and arms ached sorely, and there was no power in him. He wished he might lie down there in that dark place where sea and mountain met and sleep, sleep on the restless rocking water.

He could not tell if this weariness were a sorcery laid on him by the shadow as it fled, or came of the bitter coldness of its touch, or was from mere hunger and want of sleep and expense of strength; but he struggled against it, forcing himself to raise up a light mage-wind into the sail and follow down the dark seaway where the shadow had fled.

All terror was gone. All joy was gone. It was a chase no longer. He was neither hunted nor hunter, now. For the third time they had met and touched: he had of his own will turned to the shadow, seeking to hold it with living hands. He had not held it, but he had forged between them a bond, a link that had no breaking-point. There was no need to hunt the thing down, to track it, nor would its flight avail it. Neither could escape. When they had come to the time and place for their last meeting, they would meet.

But until that time, and elsewhere than that place, there would never be any rest or peace for Ged, day or night, on earth or sea. He knew now, and the knowledge was hard, that his task had never been to undo what he had done, but to finish what he had begun.

He sailed out from between the dark cliffs, and on the sea was broad, bright morning, with a fair wind blowing from the north.

He drank what water he had left in the sealskin pouch, and steered around the westernmost headland until he came into a wide strait between it and a second island lying to the west. Then he knew the place, calling to mind sea-charts of the East Reach. These were the Hands, a pair of lonely isles that reach their mountain-fingers northward toward the Kargad Lands. He sailed on between the two, and as the afternoon darkened with storm-clouds coming up from the north he came to shore, on the southern coast of the west isle. He had seen there was a little village there, above the beach where a stream came tumbling down to the sea, and he

cared little what welcome he got if he could have water, fire's warmth, and sleep.

The villagers were rough shy people, awed by a wizard's staff, wary of a strange face, but hospitable to one who came alone, over sea, before a storm. They gave him meat and drink in plenty, and the comfort of firelight and the comfort of human voices speaking his own Hardic tongue, and last and best they gave him hot water to wash the cold and saltness of the sea from him, and a bed where he could sleep.

Chapter 9

Iffish

Ged spent three days in that village of the West Hand, recovering himself, and making ready a boat built not of spells and sea-wrack but of sound wood well pegged and caulked, with a stout mast and sail of her own, that he might sail easily and sleep when he needed. Like most boats of the North and the Reaches she was clinker-built, with planks overlapped and clenched one upon the other for strength in the high seas; every part of her was sturdy and well-made. Ged reinforced her wood with deep-inwoven charms, for he thought he might go far in that boat. She was built to carry two or three men, and the old man who owned her said that he and his brothers had been through high seas and foul weather with her and she had ridden all gallantly.

Unlike the shrewd fisherman of Gont, this old man, for fear and wonder of his wizardry, would have given the boat to Ged. But Ged paid him for it in sorcerers' kind, healing his eyes of the cataracts that were in the way of blinding him. Then the old man, rejoicing, said to him, "We called the boat *Sanderling*, but do you call her *Lookfar*, and paint eyes aside her prow, and my thanks will look out of that blind wood for you and keep you from rock and reef. For I had forgotten how much light there is in the world, till you gave it back to me."

Other works Ged also did in his days in that village under the steep forests of the Hand, as his power came back into him. These were such people as he had known as a boy in the Northward Vale of Gont, though poorer even than those. With them he was at home, as he would never be in the courts of the wealthy, and he knew their bitter wants without having to ask. So he laid charms of heal and ward on children who were lame or sickly, and spells of increase on the villagers' scrawny flocks of goats and sheep; he set the rune Simn on the spindles and looms, the boat's oars and tools of bronze and stone they brought him, that these might do their work well; and the rune Pirr he wrote on the rooftrees of the huts, which

protects the house and its folk from fire, wind, and madness.

When his boat *Lookfar* was ready and well stocked with water and dried fish, he stayed yet one more day in the village, to teach to their young chanter the *Deed of Morred* and the Havnorian Lay. Very seldom did any Archipelagan ship touch at the Hands: songs made a hundred years ago were news to those villagers, and they craved to hear of heroes. Had Ged been free of what was laid on him he would gladly have stayed there a week or a month to sing them what he knew, that the great songs might be known on a new isle. But he was not free, and the next morning he set sail, going straight south over the wide seas of the Reach. For southward the shadow had gone. He need cast no finding-charm to know this: he knew it, as certainly as if a fine unreeling cord bound him and it together, no matter what miles and seas and lands might lie between. So he went certain, unhurried, and unhopeful on the way he must go, and the wind of winter bore him to the south.

He sailed a day and a night over the lonesome sea, and on the second day he came to a small isle, which they told him was called Vemish. The people in the little port looked at him askance, and soon their sorcerer came hurrying. He looked hard at Ged, and then he bowed, and said in a voice that was both pompous and wheedling, "Lord Wizard! forgive my temerity, and honor us by accepting of us anything you may need for your voyage—food, drink, sailcloth, rope,—my daughter is fetching to your boat at this moment a brace of fresh-roasted hens—I think it prudent, however, that you continue on your way from here as soon as it meets your convenience to do so. The people are in some dismay. For not long ago, the day before yesterday, a person was seen crossing our humble isle afoot from north to south, and no boat was seen to come with him aboard it nor no boat was seen to leave with him aboard it, and it did not seem that he cast any shadow. Those who saw this person tell me that he bore some likeness to yourself."

At that, Ged bowed his own head, and turned and went back to the docks of Vemish and sailed out, not looking back. There was no profit in frightening the islanders or making an enemy of their sorcerer. He would rather sleep at sea again, and think over this news the sorcerer had told him, for he was sorely puzzled by it.

The day ended, and the night passed with cold rain whispering over the sea all through the dark hours, and a grey dawn. Still the mild north wind carried *Lookfar* on. After noon the rain and mist blew off, and the sun shone from time to time; and late in the day Ged saw right athwart his course the low blue hills of a great island, brightened by that drifting winter sunlight. The smoke of hearthfires lingered blue

over the slate roofs of little towns among those hills, a pleasant sight in the vast sameness of the sea.

Ged followed a fishing-fleet in to their port, and going up the streets of the town in the golden winter evening he found an inn called The Harrekki, where firelight and ale and roast ribs of mutton warmed him body and soul. At the tables of the inn there were a couple of other voyagers, traders of the East Reach, but most of the men were townsfolk come there for good ale, news, and conversation. They were not rough timid people like the fisher-folk of the Hands, but true townsmen, alert and sedate. Surely they knew Ged for a wizard, but nothing at all was said of it, except that the innkeeper in talking (and he was a talkative man) mentioned that this town, Ismay, was fortunate in sharing with other towns of the island the inestimable treasure of an accomplished wizard trained at the School on Roke, who had been given his staff by the Archmage himself, and who, though out of town at the moment, dwelt in his ancestral home right in Ismay itself, which, therefore, stood in no need of any other practitioner of the High Arts. "As they say, *two staffs in one town must come to blows*, isn't it so, Sir?" said the innkeeper, smiling and full of cheer. So Ged was informed that as journeyman-wizard, one seeking a livelihood from sorcery, he was not wanted here. Thus he had got a blunt dismissal from Vemish and a bland one from Ismay, and he wondered at what he had been told about the kindly ways of the East Reach. This isle was Iffish, where his friend Vetch had been born. It did not seem so hospitable a place as Vetch had said.

And yet he saw that they were, indeed, kindly faces enough. It was only that they sensed what he knew to be true: that he was set apart from them, cut off from them, that he bore a doom upon him and followed after a dark thing. He was like a cold wind blowing through the firelit room, like a black bird carried by on a storm from foreign lands. The sooner he went on, taking his evil destiny with him, the better for these folk.

"I am on quest," he said to the innkeeper. "I will be here only a night or two." His tone was bleak. The innkeeper, with a glance at the great yew-staff in the corner, said nothing at all for once, but filled up Ged's cup with brown ale till the foam ran over the top.

Ged knew that he should spend only the one night in Ismay. There was no welcome for him there, or anywhere. He must go where he was bound. But he was sick of the cold empty sea and the silence where no voice spoke to him. He told himself he would spend one day in Ismay, and on the morrow go. So he slept late; when he woke a light snow was falling, and he idled about the lanes and byways of

the town to watch the people busy at their doings. He watched children bundled in fur capes playing at snow-castle and building snowmen; he heard gossips chatting across the street from open doors, and watched the bronze-smith at work with a little lad red-faced and sweating to pump the long bellows-sleeves at the smelting pit; through windows lit with a dim ruddy gold from within as the short day darkened he saw women at their looms, turning a moment to speak or smile to child or husband there in the warmth within the house. Ged saw all these things from outside and apart, alone, and his heart was very heavy in him, though he would not admit to himself that he was sad. As night fell he still lingered in the streets, reluctant to go back to the inn. He heard a man and a girl talking together merrily as they came down the street past him towards the town square, and all at once he turned, for he knew the man's voice.

He followed and caught up with the pair, coming up beside them in the late twilight lit only by distant lantern-gleams. The girl stepped back, but the man stared at him and then flung up the staff he carried, holding it between them as a barrier to ward off the threat or act of evil. And that was somewhat more than Ged could bear. His voice shook a little as he said, "I thought you would know me, Vetch."

Even then Vetch hesitated for a moment.

"I do know you," he said, and lowered the staff and took Ged's hand and hugged him round the shoulders—"I do know you! Welcome, my friend, welcome! What a sorry greeting I gave you, as if you were a ghost coming up from behind—and I have waited for you to come, and looked for you—"

"So you are the wizard they boast of in Ismay? I wondered—"

"Oh, yes, I'm their wizard; but listen, let me tell you why I didn't know you, lad. Maybe I've looked too hard for you. Three days ago—were you here three days ago, on Iffish?"

"I came yesterday."

"Three days ago, in the street in Quor, the village up there in the hills, I saw you. That is, I saw a presentment of you, or an imitation of you, or maybe simply a man who looks like you. He was ahead of me, going out of town, and he turned a bend in the road even as I saw him. I called and got no answer, I followed and found no one; nor any tracks; but the ground was frozen. It was a queer thing, and now seeing you come up out of the shadows like that I thought I was tricked again. I am sorry, Ged!" He spoke Ged's true name softly, so that the girl who stood waiting a little way behind him would not hear it.

Ged also spoke low, to use his friend's true name: "No matter, Estarriol. But this is myself, and I am glad to see you . . ."

Vetch heard, perhaps, something more than simple gladness in his voice. He had not yet let go of Ged's shoulder, and he said now, in the True Speech, "In trouble and from darkness you come, Ged, yet your coming is joy to me." Then he went on in his Reach-accented Hardic, "Come on, come home with us, we're going home, it's time to get in out of the dark!—This is my sister, the youngest of us, prettier than I am as you see, but much less clever: Yarrow she's called. Yarrow, this is the Sparrowhawk, the best of us and my friend."

"Lord Wizard," the girl greeted him, and decorously she bobbed her head and hid her eyes with her hands to show respect, as women did in the East Reach; her eyes when not hidden were clear, shy, and curious. She was perhaps fourteen years old, dark like her brother, but very slight and slender. On her sleeve there clung, winged and taloned, a dragon no longer than her hand.

They set off down the dusky street together, and Ged remarked as they went along, "In Gont they say Gontish women are brave, but I never saw a maiden there wear a dragon for a bracelet."

This made Yarrow laugh, and she answered him straight, "This is only a harrekki, have you no harrekki on Gont?" Then she got shy for a moment and hid her eyes.

"No, nor no dragons. Is not the creature a dragon?"

"A little one, that lives in oak trees, and eats wasps and worms and sparrows' eggs—it grows no greater than this. Oh, Sir, my brother has told me often of the pet you had, the wild thing, the otak—do you have it still?"

"No. No longer."

Vetch turned to him as if with a question, but he held his tongue and asked nothing till much later, when the two of them sat alone over the stone firepit of Vetch's house.

Though he was the chief wizard in the whole island of Iffish, Vetch made his home in Ismay, this small town where he had been born, living with his youngest brother and sister. His father had been a sea-trader of some means, and the house was spacious and strong-beamed, with much homely wealth of pottery and fine weaving and vessels of bronze and brass on carven shelves and chests. A great Taonian harp stood in one corner of the main room, and Yarrow's tapestry-loom in another, its tall frame inlaid with ivory. There Vetch for all his plain quiet ways was both a powerful wizard and a lord in his own house. There were a couple of old

servants, prospering along with the house, and the brother, a cheerful lad, and Yarrow, quick and silent as a little fish, who served the two friends their supper and ate with them, listening to their talk, and afterwards slipped off to her own room. All things here were well-founded, peaceful, and assured; and Ged looking about him at the firelit room said, "This is how a man should live," and sighed.

"Well, it's one good way," said Vetch. "There are others. Now, lad, tell me if you can what things have come to you and gone from you since we last spoke, two years ago. And tell me what journey you are on, since I see well that you won't stay long with us this time."

Ged told him, and when he was done Vetch sat pondering for a long while. Then he said, "I'll go with you, Ged."

"No."

"I think I will."

"No, Estarriol. This is no task or bane of yours. I began this evil course alone, I will finish it alone, I do not want any other to suffer from it—you least of all, you who tried to keep my hand from the evil act in the very beginning, Estarriol—"

"Pride was ever your mind's master," his friend said smiling, as if they talked of a matter of small concern to either. "Now think: it is your quest, assuredly, but if the quest fails, should there not be another there who might bear warning to the Archipelago? For the shadow would be a fearful power then. And if you defeat the thing, should there not be another there who will tell of it in the Archipelago, that the Deed may be known and sung? I know I can be of no use to you; yet I think I should go with you."

So entreated Ged could not deny his friend, but he said, "I should not have stayed this day here. I knew it, but I stayed."

"Wizards do not meet by chance, lad," said Vetch. "And after all, as you said yourself, I was with you at the beginning of your journey. It is right that I should follow you to its end." He put new wood on the fire, and they sat gazing into the flames a while.

"There is one I have not heard of since that night on Roke Knoll, and I had no heart to ask any at the School of him: Jasper, I mean."

"He never won his staff. He left Roke that same summer, and went to the Island of O to be sorcerer in the Lord's household at O-tokne. I know no more of him than that."

Again they were silent, watching the fire and enjoying (since it was a bitter night) the warmth on their legs and faces as they sat on the broad coping of the firepit,

their feet almost among the coals.

Ged said at last, speaking low, "There is a thing that I fear, Estarriol. I fear it more if you are with me when I go. There in the Hands in the dead end of the inlet I turned upon the shadow, it was within my hands' reach, and I seized it—I tried to seize it. And there was nothing I could hold. I could not defeat it. It fled, I followed. But that may happen again, and yet again. I have no power over the thing. There may be neither death nor triumph to end this quest; nothing to sing of; no end. It may be I must spend my life running from sea to sea and land to land on an endless vain venture, a shadow-quest."

"Avert!" said Vetch, turning his left hand in the gesture that turns aside the ill chance spoken of. For all his somber thoughts this made Ged grin a little, for it is rather a child's charm than a wizard's; there was always such village innocence in Vetch. Yet also he was keen, shrewd, direct to the center of a thing. He said now, "That is a grim thought and I trust a false one. I guess rather that what I saw begin, I may see end. Somehow you will learn its nature, its being, what it is, and so hold and bind and vanquish it. Though that is a hard question: what is it . . . There is a thing that worries me, I do not understand it. It seems the shadow now goes in your shape, or a kind of likeness of you at least, as they saw it on Vemish and as I saw it here in Iffish. How may that be, and why, and why did it never do so in the Archipelago?"

"They say, *Rules change in the Reaches*."

"Aye, a true saying, I can tell you. There are good spells I learned on Roke that have no power here, or go all awry; and also there are spells worked here I never learned on Roke. Every land has its own powers, and the farther one goes from the Inner Lands, the less one can guess about those powers and their governance. But I do not think it is only that which works this change in the shadow."

"Nor do I. I think that, when I ceased to flee from it and turned against it, that turning of my will upon it gave it shape and form, even though the same act prevented it from taking my strength from me. All my acts have their echo in it; it is my creature."

"In Osskil it named you, and so stopped any wizardry you might have used against it. Why did it not do so again, there in the Hands?"

"I do not know. Perhaps it is only from my weakness that it draws the strength to speak. Almost with my own tongue it speaks: for how did it know my name? How did it know my name? I have racked my brains on that over all the seas since I left Gont, and I cannot see the answer. Maybe it cannot speak at all in its own form

or formlessness, but only with borrowed tongue, as a gebbeth. I do not know."

"Then you must beware meeting it in gebbeth-form a second time."

"I think," Ged replied, stretching out his hands to the red coals as if he felt an inward chill, "I think I will not. It is bound to me now as I am to it. It cannot get so far free of me as to seize any other man and empty him of will and being, as it did Skiorh. It can possess me. If ever I weaken again, and try to escape from it, to break the bond, it will possess me. And yet, when I held it with all the strength I had, it became mere vapor, and escaped from me . . . And so it will again, and yet it cannot really escape, for I can always find it. I am bound to the foul cruel thing, and will be forever, unless I can learn the word that masters it: its name."

Brooding his friend asked, "Are there names in the dark realms?"

"Gensher the Archmage said there are not. My master Ogion said otherwise."

"Infinite are the arguments of mages," Vetch quoted, with a smile that was somewhat grim.

"She who served the Old Power on Osskil swore that the Stone would tell me the shadow's name, but that I count for little. However there was also a dragon, who offered to trade that name for his own, to be rid of me; and I have thought that, where mages argue, dragons may be wise."

"Wise, but unkind. But what dragon is this? You did not tell me you had been talking with dragons since I saw you last."

They talked together late that night, and though always they came back to the bitter matter of what lay before Ged, yet their pleasure in being together overrode all; for the love between them was strong and steadfast, unshaken by time or chance. In the morning Ged woke beneath his friend's roof, and while he was still drowsy he felt such wellbeing as if he were in some place wholly defended from evil and harm. All day long a little of this dream-peace clung to his thoughts, and he took it, not as a good omen, but as a gift. It seemed likely to him that leaving this house he would leave the last haven he was to know, and so while the short dream lasted he would be happy in it.

Having affairs he must see to before he left Iffish, Vetch went off to other villages of the island with the lad who served him as prentice-sorcerer. Ged stayed with Yarrow and her brother, called Murre, who was between her and Vetch in age. He seemed not much more than a boy, for there was no gift or scourge of mage-power in him, and he had never been anywhere but Iffish, Tok, and Holp, and his life was easy and untroubled. Ged watched him with wonder and some envy, and exactly so he watched Ged: to each it seemed very queer that the other, so different, yet

was his own age, nineteen years. Ged marveled how one who had lived nineteen years could be so carefree. Admiring Murre's comely, cheerful face he felt himself to be all lank and harsh, never guessing that Murre envied him even the scars that scored his face, and thought them the track of a dragon's claws and the very rune and sign of a hero.

The two young men were thus somewhat shy with each other, but as for Yarrow she soon lost her awe of Ged, being in her own house and mistress of it. He was very gentle with her, and many were the questions she asked of him, for Vetch, she said, would never tell her anything. She kept busy those two days making dry wheatcakes for the voyagers to carry, and wrapping up dried fish and meat and other such provender to stock their boat, until Ged told her to stop, for he did not plan to sail clear to Selidor without a halt.

"Where is Selidor?"

"Very far out in the Western Reach, where dragons are as common as mice."

"Best stay in the East then, our dragons are as small as mice. There's your meat, then; you're sure that's enough? Listen, I don't understand: you and my brother both are mighty wizards, you wave your hand and mutter and the thing is done. Why do you get hungry, then? When it comes suppertime at sea, why not say, *Meat-pie!* and the meat-pie appears, and you eat it?"

"Well, we could do so. But we don't much wish to eat our words, as they say. *Meat-pie!* is only a word, after all . . . We can make it odorous, and savorous, and even filling, but it remains a word. It fools the stomach and gives no strength to the hungry man."

"Wizards, then, are not cooks," said Murre, who was sitting across the kitchen hearth from Ged, carving a box-lid of fine wood; he was a woodworker by trade, though not a very zealous one.

"Nor are cooks wizards, alas," said Yarrow on her knees to see if the last batch of cakes baking on the hearth-bricks was getting brown. "But I still don't understand, Sparrowhawk. I have seen my brother, and even his prentice, make light in a dark place only by saying one word: and the light shines, it is bright, not a word but a light you can see your way by!"

"Aye," Ged answered. "Light is a power. A great power, by which we exist, but which exists beyond our needs, in itself. Sunlight and starlight are time, and time is light. In the sunlight, in the days and years, life is. In a dark place life may call upon the light, naming it. But usually when you see a wizard name or call upon some thing, some object to appear, that is not the same, he calls upon no power greater

than himself, and what appears is an illusion only. To summon a thing that is not there at all, to call it by speaking its true name, that is a great mastery, not lightly used. Not for mere hunger's sake. Yarrow, your little dragon has stolen a cake."

Yarrow had listened so hard, gazing at Ged as he spoke, that she had not seen the harrekki scuttle down from its warm perch on the kettle-hook over the hearth and seize a wheatcake bigger than itself. She took the small scaly creature on her knee and fed it bits and crumbs, while she pondered what Ged had told her.

"So then you would not summon up a real meat-pie lest you disturb what my brother is always talking about—I forget its name—"

"Equilibrium," Ged replied soberly, for she was very serious.

"Yes. But, when you were shipwrecked, you sailed from the place in a boat woven mostly of spells, and it didn't leak water. Was it illusion?"

"Well, partly it was illusion, because I am uneasy seeing the sea through great holes in my boat, so I patched them for the looks of the thing. But the strength of the boat was not illusion, nor summoning, but made with another kind of art, a binding-spell. The wood was bound as one whole, one entire thing, a boat. What is a boat but a thing that doesn't leak water?"

"I've bailed some that do," said Murre.

"Well, mine leaked, too, unless I was constantly seeing to the spell." He bent down from his corner seat and took a cake from the bricks, and juggled it in his hands. "I too have stolen a cake."

"You have burned fingers, then. And when you're starving on the waste water between the far isles you'll think of that cake and say, *Ah! had I not stolen that cake I might eat it now, alas!*—I shall eat my brother's, so he can starve with you—"

"Thus is Equilibrium maintained," Ged remarked, while she took and munched a hot, half-toasted cake; and this made her giggle and choke. But presently looking serious again she said, "I wish I could truly understand what you tell me. I am too stupid."

"Little sister," Ged said, "it is I that have no skill explaining. If we had more time—"

"We will have more time," Yarrow said. "When my brother comes back home, you will come with him, for a while at least, won't you?"

"If I can," he answered gently.

There was a little pause; and Yarrow asked, watching the harrekki climb back to its perch, "Tell me just this, if it is not a secret: what other great powers are there besides the light?"

"It is no secret. All power is one in source and end, I think. Years and distances, stars and candles, water and wind and wizardry, the craft in a man's hand and the wisdom in a tree's root: they all arise together. My name, and yours, and the true name of the sun, or a spring of water, or an unborn child, all are syllables of the great word that is very slowly spoken by the shining of the stars. There is no other power. No other name."

Staying his knife on the carved wood, Murre asked, "What of death?"

The girl listened, her shining black head bent down.

"For a word to be spoken," Ged answered slowly, "there must be silence. Before, and after." Then all at once he got up, saying, "I have no right to speak of these things. The word that was mine to say I said wrong. It is better that I keep still: I will not speak again. Maybe there is no true power but the dark." And he left the fireside and the warm kitchen, taking up his cloak and going out alone into the drizzling cold rain of winter in the streets.

"He is under a curse," Murre said, gazing somewhat fearfully after him.

"I think this voyage he is on leads him to his death," the girl said, "and he fears that, yet he goes on." She lifted her head as if she watched, through the red flame of the fire, the course of a boat that came through the seas of winter alone, and went on out into empty seas. Then her eyes filled with tears a moment, but she said nothing.

Vetch came home the next day, and took his leave of the notables of Ismay, who were most unwilling to let him go off to sea in midwinter on a mortal quest not even his own; but though they might reproach him, there was nothing at all they could do to stop him. Growing weary of old men who nagged him, he said, "I am yours, by parentage and custom and by duty undertaken towards you. I am your wizard. But it is time you recalled that, though I am a servant, I am not your servant. When I am free to come back I will come back: till then, farewell."

At daybreak, as grey light welled up in the east from the sea, the two young men set forth in *Lookfar* from the harbor of Ismay, raising a brown, strong-woven sail to the north wind. On the dock Yarrow stood and watched them go, as sailors' wives and sisters stand on all the shores of all Earthsea watching their men go out on the sea, and they do not wave or call aloud, but stand still in hooded cloak of grey or brown, there on the shore that dwindles smaller and smaller from the boat while the water grows wide between.

Chapter 10

The Open Sea

The haven now was sunk from sight and *Lookfar*'s painted eyes, wave-drenched, looked ahead on seas ever wider and more desolate. In two days and nights the companions made the crossing from Iffish to Soders Island, a hundred miles of foul weather and contrary winds. They stayed in port there only briefly, long enough to refill a waterskin, and to buy a tar-smeared sailcloth to protect some of their gear in the undecked boat from seawater and rain. They had not provided this earlier, because ordinarily a wizard looks after such small conveniences by way of spells, the very least and commonest kind of spells, and indeed it takes little more magic to freshen seawater and so save the bother of carrying fresh water. But Ged seemed most unwilling to use his craft, or to let Vetch use his. He said only, "It's better not," and his friend did not ask or argue. For as the wind first filled their sail, both had felt a heavy foreboding, cold as that winter wind. Haven, harbor, peace, safety, all that was behind. They had turned away. They went now a way in which all events were perilous, and no acts were meaningless. On the course on which they were embarked, the saying of the least spell might change chance and move the balance of power and of doom: for they went now toward the very center of that balance, toward the place where light and darkness meet. Those who travel thus say no word carelessly.

Sailing out again and coasting round the shores of Soders, where white snowfields faded up into foggy hills, Ged took the boat southward again, and now they entered waters where the great traders of the Archipelago never come, the outmost fringes of the Reach.

Vetch asked no question about their course, knowing that Ged did not choose it but went as he must go. As Soders Island grew small and pale behind them, and the waves hissed and smacked under the prow, and the great grey plain of water circled them all round clear to the edge of the sky, Ged asked, "What lands lie ahead this

course?"

"Due south of Soders there are no lands at all. Southeast you go a long way and find little: Pelimer, Kornay, Gosk, and Astowell which is also called Lastland. Beyond it, the Open Sea."

"What to the southwest?"

"Rolameny, which is one of our East Reach isles, and some small islets round about it; then nothing till you enter the South Reach: Rood, and Toom, and the Isle of the Ear where men do not go."

"We may," Ged said wryly.

"I'd rather not," said Vetch. "That is a disagreeable part of the world, they say, full of bones and portents. Sailors say that there are stars to be seen from the waters by the Isle of the Ear and Far Sorr that cannot be seen anywhere else, and that have never been named."

"Aye, there was a sailor on the ship that brought me first to Roke who spoke of that. And he told tales of the Raft-Folk in the far South Reach, who never come to land but once a year, to cut the great logs for their rafts, and the rest of the year, all the days and months, they drift on the currents of ocean, out of sight of any land. I'd like to see those raft-villages."

"I would not," said Vetch grinning. "Give me land, and land-folk; the sea in its bed and I in mine . . ."

"I wish I could have seen all the cities of the Archipelago," Ged said as he held the sail-rope, watching the wide grey wastes before them. "Havnor at the world's heart, and Éa where the myths were born, and Shelieth of the Fountains on Way; all the cities and the great lands. And the small lands, the strange lands of the Outer Reaches, them too. To sail right down the Dragons' Run, away in the west. Or to sail north into the ice-floes, clear to Hogen Land. Some say that is a land greater than all the Archipelago, and others say it is mere reefs and rocks with ice between. No one knows. I should like to see the whales in the northern seas . . . But I cannot. I must go where I am bound to go, and turn my back on the bright shores. I was in too much haste, and now have no time left. I traded all the sunlight and the cities and the distant lands for a handful of power, for a shadow, for the dark." So, as the mage-born will, Ged made his fear and regret into a song, a brief lament, half-sung, that was not for himself alone; and his friend replying spoke the hero's words from the *Deed of Erreth-Akbe*, "O may I see the earth's bright hearth once more, the white towers of Havnor . . ."

So they sailed on their narrow course over the wide forsaken waters. The most

they saw that day was a school of silver pannies swimming south, but never a dolphin leapt nor did the flight of gull or murre or tern break the grey air. As the east darkened and the west grew red, Vetch brought out food and divided it between them and said, "Here's the last of the ale. I drink to the one who thought to put the keg aboard for thirsty men in cold weather: my sister Yarrow."

At that Ged left off his bleak thoughts and his gazing ahead over the sea, and he saluted Yarrow more earnestly, perhaps, than Vetch. The thought of her brought to his mind the sense of her wise and childish sweetness. She was not like any person he had known. (What young girl had he ever known at all? but he never thought of that.) "She is like a little fish, a minnow, that swims in a clear creek," he said, "—defenseless, yet you cannot catch her."

At this Vetch looked straight at him, smiling. "You are a mage born," he said. "Her true name is Kest." In the Old Speech, *kest* is minnow, as Ged well knew; and this pleased him to the heart. But after a while he said in a low voice, "You should not have told me her name, maybe."

But Vetch, who had not done so lightly, said, "Her name is safe with you as mine is. And, besides, you knew it without my telling you . . ."

Red sank to ashes in the west, and ash-grey sank to black. All the sea and sky were wholly dark. Ged stretched out in the bottom of the boat to sleep, wrapped in his cloak of wool and fur. Vetch, holding the sail-rope, sang softly from the *Deed of Enlad*, where the song tells how the mage Morred the White left Havnor in his oarless longship, and coming to the island Soléa saw Elfarran in the orchards in the spring. Ged slept before the song came to the sorry end of their love, Morred's death, the ruin of Enlad, the sea-waves, vast and bitter, whelming the orchards of Soléa. Towards midnight he woke, and watched again while Vetch slept. The little boat ran sharp over choppy seas, fleeing the strong wind that leaned on her sail, running blind through the night. But the overcast had broken, and before dawn the thin moon shining between brown-edged clouds shed a weak light on the sea.

"The moon wanes to her dark," Vetch murmured, awake in the dawn, when for a while the cold wind dropped. Ged looked up at the white half-ring above the paling eastern waters, but said nothing. The dark of the moon that follows first after Sunreturn is called the Fallows, and is the contrary pole of the days of the Moon and the Long Dance in summer. It is an unlucky time for travelers and for the sick; children are not given their true name during the Fallows, and no Deeds are sung, nor swords nor edge-tools sharpened, nor oaths sworn. It is the dark axis of the year, when things done are ill done.

Three days out from Soders they came, following sea-birds and shore-wrack, to Pelimer, a small isle humped high above the high grey seas. Its people spoke Hardic, but in their own fashion, strange even to Vetch's ears. The young men came ashore there for fresh water and a respite from the sea, and at first were well received, with wonder and commotion. There was a sorcerer in the main town of the island, but he was mad. He would talk only of the great serpent that was eating at the foundations of Pelimer so that soon the island must go adrift like a boat cut from her moorings, and slide out over the edge of the world. At first he greeted the young wizards courteously, but as he talked about the serpent he began to look askance at Ged: and then he fell to railing at them there in the street, calling them spies and servants of the Sea-Snake. The Pelimerians looked dourly at them after that, since though mad he was their sorcerer. So Ged and Vetch made no long stay, but set forth again before nightfall, going always south and east.

In these days and nights of sailing Ged never spoke of the shadow, nor directly of his quest; and the nearest Vetch came to asking any question was (as they followed the same course farther and farther out and away from the known lands of Earthsea)—"Are you sure?—" To this Ged answered only, "Is the iron sure where the magnet lies?" Vetch nodded and they went on, no more being said by either. But from time to time they talked of the crafts and devices that mages of old days had used to find out the hidden name of baneful powers and beings: how Nereger of Paln had learned the Black Mage's name from overhearing the conversation of dragons, and how Morred had seen his enemy's name written by falling raindrops in the dust of the battlefield of the Plains of Enlad. They spoke of finding-spells, and invocations, and those Answerable Questions which only the Master Patterner of Roke can ask. But often Ged would end by murmuring words which Ogion had said to him on the shoulder of Gont Mountain in an autumn long ago: "To hear, one must be silent . . ." And he would fall silent, and ponder, hour by hour, always watching the sea ahead of the boat's way. Sometimes it seemed to Vetch that his friend saw, across the waves and miles and grey days yet to come, the thing they followed and the dark end of their voyage.

They passed between Kornay and Gosk in foul weather, seeing neither isle in the fog and rain, and knowing they had passed them only on the next day when they saw ahead of them an isle of pinnacled cliffs above which sea-gulls wheeled in huge flocks whose mewing clamor could be heard from far over the sea. Vetch said, "That will be Astowell, from the look of it. Lastland. East and south of it the charts are empty."

“Yet they who live there may know of farther lands,” Ged answered.

“Why do you say so?” Vetch asked, for Ged had spoken uneasily; and his answer to this again was halting and strange. “Not there,” he said, gazing at Astowell ahead, and past it, or through it—“Not there. Not on the sea. Not on the sea but on dry land: what land? Before the springs of the open sea, beyond the sources, behind the gates of daylight—”

Then he fell silent, and when he spoke again it was in an ordinary voice, as if he had been freed from a spell or a vision, and had no clear memory of it.

The port of Astowell, a creek-mouth between rocky heights, was on the northern shore of the isle, and all the huts of the town faced north and west; it was as if the island turned its face, though from so far away, always towards Earthsea, towards mankind.

Excitement and dismay attended the arrival of strangers, in a season when no boat had ever braved the seas round Astowell. The women all stayed in the wattle huts, peering out the door, hiding their children behind their skirts, drawing back fearfully into the darkness of the huts as the strangers came up from the beach. The men, lean fellows ill-clothed against the cold, gathered in a solemn circle about Vetch and Ged, and each one held a stone hand-axe or a knife of shell. But once their fear was past they made the strangers very welcome, and there was no end to their questions. Seldom did any ship come to them even from Soders or Rolameny, they having nothing to trade for bronze or fine wares; they had not even any wood. Their boats were coracles woven of reed, and it was a brave sailor who would go as far as Gosk or Kornay in such a craft. They dwelt all alone here at the edge of all the maps. They had no witch or sorcerer, and seemed not to recognize the young wizards’ staffs for what they were, admiring them only for the precious stuff they were made of, wood. Their chief or Isle-Man was very old, and he alone of his people had ever before seen a man born in the Archipelago. Ged, therefore, was a marvel to them; the men brought their little sons to look at the Archipelagan, so they might remember him when they were old. They had never heard of Gont, only of Havnor and Éa, and took him for a Lord of Havnor. He did his best to answer their questions about the white city he had never seen. But he was restless as the evening wore on, and at last he asked the men of the village, as they sat crowded round the firepit in the lodgehouse in the reeking warmth of the goatdung and broom-faggots that were all their fuel, “What lies eastward of your land?”

They were silent, some grinning others grim.

The old Isle-Man answered, “The sea.”

“There is no land beyond?”

“This is Lastland. There is no land beyond. There is nothing but water till world’s edge.”

“These are wise men, father,” said a younger man, “seafarers, voyagers. Maybe they know of a land we do not know of.”

“There is no land east of this land,” said the old man, and he looked long at Ged, and spoke no more to him.

The companions slept that night in the smoky warmth of the lodge. Before daylight Ged roused his friend, whispering, “Estarriol, wake. We cannot stay, we must go.”

“Why so soon?” Vetch asked, full of sleep.

“Not soon—late. I have followed too slow. It has found the way to escape me, and so doom me. It must not escape me, for I must follow it however far it goes. If I lose it I am lost.”

“Where do we follow it?”

“Eastward. Come. I filled the waterskins.”

So they left the lodge before any in the village was awake, except a baby that cried a little in the darkness of some hut, and fell still again. By the vague starlight they found the way down to the creek-mouth, and untied *Lookfar* from the rock cairn where she had been made fast, and pushed her out into the black water. So they set out eastward from Astowell into the Open Sea, on the first day of the Fallows, before sunrise.

That day they had clear skies. The world’s wind was cold and gusty from the northeast, but Ged had raised the magewind: the first act of magery he had done since he left the Isle of the Hands. They sailed very fast due eastward. The boat shuddered with the great, smoking, sunlit waves that hit her as she ran, but she went gallantly as her builder had promised, answering the magewind as true as any spell-enwoven ship of Roke.

Ged spoke not at all that morning, except to renew the power of the wind-spell or to keep a charmed strength in the sail, and Vetch finished his sleep, though uneasily, in the stern of the boat. At noon they ate. Ged doled their food out sparingly, and the portent of this was plain, but both of them chewed their bit of salt fish and wheaten cake, and neither said anything.

All afternoon they cleaved eastward never turning nor slackening pace. Once Ged broke his silence, saying, “Do you hold with those who think the world is all landless sea beyond the Outer Reaches, or with those who imagine other

Archipelagoes or vast undiscovered lands on the other face of the world?"

"At this time," said Vetch, "I hold with those who think the world has but one face, and he who sails too far will fall off the edge of it."

Ged did not smile; there was no mirth left in him. "Who knows what a man might meet, out there? Not we, who keep always to our coasts and shores."

"Some have sought to know, and have not returned. And no ship has ever come to us from lands we do not know."

Ged made no reply.

All that day, all that night they went driven by the powerful wind of magery over the great swells of ocean, eastward. Ged kept watch from dusk till dawn, for in darkness the force that drew or drove him grew stronger yet. Always he watched ahead, though his eyes in the moonless night could see no more than the painted eyes aside the boat's blind prow. By daybreak his dark face was grey with weariness, and he was so cramped with cold that he could hardly stretch out to rest. He said whispering, "Hold the magewind from the west, Estarriol," and then he slept.

There was no sunrise, and presently rain came beating across the bow from the northeast. It was no storm, only the long, cold winds and rains of winter. Soon all things in the open boat were wet through, despite the sailcloth cover they had bought; and Vetch felt as if he too were soaked clear to the bone; and Ged shivered in his sleep. In pity for his friend, and perhaps for himself, Vetch tried to turn aside for a little that rude ceaseless wind that bore the rain. But though, following Ged's will, he could keep the magewind strong and steady, his weatherworking had small power here so far from land, and the wind of the Open Sea did not listen to his voice.

And at this a certain fear came into Vetch, as he began to wonder how much wizardly power would be left to him and Ged, if they went on and on away from the lands where men were meant to live.

Ged watched again that night, and all night held the boat eastward. When day came the world's wind slackened somewhat, and the sun shone fitfully; but the great swells ran so high that *Lookfar* must tilt and climb up them as if they were hills, and hang at the hillcrest and plunge suddenly, and climb up the next again, and the next, and the next, unending.

In the evening of that day Vetch spoke out of long silence. "My friend," he said, "you spoke once as if sure we would come to land at last. I would not question your vision but for this, that it might be a trick, a deception made by that which you

follow, to lure you on farther than a man can go over ocean. For our power may change and weaken on strange seas. And a shadow does not tire, or starve, or drown."

They sat side by side on the thwart, yet Ged looked at him now as if from a distance, across a wide abyss. His eyes were troubled, and he was slow to answer.

At last he said, "Estarriol, we are coming near."

Hearing his words, his friend knew them to be true. He was afraid, then. But he put his hand on Ged's shoulder and said only, "Well, then, good; that is good."

Again that night Ged watched, for he could not sleep in the dark. Nor would he sleep when the third day came. Still they ran with that ceaseless, light, terrible swiftness over the sea, and Vetch wondered at Ged's power that could hold so strong a magewind hour after hour, here on the Open Sea where Vetch felt his own power all weakened and astray. And they went on, until it seemed to Vetch that what Ged had spoken would come true, and they were going beyond the sources of the sea and eastward behind the gates of daylight. Ged stayed forward in the boat, looking ahead as always. But he was not watching the ocean now, or not the ocean that Vetch saw, a waste of heaving water to the rim of the sky. In Ged's eyes there was a dark vision that overlapped and veiled the grey sea and the grey sky, and the darkness grew, and the veil thickened. None of this was visible to Vetch, except when he looked at his friend's face; then he too saw the darkness for a moment. They went on, and on. And it was as if, though one wind drove them in one boat, Vetch went east over the world's sea, while Ged went alone into a realm where there was no east or west, no rising or setting of the sun, or of the stars.

Ged stood up suddenly in the prow, and spoke aloud. The magewind dropped. *Lookfar* lost headway, and rose and fell on the vast surges like a chip of wood. Though the world's wind blew strong as ever straight from the north now, the brown sail hung slack, unstirred. And so the boat hung on the waves, swung by their great slow swinging, but going no direction.

Ged said, "Take down the sail," and Vetch did so quickly, while Ged unlashed the oars and set them in the locks and bent his back to rowing.

Vetch, seeing only the waves heaving up and down clear to the end of sight, could not understand why they went now by oars; but he waited, and presently he was aware that the world's wind was growing faint and the swells diminishing. The climb and plunge of the boat grew less and less, till at last she seemed to go forward under Ged's strong oarstrokes over water that lay almost still, as in a land-locked bay. And though Vetch could not see what Ged saw, when between his strokes he

looked ever and again over his shoulder at what lay before the boat's way—though Vetch could not see the dark scopes beneath unmoving stars, yet he began to see with his wizard's eye a darkness that welled up in the hollows of the waves all around the boat, and he saw the billows grow low and sluggish as they were choked with sand.

If this were an enchantment of illusion, it was powerful beyond belief; to make the Open Sea seem land. Trying to collect his wits and courage, Vetch spoke the Revelation-spell, watching between each slow-syllabled word for change or tremor of illusion in this strange drying and shallowing of the abyss of ocean. But there was none. Perhaps the spell, though it should affect only his own vision and not the magic at work about them, had no power here. Or perhaps there was no illusion, and they had come to world's end.

Unheeding, Ged rowed always slower, looking over his shoulder, choosing a way among channels or shoals and shallows that he alone could see. The boat shuddered as her keel dragged. Under that keel lay the vast deeps of the sea, yet they were aground. Ged drew the oars up rattling in their locks, and that noise was terrible, for there was no other sound. All sounds of water, wind, wood, sail, were gone, lost in a huge profound silence that might have been unbroken forever. The boat lay motionless. No breath of wind moved. The sea had turned to sand, shadowy, unstirred. Nothing moved in the dark sky or on that dry unreal ground that went on and on into gathering darkness all around the boat as far as eye could see.

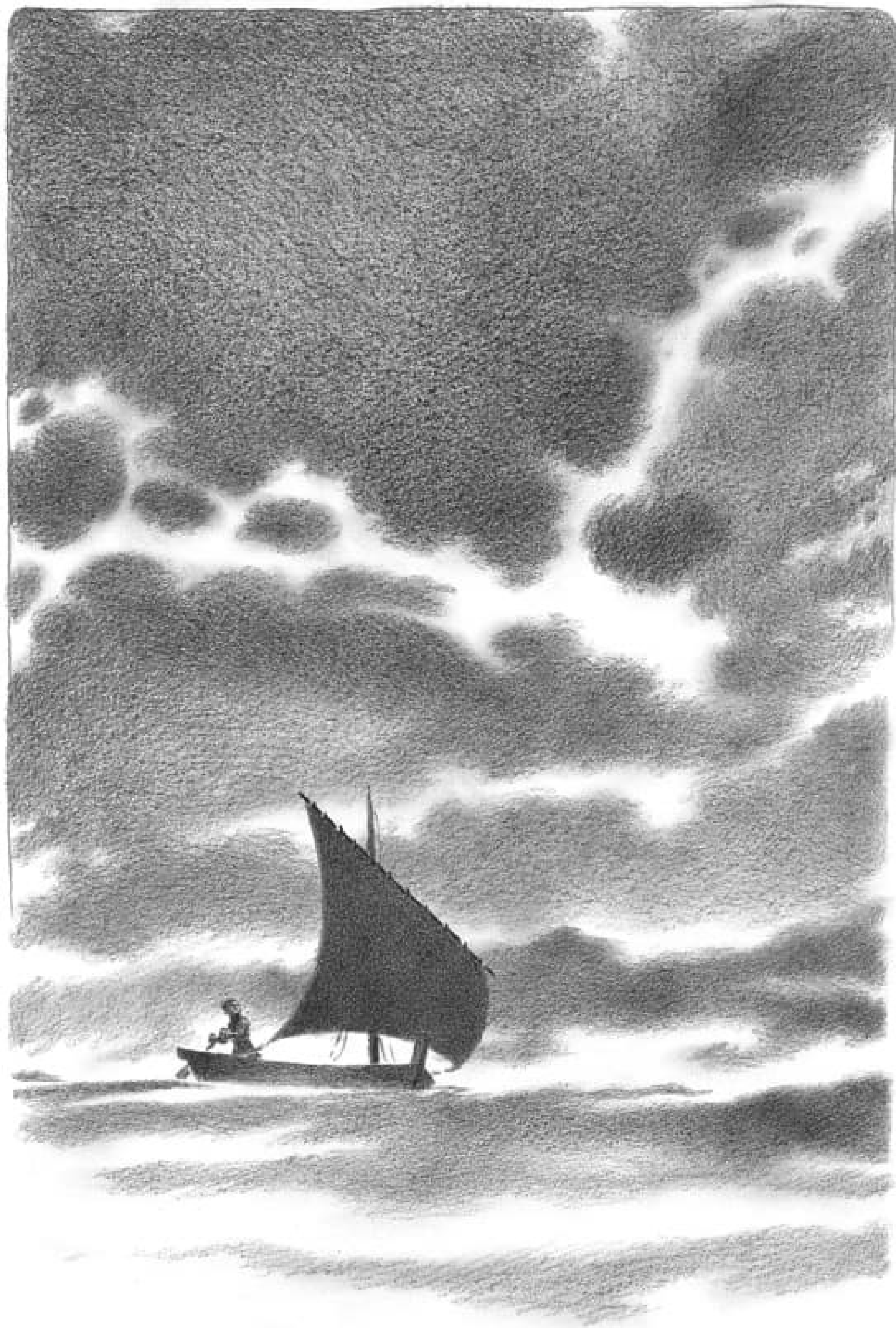
Ged stood up, and took his staff, and lightly stepped over the side of the boat. Vetch thought to see him fall and sink down in the sea, the sea that surely was there behind this dry, dim veil that hid away water, sky, and light. But there was no sea anymore. Ged walked away from the boat. The dark sand showed his footprints where he went, and whispered a little under his step.

His staff began to shine, not with the werelight but with a clear white glow, that soon grew so bright that it reddened his fingers where they held the radiant wood.

He strode forward, away from the boat, but in no direction. There were no directions here, no north or south or east or west, only towards and away.

To Vetch, watching, the light he bore seemed like a great slow star that moved through the darkness. And the darkness about it thickened, blackened, drew together. This also Ged saw, watching always ahead through the light. And after a while he saw at the faint outermost edge of the light a shadow that came towards him over the sand.

At first it was shapeless, but as it drew nearer it took on the look of a man. An old man it seemed, grey and grim, coming towards Ged; but even as Ged saw his father the smith in that figure, he saw that it was not an old man but a young one. It was Jasper: Jasper's insolent handsome young face, and silver-clasped grey cloak, and stiff stride. Hateful was the look he fixed on Ged across the dark intervening air. Ged did not stop, but slowed his pace, and as he went forward he raised his staff up a little higher. It brightened, and in its light the look of Jasper fell from the figure that approached, and it became Pechvarry. But Pechvarry's face was all bloated and pallid like the face of a drowned man, and he reached out his hand strangely as if beckoning. Still Ged did not stop, but went forward, though there were only a few yards left between them now. Then the thing that faced him changed utterly, spreading out to either side as if it opened enormous thin wings, and it writhed, and swelled, and shrank again. Ged saw in it for an instant Skiorh's white face, and then a pair of clouded, staring eyes, and then suddenly a fearful face he did not know, man or monster, with writhing lips and eyes that were like pits going back into black emptiness.



At that Ged lifted up the staff high, and the radiance of it brightened intolerably, burning with so white and great a light that it compelled and harrowed even that ancient darkness. In that light all form of man sloughed off the thing that came towards Ged. It drew together and shrank and blackened, crawling on four short taloned legs upon the sand. But still it came forward, lifting up to him a blind unformed snout without lips or ears or eyes. As they came right together it became utterly black in the white mage-radiance that burned about it, and it heaved itself upright. In silence, man and shadow met face to face, and stopped.

Aloud and clearly, breaking that old silence, Ged spoke the shadow's name and in the same moment the shadow spoke without lips or tongue, saying the same word: "Ged." And the two voices were one voice.

Ged reached out his hands, dropping his staff, and took hold of his shadow, of the black self that reached out to him. Light and darkness met, and joined, and were one.

But to Vetch, watching in terror through the dark twilight from far off over the sand, it seemed that Ged was overcome, for he saw the clear radiance fail and grow dim. Rage and despair filled him, and he sprang out on the sand to help his friend or die with him, and ran towards that small fading glimmer of light in the empty dusk of the dry land. But as he ran the sand sank under his feet, and he struggled in it as in quicksand, as through a heavy flow of water: until with a roar of noise and a glory of daylight, and the bitter cold of winter, and the bitter taste of salt, the world was restored to him and he floundered in the sudden, true, and living sea.

Nearby the boat rocked on the grey waves, empty. Vetch could see nothing else on the water; the battering wave-tops filled his eyes and blinded him. No strong swimmer, he struggled as best he could to the boat, and pulled himself up into her. Coughing and trying to wipe away the water that streamed from his hair, he looked about desperately, not knowing now which way to look. And at last he made out something dark among the waves, a long way off across what had been sand and now was wild water. Then he leapt to the oars and rowed mightily to his friend, and catching Ged's arms helped and hauled him up over the side.

Ged was dazed and his eyes stared as if they saw nothing, but there was no hurt to be seen on him. His staff, black yew-wood, all radiance quenched, was grasped in his right hand, and he would not let go of it. He said no word. Spent and soaked and shaking he lay huddled up against the mast, never looking at Vetch who raised the sail and turned the boat to catch the northeast wind. He saw nothing of the world until, straight ahead of their course, in the sky that darkened where the sun

had set, between long clouds in a bay of clear blue light, the new moon shone: a ring of ivory, a rim of horn, reflected sunlight shining across the ocean of the dark.

Ged lifted his face and gazed at that remote bright crescent in the west.

He gazed for a long time, and then he stood up erect, holding his staff in his two hands as a warrior holds his long sword. He looked about at the sky, the sea, the brown swelling sail above him, his friend's face.

"Estarriol," he said, "look, it is done. It is over." He laughed.

"The wound is healed," he said, "I am whole, I am free." Then he bent over and hid his face in his arms, weeping like a boy.

Until that moment Vetch had watched him with an anxious dread, for he was not sure what had happened there in the dark land. He did not know if this was Ged in the boat with him, and his hand had been for hours ready to the anchor, to stave in the boat's planking and sink her there in midsea, rather than carry back to the harbors of Earthsea the evil thing that he feared might have taken Ged's look and form. Now when he saw his friend and heard him speak, his doubt vanished. And he began to see the truth, that Ged had neither lost nor won but, naming the shadow of his death with his own name, had made himself whole: a man: who, knowing his whole true self, cannot be used or possessed by any power other than himself, and whose life therefore is lived for life's sake and never in the service of ruin, or pain, or hatred, or the dark. In the *Creation of Éa*, which is the oldest song, it is said, "Only in silence the word, only in dark the light, only in dying life: bright the hawk's flight on the empty sky." That song Vetch sang aloud now as he held the boat westward, going before the cold wind of the winter night that blew at their backs from the vastness of the Open Sea.

Eight days they sailed and eight again, before they came in sight of land. Many times they had to refill their waterskin with spell-sweetened water of the sea; and they fished, but even when they called out fisherman's charms they caught very little, for the fish of the Open Sea do not know their own names and pay no heed to magic. When they had nothing left to eat but a few scraps of smoked meat Ged remembered what Yarrow had said when he stole the cake from the hearth, that he would regret his theft when he came to hunger on the sea; but hungry as he was the remembrance pleased him. For she had also said that he, with her brother, would come home again.

The magewind had borne them for only three days eastward, yet sixteen days they sailed westward to return. No men have ever returned from so far out on the Open Sea as did the young wizards Estarriol and Ged in the Fallows of winter in

their open fishing-boat. They met no great storms, and steered steadily enough by the compass and by the star Tolbegren, taking a course somewhat northward of their outbound way. Thus they did not come back to Astowell, but passing by Far Toly and Sneg without sighting them, first raised land off the southernmost cape of Koppish. Over the waves they saw cliffs of stone rise like a great fortress. Seabirds cried wheeling over the breakers, and smoke of the hearthfires of small villages drifted blue on the wind.

From there the voyage to Iffish was not long. They came in to Ismay harbor on a still, dark evening before snow. They tied up the boat *Lookfar* that had borne them to the coasts of death's kingdom and back, and went up through the narrow streets to the wizard's house. Their hearts were very light as they entered into the firelight and warmth under that roof; and Yarrow ran to meet them, crying with joy.

If Estarriol of Iffish kept his promise and made a song of that first great deed of Ged's, it has been lost. There is a tale told in the East Reach of a boat that ran aground, days out from any shore, over the abyss of ocean. In Iffish they say it was Estarriol who sailed that boat, but in Tok they say it was two fishermen blown by a storm far out on the Open Sea, and in Holp the tale is of a Holpish fisherman, and tells that he could not move his boat from the unseen sands it grounded on, and so wanders there yet. So of the song of the Shadow there remain only a few scraps of legend, carried like driftwood from isle to isle over the long years. But in the *Deed of Ged* nothing is told of that voyage nor of Ged's meeting with the shadow, before ever he sailed the Dragons' Run unscathed, or brought back the Ring of Erreth-Akbe from the Tombs of Atuan to Havnor, or came at last to Roke once more, as Archmage of all the islands of the world.

Afterword

Once upon a time, a publisher asked me if I'd write a novel for teenagers. "Oh, no!" I said. "No, thanks very much, but I couldn't!"

It was the idea of writing with a specific audience in mind or a specific age of reader that scared me off. I'd published fantasy and science fiction, but I was interested in the form itself, not in who read it or how old they were. But maybe my real problem was that I'd spent so many years writing novels, sending them to publishers, and having them come back with a dull thud on the doormat that I had trouble comprehending that an actual publisher had really asked me to write a book . . .

He was Herman Schein of Parnassus Press in Berkeley, the publisher of my mother's books for children. He wanted to begin doing novels for older kids. When I said, "Oh, no!" he just said, "Well, think about it. Fantasy, maybe—whatever you like."

I thought about it. Slowly the idea sank in. Would writing for older kids be so different from just writing? Why? Despite what some adults seem to think, teenagers are fully human. And some of them read as intensely and keenly as if their life depended on it. Sometimes maybe it does.

And fantasy—pure, old-fashioned fantasy, not mixed with science fiction—I liked the idea. All my life I'd been reading about wizards, dragons, magic spells . . .

Back then, in 1967, wizards were all, more or less, Merlin and Gandalf. Old men, peaked hats, white beards. But this was to be a book for young people. Well, Merlin and Gandalf must have been young once, right? And when they were young, when they were fool kids, how did they learn to be wizards?

And there was my book.

Well, not instantly, of course. A novel takes a while to write. This one went pretty quickly and easily, though. I didn't have a plot outlined out when I started, but I knew what the story was. I knew who my Sparrowhawk was, and in a general way I knew where he was going—where he had to go, not only to learn to be a

wizard, but to learn to be Ged. Then, as I wrote his story, what he did and said, where he went and the people he met, showed me and told me what he had to do and where he had to go next.

But *where* is as important in the realms of pure imagination as it is here in mundanity. Before I started to write the story, I got a big piece of posterboard and drew the map. I drew all the islands of Earthsea, the Archipelago, the Kargad Lands, the Reaches. And I named them: Havnor, the great island at the middle of the world; Selidor, far out in the west, and the Dragon's Run, and Hur-at-Hur, and all the rest. But only as I sailed with Ged from Gont did I begin to know the islands, one by one. With him, I first came to Roke, and the Ninety Isles, and Osskil, and farther east even than Astowell. And with him I first went to the dark, dry country, the place across the wall where the dead must go. A voyage long enough, strange enough, great enough for one book.

Fantasy is now a branch of the publishing industry, with many titles, many sequels, great expectations of monster successes and movie tie-ins. In 1967 it was pretty much nowhere. Kid stuff. The only adult fantasy novel most people had even heard of was *The Lord of the Rings*. There were others, some of them wonderful, but they mostly lurked in small secondhand bookshops smelling of cats and mildew. I miss those bookshops now, the cats, the mildew, the thrill of discovery. Fantasy as an assembly-line commodity leaves me cold.

But I rejoice when I see it written as what it always was—literature—and recognized as such.

When *A Wizard of Earthsea* came out, there had not been a book like it. It was original—something new. Yet it was also conventional enough not to frighten reviewers. It was well received. The Boston Globe-Horn Book Award helped it. And the fact that fantasy isn't "for" a certain age but is a literature accessible to anybody who reads—that helped too. My wizard never got on the bestseller lists, but he kept on finding readers, year after year. The book has never been out of print.

The conventionality of the story, and its originality, reflect its existence within and partial subversion of an accepted, recognized tradition, one I grew up with. That is the tradition of fantastic tales and hero stories, which comes down to us like a great river from sources high in the mountains of Myth—a confluence of folk and fairy tale, classical epic, medieval and Renaissance and Eastern romance, romantic ballad, Victorian imaginative tale, and twentieth-century book of fantastic

adventure such as T. H. White's Arthurian cycle and Tolkien's great book.

Most of this marvelous flood of literature was written for adults, but modernist literary ideology shunted it all to children. And kids could and did swim in it happily as in their native element, at least until some teacher or professor told them they had to come out, dry off, and breathe modernism ever after.

The part of the tradition that I knew best was mostly written (or rewritten for children) in England and northern Europe. The principal characters were men. If the story was heroic, the hero was a white man; most dark-skinned people were inferior or evil. If there was a woman in the story, she was a passive object of desire and rescue (a beautiful blond princess); active women (dark, witches) usually caused destruction or tragedy. Anyway, the stories weren't about the women. They were about men, what men did, and what was important to men.

It's in this sense that *A Wizard* was perfectly conventional. The hero does what a man is supposed to do: he uses his strength, wits, and courage to rise from humble beginnings to great fame and power, in a world where women are secondary, a man's world.

In other ways my story didn't follow the tradition. Its subversive elements attracted little attention, no doubt because I was deliberately sneaky about them. A great many white readers in 1967 were not ready to accept a brown-skinned hero. But they weren't expecting one. I didn't make an issue of it, and you have to be well into the book before you realize that Ged, like most of the characters, isn't white.

His people, the Archipelagans, are various shades of copper and brown, shading into black in the South and East Reaches. The light-skinned people among them have far-northern or Kargish ancestors. The Kargish raiders in the first chapter are white. Serret, who both as girl and woman betrays Ged, is white. Ged is copper-brown and his friend Vetch is black. I was bucking the racist tradition, "making a statement"—but I made it quietly, and it went almost unnoticed.

Alas, I had no power, at that time, to combat the flat refusal of many cover departments to put people of color on a book jacket. So, through many later, lily-white Geds, Ruth Robbins's painting for the first edition—the fine, strong profile of a young man with copper-brown skin—was, to me, the book's one true cover.

My story took off in its own direction, away from the tradition, also in the whole matter of what makes heroes and villains. Hero tales and adventure fantasies traditionally put the righteous hero in a war against unrighteous enemies, which he (usually) wins. This convention was and still is so dominant that it's taken for granted—"of course" a heroic fantasy is good guys fighting bad guys, the War of

Good Against Evil.

But there are no wars in Earthsea. No soldiers, no armies, no battles. None of the militarism that came from the Arthurian saga and other sources and that by now, under the influence of fantasy war games, has become almost obligatory.

I didn't and don't think this way; my mind doesn't work in terms of war. My imagination refuses to limit all the elements that make an adventure story and make it exciting—danger, risk, challenge, courage—to battlefields. A hero whose heroism consists of killing people is uninteresting to me, and I detest the hormonal war orgies of our visual media, the mechanical slaughter of endless battalions of black-clad, yellow-toothed, red-eyed demons.

War as a moral metaphor is limited, limiting, and dangerous. By reducing the choices of action to "a war against" whatever-it-is, you divide the world into Me or Us (good) and Them or It (bad) and reduce the ethical complexity and moral richness of our life to Yes/No, On/Off. This is puerile, misleading, and degrading. In stories, it evades any solution but violence and offers the reader mere infantile reassurance. All too often the heroes of such fantasies behave exactly as the villains do, acting with mindless violence, but the hero is on the "right" side and therefore will win. Right makes might.

Or does might make right?

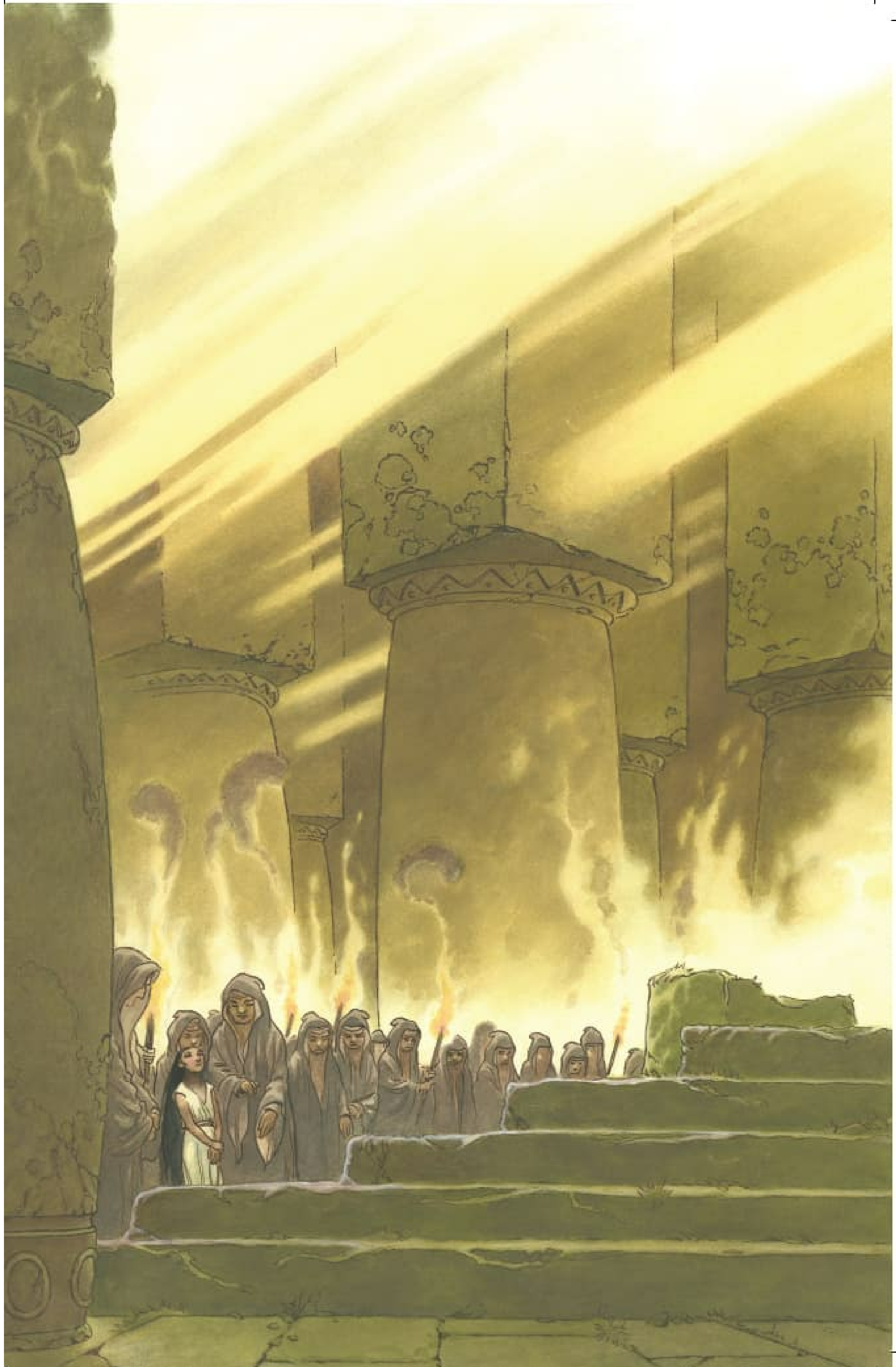
If war is the only game going, yes. Might makes right. Which is why I don't play war games.

To be the man he can be, Ged has to find out who and what his real enemy is. He has to find out what it means to be himself. That requires not a war but a search and a discovery. The search takes him through mortal danger, loss, and suffering. The discovery brings him victory, the kind of victory that isn't the end of a battle but the beginning of a life.

The Tombs of Atuan

For the redhead

from Telluride



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Trapdoor in the
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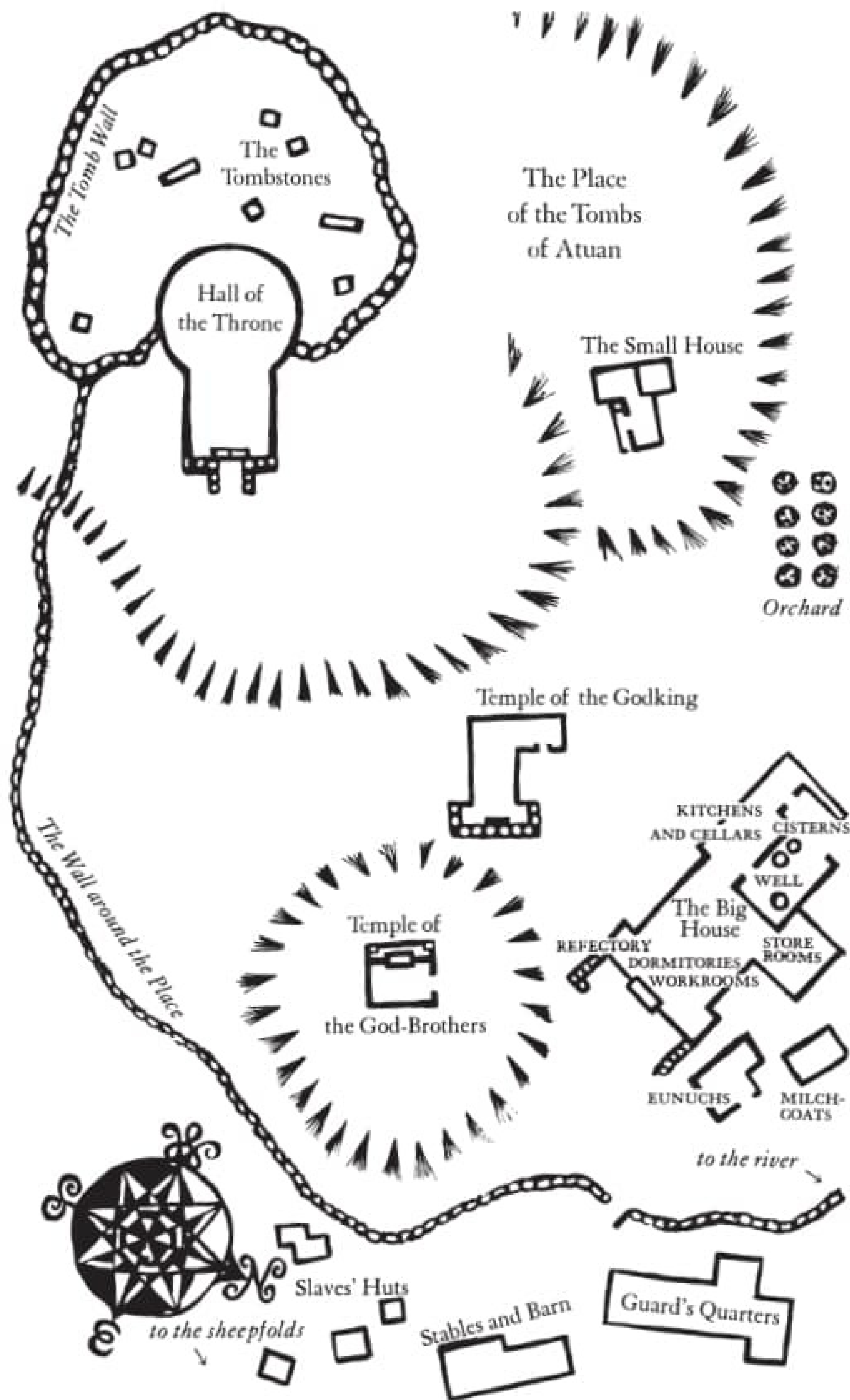
The Tomb Wall
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to the river
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to the sheepfolds

Prologue

"Come home, Tenar! Come home!"

In the deep valley, in the twilight, the apple trees were on the eve of blossoming; here and there among the shadowed boughs one flower had opened early, rose and white, like a faint star. Down the orchard aisles, in the thick, new, wet grass, the little girl ran for the joy of running; hearing the call she did not come at once, but made a long circle before she turned her face toward home. The mother waiting in the doorway of the hut, with the firelight behind her, watched the tiny figure running and bobbing like a bit of thistledown blown over the darkening grass beneath the trees.

By the corner of the hut, scraping clean an earth-clotted hoe, the father said, "Why do you let your heart hang on the child? They're coming to take her away next month. For good. Might as well bury her and be done with it. What's the good of clinging to one you're bound to lose? She's no good to us. If they'd pay for her when they took her, which would be something, but they won't. They'll take her and that's an end of it."

The mother said nothing, watching the child who had stopped to look up through the trees. Over the high hills, above the orchards, the evening star shone piercing clear.

"She isn't ours, she never was since they came here and said she must be the Priestess at the Tombs. Why can't you see that?" The man's voice was harsh with complaint and bitterness. "You have four others. They'll stay here, and this one won't. So, don't set your heart on her. Let her go!"

"When the time comes," the woman said, "I will let her go." She bent to meet the child who came running on little, bare, white feet across the muddy ground, and gathered her up in her arms. As she turned to enter the hut she bent her head to kiss the child's hair, which was black; but her own hair, in the flicker of firelight from the hearth, was fair.

The man stood outside, his own feet bare and cold on the ground, the clear sky

of spring darkening above him. His face in the dusk was full of grief, a dull, heavy, angry grief that he would never find the words to say. At last he shrugged, and followed his wife into the firelit room that rang with children's voices.

Chapter 1

The Eaten One

One high horn shrilled and ceased. The silence that followed was shaken only by the sound of many footsteps keeping time with a drum struck softly at a slow heart-pace. Through cracks in the roof of the Hall of the Throne, gaps between columns where a whole section of masonry and tile had collapsed, unsteady sunlight shone aslant. It was an hour after sunrise. The air was still and cold. Dead leaves of weeds that had forced up between marble pavement-tiles were outlined with frost, and crackled, catching on the long black robes of the priestesses.

They came, four by four, down the vast hall between double rows of columns. The drum beat dully. No voice spoke, no eye watched. Torches carried by black-clad girls burned reddish in the shafts of sunlight, brighter in the dusk between. Outside, on the steps of the Hall of the Throne, the men stood, guards, trumpeters, drummers; within the great doors only women had come, dark-robed and hooded, walking slowly four by four toward the empty throne.

Two came, tall women looming in their black, one of them thin and rigid, the other heavy, swaying with the planting of her feet. Between these two walked a child of about six. She wore a straight white shift. Her head and arms and legs were bare, and she was barefoot. She looked extremely small. At the foot of the steps leading up to the throne, where the others now waited in dark rows, the two tall women halted. They pushed the child forward a little.

The throne on its high platform seemed to be curtained on each side with great webs of blackness dropping from the gloom of the roof; whether these were curtains, or only denser shadows, the eye could not make certain. The throne itself was black, with a dull glimmer of precious stones or gold on the arms and back, and it was huge. A man sitting in it would have been dwarfed; it was not of human dimensions. It was empty. Nothing sat in it but shadows.

Alone, the child climbed up four of the seven steps of red-veined marble. They

were so broad and high that she had to get both feet onto one step before attempting the next. On the middle step, directly in front of the throne, stood a large, rough block of wood, hollowed out on top. The child knelt on both knees and fitted her head into the hollow, turning it a little sideways. She knelt there without moving.

A figure in a belted gown of white wool stepped suddenly out of the shadows at the right of the throne and strode down the steps to the child. His face was masked with white. He held a sword of polished steel five feet long. Without word or hesitation he swung the sword, held in both hands, up over the little girl's neck. The drum stopped beating.

As the blade swung to its highest point and poised, a figure in black darted out from the left side of the throne, leapt down the stairs, and stayed the sacrificer's arms with slenderer arms. The sharp edge of the sword glittered in midair. So they balanced for a moment, the white figure and the black, both faceless, dancer-like above the motionless child whose white neck was bared by the parting of her black hair.

In silence each leapt aside and up the stairs again, vanishing in the darkness behind the enormous throne. A priestess came forward and poured out a bowl of some liquid on the steps beside the kneeling child. The stain looked black in the dimness of the hall.

The child got up and descended the four stairs laboriously. When she stood at the bottom, the two tall priestesses put on her a black robe and hood and mantle, and turned her around again to face the steps, the dark stain, the throne.

"O let the Nameless Ones behold the girl given to them, who is verily the one born ever nameless. Let them accept her life and the years of her life until her death, which is also theirs. Let them find her acceptable. Let her be eaten!"

Other voices, shrill and harsh as trumpets, replied: "She is eaten! She is eaten!"

The little girl stood looking from under her black cowl up at the throne. The jewels inset in the huge clawed arms and the back were glazed with dust, and on the carven back were cobwebs and whitish stains of owl droppings. The three highest steps directly before the throne, above the step on which she had knelt, had never been climbed by mortal feet. They were so thick with dust that they looked like one slant of grey soil, the planes of the red-veined marble wholly hidden by the unstirred, untrodden siftings of how many years, how many centuries.

"She is eaten! She is eaten!"

Now the drum, abrupt, began to sound again, beating a quicker pace.

Silent and shuffling, the procession formed and moved away from the throne, eastward toward the bright, distant square of the doorway. On either side, the thick double columns, like the calves of immense pale legs, went up to the dusk under the ceiling. Among the priestesses, and now all in black like them, the child walked, her small bare feet treading solemnly over the frozen weeds, the icy stones. When sunlight slanting through the ruined roof flashed across her way, she did not look up.

Guards held the great doors wide. The black procession came out into the thin, cold light and wind of early morning. The sun dazzled, swimming above the eastern vastness. Westward, the mountains caught its yellow light, as did the facade of the Hall of the Throne. The other buildings, lower on the hill, still lay in purplish shadow, except for the Temple of the God-Brothers across the way on a little knoll: its roof, newly gilt, flashed the day back in glory. The black line of priestesses, four by four, wound down the Hill of the Tombs, and as they went they began softly to chant. The tune was on three notes only, and the word that was repeated over and over was a word so old it had lost its meaning, like a signpost still standing when the road is gone. Over and over they chanted the empty word. All that day of the Remaking of the Priestess was filled with the low chanting of women's voices, a dry unceasing drone.

The little girl was taken from room to room, from temple to temple. In one place salt was placed upon her tongue; in another she knelt facing west while her hair was cut short and washed with oil and scented vinegar; in another she lay facedown on a slab of black marble behind an altar while shrill voices sang a lament for the dead. Neither she nor any of the priestesses ate food or drank water all that day. As the evening star set, the little girl was put to bed, naked between sheepskin rugs, in a room she had never slept in before. It was in a house that had been locked for years, unlocked only that day. The room was higher than it was long, and had no windows. There was a dead smell in it, still and stale. The silent women left her there in the dark.

She held still, lying just as they had put her. Her eyes were wide open. She lay so for a long time.

She saw light shake on the high wall. Someone came quietly along the corridor, shielding a rushlight so it showed no more light than a firefly. A husky whisper: "Ho, are you there, Tenar?"

The child did not reply.

A head poked in the doorway, a strange head, hairless as a peeled potato, and of

the same yellowish color. The eyes were like potato-eyes, brown and tiny. The nose was dwarfed by great, flat slabs of cheek, and the mouth was a lipless slit. The child stared unmoving at this face. Her eyes were large, dark, and fixed.

"Ho, Tenar, my little honeycomb, there you are!" The voice was husky, high as a woman's voice but not a woman's voice. "I shouldn't be here, I belong outside the door, on the porch, that's where I go. But I had to see how my little Tenar is, after all the long day of it, eh, how's my poor little honeycomb?"

He moved toward her, noiseless and burly, and put out his hand as if to smooth back her hair.

"I am not Tenar anymore," the child said, staring up at him. His hand stopped; he did not touch her.

"No," he said, after a moment, whispering. "I know. I know. Now you're the little Eaten One. But I . . ."

She said nothing.

"It was a hard day for a little one," the man said, shuffling, the tiny light flickering in his big yellow hand.

"You should not be in this House, Manan."

"No. No. I know. I shouldn't be in this House. Well, good night, little one. . . . Good night."

The child said nothing. Manan slowly turned around and went away. The glimmer died from the high cell walls.

The little girl, who had no name anymore but *Arha*, the Eaten One, lay on her back looking steadily at the dark.

Chapter 2

The Wall Around the Place

As she grew older she lost all remembrance of her mother, without knowing she had lost it. She belonged here, at the Place of the Tombs; she had always belonged here. Only sometimes in the long evenings of July as she watched the western mountains, dry and lion-colored in the afterglow of sunset, she would think of a fire that had burned on a hearth, long ago, with the same clear yellow light. And with this came a memory of being held, which was strange, for here she was seldom even touched; and the memory of a pleasant smell, the fragrance of hair freshly washed and rinsed in sage-scented water, fair long hair, the color of sunset and firelight. That was all she had left.

She knew more than she remembered, of course, for she had been told the whole story. When she was seven or eight years old, and first beginning to wonder who indeed this person called "Arha" was, she had gone to her guardian, the Warden Manan, and said, "Tell me how I was chosen, Manan."

"Oh, you know all that, little one."

And indeed she did; the tall, dry-voiced priestess Thar had told her till she knew the words by heart, and she recited them: "Yes, I know. At the death of the One Priestess of the Tombs of Atuan, the ceremonies of burial and purification are completed within one month by the moon's calendar. After this certain of the Priestesses and Wardens of the Place of the Tombs go forth across the desert, among the towns and villages of Atuan, seeking and asking. They seek the girl-child who was born on the night of the Priestess's death. When they find such a child, they wait and they watch. The child must be sound of body and of mind, and as it grows it must not suffer from rickets nor the smallpox nor any deformity, nor become blind. If it reaches the age of five years unblemished, then it is known that the body of the child is indeed the new body of the Priestess who died. And the child is made known to the Godking in Awabath, and brought here to her

Temple and instructed for a year. And at the year's end she is taken to the Hall of the Throne and her name is given back to those who are her Masters, the Nameless Ones: for she is the nameless one, the Priestess Ever Reborn."

This was all word for word as Thar had told her, and she had never dared ask for a word more. The thin priestess was not cruel, but she was very cold and lived by an iron law, and Arha was in awe of her. But she was not in awe of Manan, far from it, and she would command him, "Now tell me how *I* was chosen!" And he would tell her again.

"We left here, going north and west, in the third day of the moon's waxing; for Arha-that-was had died in the third day of the last moon. And first we went to Tenacbah, which is a great city, though those who've seen both say it's no more to Awabath than a flea to a cow. But it's big enough for me, there must be ten hundred houses in Tenacbah! And we went on to Gar. But nobody in those cities had a baby girl born to them on the third day of the moon a month before; there were some had boys, but boys won't do. . . . So we went into the hill country north of Gar, to the towns and villages. That's my own land. I was born in the hills there, where the rivers run, and the land is green. Not in this desert." Manan's husky voice would get a strange sound when he said that, and his small eyes would be quite hidden in their folds; he would pause a little, and at last go on. "And so we found and spoke to all those who were parents of babies born in the last months. And some would lie to us. 'Oh yes, surely our baby girl was born on the moon's third day!' For poor folk, you know, are often glad to get rid of girl-babies. And there were others who were so poor, living in lonely huts in the valleys of the hills, that they kept no count of days and scarce knew how to tell the turn of time, so they could not say for certain how old their baby was. But we could always come at the truth, by asking long enough. But it was slow work. At last we found a girl-child, in a village of ten houses, in the orchard-vales westward of Entat. Eight months old she was, so long had we been looking. But she had been born on the night that the Priestess of the Tombs had died, and within the very hour of her death. And she was a fine baby, sitting up on her mother's knee and looking with bright eyes at all of us, crowding into the one room of the house like bats into a cave! The father was a poor man. He tended the apple trees of the rich man's orchard, and had nothing of his own but five children and a goat. Not even the house was his. So there we all crowded in, and you could tell by the way the priestesses looked at the baby and spoke among themselves that they thought they had found the Reborn One at last. And the mother could tell this too. She held the baby and never said a word. Well,

so, the next day we came back. And look here! The little bright-eyed baby lying in a cot of rushes weeping and screaming, and all over its body weals and red rashes of fever, and the mother wailing louder than the baby, 'Oh! Oh! My babe hath the Witch-Fingers on her!' That's how she said it; the smallpox she meant. In my village, too, they called it the Witch-Fingers. But Kossil, she who is now the High Priestess of the Godking, she went to the cot and picked up the baby. The others had all drawn back, and I with them: I don't value my life very high, but who enters a house where smallpox is? But she had no fear, not that one. She picked up the baby and said, 'It has no fever.' And she spat on her finger and rubbed at the red marks, and they came off. They were only berry juice. The poor silly mother had thought to fool us and keep her child!" Manan laughed heartily at this; his yellow face hardly changed, but his sides heaved. "So, her husband beat her, for he was afraid of the wrath of the priestesses. And soon we came back to the desert, but each year one of the people of the Place would return to the village among the apple orchards, and see how the child got on. So five years passed, and then Thar and Kossil made the journey, with the Temple guards, and soldiers of the red helmet sent by the Godking to escort them safely. They brought the child back here, for it was indeed the Priestess of the Tombs reborn, and here it belonged. And who was the child, eh, little one?"

"Me," said Arha, looking off into the distance as if to see something she could not see, something gone out of sight.

Once she asked, "What did the . . . the mother do, when they came to take the child away?"

But Manan didn't know; he had not gone with the priestesses on that final journey.

And she could not remember. What was the good in remembering? It was gone, all gone. She had come where she must come. In all the world she knew only one place: the Place of the Tombs of Atuan.

In her first year there she had slept in the big dormitory with the other novices, girls between four and fourteen. Even then Manan had been set apart among the Ten Wardens as her particular guardian, and her cot had been in a little alcove, partly separated from the long, low-beamed main room of the dormitory in the Big House where the girls giggled and whispered before they slept, and yawned and plaited one another's hair in the grey light of morning. When her name was taken from her and she became Arha, she slept alone in the Small House, in the bed and in the room that would be her bed and her room for the rest of her life. That house

was hers, the House of the One Priestess, and no one might enter it without her permission. When she was quite little still, she enjoyed hearing people knock submissively on her door, and saying, "You may come in," and it annoyed her that the two High Priestesses, Kossil and Thar, took their permission for granted and entered her house without knocking.

The days went by, the years went by, all alike. The girls of the Place of the Tombs spent their time at classes and disciplines. They did not play any games. There was no time for games. They learned the sacred songs and the sacred dances, the histories of the Kargad Lands, and the mysteries of whichever of the gods they were dedicated to: the Godking who ruled in Awabath, or the Twin Brothers, Atwah and Wuluah. Of them all, only Arha learned the rites of the Nameless Ones, and these were taught her by one person, Thar, the High Priestess of the Twin Gods. This took her away from the others for an hour or more daily, but most of her day, like theirs, was spent simply working. They learned how to spin and weave the wool of their flocks, and how to plant and harvest and prepare the food they always ate: lentils, buckwheat ground to a coarse meal for porridge or a fine flour for unleavened bread, onions, cabbages, goat-cheese, apples, and honey.

The best thing that could happen was to be allowed to go fishing in the murky green river that flowed through the desert a half mile northeast of the Place; to take along an apple or a cold buckwheat bannock for lunch and sit all day in the dry sunlight among the reeds, watching the slow green water run and the cloud-shadows change slowly on the mountains. But if you squealed with excitement when the line tensed and you swung in a flat, glittering fish to flop on the riverbank and drown in air, then Mebbeth would hiss like an adder, "Be still, you screeching fool!" Mebbeth, who served in the Godking's temple, was a dark woman, still young, but hard and sharp as obsidian. Fishing was her passion. You had to keep on her good side, and never make a sound, or she would not take you out to fish again; and then you'd never get to the river except to fetch water in summer when the wells ran low. That was a dreary business, to trudge through the searing white heat a half mile down to the river, fill the two buckets on their carrying pole, and then set off as fast as possible uphill to the Place. The first hundred yards were easy, but then the buckets began to grow heavier, and the pole burned your shoulders like a bar of hot iron, and the light glared on the dry road, and every step was harder and slower. At last you got to the cool shade of the back courtyard of the Big House by the vegetable patch, and dumped the buckets into the great

cistern with a splash. And then you had to turn around to do it all over again, and again, and again.

Within the precincts of the Place—that was all the name it had or needed, for it was the most ancient and sacred of all places in the Four Lands of the Kargish Empire—a couple of hundred people lived, and there were many buildings: three temples, the Big House and the Small House, the quarters of the eunuch wardens, and close outside the wall the guards' barracks and many slaves' huts, the storehouses and sheep pens and goat pens and farm buildings. It looked like a little town, seen from a distance, from up on the dry hills westward where nothing grew but sage, wire-grass in straggling clumps, small weeds and desert herbs. Even from away off on the eastern plains, looking up one might see the gold roof of the Temple of the Twin Gods wink and glitter beneath the mountains, like a speck of mica in a shelf of rock.

That temple itself was a cube of stone, plastered white, windowless, with a low porch and door. Showier, and centuries newer, was the Temple of the Godking a little below it, with a high portico and a row of thick white columns with painted capitals—each one a solid log of cedar, brought on shipboard from Hur-at-Hur where there are forests, and dragged by the straining of twenty slaves across the barren plains to the Place. Only after a traveler approaching from the east had seen the gold roof and the bright columns would he see, higher up on the Hill of the Place, above them all, tawny and ruinous as the desert itself, the oldest of the temples of his race: the huge, low Hall of the Throne, with patched walls and flattish, crumbling dome.

Behind the Hall and encircling the whole crest of the hill ran a massive wall of rock, laid without mortar and half fallen down in many places. Inside the loop of the wall several black stones eighteen or twenty feet high stuck up like huge fingers out of the earth. Once the eye saw them it kept returning to them. They stood there full of meaning, and yet there was no saying what they meant. There were nine of them. One stood straight, the others leaned more or less, two had fallen. They were crusted with grey and orange lichen as if splotched with paint, all but one, which was naked and black, with a dull gloss to it. It was smooth to the touch, but on the others, under the crust of lichen, vague carvings could be seen, or felt with the fingers—shapes, signs. These nine stones were the Tombs of Atuan. They had stood there, it was said, since the time of the first men, since Earthsea was created. They had been planted in the darkness when the lands were raised up from the ocean's depths. They were older by far than the Godkings of Kargad, older than

the Twin Gods, older than light. They were the tombs of those who ruled before the world of men came to be, the ones not named, and she who served them had no name.

She did not go among them often, and no one else ever set foot on that ground where they stood, on the hilltop within the rock wall behind the Hall of the Throne. Twice a year, at the full moon nearest the equinox of spring and of autumn, there was a sacrifice before the Throne and she came out from the low back door of the Hall carrying a great brass basin full of smoking goat's blood; this she must pour out, half at the foot of the standing black stone, half over one of the fallen stones which lay embedded in the rocky dirt, stained by the blood-offering of centuries.

Sometimes Arha went by herself in the early morning and wandered among the Stones trying to make out the dim humps and scratches of the carvings, brought out more clearly by the low angle of the light; or she would sit there and look up at the mountains westward, and down at the roofs and walls of the Place all laid out below, and watch the first stirrings of activity around the Big House and the guards' barracks, and the flocks of sheep and goats going off to their sparse pastures by the river. There was never anything to do among the Stones. She went only because it was permitted her to go there, because there she was alone. It was a dreary place. Even in the heat of noon in the desert summer there was a coldness about it. Sometimes the wind whistled a little between the two stones that stood closest together, leaning together as if telling secrets. But no secret was told.

From the Tomb Wall another, lower rock wall ran, making a long irregular semicircle about the Hill of the Place and then trailing off northward toward the river. It did not so much protect the Place, as cut it in two: on one side the temples and houses of the priestesses and wardens, on the other the quarters of the guards and of the slaves who farmed and herded and foraged for the Place. None of these ever crossed the wall, except that on certain very holy festivals the guards, and their drummers and players of the horn, would attend the procession of the priestesses; but they did not enter the portals of the temples. No other men set foot upon the inner ground of the Place. There had once been pilgrimages, kings and chieftains coming from the Four Lands to worship there; the first Godking, a century and a half ago, had come to enact the rites of his own temple. Yet even he could not enter among the Tombstones, even he had had to eat and sleep outside the wall around the Place.

One could climb that wall easily enough, fitting toes into crevices. The Eaten

One and a girl called Penthe were sitting up on the wall one afternoon in late spring. They were both twelve years old. They were supposed to be in the weaving room of the Big House, a huge stone attic; they were supposed to be at the great looms always warped with dull black wool, weaving black cloth for robes. They had slipped outside for a drink at the well in the courtyard, and then Arha had said, "Come on!" and had led the other girl down the hill, around out of sight of the Big House, to the wall. Now they sat on top of it, ten feet up, their bare legs dangling down on the outside, looking over the flat plains that went on and on to the east and north.

"I'd like to see the sea," said Penthe.

"What for?" said Arha, chewing a bitter stem of milkweed she had picked from the wall. The barren land was just past its flowering. All the small desert blossoms, yellow and rose and white, low-growing and quick-flowering, were going to seed, scattering tiny plumes and parasols of ash white on the wind, dropping their hooked, ingenious burrs. The ground under the apple trees of the orchard was a drift of bruised white and pink. The branches were green, the only green trees within miles of the Place. Everything else, from horizon to horizon, was a dull, tawny, desert color, except that the mountains had a silvery bluish tinge from the first buds of the flowering sage.

"Oh, I don't know what for. I'd just like to see something different. It's always the same here. Nothing happens."

"All that happens everywhere, begins here," said Arha.

"Oh, I know. . . . But I'd like to see some of it happening!"

Penthe smiled. She was a soft, comfortable-looking girl. She scratched the soles of her bare feet on the sun-warmed rocks, and after a while went on, "You know, I used to live by the sea when I was little. Our village was right behind the dunes, and we used to go down and play on the beach sometimes. Once I remember we saw a fleet of ships going by, way out at sea. We ran and told the village and everybody came to see. The ships looked like dragons with red wings. Some of them had real necks, with dragon heads. They came sailing by Atuan, but they weren't Kargish ships. They came from the west, from the Inner Lands, the headman said. Everybody came down to watch them. I think they were afraid they might land. They just went by, nobody knew where they were going. Maybe to make war in Karego-At. But think of it, they really came from the sorcerers' islands, where all the people are the color of dirt and they can all cast a spell on you easy as winking."

"Not on me," Arha said fiercely. "I wouldn't have looked at them. They're vile accursed sorcerers. How dare they sail so close to the Holy Land?"

"Oh, well, I suppose the Godking will conquer them someday and make them all slaves. But I wish I could see the sea again. There used to be little octopuses in the tide pools, and if you shouted 'Boo!' at them they turned all white.—There comes that old Manan, looking for you."

Arha's guard and servant was coming slowly along the inner side of the wall. He would stoop to pull a wild onion, of which he held a large, limp bunch, then straighten up and look about him with his small, dull, brown eyes. He had grown fatter with the years, and his hairless yellow skin glistened in the sun.

"Slide down partway on the men's side," Arha hissed, and both girls wriggled lithe as lizards down the far side of the wall until they could cling there just below the top, invisible from the inner side. They heard Manan's slow footsteps coming by.

"Hoo! Hoo! Potato face!" crooned Arha, a whispering jeer faint as the wind among the grasses.

The heavy tread halted. "Ho there," said the uncertain voice. "Little one? Arha?"

Silence.

Manan went forward.

"Hoo-oo! Potato face!"

"Hoo, potato belly!" Penthe whispered in imitation, and then moaned, trying to suppress giggles.

"Somebody there?"

Silence.

"Oh well, well, well," the eunuch sighed, and his slow feet went on. When he was gone over the shoulder of the slope, the girls scrambled back up onto the top of the wall. Penthe was pink with sweat and giggles, but Arha looked savage.

"The stupid old bellwether, following me around everywhere!"

"He has to," Penthe said reasonably. "It's his job, looking after you."

"Those I serve look after me. I please them: I need please nobody else. These old women and half-men, these people should leave me alone. I am the One Priestess!"

Penthe stared at the other girl. "Oh," she said feebly, "oh, I know you are, Arha —"

"Then they should let me be. And not order me about all the time!"

Penthe said nothing for a while, but sighed, and sat swinging her plump legs and gazing at the vast, pale lands below, that rose so slowly to a high, vague, immense horizon.

"You'll get to give the orders pretty soon, you know," she said at last, quietly. "In two more years we won't be children anymore. We'll be fourteen. I'll go into the Godking's temple, and things will be about the same for me. But you'll really be the High Priestess then. Even Kossil and Thar will have to obey you."

The Eaten One said nothing. Her face was set, her eyes under black brows caught the light of the sky in a pale glitter.

"We ought to go back," Penthe said.

"No."

"But the weaving mistress might tell Thar. And soon it'll be time for the Nine Chants."

"I'm staying here. You stay, too."

"They won't punish you, but they will punish me," Penthe said in her mild way. Arha did not reply. Penthe sighed, and stayed. The sun was sinking into haze high above the plains. Far away on the long, gradual slant of the land, sheep bells clanked faintly and lambs bleated. The spring wind blew in dry, faint gusts, sweet-smelling.

The Nine Chants were nearly over when the two girls returned. Mebbeth had seen them sitting on the "Men's Wall" and had reported this to her superior, Kossil, High Priestess of the Godking.

Kossil was heavy-footed, heavy-faced. Without expression in face or voice she spoke to the two girls, telling them to follow her. She led them through the stone hallways of the Big House, out the front door, up the knoll to the Temple of Atwah and Wuluah. There she spoke with the High Priestess of that temple, Thar, tall and dry and thin as the leg-bone of a deer.

Kossil said to Penthe, "Take off your gown."

She whipped the girl with a bundle of reed canes, which cut the skin a little. Penthe bore this patiently, with silent tears. She was sent back to the weaving room without supper, and the next day also she would go without food. "If you are found climbing over the Men's Wall again," Kossil said, "there will be very much worse things than this happen to you. Do you understand, Penthe?" Kossil's voice was soft, but not kindly. Penthe said, "Yes," and slipped away, cowering and flinching as her heavy clothing rubbed the cuts on her back.

Arha had stood beside Thar to watch the whipping. Now she watched Kossil

clean the canes of the whip.

Thar said to her, “It is not fitting that you be seen climbing and running with other girls. You are Arha.”

She stood sullen and did not reply.

“It is better that you do only what is needful for you to do. You are Arha.”

For a moment the girl raised her eyes to Thar’s face, then to Kossil’s, and there was a depth of hate or rage in her look that was terrible to see. But the thin priestess showed no concern; rather she confirmed, leaning forward a little, almost whispering, “*You are Arha*. There is nothing left. It was all eaten.”

“It was all eaten,” the girl repeated, as she had repeated daily, all the days of her life since she was six.

Thar bowed her head slightly; so did Kossil, as she put away the whip. The girl did not bow, but turned submissively and left.

After the supper of potatoes and spring onions, eaten in silence in the narrow, dark refectory, after the chanting of the evening hymns, and the placing of the sacred words upon the doors, and the brief Ritual of the Unspoken, the work of the day was done. Now the girls might go up to the dormitory and play games with dice and sticks, so long as the single rushlight burned, and whisper in the dark from bed to bed. Arha set off across the courts and slopes of the Place as she did every night, to the Small House where she slept alone.

The night wind was sweet. The stars of spring shone thick, like drifts of daisies in spring meadows, like the glittering of light on the April sea. But the girl had no memory of meadows or the sea. She did not look up.

“Ho there, little one!”

“Manan,” she said indifferently.

The big shadow shuffled up beside her, starlight glinting on his hairless pate.

“Were you punished?”

“I can’t be punished.”

“No. . . . That’s so. . . .”

“They can’t punish me. They don’t dare.”

He stood with his big hands hanging, dim and bulky. She smelled wild onion, and the sweaty, sagey smell of his old black robes, which were torn at the hem, and too short for him.

“They can’t touch me. I am Arha,” she said in a shrill, fierce voice, and burst into tears.

The big, waiting hands came up and drew her to him, held her gently, smoothed

her braided hair. “There, there. Little honeycomb, little girl. . . .” She heard the husky murmur in the deep hollow of his chest, and clung to him. Her tears stopped soon, but she held on to Manan as if she could not stand up.

“Poor little one,” he whispered, and picking the child up carried her to the doorway of the house where she slept alone. He set her down.

“All right now, little one?”

She nodded, turned from him, and entered the dark house.

Chapter 3

The Prisoners

Kossil's steps sounded along the hallway of the Small House, even and deliberate. The tall, heavy figure filled the doorway of the room, shrank as the priestess bowed down touching one knee to the floor, swelled as she straightened to her full height.

"Mistress."

"What is it, Kossil?"

"I have been permitted to look after certain matters pertaining to the Domain of the Nameless Ones, until now. If you so desire, it is now time for you to learn, and see, and take charge of these matters, which you have not yet remembered in this life."

The girl had been sitting in her windowless room, supposedly meditating, actually doing nothing and thinking almost nothing. It took some time for the fixed, dull, haughty expression of her face to change. Yet it did change, though she tried to conceal it. She said, with a certain slyness, "The Labyrinth?"

"We will not enter the Labyrinth. But it will be necessary to cross the Undertomb."

There was a tone in Kossil's voice that might have been fear, or might have been a pretense of fear, intended to frighten Arha. The girl stood up without haste and said indifferently, "Very well." But in her heart, as she followed the heavy figure of the Godking's priestess, she exulted: At last! At last! I shall see my own domain at last!

She was fifteen. It was over a year since she had made her crossing into womanhood and at the same time had come into her full powers as the One Priestess of the Tombs of Atuan, highest of all high priestesses of the Kargad Lands, one whom not even the Godking himself might command. They all bowed the knee to her now, even grim Thar and Kossil. All spoke to her with elaborate deference. But nothing had changed. Nothing happened. Once the ceremonies of

her consecration were over, the days went on as they had always gone. There was wool to be spun, black cloth to be woven, meal to be ground, rites to be performed; the Nine Chants must be sung nightly, the doorways blessed, the Stones fed with goat's blood twice a year, the dances of the dark of the moon danced before the Empty Throne. And so the whole year had passed, just as the years before it had passed, and were all the years of her life to pass so?

Her boredom rose so strong in her sometimes that it felt like terror: it took her by the throat. Not long ago she had been driven to speak of it. She had to talk, she thought, or she would go mad. It was Manan she talked to. Pride kept her from confiding in the other girls, and caution kept her from confessing to the older women, but Manan was nothing, a faithful old bellwether; it didn't matter what she said to him. To her surprise he had had an answer for her.

"Long ago," he said, "you know, little one, before our four lands joined together into an empire, before there was a Godking over us all, there were a lot of lesser kings, princes, chiefs. They were always quarreling with each other. And they'd come here to settle their quarrels. That was how it was, they'd come from our land Atuan, and from Karego-At, and Atnini, and even from Hur-at-Hur, all the chiefs and princes with their servants and their armies. And they'd ask you what to do. And you'd go before the Empty Throne, and give them the counsel of the Nameless Ones. Well, that was long ago. After a while the Priest-Kings came to rule all of Karego-At, and soon they were ruling Atuan; and now for four or five lifetimes of men the Godkings have ruled all the four lands together, and made them an empire. And so things are changed. The Godking can put down the unruly chiefs, and settle all the quarrels himself. And being a god, you see, he doesn't have to consult the Nameless Ones very often."

Arha stopped to think this over. Time did not mean very much, here in the desert land, under the unchanging Stones, leading a life that had been led in the same way since the beginning of the world. She was not accustomed to thinking about things changing, old ways dying and new ones arising. She did not find it comfortable to look at things in that light. "The powers of the Godking are much less than the powers of the Ones I serve," she said, frowning.

"Surely. . . . Surely. . . . But one doesn't go about saying that to a god, little honeycomb. Nor to his priestess."

And catching his small, brown, twinkling eye, she thought of Kossil, High Priestess of the Godking, whom she had feared ever since she first came to the Place; and she took his meaning.

“But the Godking, and his people, are neglecting the worship of the Tombs. No one comes.”

“Well, he sends prisoners here to sacrifice. He doesn’t neglect that. Nor the gifts due to the Nameless Ones.”

“Gifts! His temple is painted fresh every year, there’s a hundredweight of gold on the altar, the lamps burn attar of roses! And look at the Hall of the Throne—holes in the roof, and the dome cracking, and the walls full of mice, and owls, and bats. . . . But all the same it will outlast the Godking and all his temples, and all the kings that come after him. It was there before them, and when they’re all gone it will still be there. It is the center of things.”

“It is the center of things.”

“There are riches there; Thar tells me about them sometimes. Enough to fill the Godking’s temple ten times over. Gold and trophies given ages ago, a hundred generations, who knows how long. They’re all locked away in the pits and vaults, underground. They won’t take me there yet, they keep me waiting and waiting. But I know what it’s like. There are rooms underneath the Hall, underneath the whole Place, under where we stand now. There’s a great maze of tunnels, a Labyrinth. It’s like a great dark city, under the hill. Full of gold, and the swords of old heroes, and old crowns, and bones, and years, and silence.”

She spoke as if in trance, in rapture. Manan watched her. His slabby face never expressed much but stolid, careful sadness; it was sadder than usual now. “Well, and you’re mistress of all that,” he said. “The silence, and the dark.”

“I am. But they won’t show me anything, only the rooms above ground, behind the Throne. They haven’t even shown me the entrances to the places underground; they just mumble about them sometimes. They’re keeping my own domain from me! Why do they make me wait and wait?

“You are young. And perhaps,” Manan said in his husky alto, “perhaps they’re afraid, little one. It’s not their domain, after all. It’s yours. They are in danger when they enter there. There’s no mortal that doesn’t fear the Nameless Ones.”

Arha said nothing, but her eyes flashed. Again Manan had shown her a new way of seeing things. So formidable, so cold, so strong had Thar and Kossil always seemed to her, that she had never even imagined their being afraid. Yet Manan was right. They feared those places, those powers of which Arha was part, to which she belonged. They were afraid to go into the dark places, lest they be eaten.

Now, as she went with Kossil down the steps of the Small House and up the steep winding path toward the Hall of the Throne, she recalled that conversation

with Manan, and exulted again. No matter where they took her, what they showed her, she would not be afraid. She would know her way.

A little behind her on the path, Kossil spoke. "One of my mistress's duties, as she knows, is the sacrifice of certain prisoners, criminals of noble birth, who by sacrilege or treason have sinned against our lord the Godking."

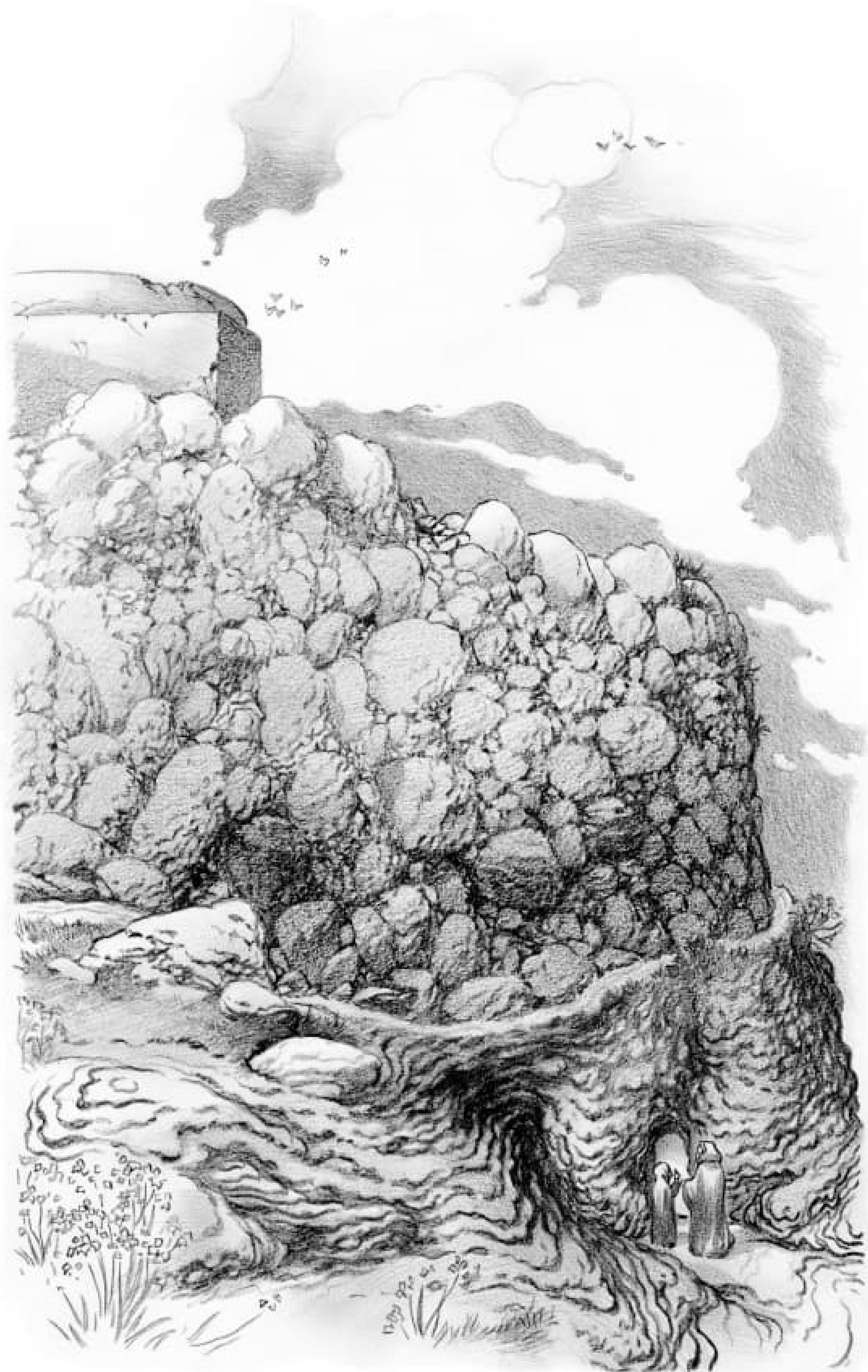
"Or against the Nameless Ones," said Arha.

"Truly. Now it is not fitting that the Eaten One while yet a child should undertake this duty. But my mistress is no longer a child. There are prisoners in the Room of Chains, sent a month ago by the grace of our lord the Godking from his city Awabath."

"I did not know prisoners had come. Why did I not know?"

"Prisoners are brought at night, and secretly, in the way prescribed of old in the rituals of the Tombs. It is the secret way my mistress will follow, if she takes the path that leads along the wall."

Arha turned off the path to follow the great wall of stone that bounded the Tombs behind the domed hall. The rocks it was built of were massive; the least of them would outweigh a man, and the largest were big as wagons. Though unshapen they were carefully fitted and interlocked. Yet in places the height of the wall had slipped down and the rocks lay in a shapeless heap. Only a vast span of time could do that, the desert centuries of fiery days and frozen nights, the millennial, imperceptible movements of the hills themselves.



"It is very easy to climb the Tomb Wall," Arha said as they went along beneath it.

"We have not men enough to rebuild it," Kossil replied.

"We have men enough to guard it."

"Only slaves. They cannot be trusted."

"They can be trusted if they're frightened. Let the penalty be the same for them as for the stranger they allow to set foot on the holy ground within the wall."

"What is that penalty?" Kossil did not ask to learn the answer. She had taught the answer to Arha, long ago.

"To be decapitated before the Throne."

"Is it my mistress's will that a guard be set upon the Tomb Wall?"

"It is," the girl answered. Inside her long black sleeves her fingers clenched with elation. She knew Kossil did not want to spare a slave to this duty of watching the wall, and indeed it was a useless duty, for what strangers ever came here? It was not likely that any man would wander, by mischance or intent, anywhere within a mile of the Place without being seen; he certainly would get nowhere near the Tombs. But a guard was an honor due them, and Kossil could not well argue against it. She must obey Arha.

"Here," said her cold voice.

Arha stopped. She had often walked this path around the Tomb Wall, and knew it as she knew every foot of the Place, every rock and thorn and thistle. The great rock wall reared up thrice her height to the left; to the right the hill shelved away into a shallow, arid valley, which soon rose again toward the foothills of the western range. She looked over all the ground nearby, and saw nothing that she had not seen before.

"Under the red rocks, mistress."

A few yards down the slope an outcropping of red lava made a stair or little cliff in the hill. When she went down to it and stood on the level before it, facing the rocks, Arha realized that they looked like a rough doorway, four feet high.

"What must be done?"

She had learned long ago that in the holy places it is no use trying to open a door until you know how the door is opened.

"My mistress has all the keys to the dark places."

Since the rites of her coming of age, Arha had worn on her belt an iron ring on which hung a little dagger and thirteen keys, some long and heavy, some small as fishhooks. She lifted the ring and spread the keys. "That one," Kossil said,

pointing; and then placed her thick forefinger on a crevice between two red, pitted rock-surfaces.

The key, a long shaft of iron with two ornate wards, entered the crevice. Arha turned it to the left, using both hands, for it was stiff to move; yet it turned smoothly.

"Now?"

"Together—"

Together they pushed at the rough rock face to the left of the keyhole. Heavily, but without catch and with very little noise, an uneven section of the red rock moved inward until a narrow slit was opened. Inside it was blackness.

Arha stooped and entered.

Kossil, a heavy woman heavily clothed, had to squeeze through the narrow opening. As soon as she was inside she backed against the door and, straining, pushed it shut.

It was absolutely black. There was no light. The dark seemed to press like wet felt upon the open eyes.

They crouched, almost doubled over, for the place they stood in was not four feet high, and so narrow that Arha's groping hands touched damp rock at once to right and left.

"Did you bring a light?"

She whispered, as one does in the dark.

"I brought no light," Kossil replied, behind her. Kossil's voice too was lowered, but it had an odd sound to it, as if she were smiling. Kossil never smiled. Arha's heart jumped; the blood pounded in her throat. She said to herself, fiercely: This is my place, I belong here, I will not be afraid!

Aloud she said nothing. She started forward; there was only one way to go. It went into the hill, and downward.

Kossil followed, breathing heavily, her garments brushing and scraping against rock and earth.

All at once the roof lifted: Arha could stand straight, and stretching out her hands she felt no walls. The air, which had been close and earthy, touched her face with a cooler dampness, and faint movements in it gave the sense of a great expanse. Arha took a few cautious steps forward into the utter blackness. A pebble, slipping under her sandaled foot, struck another pebble, and the tiny sound wakened echoes, many echoes, minute, remote, yet more remote. The cavern must be immense, high and broad, yet not empty: something in its darkness, surfaces of

invisible objects or partitions, broke the echo into a thousand fragments.

"Here we must be beneath the Stones," the girl said, whispering, and her whisper ran out into the hollow blackness and frayed into threads of sound as fine as spiderweb that clung to the hearing for a long time.

"Yes. This is the Undertomb. Go on. I cannot stay here. Follow the wall to the left. Pass three openings."

Kossil's whisper hissed (and the tiny echoes hissed after it). She was afraid, she was indeed afraid. She did not like to be here among the Nameless Ones, in their tombs, in their caves, in the dark. It was not her place, she did not belong here.

"I shall come here with a torch," Arha said, guiding herself along the wall of the cavern by the touch of her fingers, wondering at the strange shapes of the rock, hollows and swellings and fine curves and edges, rough as lace here, smooth as brass there: surely this was carven work. Perhaps the whole cavern was the work of sculptors of the ancient days?

"Light is forbidden here." Kossil's whisper was sharp. Even as she said it, Arha knew it must be so. This was the very home of darkness, the inmost center of the night.

Three times her fingers swept across a gap in the complex, rocky blackness. The fourth time she felt for the height and width of the opening, and entered it. Kossil came behind.

In this tunnel, which went upward again at a slight slant, they passed an opening on the left, and then at a branching way took the right: all by feel, by groping, in the blindness of the underearth and the silence inside the ground. In such a passageway as this, one must reach out almost constantly to touch both sides of the tunnel, lest one of the openings that must be counted be missed, or the forking of the way go unnoticed. Touch was one's whole guidance; one could not see the way, but held it in one's hands.

"Is this the Labyrinth?"

"No. This is the lesser maze, which is beneath the Throne."

"Where is the entrance to the Labyrinth?"

Arha liked this game in the dark, she wanted a greater puzzle to be set her.

"The second opening we passed in the Undertomb. Feel for a door to the right now, a wooden door, perhaps we've passed it already—"

Arha heard Kossil's hands fumbling uneasily along the wall, scraping on the rough rock. She kept her fingertips light against the rock, and in a moment felt the smooth grain of wood beneath them. She pushed on it, and the door creaked open

easily. She stood for a moment blind with light.

They entered a large low room, walled with hewn stone and lighted by one fuming torch hung from a chain. The place was foul with the torch-smoke that had no outlet. Arha's eyes stung and watered.

"Where are the prisoners?"

"There."

At last she realized that the three heaps of something on the far side of the room were men.

"The door isn't locked. Is there no guard?"

"None is needed."

She went a little farther into the room, hesitant, peering through the smoky haze. The prisoners were manacled by both ankles and one wrist to great rings driven into the rock of the wall. If one of them wanted to lie down, his chained arm must remain raised, hanging from the manacle. Their hair and beards had made a matted tangle which, together with the shadows, hid their faces. One of them half lay, the other two sat or squatted. They were naked. The smell from them was stronger even than the reek of smoke.

One of them seemed to be watching Arha; she thought she saw the glitter of eyes, then was not sure. The others had not moved or lifted their heads.

She turned away. "They are not men anymore," she said.

"They were never men. They were demons, beast-spirits, who plotted against the sacred life of the Godking!" Kossil's eyes shone with the reddish torchlight.

Arha looked again at the prisoners, awed and curious. "How could a man attack a god? How was it? You: how could you dare attack a living god?"

The one man stared at her through the black brush of his hair, but said nothing.

"Their tongues were cut out before they were sent from Awabath," Kossil said. "Do not speak to them, mistress. They are defilement. They are yours, but not to speak to, nor to look at, nor to think upon. They are yours to give to the Nameless Ones."

"How are they to be sacrificed?"

Arha no longer looked at the prisoners. She faced Kossil instead, drawing strength from the massive body, the cold voice. She felt dizzy, and the reek of smoke and filth made her sick, yet she seemed to think and speak with perfect calm. Had she not done this many times before?

"The Priestess of the Tombs knows best what manner of death will please her Masters, and it is hers to choose. There are many ways."

"Let Gobar the captain of the guards hew off their heads. And the blood will be poured out before the Throne."

"As if it were a sacrifice of goats?" Kossil seemed to be sneering at her lack of imagination. She stood dumb. Kossil went on, "Besides, Gobar is a man. No man can enter the Dark Places of the Tombs, surely my mistress remembers that? If he enters, he does not leave. . . ."

"Who brought them here? Who feeds them?"

"The wardens who serve my temple, Duby and Uahto; they are eunuchs and may enter here on the services of the Nameless Ones, as I may. The Godking's soldiers left the prisoners bound outside the wall, and I and the wardens brought them in through the Prisoner's Door, the door in the red rocks. So it is always done. The food and water is lowered from a trapdoor in one of the rooms behind the Throne."

Arha looked up and saw, beside the chain from which the torch hung, a wooden square set into the stone ceiling. It was far too small for a man to crawl through, but a rope lowered from it would come down just within reach of the middle prisoner of the three. She looked away again quickly.

"Let them not bring any more food or water, then. Let the torch go out."

Kossil bowed. "And the bodies, when they die?"

"Let Duby and Uahto bury them in the great cavern that we passed through, the Undertomb," the girl said, her voice becoming quick and high. "They must do it in the dark. My Masters will eat the bodies."

"It shall be done."

"Is this well, Kossil?"

"It is well, mistress."

"Then let us go," Arha said, very shrill. She turned and hurried back to the wooden door, and out of the Room of Chains into the blackness of the tunnel. It seemed sweet and peaceful as a starless night, silent, without sight, or light, or life. She plunged into the clean darkness, hurried forward through it like a swimmer through water. Kossil hastened along, behind her and getting farther behind, panting, lumbering. Without hesitation Arha repeated the missed and taken turnings as they had come, skirted the vast echoing Undertomb, and crept, bent over, up the last long tunnel to the shut door of rock. There she crouched down and felt for the long key on the ring at her waist. She found it, but could not find the keyhole. There was no pinprick of light in the invisible wall before her. Her fingers groped over it seeking lock or bolt or handle and finding nothing. Where

must the key go? How could she get out?

"Mistress!"

Kossil's voice, magnified by echoes, hissed and boomed far behind her.

"Mistress, the door will not open from inside. There is no way out. There is no return."

Arha crouched against the rock. She said nothing.

"Arha!"

"I am here."

"Come!"

She came, crawling on hands and knees along the passage, like a dog, to Kossil's skirts.

"To the right. Hurry! I must not linger here. It is not my place. Follow me."

Arha got to her feet, and held on to Kossil's robes. They went forward, following the strangely carven wall of the cavern to the right for a long way, then entering a black gap in the blackness. They went upward now, in tunnels, by stairs. The girl still clung to the woman's robe. Her eyes were shut.

There was light, red through her eyelids. She thought it was the torchlit room full of smoke again, and did not open her eyes. But the air smelt sweetish, dry and moldy, a familiar smell; and her feet were on a staircase steep almost as a ladder. She let go Kossil's robe, and looked. A trapdoor was open over her head. She scrambled through it after Kossil. It let her into a room she knew, a little stone cell containing a couple of chests and iron boxes, in the warren of rooms behind the Throne Room of the Hall. Daylight glimmered grey and faint in the hallway outside its door.

"The other, the Prisoner's Door, leads only into the tunnels. It does not lead out. This is the only way out. If there is any other way I do not know of it, nor does Thar. You must remember it for yourself, if there is one. But I do not think there is." Kossil still spoke in an undertone, and with a kind of spitefulness. Her heavy face within the black cowl was pale, and damp with sweat.

"I don't remember the turnings to this way out."

"I'll tell them to you. Once. You must remember them. Next time I will not come with you. This is not my place. You must come alone."

The girl nodded. She looked up into the older woman's face, and thought how strange it looked, pale with scarcely mastered fear and yet triumphant, as if Kossil gloated over her weakness.

"I will come alone after this," Arha said, and then trying to turn away from

Kossil she felt her legs give way, and saw the room turn over. She fainted in a little black heap at the priestess's feet.

"You'll learn," Kossil said, still breathing heavily, standing motionless. "You'll learn."

Chapter 4

Dreams and Tales

Arha was not well for several days. They treated her for fever. She kept to her bed, or sat in the mild autumn sunlight on the porch of the Small House, and looked up at the western hills. She felt weak and stupid. The same ideas occurred to her again and again. She was ashamed of having fainted. No guard had been set upon the Tomb Wall, but now she would never dare ask Kossil about that. She did not want to see Kossil at all: never. It was because she was ashamed of having fainted.

Often, in the sunlight, she would plan how she was going to behave next time she went into the dark places under the hill. She thought many times about what kind of death she should command for the next set of prisoners, more elaborate, better suited to the rituals of the Empty Throne.

Each night, in the dark, she woke up screaming, "They aren't dead yet! They are still dying!"

She dreamed a great deal. She dreamed that she had to cook food, great cauldrons full of savory porridge, and pour it all out into a hole in the ground. She dreamed that she had to carry a full bowl of water, a deep brass bowl, through the dark, to someone who was thirsty. She could never get to this person. She woke, and she herself was thirsty, but she did not go and get a drink. She lay awake, eyes open, in the room without windows.

One morning Penthe came to see her. From the porch Arha saw her approach the Small House with a careless, purposeless air, as if she just happened to be wandering that way. If Arha had not spoken she would not have come up the steps. But Arha was lonely, and spoke.

Penthe made the deep bow required of all who approached the Priestess of the Tombs, and then plopped down on the steps below Arha and made a noise like "Phewph!" She had gotten quite tall and plump; anything she did turned her cherry pink, and she was pink now from walking.

"I heard you were ill. I saved you out some apples." She suddenly produced a rush net containing six or eight perfect yellow apples, from somewhere under her voluminous black robe. She was now consecrated to the service of the Godking, and served in his temple under Kossil; but she wasn't yet a priestess, and still did lessons and chores with the novices. "Poppe and I sorted the apples this year, and I saved the very best ones out. They always dry all the really good ones. Of course they keep best, but it seems such a waste. Aren't they pretty?"

Arha felt the pale gold satin skins of the apples, looked at the twigs to which brown leaves still delicately clung. "They are pretty."

"Have one," said Penthe.

"Not now. You do."

Penthe selected the smallest, out of politeness, and ate it in about ten juicy, skillful, interested bites.

"I could eat all day," she said. "I never get enough. I wish I could be a cook instead of a priestess. I'd cook better than that old skinflint Nathabba, and besides, I'd get to lick the pots. . . . Oh, did you hear about Munith? She was supposed to be polishing those brass pots they keep the rose oil in, you know, those long thin sort of jars with stoppers. And she thought she was supposed to clean the insides too, so she stuck her hand in, with a rag around it, you know, and then she couldn't get it out. She tried so hard it got all puffed up and swollen at the wrist, you know, so that she really *was* stuck. And she went galloping all over the dormitories yelling, 'I can't get it off! I can't get it off!' And Punti's so deaf now he thought it was a fire, and started screeching at the other wardens to come and rescue the novices. And Uahto was milking and came running out of the pen to see what was the matter, and left the gate open, and all the milch-goats got out and came charging into the courtyard and ran into Punti and the wardens and the little girls, and Munith waving this brass pot around on the end of her arm and having hysterics, and they were all sort of rushing around down there when Kossil came down from the temple. And she said, 'What's this? What's this?'"

Penthe's fair, round face took on a repulsive sneer, not at all like Kossil's cold expression, and yet somehow so like Kossil that Arha gave a snort of almost terrified laughter.

"'What's this? What's all this?' Kossil said. And then—and then the brown goat *butted* her—" Penthe dissolved in laughter, tears welled in her eyes. "And M-Munith hit the, the goat with the p-p-pot—"

Both girls rocked back and forth in spasms of giggling, holding their knees,

choking.

"And Kossil turned around and said, 'What's this? What's this?' to the—to the—to the goat. . . ." The end of the tale was lost in laughter. Penthe finally wiped her eyes and nose, and absentmindedly started on another apple.

To laugh so hard made Arha feel a little shaky. She calmed herself down, and after a while asked, "How did you come here, Penthe?"

"Oh, I was the sixth girl my mother and father had, and they just couldn't bring up so many and marry them all off. So when I was seven they brought me to the Godking's temple and dedicated me. That was in Ossawa. They had too many novices there, I guess, because pretty soon they sent me on here. Or maybe they thought I'd make a specially good priestess or something. But they were wrong about that!" Penthe bit her apple with a cheerful, rueful face.

"Would you rather not have been a priestess?"

"Would I rather! Of course! I'd rather marry a pig-herd and live in a ditch. I'd rather anything than stay buried alive here all my born days with a mess of women in a perishing old desert where nobody ever comes! But there's no good *wishing* about it, because I've been consecrated now and I'm stuck with it. But I do hope that in my next life I'm a dancing-girl in Awabath! Because I will have earned it."

Arha looked down at her with a dark steady gaze. She did not understand. She felt that she had never seen Penthe before, never looked at her and seen her, round and full of life and juice as one of her golden apples, beautiful to see.

"Doesn't the Temple mean anything to you?" she asked, rather harshly.

Penthe, always submissive and easily bullied, did not take alarm this time. "Oh, I know your Masters are very important to you," she said with an indifference that shocked Arha. "That makes some sense, anyhow, because you're their one special servant. You weren't just consecrated, you were specially born. But look at me. Am I supposed to feel so much awe and so on about the Godking? After all he's just a man, even if he does live in Awabath in a palace ten miles around with gold roofs. He's about fifty years old, and he's bald. You can see in all the statues. And I'll bet you he has to cut his toenails, just like any other man. I know perfectly well that he's a god, too. But what I think is, he'll be much godlier after he's *dead*."

Arha agreed with Penthe, for secretly she had come to consider the self-styled Divine Emperors of Kargad as upstarts, false gods trying to filch the worship due to the true and everlasting Powers. But there was something underneath Penthe's words with which she didn't agree, something wholly new to her, frightening to her. She had not realized how very different people were, how differently they saw

life. She felt as if she had looked up and suddenly seen a whole new planet hanging huge and populous right outside the window, an entirely strange world, one in which the gods did not matter. She was scared by the solidity of Penthe's unfaith. Scared, she struck out.

"That's true. My Masters have been dead a long, long time; and they were never men. . . . Do you know, Penthe, I could call you into the service of the Tombs." She spoke pleasantly, as if offering her friend a better choice.

The pink went right out of Penthe's cheeks.

"Yes," she said, "you could. But I'm not . . . I'm not the sort that would be good at that."

"Why?"

"I am afraid of the dark," Penthe said in a low voice.

Arha made a little sound of scorn, but she was pleased. She had made her point. Penthe might disbelieve in the gods, but she feared the unnameable powers of the dark—as did every mortal soul.

"I wouldn't do that unless you wanted to, you know," Arha said.

A long silence fell between them.

"You're getting to be more and more like Thar," Penthe said in her soft dreamy way. "Thank goodness you're not getting like Kossil! But you're so strong. I wish I were strong. I just like eating. . . ."

"Go ahead," Arha said, superior and amused, and Penthe slowly consumed a third apple down to the seeds.

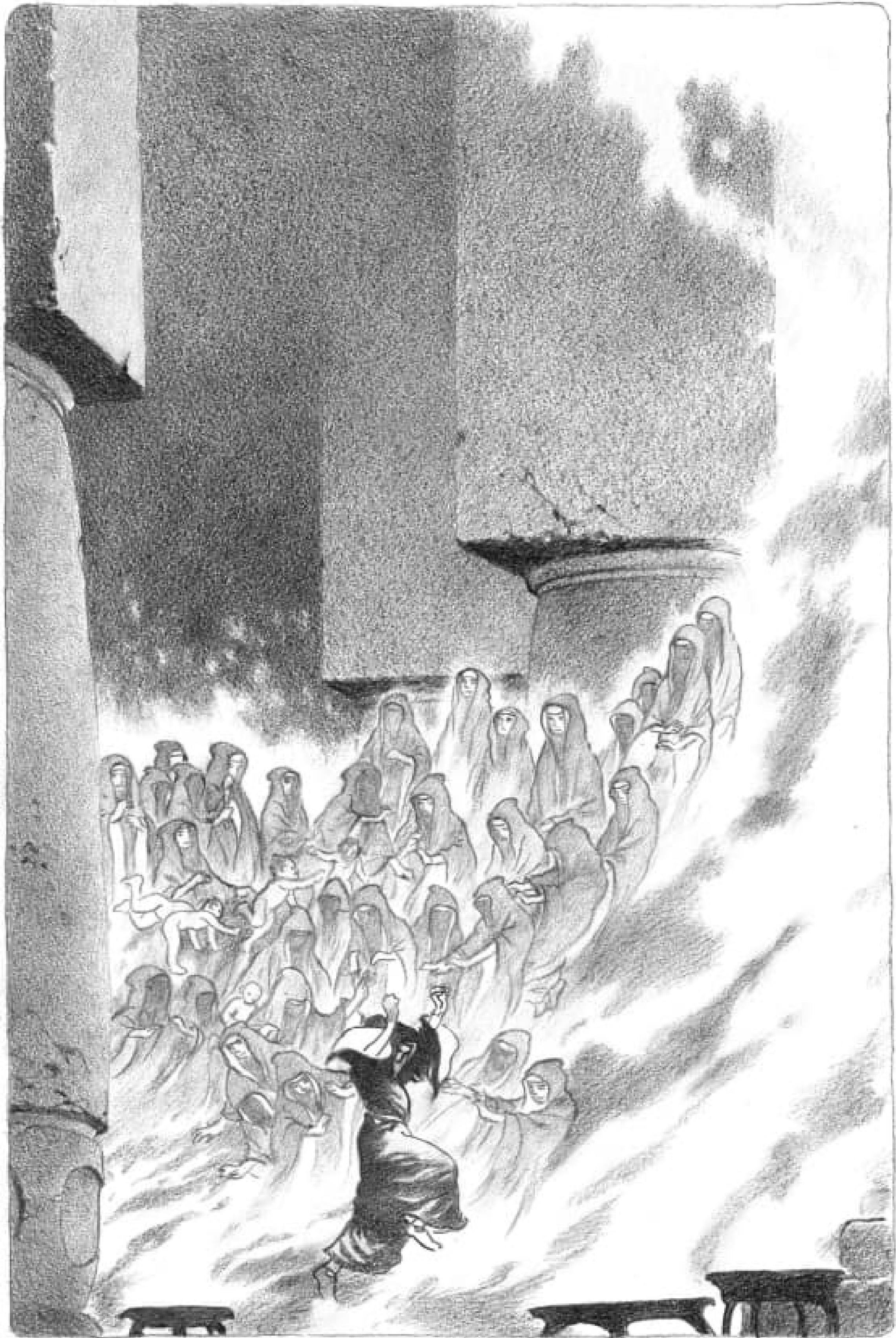
The demands of the endless ritual of the Place brought Arha out of her privacy a couple of days later. Twin kids had been born out of season to a she-goat, and were to be sacrificed to the Twin God-Brothers as the custom was: an important rite, at which the First Priestess must be present. Then it was dark of the moon, and the ceremonies of the darkness must be performed before the Empty Throne. Arha breathed in the drugging fumes of herbs burning in broad trays of bronze before the Throne, and danced, solitary in black. She danced for the unseen spirits of the dead and the unborn and as she danced the spirits crowded the air around her, following the turn and spin of her feet and the slow, sure gestures of her arms. She sang the songs whose words no man understood, which she had learned syllable by syllable, long ago, from Thar. A choir of priestesses hidden in the dusk behind the great double row of columns echoed the strange words after her, and the air in the vast ruinous room hummed with voices, as if the crowding spirits repeated the chants again and again.

The Godking in Awabath sent no more prisoners to the Place, and gradually Arha ceased to dream of the three now long since dead and buried in shallow graves in the great cavern under the Tombstones.

She summoned up her courage to return to that cavern. She must go back there: the Priestess of the Tombs must be able to enter her own domain without terror, to know its ways.

The first time she entered the trapdoor was hard; yet not so hard as she had feared. She had schooled herself up to it so well, had so determined that she would go alone and keep her nerve, that when she came there she was almost dismayed to find that there was nothing to be afraid of. Graves might be there, but she could not see them; she could not see anything. It was black; it was silent. And that was all.

Day after day she went there, always entering by the trapdoor in the room behind the Throne, until she knew well the whole circuit of the cavern, with its strange sculptured walls—as well as one can know what one cannot see. She never left the walls, for in striking out across the great hollow she might soon lose the sense of direction in the darkness, and so, blundering back at last to the wall, not know where she was. For as she had learned the first time, the important thing down in the dark places was to know which turnings and openings one had passed, and which were to come. It must be done by counting, for they were all alike to the groping hands. Arha's memory had been well trained, and she found no difficulty to this odd trick of finding one's way by touch and number, instead of by sight and common sense. She soon knew by heart all the corridors that opened off the Undertomb, the lesser maze that lay under the Hall of the Throne and the hilltop. But there was one corridor she never entered: the second left of the red rock entrance, that one which, if she entered mistaking it for one she knew, she might never find her way out of again. Her longing to enter it, to learn the Labyrinth, grew steadily, but she restrained it until she had learned all she could about it, aboveground.



Thar knew little about it but the names of certain of its rooms, and the list of directions, of turns made and missed, for getting to these rooms. She would tell these to Arha, but she would never draw them in the dust or even with the gesture of a hand in the air; and she herself had never followed them, had never entered the Labyrinth. But when Arha asked her, "What is the way from the iron door that stands open to the Painted Room?" or, "How does the way run from the Room of Bones to the tunnel by the river?"—then Thar would be silent a little, and then recite the strange directions she had learned long before from Arha-that-was: so many crossings passed, so many left-hand turns taken, and so on, and so on. And all these Arha got by heart, as Thar had, often on the first listening. When she lay in bed nights she would repeat them to herself, trying to imagine the places, the rooms, the turnings.

Thar showed Arha the many spy holes that opened into the maze, in every building and temple of the Place, and even under rocks out of doors. The spiderweb of stone-walled tunnels underlay all the Place and even beyond its walls; there were miles of tunnels, down there in the dark. No person there but she, the two High Priestesses, and their special servants, the eunuchs Manan, Uahto, and Duby, knew of the existence of this maze that lay beneath every step they took. There were vague rumors of it among the others; they all knew that there were caves or rooms of some sort under the Tombstones. But none of them was very curious about anything to do with the Nameless Ones and the places sacred to them. Perhaps they felt that the less they knew, the better. Arha of course had been intensely curious, and knowing that there were spy holes into the Labyrinth, had sought for them; yet they were so well concealed, in the pavements of the floors or in the desert ground, that she had never found one, not even the one in her own Small House, until Thar showed it to her.

One night in early spring she took a candle lantern and went down with it, unlit, through the Undertomb to the second passage to the left of the passage from the red rock door.

In the dark, she went some thirty paces down the passage, and then passed through a doorway, feeling the iron frame set in the rock: the limit, until now, of her explorations. Past the Iron Door she went a long way along the tunnel, and when at last it began to curve to the right, she lit her candle and looked about her. For light was permitted, here. She was no longer in the Undertomb. She was in a place less sacred, though perhaps more dreadful. She was in the Labyrinth.

The raw, blank walls and vault and floor of rock surrounded her in the small

sphere of candlelight. The air was dead. Before her and behind her the tunnel stretched off into darkness.

All the tunnels were the same, crossing and recrossing. She kept careful count of her turnings and passings, and recited Thar's directions to herself, though she knew them perfectly. For it would not do to get lost in the Labyrinth. In the Undertomb and the short passages around it, Kossil or Thar might find her, or Manan come seeking for her, for she had taken him there several times. Here, none of them had ever been: only she herself. Little good it would do her if they came to the Undertomb and called aloud, and she was lost in some spiraling tangle of tunnels half a mile away. She imagined how she might hear the echo of voices calling her, echoing down every corridor, and she would try to come to them, but, lost, would only become farther lost. So vividly did she imagine this that she stopped, thinking she heard a distant voice calling. But there was nothing. And she would not get lost. She was very careful; and this was her place, her own domain. The powers of the dark, the Nameless Ones, would guide her steps here, just as they would lead astray any other mortal who dared enter the Labyrinth of the Tombs.

She did not go far into it that first time, but far enough that the strange, bitter, yet pleasurable certainty of her utter solitude and independence there grew strong in her, and led her back, and back again, and each time farther. She came to the Painted Room, and the Six Ways, and followed the long Outmost Tunnel, and penetrated the strange tangle that led to the Room of Bones.

"When was the Labyrinth made?" she asked Thar, and the stern, thin priestess answered, "Mistress, I do not know. No one knows."

"Why was it made?"

"For the hiding away of the treasures of the Tombs, and for the punishment of those who tried to steal those treasures."

"All the treasures I've seen are in the rooms behind the Throne, and the basements under it. What lies in the Labyrinth?"

"A far greater and more ancient treasure. Would you look on it?"

"Yes."

"None but you may enter the Treasury of the Tombs. You may take your servants into the Labyrinth, but not into the Treasury. If even Manan entered there, the anger of the dark would waken; he would not leave the Labyrinth alive. There you must go alone, forever. I know where the Great Treasure is. You told me the way, fifteen years ago, before you died, so that I would remember and tell

you when you returned. I can tell you the way to follow in the Labyrinth, beyond the Painted Room; and the key to the treasury is that silver one on your ring, with a figure of a dragon on the haft. But you must go alone."

"Tell me the way."

Thar told her, and she remembered, as she remembered all that was told her. But she did not go to see the Great Treasure of the Tombs. Some feeling that her will or her knowledge was not yet complete held her back. Or perhaps she wanted to keep something in reserve, something to look forward to, that cast a glamor over those endless tunnels through the dark that ended always in blank walls or bare dusty cells. She would wait awhile before she saw her treasures.

After all, had she not seen them before?

It still made her feel strange when Thar and Kossil spoke to her of things she had seen or said before she died. She knew that indeed she had died, and had been reborn in a new body at the hour of her old body's death: not only once, fifteen years ago, but fifty years ago, and before that, and before that, back down the years and hundreds of years, generation before generation, to the very beginning of years when the Labyrinth was dug, and the Stones were raised, and the First Priestess of the Nameless Ones lived in this Place and danced before the Empty Throne. They were all one, all those lives and hers. She was the First Priestess. All human beings were forever reborn, but only she, Arha, was reborn forever as herself. A hundred times she had learned the ways and turnings of the Labyrinth and had come to the hidden room at last.

Sometimes she thought she remembered. The dark places under the hill were so familiar to her, as if they were not only her domain, but her home. When she breathed in the drug-fumes to dance at dark of the moon, her head grew light and her body was no longer hers; then she danced across the centuries, barefoot in black robes, and knew that the dance had never ceased.

Yet it was always strange when Thar said, "You told me before you died . . ."

Once she asked, "Who were those men that came to rob the Tombs? Did any ever do so?" The idea of robbers had struck her as exciting, but improbable. How would they come secretly to the Place? Pilgrims were very few, fewer even than prisoners. Now and then new novices or slaves were sent from lesser temples of the Four Lands, or a small group came to bring some offering of gold or rare incense to one of the temples. And that was all. Nobody came by chance, or to buy and sell, or to sightsee, or to steal; nobody came but under orders. Arha did not even know

how far it was to the nearest town, twenty miles or more; and the nearest town was a small one. The Place was guarded and defended by emptiness, by solitude. Anybody crossing the desert that surrounded it, she thought, would have as much chance of going unseen as a black sheep in a snowfield.

She was with Thar and Kossil, with whom much of her time was spent now when she was not in the Small House or alone under the hill. It was a stormy, cold night in April. They sat by a tiny fire of sage on the hearth in the room behind the Godking's temple, Kossil's room. Outside the doorway, in the hall, Manan and Duby played a game with sticks and counters, tossing a bundle of sticks and catching as many as possible on the back of the hand. Manan and Arha still sometimes played that game, in secret, in the inner courtyard of the Small House. The rattle of dropped sticks, the husky mumbles of triumph and defeat, the small crackle of the fire, were the only sounds when the three priestesses fell silent. All around beyond the walls reached the profound silence of the desert night. From time to time came the patter of a sparse, hard shower of rain.

"Many came to rob the Tombs, long ago; but none ever did so," said Thar. Taciturn as she was, she liked now and then to tell a story, and often did so as part of Arha's instruction. She looked tonight as if a story might be gotten out of her.

"How would any man dare?"

"*They* would dare," Kossil said. "They were sorcerers, wizard-folk from the Inner Lands. That was before the Godkings ruled the Kargad Lands; we were not so strong then. The wizards used to sail from the west to Karego-At and Atuan to plunder the towns on the coast, loot the farms, even come into the Sacred City Awabath. They came to kill dragons, they said, but they stayed to rob towns and temples."

"And their great heroes would come among us to test their swords," Thar said, "and work their ungodly spells. One of them, a mighty sorcerer and dragonlord, the greatest of them all, came to grief here. It was long ago, very long ago, but the tale is still remembered, and not only in this place. The sorcerer was named Erreth-Akbe, and he was both king and wizard in the West. He came to our lands, and in Awabath he joined with certain Kargish rebel lords, and fought for the rule of the city with the High Priest of the Inmost Temple of the Twin Gods. Long they fought, the man's sorcery against the lightning of the gods, and the temple was destroyed around them. At last the High Priest broke the sorcerer's witching-staff, broke in half his amulet of power, and defeated him. He escaped from the city and from the Kargish lands, and fled clear across Earthsea to the farthest west; and

there a dragon slew him, because his power was gone. And since that day the power and might of the Inner Lands has ever waned. Now the High Priest was named Intathin, and he was the first of the house of Tarb, that lineage from which, after the fulfillment of the prophecies and the centuries, the Priest-Kings of Karego-At were descended, and from them, the Godkings of all Kargad. So it is that since the day of Intathin the power and might of the Kargish lands has ever grown. Those who came to rob the Tombs, they were sorcerers, trying and trying to get back the broken amulet of Erreth-Akbe. But it is still here, where the High Priest put it for safekeeping. And so are their bones. . . ." Thar pointed at the ground under her feet.

"Half of it is here," Kossil said.

"And the other half lost forever."

"How lost?" asked Arha.

"The one half, in Intathin's hand, was given by him to the Treasury of the Tombs, where it should lie safe forever. The other remained in the sorcerer's hand, but he gave it before he fled to a petty king, one of the rebels, named Thoreg of Hupun. I do not know why he did so."

"To cause strife, to make Thoreg proud," Kossil said. "And so it did. The descendants of Thoreg rebelled again when the house of Tarb ruled; and yet again they took arms against the first Godking, refusing to acknowledge him as either king or god. They were an accursed, ensorcelled race. They are all dead now."

Thar nodded. "The father of our present Godking, the Lord Who Has Arisen, put down that family of Hupun, and destroyed their palaces. When that was done, the half-amulet, which they had kept ever since the days of Erreth-Akbe and Intathin, was lost. No one knows what became of it. And that was a lifetime ago."

"It was thrown out as trash, no doubt," Kossil said. "They say it doesn't look like anything of value, the Ring of Erreth-Akbe. A curse upon it and upon all the things of the wizard-folk!" Kossil spat into the fire.

"Have you seen the half that is here?" Arha asked of Thar.

The thin woman shook her head. "It is in that treasury to which none may come but the One Priestess. It may be the greatest of all the treasures there; I do not know. I think perhaps it is. For hundreds of years the Inner Lands sent thieves and wizards here to try to steal it back, and they would pass by open coffers of gold, seeking that one thing. It is very long since Erreth-Akbe and Intathin lived, and yet still the story is known and told, both here and in the West. Most things grow old and perish, as the centuries go on and on. Very few are the precious things that

remain precious, or the tales that are still told."

Arha brooded awhile and said, "They must have been very brave men, or very stupid, to enter the Tombs. Don't they know the powers of the Nameless Ones?"

"No," Kossil said in her cold voice. "They have no gods. They work magic, and think they are gods themselves. But they are not. And when they die, they are not reborn. They become dust and bone, and their ghosts whine on the wind a little while till the wind blows them away. They do not have immortal souls."

"But what is this magic they work?" Arha asked, enthralled. She did not remember having said once that she would have turned away and refused to look at the ships from the Inner Lands. "How do they do it? What does it do?"

"Tricks, deceptions, jugglery," Kossil said.

"Somewhat more," said Thar, "if the tales be true even in part. The wizards of the West can raise and still the winds, and make them blow whither they will. On that, all agree, and tell the same tale. That is why they are great sailors; they can put the wind of magic in their sails, and go where they will, and hush the storms at sea. And it is said that they can make light at will, and darkness; and change rocks to diamonds, and lead to gold; that they can build a great palace or a whole city in one instant, at least in seeming; that they can turn themselves into bears, or fish, or dragons, just as they please."

"I do not believe all that," said Kossil. "That they are dangerous, subtle with trickery, slippery as eels, yes. But they say that if you take his wooden staff away from a sorcerer, he has no power left. Probably there are evil runes written on the staff."

Thar shook her head again. "They carry a staff, indeed, but it is only a tool for the power they bear within them."

"But how do they get the power?" Arha asked. "Where does it come from?"

"Lies," Kossil said.

"Words," said Thar. "So I was told by one who once had watched a great sorcerer of the Inner Lands, a Mage as they are called. They had taken him prisoner, raiding to the West. He showed them a stick of dry wood, and spoke a word to it. And lo! it blossomed. And he spoke another word, and lo! it bore red apples. And he spoke one word more, and stick, blossoms, apples, and all vanished, and with them the sorcerer. With one word he had gone as a rainbow goes, like a wink, without a trace; and they never found him on that isle. Was that mere jugglery?"

"It's easy to fool fools," Kossil said.

Thar said no more, avoiding argument; but Arha was loath to have the subject dropped. "What do the wizard-folk look like?" she asked. "Are they truly black all over, with white eyes?"

"They are black and vile. I have never seen one," Kossil said with satisfaction, shifting her heavy bulk on the low stool and spreading her hands to the fire.

"May the Twin Gods keep them afar," Thar muttered.

"They will never come here again," said Kossil. And the fire sputtered, and the rain spattered on the roof, and outside the gloomy doorway Manan cried shrilly, "Aha! A half for me, a half!"

Chapter 5

Light Under the Hill

As the year was rounding again toward winter, Thar died. In the summer a wasting disease had come upon her; she who had been thin grew skeletal, she who had been grim now did not speak at all. Only to Arha would she talk, sometimes, when they were alone together; then even that ceased, and she went silently into the dark. When she was gone, Arha missed her sorely. If Thar had been stern, she had never been cruel. It was pride she had taught to Arha, not fear.

Now there was only Kossil.

A new High Priestess for the Temple of the Twin Gods would come in spring from Awabath; until then, Arha and Kossil between them were the rulers of the Place. The woman called the girl "mistress," and should obey her if commanded. But Arha had learned not to command Kossil. She had the right to do so, but not the strength; it would take very great strength to stand up against Kossil's jealousy of a higher status than her own, her hatred of anything she herself did not control.

Since Arha had learned (from gentle Penthe) of the existence of unfaith, and had accepted it as a reality even though it frightened her, she had been able to look at Kossil much more steadily, and to understand her. Kossil had no true worship in her heart of the Nameless Ones or of the gods. She held nothing sacred but power. The Emperor of the Kargad Lands now held the power, and therefore he was indeed a godking in her eyes, and she would serve him well. But to her the temples were mere show, the Tombstones were rocks, the Tombs of Atuan were dark holes in the ground, terrible but empty. She would do away with the worship of the Empty Throne, if she could. She would do away with the First Priestess, if she dared.

Arha had come to face even this last fact quite steadily. Perhaps Thar had helped her to see it, though she had never said anything directly. In the first stages of her illness, before the silence came upon her, she had asked Arha to come to her every

few days, and had talked to her, telling her much about the doings of the Godking and his predecessor, and the ways of Awabath—matters which she should as an important priestess know, but which were not often flattering to the Godking and his court. And she had spoken of her own life, and described what the Arha of the previous life had looked like and done; and sometimes, not often, she had mentioned what might be the difficulties and dangers of Arha's present life. Not once did she mention Kossil by name. But Arha had been Thar's pupil for eleven years, and needed no more than a hint or a tone to understand, and to remember.

After the gloomy commotion of the Rites of Mourning was over, Arha took to avoiding Kossil. When the long works and rituals of the day were done, she went to her solitary dwelling; and whenever there was time, she went to the room behind the Throne, and opened the trapdoor, and went down into the dark. In daytime and nighttime, for it made no difference there, she pursued a systematic exploration of her domain. The Undertomb, with its great weight of sacredness, was utterly forbidden to any but priestesses and their most trusted eunuchs. Any other, man or woman, who ventured there would certainly be struck dead by the wrath of the Nameless Ones. But among all the rules she had learned, there was no rule forbidding entry to the Labyrinth. There was no need. It could be entered only from the Undertomb; and anyway, do flies need rules to tell them not to enter in a spider's web?

So she took Manan often into the nearer regions of the Labyrinth, that he might learn the ways. He was not at all eager to go there, but as always he obeyed her. She made sure that Duby and Uahto, Kossil's eunuchs, knew the way to the Room of Chains and the way out of the Undertomb, but no more; she never took them into the Labyrinth. She wanted no one but Manan, utterly faithful to her, to know those secret ways. For they were hers, hers alone, forever. She had begun her full exploration with the Labyrinth. All the autumn she spent many days walking those endless corridors, and still there were regions of them she had never come to. There was a weariness in that tracing of the vast, meaningless web of ways; the legs got tired and the mind got bored, forever reckoning up the turnings and the passages behind and to come. It was wonderful, laid out in the solid rock underground like the streets of a great city; but it had been made to weary and confuse the mortal walking in it, and even its priestess must feel it to be nothing, in the end, but a great trap.

So, more and more as winter deepened, she turned her thorough exploration to the Hall itself, the altars, the alcoves behind and beneath the altars, the rooms of

chests and boxes, the contents of the chests and boxes, the passages and attics, the dusty hollow under the dome where hundreds of bats nested, the basements and underbasements that were the anterooms of the corridors of darkness.

Her hands and sleeves perfumed with the dry sweetness of a musk that had fallen to powder lying for eight centuries in an iron chest, her brow smeared with the clinging black of cobweb, she would kneel for an hour to study the carvings on a beautiful, time-ruined coffer of cedar wood, the gift of some king ages since to the Nameless Powers of the Tombs. There was the king, a tiny stiff figure with a big nose, and there was the Hall of the Throne with its flat dome and porch columns, carved in delicate relief on the wood by some artist who had been dust for how many hundred years. There was the One Priestess, breathing in the drug-fumes from the trays of bronze and prophesying or advising the king, whose nose was broken off in this frame; the face of the Priestess was too small to have clear features, yet Arha would imagine that the face was her own face. She wondered what she had told the king with the big nose, and whether he had been grateful.

She had favorite places in the Hall of the Throne, as one might have favorite spots to sit in a sunny house. She often went to a little half-loft over one of the robing rooms in the hinder part of the Hall. There ancient gowns and costumes were kept, left from the days when great kings and lords came to worship at the Place of the Tombs of Atuan, acknowledging a domain greater than their own or any man's. Sometimes their daughters, the princesses, had put on these soft white silks, embroidered with topaz and dark amethyst, and had danced with the Priestess of the Tombs. There were little painted ivory tables in one of the treasuries, showing such a dance, and the lords and kings waiting outside the Hall, for then as now no man ever set foot on the ground of the Tombs. But the maidens might come in, and dance with the Priestess, in white silk. The Priestess herself wore rough cloth, homespun black, always, then and now; but she liked to come and finger the sweet, soft stuff, rotten with age, the unperishing jewels tearing from the cloth by their own slight weight. There was a scent in these chests different from all the musks and incenses of the temples of the Place: a fresher scent, fainter, younger.

In the treasure rooms she would spend a night learning the contents of a single chest, jewel by jewel, the rusted armor, the broken plumes of helms, the buckles and pins and brooches, bronze, silver-gilt, and solid gold.

Owls, undisturbed by her presence, sat on the rafters and opened and shut their yellow eyes. A bit of starlight shone in between tiles of the roof; or the snow came

sifting down, fine and cold as those ancient silks that fell to nothing at hand's touch.

One night late in the winter, it was too cold in the Hall. She went to the trapdoor, raised it, swung down onto the steps, and closed it above her. She set off silently on the way she now knew so well, the passage to the Undertomb. There, of course, she never bore a light; if she carried a lantern, from going in the Labyrinth or in the dark of night above ground, she extinguished it before she came near the Undertomb. She had never seen that place, never in all the generations of her priestesshood. In the passage now, she blew out the candle in the lamp she carried, and without slowing her pace at all went forward in the pitch dark, easy as a little fish in dark water. Here, winter or summer, there was no cold, no heat: always the same even chill, a little damp, changeless. Up above, the great frozen winds of winter whipped thin snow over the desert. Here there was no wind, no season; it was close, it was still, it was safe.

She was going to the Painted Room. She liked sometimes to go there and study the strange wall drawings that leapt out of the dark at the gleam of her candle: men with long wings and great eyes, serene and morose. No one could tell her what they were, there were no such paintings elsewhere in the Place, but she thought she knew; they were the spirits of the damned, who are not reborn. The Painted Room was in the Labyrinth, so she must pass through the cavern beneath the Tombstones first. As she approached it down the slanting passage, a faint grey bloomed, a bare hint and glimmer, the echo of an echo of a distant light.

She thought her eyes were tricking her, as they often did in that utter blackness. She closed them, and the glimmering vanished. She opened them, and it reappeared.

She had stopped and was standing still. Grey, not black. A dull edge of pallor, just visible, where nothing could be visible, where all must be black.

She took a few steps forward and put out her hand to that angle of the tunnel wall; and, infinitely faint, saw the movement of her hand.

She went on. This was strange beyond thought, beyond fear, this faint blooming of light where no light had ever been, in the inmost grave of darkness. She went noiseless on bare feet, black-clothed. At the last turn of the corridor she halted; then very slowly took the last step, and looked, and saw.

—Saw what she had never seen, not though she had lived a hundred lives: the great vaulted cavern beneath the Tombstones, not hollowed by man's hand but by the powers of the Earth. It was jeweled with crystals and ornamented with

pinnacles and filigrees of white limestone where the waters under earth had worked, eons since: immense, with glittering roof and walls, sparkling, delicate, intricate, a palace of diamonds, a house of amethyst and crystal, from which the ancient darkness had been driven out by glory.

Not bright, but dazzling to the dark-accustomed eye, was the light that worked this wonder. It was a soft gleam, like marshlight, that moved slowly across the cavern, striking a thousand scintillations from the jeweled roof and shifting a thousand fantastic shadows along the carven walls.

The light burned at the end of a staff of wood, smokeless, unconsuming. The staff was held by a human hand. Arha saw the face beside the light; the dark face: the face of a man.

She did not move.

For a long time he crossed and recrossed the vast cave. He moved as if he sought something, looking behind the lacy cataracts of stone, studying the several corridors that led out of the Undertomb, yet not entering them. And still the Priestess of the Tombs stood motionless, in the black angle of the passage, waiting.

What was hardest for her to think, perhaps, was that she was looking at a stranger. She had very seldom seen a stranger. It seemed to her that this must be one of the wardens—no, one of the men from over the wall, a goatherd or guard, a slave of the Place; and he had come to see the secrets of the Nameless Ones, maybe to steal something from the Tombs. . . .

To steal something. To rob the Dark Powers. Sacrilege: the word came slowly into Arha's mind. This was a man, and no man's foot must ever touch the soil of the Tombs, the Holy Place. Yet he had come here into the hollow place that was the heart of the Tombs. He had entered in. He had made light where light was forbidden, where it had never been since world's beginning. Why did the Nameless Ones not strike him down?

He was standing now looking down at the rocky floor, which was cut and troubled. One could see that it had been opened and reclosed. The sour sterile clods dug up for the graves had not all been stamped down again.

Her Masters had eaten those three. Why did they not eat this one? What were they waiting for?

For their hands to act, for their tongue to speak. . . .

"Go! Go! Begone!" she screamed all at once at the top of her voice. Great echoes shrilled and boomed across the cavern, seeming to blur the dark, startled face that turned toward her, and, for one moment, across the shaken splendor of the cavern,

saw her. Then the light was gone. All splendor gone. Blind dark, and silence.

Now she could think again. She was released from the spell of light.

He must have come in by the red rock door, the Prisoners' Door, so he would try to escape by it. Light and silent as the soft-winged owls she ran the half-circuit of the cavern to the low tunnel that led to the door which opened only inwards. She stooped there at the entrance of the tunnel. There was no draft of wind from outside; he had not left the door fixed open behind him. It was shut, and if he was in the tunnel, he was trapped there.

But he was not in the tunnel. She was sure of it. So close, in that cramped place, she would have heard his breath, felt the warmth and pulse of his life itself. There was no one in the tunnel. She stood erect, and listened. Where had he gone?

The darkness pressed like a bandage on her eyes. To have seen the Undertomb confused her; she was bewildered. She had known it only as a region defined by hearing, by hand's touch, by drifts of cool air in the dark; a vastness; a mystery, never to be seen. She had seen it, and the mystery had given place, not to horror, but to beauty, a mystery deeper even than that of the dark.

She went slowly forward now, unsure. She felt her way to the left, to the second passageway, the one that led into the Labyrinth. There she paused and listened.

Her ears told her no more than her eyes. But, as she stood with one hand on either side of the rock archway, she felt a faint, obscure vibration in the rock, and on the chill, stale air was the trace of a scent that did not belong there: the smell of the wild sage that grew on the desert hills, overhead, under the open sky.

Slow and quiet she moved down the corridor, following her nose.

After perhaps a hundred paces she heard him. He was almost as silent as she, but he was not so surefooted in the dark. She heard a slight scuffle, as if he had stumbled on the uneven floor and recovered himself at once. Nothing else. She waited awhile and then went slowly on, touching her right-hand fingertips very lightly to the wall. At last a rounded bar of metal came under them. There she stopped, and felt up the strip of iron until, almost as high as she could reach, she touched a projecting handle of rough iron. This, suddenly, with all her strength, she dragged downward.

There was a fearful grinding and a clash. Blue sparks leapt out in a falling shower. Echoes died away, quarreling, down the corridor behind her. She put out her hands and felt, only a few inches before her face, the pocked surface of an iron door.

She drew a long breath.

Returning slowly up the tunnel to the Undertomb, and keeping its wall to her right, she went on to the trapdoor in the Hall of the Throne. She did not hasten, and went silently, though there was no need for silence anymore. She had caught her thief. The door that he had gone through was the only way into or out of the Labyrinth; and it could be opened only from the outer side.

He was down there now, in the darkness underground, and he would never come out again.

Walking slowly and erect, she went past the Throne into the long columned hall. There, where one bronze bowl on the high tripod brimmed with the red glow of charcoal, she turned and approached the seven steps that led up to the Throne.

On the lowest step she knelt, and bowed her forehead down to the cold, dusty stone, littered with mouse bones dropped by the hunting owls.

"Forgive me that I have seen Your darkness broken," she said, not speaking the words aloud. "Forgive me that I have seen Your tombs violated. You will be avenged. O my Masters, death will deliver him to you, and he will never be reborn!"

Yet even as she prayed, in her mind's eye she saw the quivering radiance of the lighted cavern, life in the place of death; and instead of terror at the sacrilege and rage against the thief, she thought only how strange it was, how strange. . . .

"What must I tell Kossil?" she asked herself as she came out into the blast of the winter wind and drew her cloak about her. "Nothing. Not yet. *I* am mistress of the Labyrinth. This is no business of the Godking's. I'll tell her after the thief is dead, perhaps. How must I kill him? I should make Kossil come and watch him die. She's fond of death. What is it he was seeking? He must be mad. How did he get in? Kossil and I have the only keys to the red rock door and the trapdoor. He must have come by the red rock door. Only a sorcerer could open it. A sorcerer—"

She halted, though the wind almost buffeted her off her feet.

"He is a sorcerer, a wizard of the Inner Lands, seeking the amulet of Erreth-Akbe." And there was such an outrageous glamor in this, that she grew warm all over, even in that icy wind, and laughed out loud. All around her the Place, and the desert around it, was black and silent; the wind keened; there were no lights down in the Big House. Thin, invisible snow flicked past on the wind.

"If he opened the red rock door with sorcery, he can open others. He can escape."

This thought chilled her for a moment, but it did not convince her. The Nameless Ones had let him enter. Why not? He could not do any harm. What

harm is a thief who can't leave the scene of his theft? Spells and black powers he must have, and strong ones no doubt, since he had got that far; but he would not get farther. No spell cast by mortal man could be stronger than the will of the Nameless Ones, the presences in the Tombs, the Kings whose Throne was empty.

To reassure herself of this, she hastened on down to the Small House. Manan was asleep on the porch, rolled up in his cloak and the ratty fur blanket that was his winter bed. She entered quietly, so as not to awaken him, and without lighting any lamp. She opened a little locked room, a mere closet at the end of the hall. She struck a flint spark long enough to find a certain place on the floor, and kneeling, pried up one tile. A bit of heavy, dirty cloth, only a few inches square, was revealed to her touch. This she slipped aside noiselessly. She started back, for a ray of light shot upward, straight into her face.

After a moment, very cautiously, she looked into the opening. She had forgotten that he carried that queer light on his staff. She had been expecting at most to hear him, down there in the dark. She had forgotten the light, but he was where she had expected him to be: right beneath the spy hole, at the iron door that blocked his escape from the Labyrinth.

He was standing there, one hand on his hip, the other holding out at an angle the wooden staff, as tall as he was, to the tip of which clung the soft will-o'-the-wisp. His head, which she looked down upon from some six feet above, was cocked a bit to the side. His clothes were those of any winter traveler or pilgrim, a short heavy cloak, a leather tunic, leggings of wool, laced sandals; there was a light pack on his back, a water bottle slung from it, a knife sheathed at his hip. He stood there still as a statue, easy and thoughtful.

Slowly he raised his staff from the ground, and held the bright tip of it out toward the door, which Arha could not see from her spy hole. The light changed, growing smaller and brighter, an intense brilliance. He spoke aloud. The language he spoke was strange to Arha, but stranger to her than the words was the voice, deep and resonant.

The light on the staff brightened, flickered, dimmed. For a moment it died quite away, and she could not see him.

The pale violet marshlight reappeared, steady, and she saw him turn away from the door. His spell of opening had failed. The powers that held the lock fast on that door were stronger than any magic he possessed.

He looked about him, as if thinking, now what?

The tunnel or corridor in which he stood was about five feet wide. Its roof was

from twelve to fifteen feet above the rough rock floor. The walls here were of dressed stone, laid without mortar but very carefully and closely, so that one could scarcely slip a knife-tip into the joints. They leaned inward increasingly as they rose, forming a vault.

There was nothing else.

He started forward. One stride took him out of Arha's range of vision. The light died away. She was about to replace the cloth and the tile, when again the soft shaft of light rose up out of the floor before her. He had come back to the door. Perhaps he had realized that if he once left it and entered the maze, he was not very likely to find it again.

He spoke, one word only, in a low voice. *"Emenn,"* he said, and then again, louder, *"Emenn!"* And the iron door rattled in its jambs, and low echoes rolled down the vaulted tunnel like thunder, and it seemed to Arha that the floor beneath her shook.

But the door stayed fast.

He laughed then, a short laugh, that of a man who thinks, "What a fool I've made of myself!" He looked around the walls once more, and as he glanced upward Arha saw the smile lingering on his dark face. Then he sat down, unslung his pack, got out a piece of dry bread, and munched on it. He unstopped his leather bottle of water and shook it; it looked light in his hand, as if nearly empty. He replaced the stopper without drinking. He put the pack behind him for a pillow, pulled his cloak around him, and lay down. His staff was in his right hand. As he lay back, the little wisp or ball of light floated upward from the staff and hung dimly behind his head, a few feet off the ground. His left hand was on his breast, holding something that hung from a heavy chain around his neck. He lay there quite comfortable, legs crossed at the ankle; his gaze wandered across the spy hole and away; he sighed and closed his eyes. The light grew slowly dimmer. He slept.

The clenched hand on his breast relaxed and slipped aside, and the watcher above saw then what talisman he wore on the chain: a bit of rough metal, crescent-shaped, it seemed.

The faint glimmer of his sorcery died away. He lay in silence and the dark.

Arha replaced the cloth and reset the tile in its place, rose cautiously and slipped away to her room. There she lay long awake in the wind-loud darkness, seeing always before her the crystal radiance that had shimmered in the house of death, the soft unburning fire, the stones of the tunnel wall, the quiet face of the man asleep.

Chapter 6

The Man Trap

Next day, when she had finished with her duties at the various temples, and with her teaching of the sacred dances to the novices, she slipped away to the Small House and, darkening the room, opened the spy hole and peered down it. There was no light. He was gone. She had not thought he would stay so long at the unavailing door, but it was the only place she knew to look. How was she to find him now that he had lost himself?

The tunnels of the Labyrinth, by Thar's account and her own experience, extended in all their windings, branchings, spirals, and dead ends, for more than twenty miles. The blind alley that lay farthest from the Tombs was not much more than a mile away in a straight line, probably. But down underground, nothing ran straight. All the tunnels curved, split, rejoined, branched, interlaced, looped, traced elaborate routes that ended where they began, for there was no beginning, and no end. One could go, and go, and go, and still get nowhere, for there was nowhere to get to. There was no center, no heart of the maze. And once the door was locked, there was no end to it. No direction was right.

Though the ways and turnings to the various rooms and regions were firm in Arha's memory, even she had taken with her on her longer explorations a ball of fine yarn, and let it unravel behind her, and rewound it as she followed it returning. For if one of the turns and passages that must be counted were missed, even she might be lost. A light was no help, for there were no landmarks. All the corridors, all the doorways and openings, were alike.

He might have gone miles by now, and yet not be forty feet from the door where he had entered.

She went to the Hall of the Throne, and to the Twin Gods' temple, and to the cellar under the kitchens, and, choosing a moment when she was alone, looked through each of those spy holes down into the cold, thick dark. When night came,

freezing and blazing with stars, she went to certain places on the Hill and raised up certain stones, cleared away the earth, peered down again, and saw the starless darkness underground.

He was there. He must be there. Yet he had escaped her. He would die of thirst before she found him. She would have to send Manan into the maze to find him, once she was sure he was dead. That was unbearable to think of. As she knelt in the starlight on the bitter ground of the Hill, tears of rage rose in her eyes.

She went to the path that led back down the slope to the temple of the Godking. The columns with their carved capitals shone white with hoarfrost in the starlight, like pillars of bone. She knocked at the rear door, and Kossil let her in.

"What brings my mistress?" said the stout woman, cold and watchful.

"Priestess, there is a man within the Labyrinth."

Kossil was taken off guard; for once something had occurred that she did not expect. She stood and stared. Her eyes seemed to swell a little. It flitted across Arha's mind that Kossil looked very like Penthe imitating Kossil, and a wild laugh rose up in her, was repressed, and died away.

"A man? In the Labyrinth?"

"A man, a stranger." Then as Kossil continued to look at her with disbelief, she added, "I know a man by sight, though I have seen few."

Kossil disdained her irony. "How came a man there?"

"By witchcraft, I think. His skin is dark, perhaps he is from the Inner Lands. He came to rob the Tombs. I found him first in the Undertomb, beneath the very Stones. He ran to the entrance of the Labyrinth when he became aware of me, as if he knew where he went. I locked the iron door behind him. He made spells, but that did not open the door. In the morning he went on into the maze. I cannot find him now."

"Has he a light?"

"Yes."

"Water?"

"A little flask, not full."

"His candle will be burned down already." Kossil pondered. "Four or five days. Maybe six. Then you can send my wardens down to drag the body out. The blood should be fed to the Throne and the—"

"No," Arha said with sudden, shrill fierceness. "I wish to find him alive."

The priestess looked down at the girl from her heavy height. "Why?"

"To make—to make his dying longer. He has committed sacrilege against the

Nameless Ones. He has defiled the Undertomb with light. He came to rob the Tombs of their treasures. He must be punished with worse than lying down in a tunnel alone and dying."

"Yes," Kossil said, as if deliberating. "But how will you catch him, mistress? That is chancy. There is no chance about the other. Is there not a room full of bones, somewhere in the Labyrinth, bones of men who entered it and did not leave it? . . . Let the Dark Ones punish him in their own way, in their own ways, the black ways of the Labyrinth. It is a cruel death, thirst."

"I know," the girl said. She turned and went out into the night, pulling her hood up over her head against the hissing, icy wind. Did she not know?

It had been childish of her, and stupid, to come to Kossil. She would get no help there. Kossil herself knew nothing, all she knew was cold waiting and death at the end of it. She did not understand. She did not see that the man must be found. It must not be the same as with those others. She could not bear that again. Since there must be death let it be swift, in daylight. Surely it would be more fitting that this thief, the first man in centuries brave enough to try to rob the Tombs, should die by sword's edge. He did not even have an immortal soul to be reborn. His ghost would go whining through the corridors. He could not be let die of thirst there alone in the dark.

Arha slept very little that night. The next day was filled with rites and duties. She spent the night going, silent and without lantern, from one spy hole to another in all the dark buildings of the Place, and on the windswept hill. She went to the Small House to bed at last, two or three hours before dawn, but still she could not rest. On the third day, late in the afternoon, she walked out alone onto the desert, toward the river that now lay low in the winter drought, with ice among the reeds. A memory had come to her that once, in the autumn, she had gone very far in the Labyrinth, past the Six-Cross, and all along one long curving corridor she had heard behind the stones the sound of running water. Might not a man athirst, if he came that way, stay there? There were spy holes even out here; she had to search for them, but Thar had shown her each one, last year, and she refound them without much trouble. Her recall of place and shape was like that of a blind person: she seemed to feel her way to each hidden spot, rather than to look for it. At the second, the farthest of all from the Tombs, when she pulled up her hood to cut out light, and put her eye to the hole cut in a flat pan of rock, she saw below her the dim glimmer of the wizardly light.

He was there, half out of sight. The spy hole looked down at the very end of the

blind alley. She could see only his back, and bent neck, and right arm. He sat near the corner of the walls, and was picking at the stones with his knife, a short dagger of steel with a jeweled grip. The blade of it was broken short. The broken point lay directly under the spy hole. He had snapped it trying to pry apart the stones, to get at the water he could hear running, clear and murmurous in that dead stillness under earth, on the other side of the impenetrable wall.

His movements were listless. He was very different, after these three nights and days, from the figure that had stood lithe and calm before the iron door and laughed at his own defeat. He was still obstinate, but the power was gone out of him. He had no spell to stir those stones aside, but must use his useless knife. Even his sorcerer's light was wan and dim. As Arha watched, the light flickered; the man's head jerked and he dropped the dagger. Then doggedly he picked it up and tried to force the broken blade between the stones.

Lying among ice-bound reeds on the riverbank, unconscious of where she was or what she was doing, Arha put her mouth to the cold mouth of rock, and cupped her hands around to hold the sound in. "Wizard!" she said, and her voice slipping down the stone throat whispered coldly in the tunnel underground.

The man started and scrambled to his feet, so going out of the circle of her vision when she looked for him. She put her mouth to the spy hole again and said, "Go back along the river wall to the second turn. The first turn right, miss one, then right again. At the Six Ways, right again. Then left, and right, and left, and right. Stay there in the Painted Room."

As she moved to look again, she must have let a shaft of daylight shoot through the spy hole into the tunnel for a moment, for when she looked he was back in the circle of her vision and staring upward at the opening. His face, which she now saw to be scarred in some way, was strained and eager. The lips were parched and black, the eyes bright. He raised his staff, bringing the light closer and closer to her eyes. Frightened, she drew back, stopped the spy hole with its rock lid and litter of covering stones, rose, and went back swiftly to the Place. She found her hands were shaky, and sometimes a giddiness swept over her as she walked. She did not know what to do.

If he followed the directions she had given him, he would come back in the direction of the iron door, to the room of pictures. There was nothing there, no reason for him to go there. There was a spy hole in the ceiling of the Painted Room, a good one, in the treasury of the Twin Gods' temple; perhaps that was why she had thought of it. She did not know. Why had she spoken to him?

She could let a little water for him down one of the spyholes, and then call him to that place. That would keep him alive longer. As long as she pleased, indeed. If she put down water and a little food now and then, he would go on and on, days, months, wandering in the Labyrinth; and she could watch him through the spy holes, and tell him where water was to be found, and sometimes tell him falsely so he would go in vain, but he would always have to go. That would teach him to mock the Nameless Ones, to swagger his foolish manhood in the burial places of the Immortal Dead!

But so long as he was there, she would never be able to enter the Labyrinth herself. Why not? she asked herself, and replied—Because he might escape by the iron door, which I must leave open behind me. . . . But he could escape no farther than the Undertomb. The truth was that she was afraid to face him. She was afraid of his power, the arts he had used to enter the Undertomb, the sorcery that kept that light burning. And yet, was that so much to be feared? The powers that ruled in the dark places were on her side, not his. Plainly he could not do much, there in the realm of the Nameless Ones. He had not opened the iron door; he had not summoned magic food, nor brought water through the wall, nor conjured up some demon monster to break down the walls, all of which she had feared he might be able to do. He had not even found his way in three days' wandering to the door of the Great Treasury, which surely he had sought. Arha herself had never yet pursued Thar's directions to that room, putting off and putting off the journey out of a certain awe, a reluctance, a sense that the time had not yet come.

Now she thought, why should he not go that journey for her? He could look all he liked at the treasures of the Tombs. Much good they would do him! She could jeer at him, and tell him to eat the gold, and drink the diamonds.

With the nervous, feverish hastiness that had possessed her all these three days, she ran to the Twin Gods' temple, unlocked its little vaulted treasury, and uncovered the well-hidden spy hole in the floor.

The Painted Room was below, but pitch dark. The way the man must follow in the maze was much more roundabout, miles longer perhaps; she had forgotten that. And no doubt he was weakened and not going fast. Perhaps he would forget her directions and take the wrong turning. Few people could remember directions from one hearing of them, as she could. Perhaps he did not even understand the tongue she spoke. If so, let him wander till he fell down and died in the dark, the fool, the foreigner, the unbeliever. Let his ghost whine down the stone roads of the Tombs of Atuan until the darkness ate even it. . . .

Next morning very early, after a night of little sleep and evil dreams, she returned to the spy hole in the little temple. She looked down and saw nothing: blackness. She lowered a candle burning in a little tin lantern on a chain. He was there, in the Painted Room. She saw, past the candle's glare, his legs and one limp hand. She spoke into the spy hole, which was a large one, the size of a whole floor tile: "Wizard!"

No movement. Was he dead? Was that all the strength he had in him? She sneered; her heart pounded. "Wizard!" she cried, her voice ringing in the hollow room beneath. He stirred, and slowly sat up, and looked around bewildered. After a while he looked up, blinking at the tiny lantern that swung from his ceiling. His face was terrible to see, swollen, dark as a mummy's face.

He put his hand out to his staff that lay on the floor beside him, but no light flowered on the wood. There was no power left in him.

"Do you want to see the treasure of the Tombs of Atuan, wizard?"

He looked up wearily, squinting at the light of her lantern, which was all he could see. After a while, with a wince that might have begun as a smile, he nodded once.

"Go out of this room to the left. Take the first corridor to the left. . . ." She rattled off the long series of directions without pause, and at the end said, "There you will find the treasure which you came for. And there, maybe, you'll find water. Which would you rather have now, wizard?"

He got to his feet, leaning on his staff. Looking up with eyes that could not see her, he tried to say something, but there was no voice in his dry throat. He shrugged a little, and left the Painted Room.

She would not give him any water. He would never find the way to the treasure room, anyway. The instructions were too long for him to remember; and there was the Pit, if he got that far. He was in the dark, now. He would lose his way, and would fall down at last and die somewhere in the narrow, hollow, dry halls. And Manan would find him and drag him out. And that was the end. Arha clutched the lip of the spy hole with her hands, and rocked her crouching body back and forth, back and forth, biting her lip as if to bear some dreadful pain. She would not give him any water. She would not give him any water. She would give him death, death, death, death, death.

In that grey hour of her life, Kossil came to her, entering the treasury room with heavy step, bulky in black winter robes.

"Is the man dead yet?"

Arha raised her head. There were no tears in her eyes, nothing to hide.

"I think so," she said, getting up and dusting her skirts. "His light has gone out."

"He may be tricking. The soulless ones are very cunning."

"I shall wait a day to be sure."

"Yes, or two days. Then Duby can go down and bring it out. He is stronger than old Manan."

"But Manan is in the service of the Nameless Ones, and Duby is not. There are places within the Labyrinth where Duby should not go, and the thief is in one of these."

"Why, then it is defiled already—"

"It will be made clean by his death there," Arha said. She could see by Kossil's expression that there must be something strange about her own face. "This is my domain, priestess. I must care for it as my Masters bid me. I do not need more lessons in death."

Kossil's face seemed to withdraw into the black hood, like a desert tortoise's into its shell, sour and slow and cold. "Very well, mistress."

They parted before the altar of the God-Brothers. Arha went, without haste now, to the Small House, and called Manan to accompany her. Since she had spoken to Kossil she knew what must be done.

She and Manan went together up the hill, into the Hall, down into the Undertomb. Straining together at the long handle, they opened the iron door of the Labyrinth. They lit their lanterns there, and entered. Arha led the way to the Painted Room, and from it started on the way to the Great Treasury.

The thief had not got very far. She and Manan had not walked five hundred paces on their tortuous course when they came upon him, crumpled up in the narrow corridor like a heap of rags thrown down. He had dropped his staff before he fell; it lay some distance from him. His mouth was bloody, his eyes half shut.

"He's alive," said Manan, kneeling, his great yellow hand on the dark throat, feeling the pulse. "Shall I strangle him, mistress?"

"No. I want him alive. Pick him up and bring him after me."

"Alive?" said Manan, disturbed. "What for, little mistress?"

"To be a slave of the Tombs! Be still with your talk and do as I say."

His face more melancholy than ever, Manan obeyed, hoisting the young man effortfully up onto his shoulders like a long sack. He staggered along after Arha

thus laden. He could not go far at a time under that load. They stopped a dozen times on the return journey for Manan to catch his breath. At each halt the corridor was the same: the greyish-yellow, close-set stones rising to a vault, the uneven rocky floor, the dead air; Manan groaning and panting, the stranger lying still, the two lanterns burning dull in a dome of light that narrowed away into darkness down the corridor in both directions. At each halt Arha dripped some of the water she had brought in a flask into the dry mouth of the man, a little at a time, lest life returning kill him.

"To the Room of Chains?" Manan asked, as they were in the passage that led to the iron door; and at that, Arha thought for the first time where she must take this prisoner. She did not know.

"Not there, no," she said, sickened as ever by the memory of the smoke and reek and the matted, speechless, unseeing faces. And Kossil might come to the Room of Chains. "He . . . he must stay in the Labyrinth, so that he cannot regain his sorcery. Where is there a room. . . ."

"The Painted Room has a door, and a lock, and a spy hole, mistress. If you trust him with doors."

"He has no powers, down here. Take him there, Manan."

So Manan lugged him back, half again as far as they had come, too laboring and breathless to protest. When they entered the Painted Room at last, Arha took off her long, heavy winter cloak of wool, and laid it on the dusty floor. "Put him on that," she said.

Manan stared in melancholy consternation, wheezing. "Little mistress—"

"I want the man to live, Manan. He'll die of the cold, look how he shakes now."

"Your garment will be defiled. The Priestess's garment. He is an unbeliever, a man," Manan blurted, his small eyes wrinkling up as if in pain.

"Then I shall burn the cloak and have another woven! Come on, Manan!"

At that he stooped, obedient, and let the prisoner flop off his back onto the black cloak. The man lay still as death, but the pulse beat heavy in his throat, and now and then a spasm made his body shiver as it lay.

"He should be chained," said Manan.

"Does he look dangerous?" Arha scoffed; but when Manan pointed out an iron hasp set into the stones, to which the prisoner could be fastened, she let him go fetch a chain and band from the Room of Chains. He grumbled off down the corridors, muttering the directions to himself; he had been to and from the Painted Room before this, but never by himself.

In the light of her single lantern the paintings on the four walls seemed to move, to twitch, the uncouth human forms with great drooping wings, squatting and standing in a timeless dreariness.

She knelt and let water drop, a little at a time, into the prisoner's mouth. At last he coughed, and his hands reached up feebly to the flask. She let him drink. He lay back with his face all wet, besmeared with dust and blood, and muttered something, a word or two in a language she did not know.

Manan returned at last, dragging a length of iron links, a great padlock with its key, and an iron band which fitted around the man's waist and locked there. "It's not tight enough, he can slip out," he grumbled as he locked the end link onto the ring set in the wall.

"No, look." Feeling less fearful of her prisoner now, Arha showed that she could not force her hand between the iron band and the man's ribs. "Not unless he starves longer than four days."

"Little mistress," Manan said plaintively, "I do not question, but . . . what good is he as a slave to the Nameless Ones? He is a man, little one."

"And you are an old fool, Manan. Come along now, finish your fussing."

The prisoner watched them with bright, weary eyes.

"Where's his staff, Manan? There. I'll take that; it has magic in it. Oh, and this; this I'll take too." And with a quick movement she seized the silver chain that showed at the neck of the man's tunic, and tore it off over his head, though he tried to catch her arms and stop her. Manan kicked him in the back. She swung the chain over him, out of his reach. "Is this your talisman, wizard? Is it precious to you? It doesn't look like much, couldn't you afford a better one? I shall keep it safe for you." And she slipped the chain over her own head, hiding the pendant under the heavy collar of her woolen robe.

"You don't know what to do with it," he said, very hoarse, and mispronouncing the words of the Kargish tongue, but clearly enough.

Manan kicked him again, and at that he made a little grunt of pain and shut his eyes.

"Leave off, Manan. Come."

She left the room. Grumbling, Manan followed.

That night, when all the lights of the Place were out, she climbed the hill again, alone. She filled her flask from the well in the room behind the Throne, and took the water and a big, flat, unleavened cake of buckwheat bread down to the Painted Room in the Labyrinth. She set them just within the prisoner's reach, inside the

door. He was asleep, and never stirred. She returned to the Small House, and that night she too slept long and sound.

In early afternoon she returned alone to the Labyrinth. The bread was gone, the flask was dry, the stranger was sitting up, his back against the wall. His face still looked hideous with dirt and scabs, but the expression of it was alert.

She stood across the room from him where he could not possibly reach her, chained as he was, and looked at him. Then she looked away. But there was nowhere particular to look. Something prevented her speaking. Her heart beat as if she were afraid. There was no reason to fear him. He was at her mercy.

"It's pleasant to have light," he said in the soft but deep voice, which perturbed her.

"What's your name?" she asked, peremptory. Her own voice, she thought, sounded uncommonly high and thin.

"Well, mostly I'm called Sparrowhawk."

"Sparrowhawk? Is that your name?"

"No."

"What is your name, then?"

"I cannot tell you that. Are you the One Priestess of the Tombs?"

"Yes."

"What are you called?"

"I am called Arha."

"The one who has been devoured—is that what it means?" His dark eyes watched her intently. He smiled a little. "What is your name?"

"I have no name. Do not ask me questions. Where do you come from?"

"From the Inner Lands, the West."

"From Havnor?"

It was the only name of a city or island of the Inner Lands that she knew.

"Yes, from Havnor."

"Why did you come here?"

"The Tombs of Atuan are famous among my people."

"But you're an infidel, an unbeliever."

He shook his head. "Oh no, Priestess. I believe in the powers of darkness! I have met with the Unnamed Ones, in other places."

"What other places?"

"In the Archipelago—the Inner Lands—there are places which belong to the Old Powers of the Earth, like this one. But none so great as this one. Nowhere else have

they a temple, and a priestess, and such worship as they receive here."

"You came to worship them," she said, jeering.

"I came to rob them," he said.

She stared at his grave face. "Braggart!"

"I knew it would not be easy."

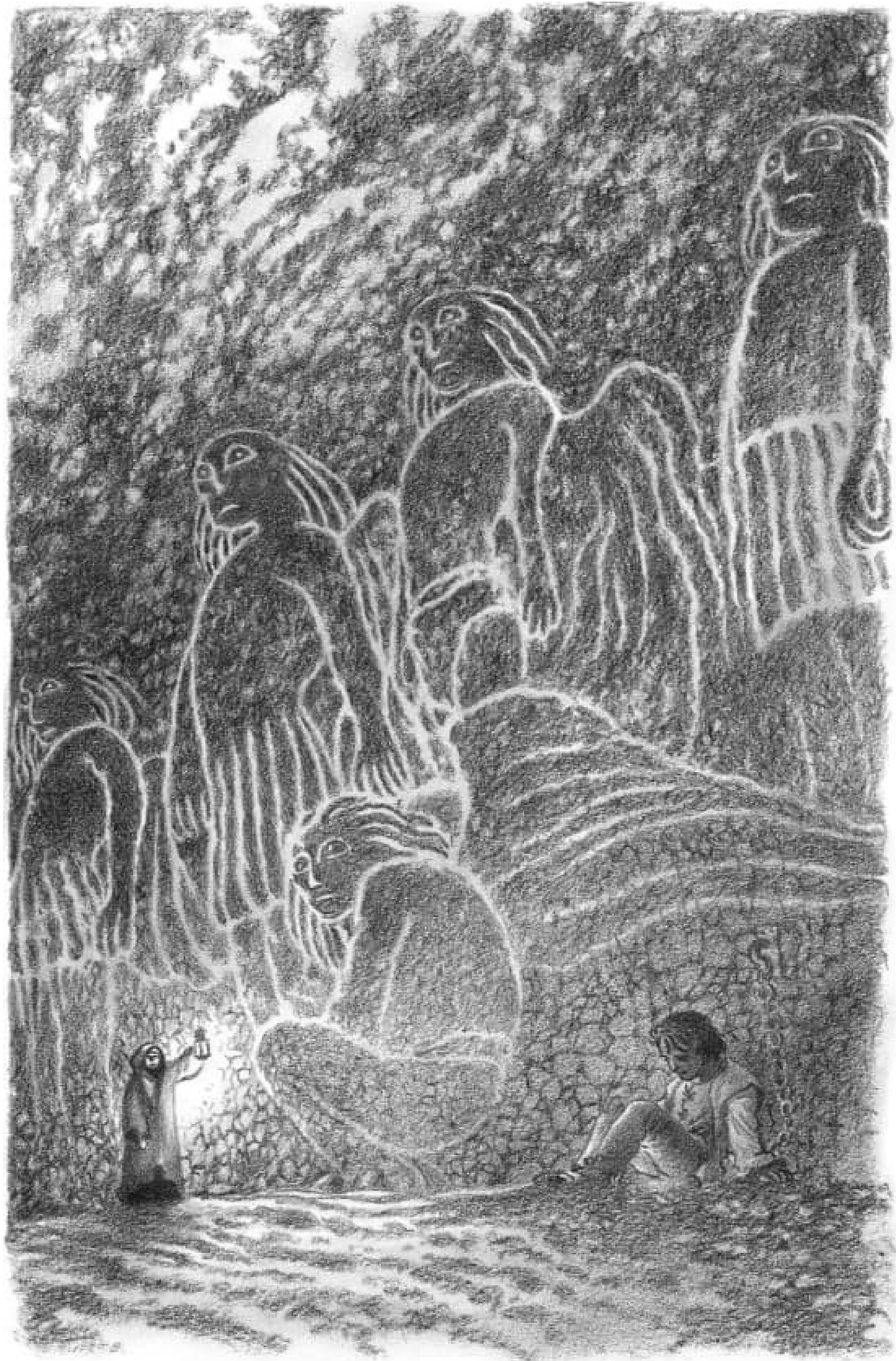
"Easy! It cannot be done. If you weren't an unbeliever you'd know that. The Nameless Ones look after what is theirs."

"What I seek is not theirs."

"It's yours, no doubt?"

"Mine to claim."

"What are you then—a god? a king?" She looked him up and down, as he sat chained, dirty, exhausted. "You are nothing but a thief!"



He said nothing, but his gaze met hers.

"You are not to look at me!" she said shrilly.

"My lady," he said, "I do not mean offense. I am a stranger, and a trespasser. I do not know your ways, nor the courtesies due the Priestess of the Tombs. I am at your mercy, and I ask your pardon if I offend you."

She stood silent, and in a moment she felt the blood rising to her cheeks, hot and foolish. But he was not looking at her and did not see her blush. He had obeyed, and turned away his dark gaze.

Neither spoke for some while. The painted figures all around watched them with sad, blind eyes.

She had brought a stone jug of water. His eyes kept straying to that, and after a time she said, "Drink, if you like."

He hitched himself over to the jug at once, and hefting it as lightly as if it were a wine cup, drank a long, long draft. Then he wet a corner of his sleeve, and cleaned the grime and bloodclot and cobweb off his face and hands as best he could. He spent some while at this, and the girl watched. When he was done he looked better, but his cat-bath had revealed the scars on one side of his face: old scars long healed, whitish on his dark skin, four parallel ridges from eye to jawbone, as if from the scraping talons of a huge claw.

"What is that?" she said. "That scar."

He did not answer at once.

"A dragon?" she said, trying to scoff. Had she not come down here to make mock of her victim, to torment him with his helplessness?

"No, not a dragon."

"You're not a dragonlord, at least, then."

"No," he said rather reluctantly, "I *am* a dragonlord. But the scars were before that. I told you that I had met with the Dark Powers before, in other places of the earth. This on my face is the mark of one of the kinship of the Nameless Ones. But no longer nameless, for I learned his name, in the end."

"What do you mean? What name?"

"I cannot tell you that," he said, and smiled, though his face was grave.

"That's nonsense, fool's babble, sacrilege. They are the Nameless Ones! You don't know what you're talking about—"

"I know even better than you, Priestess," he said, his voice deepening. "Look again!" He turned his head so she must see the four terrible marks across his cheek.

"I don't believe you," she said, and her voice shook.

“Priestess,” he said gently, “you are not very old; you can’t have served the Dark Ones very long.”

“But I have. Very long! I am the First Priestess, the Reborn. I have served my masters for a thousand years and a thousand years before that. I am their servant and their voice and their hands. And I am their vengeance on those who defile the Tombs and look upon what is not to be seen! Stop your lying and your boasting, can’t you see that if I say one word my guard will come and cut your head off your shoulders? Or if I go away and lock this door, then nobody will come, ever, and you’ll die here in the dark, and those I serve will eat your flesh and eat your soul and leave your bones here in the dust?”

Quietly, he nodded.

She stammered, and finding no more to say, swept out of the room and bolted the door behind her with a clang. Let him think she wasn’t coming back! Let him sweat, there in the dark, let him curse and shiver and try to work his foul, useless spells!

But in her mind’s eye she saw him stretching out to sleep, as she had seen him do by the iron door, serene as a sheep in a sunny meadow.

She spat at the bolted door, and made the sign to avert defilement, and went almost at a run toward the Undertomb.

While she skirted its wall on the way to the trapdoor in the Hall, her fingers brushed along the fine planes and traceries of rock, like frozen lace. A longing swept over her to light her lantern, to see once more, just for a moment, the time-carven stone, the lovely glitter of the walls. She shut her eyes tight and hurried on.

Chapter 7

The Great Treasure

Never had the rites and duties of the day seemed so many, or so petty, or so long. The little girls with their pale faces and furtive ways, the restless novices, the priestesses whose looks were stern and cool but whose lives were all a secret brangle of jealousies and miseries and small ambitions and wasted passions—all these women, among whom she had always lived and who made up the human world to her, now appeared to her as both pitiable and boring.

But she who served great powers, she the priestess of grim Night, was free of that pettiness. She did not have to care about the grinding meanness of their common life, the days whose one delight was likely to be getting a bigger slop of lamb fat over your lentils than your neighbor got. . . . She was free of the days altogether. Underground, there were no days. There was always and only night.

And in that unending night, the prisoner: the dark man, practicer of dark arts, bound in iron and locked in stone, waiting for her to come or not to come, to bring him water and bread and life, or a knife and a butcher's bowl and death, just as the whim took her.

She had told no one but Kossil about the man, and Kossil had not told anyone else. He had been in the Painted Room three nights and days now, and still she had not asked Arha about him. Perhaps she assumed that he was dead, and that Arha had had Manan carry the body to the Room of Bones. It was not like Kossil to take anything for granted; but Arha told herself that there was nothing strange about Kossil's silence. Kossil wanted everything kept secret, and hated to have to ask questions. And besides, Arha had told her not to meddle in her business. Kossil was simply obeying.

However, if the man was supposed to be dead, Arha could not ask for food for him. So, aside from stealing some apples and dried onions from the cellars of the Big House, she did without food. She had her morning and evening meals sent to

the Small House, pretending she wished to eat alone, and each night took the food down to the Painted Room in the Labyrinth, all but the soups. She was used to fasting for a day on up to four days at a time, and thought nothing about it. The fellow in the Labyrinth ate up her meager portions of bread and cheese and beans as a toad eats a fly: snap! it's gone. Clearly he could have done so five or six times over; but he thanked her soberly, as if he were her guest and she his hostess at a table such as she had heard of in tales of feasts at the palace of the Godking, all set with roast meats and buttered loaves and wine in crystal. He was very strange.

"What is it like in the Inner Lands?"

She had brought down a little cross-leg folding stool of ivory, so that she would not have to stand while she questioned him, yet would not have to sit down on the floor, on his level.

"Well, there are many islands. Four times forty, they say, in the Archipelago alone, and then there are the Reaches; no man has ever sailed all the Reaches, nor counted all the lands. And each is different from the others. But the fairest of them all, maybe, is Havnor, the great land at the center of the world. In the heart of Havnor on a broad bay full of ships is the City Havnor. The towers of the city are built of white marble. The house of every prince and merchant has a tower, so they rise up one above the other. The roofs of the houses are red tile, and all the bridges over the canals are covered in mosaic work, red and blue and green. And the flags of the princes are all colors, flying from the white towers. On the highest of all the towers the Sword of Erreth-Akbe is set, like a pinnacle, skyward. When the sun rises on Havnor it flashes first on that blade and makes it bright, and when it sets the Sword is golden still above the evening, for a while."

"Who was Erreth-Akbe?" she said, sly.

He looked up at her. He said nothing, but he grinned a little. Then as if on second thought he said, "It's true you would know little of him here. Nothing beyond his coming to the Kargish lands, perhaps. And how much of that tale do you know?"

"That he lost his sorcerer's staff and his amulet and his power—like you," she answered. "He escaped from the High Priest and fled into the west, and dragons killed him. But if he'd come here to the Tombs, there had been no need of dragons."

"True enough," said her prisoner.

She wanted no more talk of Erreth-Akbe, sensing a danger in the subject. "He was a dragonlord, they say. And you say you're one. Tell me, what is a

dragonlord?"

Her tone was always jeering, his answers direct and plain, as if he took her questions in good faith.

"One whom the dragons will speak with," he said, "that is a dragonlord, or at least that is the center of the matter. It's not a trick of mastering the dragons, as most people think. Dragons have no masters. The question is always the same, with a dragon: will he talk with you or will he eat you? If you can count upon his doing the former, and not doing the latter, why then you're a dragonlord."

"Dragons can speak?"

"Surely! In the Eldest Tongue, the language we men learn so hard and use so brokenly, to make our spells of magic and of patterning. No man knows all that language, or a tenth of it. He has not time to learn it. But dragons live a thousand years. . . . They are worth talking to, as you might guess."

"Are there dragons here in Atuan?"

"Not for many centuries, I think, nor in Karego-At. But in your northernmost island, Hur-at-Hur, they say there are still large dragons in the mountains. In the Inner Lands they all keep now to the farthest west, the remote West Reach, islands where no men live and few men come. If they grow hungry, they raid the lands to their east; but that is seldom. I have seen the island where they come to dance together. They fly on their great wings in spirals, in and out, higher and higher over the western sea, like a storming of yellow leaves in autumn." Full of the vision, his eyes gazed through the black paintings on the walls, through the walls and the earth and the darkness, seeing the open sea stretch unbroken to the sunset, the golden dragons on the golden wind.

"You are lying," the girl said fiercely, "you are making it up."

He looked at her, startled. "Why should I lie, Arha?"

"To make me feel like a fool, and stupid, and afraid. To make yourself seem wise, and brave, and powerful, and a dragonlord and all this and all that. You've seen dragons dancing, and the towers in Havnor, and you know all about everything. And I know nothing at all and haven't been anywhere. But all you know is lies! You are nothing but a thief and a prisoner, and you have no soul, and you'll never leave this place again. It doesn't matter if there's oceans and dragons and white towers and all that, because you'll never see them again, you'll never even see the light of the sun. All I know is the dark, the night underground. And that's all there really is. That's all there is to know, in the end. The silence, and the dark. You know everything, wizard. But I know one thing—the one true thing!"

He bowed his head. His long hands, copper-brown, were quiet on his knees. She saw the fourfold scar on his cheek. He had gone farther than she into the dark; he knew death better than she did, even death. . . . A rush of hatred for him rose up in her, choking her throat for an instant. Why did he sit there so defenseless and so strong? Why could she not defeat him?

"This is why I have let you live," she said suddenly, without the least forethought. "I want you to show me how the tricks of sorcerers are performed. So long as you have some art to show me, you'll stay alive. If you have none, if it's all foolery and lies, why then I'll have done with you. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Very well. Go on."

He put his head in his hands a minute, and shifted his position. The iron belt kept him from ever getting quite comfortable, unless he lay down flat.

He raised his face at last and spoke very seriously. "Listen, Arha. I am a Mage, what you call a sorcerer. I have certain arts and powers. That's true. It's also true that here in the Place of the Old Powers, my strength is very little and my crafts don't avail me. Now I could work illusion for you, and show you all kinds of wonders. That's the least part of wizardry. I could work illusions when I was a child; I can do them even here. But if you believe them, they'll frighten you, and you may wish to kill me if fear makes you angry. And if you disbelieve them, you'll see them as only lies and foolery, as you say; and so I forfeit my life again. And my purpose and desire, at the moment, is to stay alive."

That made her laugh, and she said, "Oh, you'll stay alive awhile, can't you see that? You are stupid! All right, show me these illusions. I know them to be false and won't be afraid of them. I wouldn't be afraid if they were real, as a matter of fact. But go ahead. Your precious skin is safe, for tonight, anyhow."

At that he laughed, as she had a moment ago. They tossed his life back and forth between them like a ball, playing.

"What do you wish me to show you?"

"What can you show me?"

"Anything."

"How you brag and brag!"

"No," he said, evidently a little stung. "I do not. I didn't mean to, anyway."

"Show me something you think worth seeing. Anything!"

He bent his head and looked at his hands awhile. Nothing happened. The tallow candle in her lantern burned dim and steady. The black pictures on the walls, the

bird-winged, flightless figures with eyes painted dull red and white, loomed over him and over her. There was no sound. She sighed, disappointed and somehow grieved. He was weak; he talked great things, but did nothing. He was nothing but a good liar, and not even a good thief. "Well," she said at last, and gathered her skirts together to rise. The wool rustled strangely as she moved. She looked down at herself, and stood up in startlement.

The heavy black she had worn for years was gone; her dress was of turquoise-colored silk, bright and soft as the evening sky. It belled out full from her hips, and all the skirt was embroidered with thin silver threads and seed pearls and tiny crumbs of crystal, so that it glittered softly, like rain in April.

She looked at the magician, speechless.

"Do you like it?"

"Where—"

"It's like a gown I saw a princess wear once, at the Feast of Sunreturn in the New Palace in Havnor," he said, looking at it with satisfaction. "You told me to show you something worth seeing. I show you yourself."

"Make it—make it go away."

"You gave me your cloak," he said as if in reproach. "Can I give you nothing? Well, don't worry. It's only illusion; see."

He seemed not to raise a finger, certainly he said no word; but the blue splendor of silk was gone, and she stood in her own harsh black.

She stood still awhile.

"How do I know," she said at last, "that you are what you seem to be?"

"You don't," said he. "I don't know what I seem, to you."

She brooded again. "You could trick me into seeing you as—" She broke off, for he had raised his hand and pointed upward, the briefest sketch of a gesture. She thought he was casting a spell, and drew back quickly toward the door; but following his gesture, her eyes found high in the dark arching roof the small square that was the spy hole from the treasury of the Twin Gods' temple.

There was no light from the spy hole; she could see nothing, hear no one overhead there; but he had pointed, and his questioning gaze was on her.

Both held perfectly still for some time.

"Your magic is mere folly for the eyes of children," she said clearly. "It is trickery and lies. I have seen enough. You will be fed to the Nameless Ones. I shall not come again."

She took her lantern and went out, and sent the iron bolts home firm and loud.

Then she stopped there outside the door and stood dismayed. What must she do?

How much had Kossil seen or heard? What had they been saying? She could not remember. She never seemed to say what she had intended to say to the prisoner. He always confused her with his talk about dragons, and towers, and giving names to the Nameless, and wanting to stay alive, and being grateful for her cloak to lie on. He never said what he was supposed to say. She had not even asked him about the talisman, which she still wore, hidden against her breast.

That was just as well, since Kossil had been listening.

Well, what did it matter, what harm could Kossil do? Even as she asked herself the question she knew the answer. Nothing is easier to kill than a caged hawk. The man was helpless, chained there in the cage of stone. The Priestess of the Godking had only to send her servant Duby to throttle him tonight; or if she and Duby did not know the Labyrinth this far, all she need do was blow poison-dust down the spy hole into the Painted Room. She had boxes and phials of evil substances, some to poison food or water, some that drugged the air, and killed, if one breathed that air too long. And he would be dead in the morning, and it would all be over. There would never be a light beneath the Tombs again.

Arha hastened through the narrow ways of stone to the entrance from the Undertomb, where Manan waited for her, squatting patient as an old toad in the dark. He was uneasy about her visits to the prisoner. She would not let him come with her all the way, so they had settled on this compromise. Now she was glad that he was there at hand. Him, at least, she could trust.

"Manan, listen. You are to go to the Painted Room, right now. Say to the man that you're taking him to be buried alive beneath the Tombs." Manan's little eyes lit up. "Say that aloud. Unlock the chain, and take him to—" She halted, for she had not yet decided where she could best hide the prisoner.

"To the Undertomb," said Manan, eagerly.

"No, fool. I said to say that, not to do it. Wait—"

What place was safe from Kossil and Kossil's spies? None but the deepest places underground, the holiest and most hidden places of the domain of the Nameless, where she dared not come. Yet would Kossil not dare almost anything? Afraid of the dark places she might be, but she was one who would subdue her fear to gain her ends. There was no telling how much of the plan of the Labyrinth she might actually have learned, from Thar, or from the Arha of the previous life, or even from secret explorations of her own in past years; Arha suspected her of knowing more than she pretended to know. But there was one way she surely could not have

learned, the best-kept secret.

"You must bring the man where I lead you, and you must do it in the dark. Then when I bring you back here, you will dig a grave in the Undertomb, and make a coffin for it, and put it in the grave empty, and fill in the earth again, yet so that it can be felt and found if someone sought for it. A deep grave. Do you understand?"

"No," said Manan, dour and fretful. "Little one, this trickery is not wise. It is not good. There should not be a man here! There will come a punishment—"

"An old fool will have his tongue cut out, yes! Do you dare tell me what is wise? I follow the orders of the Dark Powers. Follow me!"

"I'm sorry, little mistress, I'm sorry. . . ."

They returned to the Painted Room. There she waited outside in the tunnel, while Manan entered and unlocked the chain from the hasp in the wall. She heard the deep voice ask, "Where now, Manan?" and the husky alto answer, sullenly, "You are to be buried alive, my mistress says. Under the Tombstones. Get up!" She heard the heavy chain crack like a whip.

The prisoner came out, his arms bound with Manan's leather belt. Manan came behind, holding him like a dog on a short leash, but the collar was around his waist and the leash was iron. His eyes turned to her, but she blew out her candle and without a word set off into the dark. She fell at once into the slow but fairly steady pace that she usually kept when she was not using a light in the Labyrinth, brushing her fingertips very lightly but almost constantly along the walls on either side. Manan and the prisoner followed behind, much more awkward because of the leash, shuffling and stumbling along. But in the dark they must go; for she did not want either of them to learn this way.

A left turn from the Painted Room, and pass two openings; go right at the Four Ways, and pass the opening to the right; then a long curving way, and a flight of steps down, long, slippery, and much too narrow for normal human feet. Farther than these steps she had never gone.

The air was fouler here, very still, with a sharp odor to it. The directions were clear in her mind, even the tones of Thar's voice speaking them. Down the steps (behind her, the prisoner stumbled in the pitch blackness, and she heard him gasp as Manan kept him afoot with a mighty jerk on the chain), and at the foot of the steps turn at once to the left. Hold the left then for three openings, then the first right, then hold to the right. The tunnels curved and angled, none ran straight. "Then you must skirt the Pit," said Thar's voice in the darkness of her mind, "and

the way is very narrow."

She slowed her step, stooped over, and felt before her with one hand along the floor. The corridor now ran straight for a long way, giving false reassurance to the wanderer. All at once her groping hand, which never ceased to touch and sweep the rock before her, felt nothing. There was a stone lip, an edge: beyond the edge, void. To the right the wall of the corridor plunged down sheer into the pit. To the left there was a ledge or curb, not much more than a hand's-breadth wide.

"There is a pit. Face the wall to the left, press against it, and go sideways. Slide your feet. Keep hold of the chain, Manan. . . . Are you on the ledge? It grows narrower. Don't put your weight on your heels. So, I'm past the pit. Reach me your hand. There. . . ."

The tunnel ran in short zigzags with many side openings. From some of these as they passed the sound of their footsteps echoed in a strange way, hollowly; and stranger than that, a very faint draft could be felt, sucking inward. Those corridors must end in pits like the one they had passed. Perhaps there lay, under this low part of the Labyrinth, a hollow place, a cavern so deep and so vast that the cavern of the Undertomb would be little in comparison, a huge black inward emptiness.

But above that chasm, where they went in the dark tunnels, the corridors grew slowly narrower and lower, until even Arha must stoop. Was there no end to this way?

The end came suddenly: a shut door. Going bent over, and a little faster than usual, Arha ran up against it, jarring her head and hands. She felt for the keyhole, then for the small key on her belt-ring, never used, the silver key with the haft shaped like a dragon. It fit, it turned. She opened the door of the Great Treasure of the Tombs of Atuan. A dry, sour, stale air sighed outward through the dark.

"Manan, you may not enter here. Wait outside the door."

"He, but not I?"

"If you enter this room, Manan, you will not leave it. That is the law for all but me. No mortal being but I has ever left this room alive. Will you go in?"

"I will wait outside," said the melancholy voice in the blackness. "Mistress, mistress, don't shut the door—"

His alarm so unnerved her that she left the door ajar. Indeed the place filled her with a dull dread, and she felt some mistrust of the prisoner, pinioned though he was. Once inside, she struck her light. Her hands trembled. The lantern candle caught reluctantly; the air was close and dead. In the yellowish flicker that seemed bright after the long passages of night, the treasure room loomed about them, full of

moving shadows.

There were six great chests, all of stone, all thick with a fine grey dust like the mold on bread; nothing else. The walls were rough, the roof low. The place was cold, with a deep and airless cold that seemed to stop the blood in the heart. There were no cobwebs, only the dust. Nothing lived here, nothing at all, not even the rare, small, white spiders of the Labyrinth. The dust was thick, thick, and every grain of it might be a day that had passed here where there was no time or light: days, months, years, ages all gone to dust.

"This is the place you sought," Arha said, and her voice was steady. "This is the Great Treasure of the Tombs. You have come to it. You cannot ever leave it."

He said nothing, and his face was quiet, but there was in his eyes something that moved her: a desolation, the look of one betrayed.

"You said you wanted to stay alive. This is the only place I know where you can stay alive. Kossil will kill you or make me kill you, Sparrowhawk. But here she cannot reach."

Still he said nothing.

"You could never have left the Tombs in any case, don't you see? This is no different. And at least you've come to . . . to the end of your journey. What you sought is here."

He sat down on one of the great chests, looking spent. The trailing chain clanked harshly on the stone. He looked around at the grey walls and the shadows, then at her.

She looked away from him, at the stone chests. She had no wish at all to open them. She did not care what marvels rotted in them.

"You don't have to wear that chain, in here." She came to him and unlocked the iron belt, and unbuckled Manan's leather belt from his arms. "I must lock the door, but when I come I will trust you. You know that you *cannot* leave—that you must not try? I am their vengeance, I do their will; but if I fail them—if you fail my trust—then they will avenge themselves. You must not try to leave the room, by hurting me or tricking me when I come. You must believe me."

"I will do as you say," he said gently.

"I'll bring food and water when I can. There won't be much. Water enough, but not much food for a while; I'm getting hungry, do you see? But enough to stay alive on. I may not be able to come back for a day or two days, perhaps even longer. I must get Kossil off the track. But I will come. I promise. Here's the flask. Hoard it, I can't come back soon. But I will come back."

He raised his face to her. His expression was strange. “Take care, Tenar,” he said.

Chapter 8

Names

She brought Manan back through the winding ways in the dark, and left him in the dark of the Undertomb, to dig the grave that must be there as proof to Kossil that the thief had indeed been punished. It was late, and she went straight to the Small House to bed. In the night she woke suddenly; she remembered that she had left her cloak in the Painted Room. He would have nothing for warmth in that dank vault but his own short cloak, no bed but the dusty stone. A cold grave, a cold grave, she thought miserably, but she was too weary to wake up fully, and soon slipped back into sleep. She began to dream. She dreamt of the souls of the dead on the walls of the Painted Room, the figures like great bedraggled birds with human hands and feet and faces, squatting in the dust of the dark places. They could not fly. Clay was their food and dust their drink. They were the souls of those not reborn, the ancient peoples and the unbelievers, those whom the Nameless Ones devoured. They squatted all around her in the shadows, and a faint creaking or cheeping sound came from them now and then. One of them came up quite close to her. She was afraid at first and tried to draw away, but could not move. This one had the face of a bird, not a human face; but its hair was golden, and it said in a woman's voice, "Tenar," tenderly, softly, "Tenar."

She woke. Her mouth was stopped with clay. She lay in a stone tomb, underground. Her arms and legs were bound with graveclothes and she could not move or speak.

Her despair grew so great that it burst her breast open and like a bird of fire shattered the stone and broke out into the light of day—the light of day, faint in her windowless room.

Really awake this time, she sat up, worn out by that night's dreaming, her mind befogged. She got into her clothes, and went out to the cistern in the walled courtyard of the Small House. She plunged her arms and face, her whole head, into

the icy water until her body jumped with cold and her blood raced. Then flinging back her dripping hair she stood erect and looked up into the morning sky.

It was not long past sunrise, a fair winter's day. The sky was yellowish, very clear. High up, so high he caught the sunlight and burned like a fleck of gold, a bird was circling, a hawk or desert eagle.

"I am Tenar," she said, not aloud, and she shook with cold, and terror, and exultation, there under the open, sun-washed sky. "I have my name back. I am Tenar!"

The golden fleck veered westward toward the mountains, out of sight. Sunrise gilded the eaves of the Small House. Sheep bells clanked, down in the folds. The smells of woodsmoke and buckwheat porridge from the kitchen chimneys drifted on the fine, fresh wind.

"I am so hungry. . . . How did he know? How did he know my name? . . . Oh, I've got to go eat, I'm so hungry. . . ."

She pulled up her hood and ran off to breakfast.

Food, after three days of semi-fasting, made her feel solid, gave her ballast; she didn't feel so wild and lighthearted and frightened. She felt quite capable of handling Kossil, after breakfast.

She came up beside the tall, stout figure on the way out of the dining hall of the Big House, and said in a low voice, "I have done away with the robber. . . . What a fine day it is!"

The cold grey eyes looked sidelong at her from the black hood.

"I thought that the Priestess must abstain from eating for three days after a human sacrifice?"

This was true. Arha had forgotten it, and her face showed that she had forgotten.

"He is not dead yet," she said at last, trying to feign the indifferent tone that had come so easily a moment ago. "He is buried alive. Under the Tombs. In a coffin. There will be some air, the coffin isn't sealed, it's a wooden one. It will go quite slowly; the dying. When I know he is dead then I'll begin the fast."

"How will you know?"

Flustered, she hesitated again. "I will know. The . . . My Masters will tell me."

"I see. Where is the grave?"

"In the Undertomb. I told Manan to dig it beneath the Smooth Stone." She must not answer so quickly, in that foolish, appeasing tone; she must be on her dignity with Kossil.

"Alive, in a wooden coffin. That's a risky thing with a sorcerer, mistress. Did you make sure his mouth was stopped so he cannot say charms? Are his hands bound? They can weave spells with the motion of a finger, even when their tongues are cut out."

"There is nothing to his sorcery, it is mere tricking," the girl said, raising her voice. "He is buried, and my Masters are waiting for his soul. And the rest does not concern you, priestess!"

This time she had gone too far. Others could hear; Penthe and a couple of other girls, Duby, and the priestess Mebbeth, all were in hearing distance. The girls were all ears, and Kossil was aware of it.

"All that happens here is my concern, mistress. All that happens in his realm is the concern of the Godking, the Man Immortal, whose servant I am. Even into the places underground and into the hearts of men does he search and look, and none shall forbid him entrance!"

"I shall. Into the Tombs no one comes if the Nameless Ones forbid it. They were before your Godking and they will be after him. Speak softly of them, priestess. Do not call their vengeance on you. They will come into your dreams, they will enter the dark places in your mind, and you will go mad."

The girl's eyes were blazing. Kossil's face was hidden, drawn back into the black cowl. Penthe and the others watched, terrified and enthralled.

"They are old," Kossil's voice said, not loud, a whistling thread of sound out of the depths of the cowl. "They are old. Their worship is forgotten, save in this one place. Their power is gone. They are only shadows. They have no power anymore. Do not try to frighten me, Eaten One. You are the First Priestess; does that not mean also that you are the last? . . . You cannot trick me. I see into your heart. The darkness hides nothing from me. Take care, Arha!"

She turned and went on, with her massive, deliberate steps, crushing the frost-starred weeds under her heavy, sandaled feet, going to the white-pillared house of the Godking.

The girl stood, slight and dark, as if frozen to earth, in the front courtyard of the Big House. Nobody moved, nothing moved, only Kossil, in all the vast landscape of court and temple, hill and desert plain and mountain.

"May the Dark Ones eat your soul, Kossil!" she shouted in a voice like a hawk's scream, and lifting her arm with the hand stretched out stiff, she brought the curse down on the priestess's heavy back, even as she set foot on the steps of her temple. Kossil staggered, but did not stop or turn. She went on, and entered the Godking's

door.

Arha spent that day sitting on the lowest step of the Empty Throne. She dared not go into the Labyrinth; she would not go among the other priestesses. A heaviness filled her, and held her there hour after hour in the cold dusk of the great hall. She stared at the pairs of thick pale columns going off into the gloom at the distant end of the hall, and at the shafts of daylight that slanted in from holes in the roof, and at the thick-curling smoke from the bronze tripod of charcoal near the Throne. She made patterns with the little bones of mice on the marble stair, her head bowed, her mind active and yet as if stupefied. Who am I? she asked herself, and got no answer.

Manan came shuffling down the hall between the double rows of columns, when the light had long since ceased to shaft the hall's darkness, and the cold had grown intense. Manan's doughy face was very sad. He stood at a distance from her, his big hands hanging; a torn hem of his rusty cloak dangled by his heel.

"Little mistress."

"What is it, Manan?" She looked at him with dull affection.

"Little one, let me do what you said . . . what you said was done. He must die, little one. He has bewitched you. She will have revenge. She is old and cruel, and you are too young. You have not strength enough."

"She can't hurt me."

"If she killed you, even in the sight of all, in the open, there is none in all the Empire who would dare punish her. She is the High Priestess of the Godking, and the Godking rules. But she won't kill you in the open. She will do it by stealth, by poison, in the night."

"Then I will be born again."

Manan twisted his big hands together. "Perhaps she will not kill you," he whispered.

"What do you mean?"

"She could lock you into a room in the . . . down there. . . . As you have done with him. And you would be alive for years and years, maybe. For years. . . . And no new Priestess would be born, for you wouldn't be dead. Yet there would be no Priestess of the Tombs, and the dances of the dark of the moon would not be danced, and the sacrifices would not be made, and the blood not poured out, and the worship of the Dark Ones could be forgotten, forever. She and her Lord would like it to be so."

"*They* would set me free, Manan."

"Not while they are wrathful at you, little mistress," Manan whispered.

"Wrathful?"

"Because of him. . . . The sacrilege not paid for. Oh little one, little one! They do not forgive!"

She sat in the dust of the lowest step, her head bowed. She looked at a tiny thing that she held on her palm, the minute skull of a mouse. The owls in the rafters over the Throne stirred a little; it was darkening toward night.

"Do not go down into the Labyrinth tonight," Manan said very low. "Go to your house, and sleep. In the morning go to Kossil, and tell her that you lift the curse from her. And that will be all. You need not worry. I will show her proof."

"Proof?"

"That the sorcerer is dead."

She sat still. Slowly she closed her hand, and the fragile skull cracked and collapsed. When she opened her hand it held nothing but splinters of bone and dust.

"No," she said. She brushed the dust from her palm.

"He must die. He has put a spell on you. You are lost, Arha!"

"He has not put any spell on me. You're old and cowardly, Manan; you're frightened by old women. How do you think you'd come to him and kill him and get your 'proof'? Do you know the way clear to the Great Treasure, that you followed in the dark last night? Can you count the turnings and come to the steps, and then the pit, and then the door? Can you unlock that door? . . . Oh, poor old Manan, your wits are all thick. She has frightened you. You go down to the Small House now, and sleep, and forget all these things. Don't worry me forever with talk of death. . . . I'll come later. Go on, go on, old fool, old lump." She had risen, and gently pushed Manan's broad chest, patting him and pushing him to go. "Good night, good night!"

He turned, heavy with reluctance and foreboding, but obedient, and trudged down the long hall under the columns and the ruined roof. She watched him go.

When he had been gone some while she turned and went around the dais of the Throne, and vanished into the dark behind it.

Chapter 9

The Ring of Erreth-Akbe

In the great treasury of the Tombs of Atuan, time did not pass. No light; no life; no least stir of spider in the dust or worm in the cold earth. Rock, and dark, and time not passing.

On the stone lid of a great chest the thief from the Inner Lands lay stretched on his back like the carven figure on a tomb. The dust disturbed by his movements had settled on his clothes. He did not move.

The lock of the door rattled. The door opened. Light broke the dead black and a fresher draft stirred the dead air. The man lay inert.

Arha closed the door and locked it from within, set her lantern on a chest, and slowly approached the motionless figure. She moved timorously, and her eyes were wide, the pupils still fully dilated from her long journey through the dark.

"Sparrowhawk!"

She touched his shoulder, and spoke his name again, and yet again.

He stirred then, and moaned. At last he sat up, face drawn and eyes blank. He looked at her unrecognizing.

"It's I, Arha—Tenar. I brought you water. Here, drink."

He fumbled for the flask as if his hands were numb, and drank, but not deeply.

"How long has it been?" he asked, speaking with difficulty.

"Two days have passed since you came to this room. This is the third night. I couldn't come earlier. I had to steal the food—here it is—" She got out one of the flat grey loaves from the bag she had brought, but he shook his head.

"I'm not hungry. This . . . this is a deathly place." He put his head in his hands and sat unmoving.

"Are you cold? I brought the cloak from the Painted Room."

He did not answer.

She put the cloak down and stood gazing at him. She was trembling a little, and

her eyes were still black and wide.

All at once she sank down on her knees, bowed over, and began to cry, with deep sobs that wrenched her body, but brought no tears.

He got down stiffly from the chest, and bent over her. "Tenar—"

"I am not Tenar. I am not Arha. The gods are dead, the gods are dead."

He laid his hands on her head, pushing back the hood. He began to speak. His voice was soft, and the words were in no tongue she had ever heard. The sound of them came into her heart like rain falling. She grew still to listen.

When she was quiet he lifted her, and set her like a child on the great chest where he had lain. He put his hand on hers.

"Why did you weep, Tenar?"

"I'll tell you. It doesn't matter what I tell you. You can't do anything. You can't help. You're dying too, aren't you? So it doesn't matter. Nothing matters. Kossil, the Priestess of the Godking, she was always cruel, she kept trying to make me kill you. The way I killed those others. And I would not. What right has she? And she defied the Nameless Ones and mocked them, and I set a curse upon her. And since then I've been afraid of her, because it's true what Manan said, she doesn't believe in the gods. She wants them to be forgotten, and she'd kill me while I slept. So I didn't sleep. I didn't go back to the Small House. I stayed in the Hall all last night, in one of the lofts, where the dancing dresses are. Before it was light I went down to the Big House and stole some food from the kitchen, and then I came back to the Hall and stayed there all day. I was trying to find out what I should do. And tonight . . . tonight I was so tired, I thought I could go to a holy place and go to sleep, she might be afraid to come there. So I came down to the Undertomb. That great cave where I first saw you. And . . . and she was there. She must have come in by the red rock door. She was there with a lantern. Scratching in the grave that Manan dug, to see if there was a corpse in it. Like a rat in a graveyard, a great fat black rat, digging. And the light burning in the Holy Place, the dark place. And the Nameless Ones did nothing. They didn't kill her or drive her mad. They are old, as she said. They are dead. They are all gone. I am not a priestess anymore."

The man stood listening, his hand still on hers, his head a little bent. Some vigor had come back into his face and stance, though the scars on his cheek showed livid grey, and there was dust yet on his clothes and hair.

"I went past her, through the Undertomb. Her candle made more shadows than light, and she didn't hear me. I wanted to go into the Labyrinth to get away from her. But when I was in it I kept thinking that I heard her following me. All through

the corridors I kept hearing somebody behind me. And I didn't know where to go. I thought I would be safe here, I thought my Masters would protect me and defend me. But they don't, they are gone, they are dead. . . ."

"It was for them you wept—for their death? But they are here, Tenar, here!"

"How should you know?" she said listlessly.

"Because every instant since I set foot in the cavern under the Tombstones, I have striven to keep them still, to keep them unaware. All my skills have gone to that, I have spent my strength on it. I have filled these tunnels with an endless net of spells, spells of sleep, of stillness, of concealment, and yet still they are aware of me, half aware; half sleeping, half awake. And even so I am all but worn out, striving against them. This is a most terrible place. One man alone has no hope, here. I was dying of thirst when you gave me water, yet it was not the water alone that saved me. It was the strength of the hands that gave it." As he said that, he turned her hand palm upward in his own for a moment, gazing at it; then he turned away, walked a few steps about the room, and stopped again before her. She said nothing.

"Did you truly think them dead? You know better in your heart. They do not die. They are dark and undying, and they hate the light: the brief, bright light of our mortality. They are immortal, but they are not gods. They never were. They are not worth the worship of any human soul."

She listened, her eyes heavy, her gaze fixed on the flickering lantern.

"What have they ever given you, Tenar?"

"Nothing," she whispered.

"They have nothing to give. They have no power of making. All their power is to darken and destroy. They cannot leave this place; they *are* this place; and it should be left to them. They should not be denied nor forgotten, but neither should they be worshiped. The Earth is beautiful, and bright, and kindly, but that is not all. The Earth is also terrible, and dark, and cruel. The rabbit shrieks dying in the green meadows. The mountains clench their great hands full of hidden fire. There are sharks in the sea, and there is cruelty in men's eyes. And where men worship these things and abase themselves before them, there evil breeds; there places are made in the world where darkness gathers, places given over wholly to the Ones whom we call Nameless, the ancient and holy Powers of the Earth before the Light, the powers of the dark, of ruin, of madness. . . . I think they drove your priestess Kossil mad a long time ago; I think she has prowled these caverns as she prowls the labyrinth of her own self, and now she cannot see the daylight anymore.

She tells you that the Nameless Ones are dead; only a lost soul, lost to truth, could believe that. They exist. But they are not your Masters. They never were. You are free, Tenar. You were taught to be a slave, but you have broken free."

She listened, though her expression did not change. He said no more. They were silent; but it was not the silence that had been in that room before she entered. There was the breathing of two of them now, and the movement of life in their veins, and the burning of the candle in its lantern of tin, a tiny, lively sound.

"How is it that you know my name?"

He walked up and down the room, stirring up the fine dust, stretching his arms and shoulders in an effort to shake off the numbing chill.

"Knowing names is my job. My art. To weave the magic of a thing, you see, one must find its true name out. In my lands we keep our true names hidden all our lives long, from all but those whom we trust utterly; for there is great power, and great peril, in a name. Once, at the beginning of time, when Segoy raised the isles of Earthsea from the ocean deeps, all things bore their own true names. And all doing of magic, all wizardry, hangs still upon the knowledge—the relearning, the remembering—of that true and ancient language of the Making. There are spells to learn, of course, ways to use the words; and one must know the consequences, too. But what a wizard spends his life at is finding out the names of things, and finding out how to find out the names of things."

"How did you find out mine?"

He looked at her a moment, a deep clear glance across the shadows between them; he hesitated a moment. "I cannot tell you that. You are like a lantern swathed and covered, hidden away in a dark place. Yet the light shines; they could not put out the light. They could not hide you. As I know the light, as I know you, I know your name, Tenar. That is my gift, my power. I cannot tell you more. But tell me this: what will you do now?"

"I don't know."

"Kossil has found an empty grave, by now. What will she do?"

"I don't know. If I go back up, she can have me killed. It is death for a High Priestess to lie. She could have me sacrificed on the steps of the Throne if she wanted. And Manan would have to really cut off my head this time, instead of just lifting the sword and waiting for the Dark Figure to stop it. But this time it wouldn't stop. It would come down and cut off my head."

Her voice was dull and slow. He frowned. "If we stay here long," he said, "you are going to go mad, Tenar. The anger of the Nameless Ones is heavy on your

mind. And on mine. It's better now that you're here, much better. But it was a long time before you came, and I've used up most of my strength. No one can withstand the Dark Ones long alone. They are very strong." He stopped; his voice had sunk low, and he seemed to have lost the thread of his speech. He rubbed his hands over his forehead, and presently went to drink again from the flask. He broke off a hunch of bread and sat down on the chest opposite to eat it.

What he said was true; she felt a weight, a pressure on her mind, that seemed to darken and confuse all thought and feeling. Yet she was not terrified, as she had been coming through the corridors alone. Only the utter silence outside the room seemed terrible. Why was that? She had never feared the silence of the underearth before. But never before had she disobeyed the Nameless Ones, never had she set herself against them.

She gave a little whimpering laugh at last. "Here we sit on the greatest treasure of the Empire," she said. "The Godking would give all his wives to have one chest of it. And we haven't even opened a lid to look."

"I did," said the Sparrowhawk, chewing.

"In the dark?"

"I made a little light. The werelight. It was hard to do, here. Even with my staff it would have been hard, and without it, it was like trying to light a fire with wet wood in the rain. But it came at last. And I found what I was after."

She raised her face slowly to look at him. "The ring?"

"The half-ring. You have the other half."

"I have it? The other half was lost—"

"And found. I wore it on a chain around my neck. You took it off, and asked me if I couldn't afford a better talisman. The only talisman better than half the Ring of Erreth-Akbe would be the whole. But then, as they say, half a loaf's better than none. So you now have my half, and I have yours." He smiled at her across the shadows of the tomb.

"You said, when I took it, that I didn't know what to do with it."

"That was true."

"And you do know?"

He nodded.

"Tell me. Tell me what it is, the ring, and how you came upon the lost half, and how you came here, and why. All this I must know, then maybe I will see what to do."

"Maybe you will. Very well. What is it, the Ring of Erreth-Akbe? Well, you can

see that it's not precious looking, and it's not even a ring. It's too big. An arm-ring, perhaps, yet it seems too small for that. No man knows who it was made for. Elfarran the Fair wore it once, before the Isle of Soléa was lost beneath the sea; and it was old when she wore it. And at last it came into the hands of Erreth-Akbe. . . . The metal is hard silver, pierced with nine holes. There's a design like waves scratched on the outside, and nine Runes of Power on the inside. The half you have bears four runes and a bit of another; and mine likewise. The break came right across that one symbol, and destroyed it. It is what's been called, since then, the Lost Rune. The other eight are known to Mages: Pirr that protects from madness and from wind and fire, Ges that gives endurance, and so on. But the broken rune was the one that bound the lands. It was the Bond-Rune, the sign of dominion, the sign of peace. No king could rule well if he did not rule beneath that sign. No one knows how it was written. Since it was lost there have been no great kings in Havnor. There have been princes and tyrants, and wars and quarreling among all the lands of Earthsea.

"So the wise lords and Mages of the Archipelago wanted the Ring of Erreth-Akbe, that they might restore the lost rune. But at last they gave up sending men out to seek it, since none could take the one half from the Tombs of Atuan, and the other half, which Erreth-Akbe gave to a Kargish king, was lost long since. They said there was no use in the search. That was many hundred years ago.

"Now I come into it thus. When I was a little older than you are now, I was on a chase, a kind of hunt across the sea. That which I hunted tricked me, so that I was cast up on a desert isle, not far off the coasts of Karego-At and Atuan, south and west of here. It was a little islet, not much more than a sandbar, with long grassy dunes down the middle, and a spring of salty water, and nothing else.

"Yet two people lived there. An old man and woman; brother and sister, I think. They were terrified of me. They had not seen any other human face for—how long? Years, tens of years. But I was in need, and they were kind to me. They had a hut of driftwood, and a fire. The old woman gave me food, mussels she pulled from the rocks at low tide, dried meat of seabirds they killed by throwing stones. She was afraid of me, but she gave me food. Then when I did nothing to frighten her, she came to trust me, and she showed me her treasure. She had a treasure, too. . . . It was a little dress. All of silk stuff, with pearls. A little child's dress, a princess's dress. She was wearing uncured sealskin.

"We couldn't talk. I didn't know the Kargish tongue then, and they knew no language of the Archipelago, and little enough of their own. They must have been

brought there as young children, and left to die. I don't know why, and doubt that they knew. They knew nothing but the island, the wind, and the sea. But when I left she gave me a present. She gave me the lost half of the Ring of Erreth-Akbe."

He paused for a while.

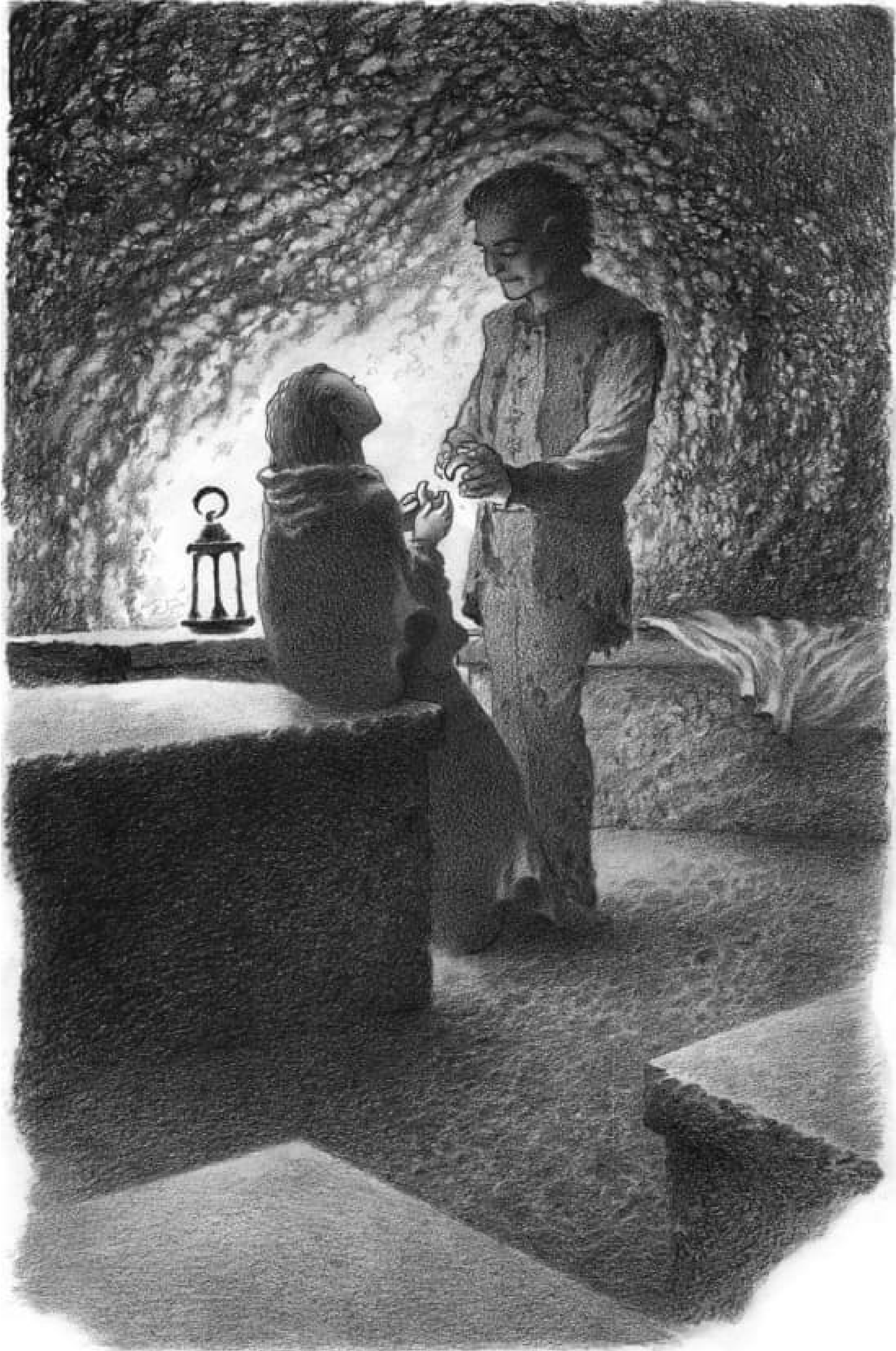
"I didn't know it for what it was, no more than she did. The greatest gift of this age of the world, and it was given by a poor old foolish woman in sealskins to a silly lout who stuffed it into his pocket and said 'Thanks!' and sailed off. . . . Well, so I went on, and did what I had to do. And then other things came up, and I went to the Dragons' Run, westward, and so on. But all the time I kept the thing with me, because I felt a gratitude toward that old woman who had given me the only present she had to give. I put a chain through one of the holes pierced in it, and wore it, and never thought about it. And then one day on Selidor, the Farthest Isle, the land where Erreth-Akbe died in his battle with the dragon Orm—on Selidor I spoke with a dragon, one of that lineage of Orm. He told me what I wore upon my breast.

"He thought it very funny that I hadn't known. Dragons think we are amusing. But they remember Erreth-Akbe; him they speak of as if he were a dragon, not a man.

"When I came back to the Inmost Isles, I went at last to Havnor. I was born on Gont, which lies not far west of your Kargish lands, and I had wandered a good deal since, but I had never been to Havnor. It was time to go there. I saw the white towers, and spoke with the great men, the merchants and the princes and the lords of the ancient domains. I told them what I had. I told them that if they liked, I would go seek the rest of the ring in the Tombs of Atuan, in order to find the Lost Rune, the key to peace. For we need peace sorely in the world. They were full of praise; and one of them even gave me money to provision my boat. So I learned your tongue, and came to Atuan."

He fell silent, gazing before him into the shadows.

"Didn't the people in our towns know you for a Westerner, by your skin, by your speech?"



"Oh, it's easy to fool people," he said rather absently, "if you know the tricks. You make some illusion-changes, and nobody but another Mage will see through them. And you have no wizards or Mages here in the Kargish lands. That's a queer thing. You banished all your wizards long ago, and forbade the practice of the Art Magic; and now you scarcely believe in it."

"I was taught to disbelieve in it. It is contrary to the teachings of the Priest Kings. But I know that only sorcery could have got you to the Tombs, and in at the door of red rock."

"Not only sorcery, but good advice also. We use writing more than you, I think. Do you know how to read?"

"No. It is one of the black arts."

He nodded. "But a useful one," he said. "An ancient unsuccessful thief left certain descriptions of the Tombs of Atuan, and instructions for entering, if one were able to use one of the Great Spells of Opening. All this was written down in a book in the treasury of a prince of Havnor. He let me read it. So I got as far as the great cavern—"

"The Undertomb."

"The thief who wrote the way to enter thought that the treasure was there, in the Undertomb. So I looked there, but I had the feeling that it must be better hidden, farther on in the maze. I knew the entrance to the Labyrinth, and when I saw you, I went to it, thinking to hide in the maze and search it. That was a mistake, of course. The Nameless Ones had hold of me already, bewildering my mind. And since then I have grown only weaker and stupider. One must not submit to them, one must resist, keep one's spirit always strong and certain. I learned that a long time ago. But it's hard to do, here, where they are so strong. They are not gods, Tenar. But they are stronger than any man."

They were both silent for a long time.

"What else did you find in the treasure chests?" she asked dully.

"Rubbish. Gold, jewels, crowns, swords. Nothing to which any man alive has any claim. . . . Tell me this, Tenar. How were you chosen to be the Priestess of the Tombs?"

"When the First Priestess dies they go looking all through Atuan for a girl-baby born on the night the Priestess died. And they always find one. Because it is the Priestess reborn. When the child is five they bring it here to the Place. And when it is six it is given to the Dark Ones and its soul is eaten by them. And so it belongs to them, and has belonged to them since the beginning days. And it has no name."

"Do you believe that?"

"I have always believed it."

"Do you believe it now?"

She said nothing.

Again the shadowy silence fell between them. After a long time she said, "Tell me . . . tell me about the dragons in the West."

"Tenar, what will you do? We can't sit here telling each other tales until the candle burns out, and the darkness comes again."

"I don't know what to do. I am afraid." She sat erect on the stone chest, her hands clenched one in the other, and spoke loudly, like one in pain. She said, "I am afraid of the dark."

He answered softly. "You must make a choice. Either you must leave me, lock the door, go up to your altars and give me to your Masters; then go to the Priestess Kossil and make your peace with her—and that is the end of the story—or, you must unlock the door, and go out of it, with me. Leave the Tombs, leave Atuan, and come with me oversea. And that is the beginning of the story. You must be Arha, or you must be Tenar. You cannot be both."

The deep voice was gentle and certain. She looked through the shadows into his face, which was hard and scarred, but had in it no cruelty, no deceit.

"If I leave the service of the Dark Ones, they will kill me. If I leave this place I will die."

"You will not die. Arha will die."

"I cannot . . ."

"To be reborn one must die, Tenar. It is not so hard as it looks from the other side."

"They would not let us get out. Ever."

"Perhaps not. Yet it's worth trying. You have knowledge, and I have skill, and between us we have . . ." He paused.

"We have the Ring of Erreth-Akbe."

"Yes, that. But I thought also of another thing between us. Call it trust. . . . That is one of its names. It is a very great thing. Though each of us alone is weak, having that we are strong, stronger than the Powers of the Dark." His eyes were clear and bright in his scarred face. "Listen, Tenar!" he said. "I came here a thief, an enemy, armed against you; and you showed me mercy, and trusted me. And I have trusted you from the first time I saw your face, for one moment in the cave beneath the Tombs, beautiful in darkness. You have proved your trust in me. I have made no

return. I will give you what I have to give. My true name is Ged. And this is yours to keep." He had risen, and he held out to her a semicircle of pierced and carven silver. "Let the ring be rejoined," he said.

She took it from his hand. She slipped from her neck the silver chain on which the other half was strung, and took it off the chain. She laid the two pieces in her palm so that the broken edges met, and it looked whole.

She did not raise her face.

"I will come with you," she said.

Chapter 10

The Anger of the Dark

When she said that, the man named Ged put his hand over hers that held the broken talisman. She looked up startled, and saw him flushed with life and triumph, smiling. She was dismayed and frightened of him. "You have set us both free," he said. "Alone, no one wins freedom. Come, let's waste no time while we still have time! Hold it out again, for a little." She had closed her fingers over the pieces of silver, but at his request she held them out again on her hand, the broken edges touching.

He did not take them, but put his fingers on them. He said a couple of words, and sweat suddenly sprang out on his face. She felt a queer little tremor on the palm of her hand, as if a small animal sleeping there had moved. Ged sighed; his tense stance relaxed, and he wiped his forehead.

"There," he said, and picking up the Ring of Erreth-Akbe he slid it over the fingers of her right hand, narrowly over the breadth of the hand, and up onto the wrist. "There!" and he regarded it with satisfaction. "It fits. It must be a woman's arm-ring, or a child's."

"Will it hold?" she murmured nervously, feeling the strip of silver slip cold and delicate on her thin arm.

"It will. I couldn't put a mere mending charm on the Ring of Erreth-Akbe, like a village witch mending a kettle. I had to use a Patterning, and make it whole. It is whole now as if it had never been broken. Tenar, we must be gone. I'll bring the bag and flask. Wear your cloak. Is there anything more?"

As she fumbled at the door, unlocking it, he said, "I wish I had my staff," and she replied, still whispering, "it's just outside the door. I brought it."

"Why did you bring it?" he asked curiously.

"I thought of . . . taking you to the door. Letting you go."

"That was a choice you didn't have. You could keep me a slave, and be a slave;

or set me free, and come free with me. Come, little one, take courage, turn the key."

She turned the dragon-hafted key and opened the door on the low, black corridor. She went out of the Treasury of the Tombs with the Ring of Erreth-Akbe on her arm, and the man followed her.

There was a low vibration, not quite a noise, in the rock of the walls and floor and vaulting. It was like distant thunder, like something huge falling a great way off.

The hair on her head rose up, and without stopping to reason she blew out the candle in the tin lantern. She heard the man move behind her; his quiet voice said, so close that his breath stirred her hair, "Leave the lantern. I can make light if need be. What time is it, outside?"

"Long past midnight when I came here."

"We must go forward then."

But he did not move. She realized that she must lead him. Only she knew the way out of the Labyrinth, and he waited to follow her. She set out, stooping because the tunnel here was so low, but keeping a pretty good pace. From unseen cross-passages came a cold breath and a sharp, dank odor, the lifeless smell of the huge hollowness beneath them. When the passage grew a little higher and she could stand upright, she went slower, counting her steps as they approached the pit. Light-footed, aware of all her movements, he followed a short way behind her. The instant she stopped, he stopped.

"Here's the pit," she whispered. "I can't find the ledge. No, here. Be careful, I think the stones are coming loose. . . . No, no, wait—it's loose—" She sidled back to safety as the stones teetered under her feet. The man caught her arm and held her. Her heart pounded. "The ledge isn't safe, the stones are coming loose."

"I'll make a little light, and look at them. Maybe I can mend them with the right word. It's all right, little one."

She thought how strange it was that he called her what Manan had always called her. And as he kindled a faint glow on the end of his staff, like the glow on rotting wood or a star behind fog, and stepped out onto the narrow way beside the black abyss, she saw the bulk looming in the farther dark beyond him, and knew it for Manan. But her voice was caught in her throat as in a noose, and she could not cry out.

As Manan reached out to push him off his shaky perch into the pit beside him, Ged looked up, saw him, and with a shout of surprise or rage struck out at him with the staff. At the shout the light blazed up white and intolerable, straight in the eunuch's face. Manan flung up one of his big hands to shield his eyes, lunged

desperately to catch hold of Ged, and missed, and fell.

He made no cry as he fell. No sound came up out of the black pit, no sound of his body hitting the bottom, no sound of his death, none at all. Clinging perilously to the ledge, kneeling frozen at the lip, Ged and Tenar did not move; listened; heard nothing.

The light was grey wisp, barely visible.

"Come!" Ged said, holding out his hand; she took it, and in three bold steps he brought her across. He quenched the light. She went ahead of him again to lead the way. She was quite numb and did not think of anything. Only after some time she thought, *Is it right or left?*

She stopped.

Halted a few steps behind her, he said softly, "What is it?"

"I am lost. Make the light."

"Lost?"

I have . . . I have lost count of the turnings."

"I kept count," he said, coming a little closer. "A left turn after the pit; then a right, and a right again."

"Then the next will be right again," she said automatically, but she did not move. "Make the light."

"The light won't show us the way, Tenar."

"Nothing will. It is lost. We are lost."

The dead silence closed in upon her whisper, ate it.

She felt the movement and warmth of the other, close to her in the cold dark. He sought her hand and took it. "Go on, Tenar. The next turn to the right."

"Make a light," she pleaded. "The tunnels twist so. . . ."

"I cannot. I have no strength to spare. Tenar, they are—They know that we left the Treasury. They know that we're past the pit. They are seeking us, seeking our will, our spirit. To quench it, to devour it. I must keep that alight. All my strength is going into that. I must withstand them; with you. With your help. We must go on."

"There is no way out," she said, but she took one step forward. Then she took another, hesitant as if beneath each step the black hollow void gaped open, the emptiness under the earth. The warm, hard grip of his hand was on her hand. They went forward.

After what seemed a long time they came to the flight of steps. It had not seemed so steep before, the steps hardly more than slimy notches in the rock. But they

climbed it, and then went on a little more rapidly, for she knew that the curving passage went a long way without side turnings after the steps. Her fingers, trailing the left-hand wall for guidance, crossed a gap, an opening to the left. "Here," she murmured; but he seemed to hold back, as if something in her movements made him doubtful.

"No," she muttered in confusion, "not this, it's the next turn to the left. I don't know. I can't do it. There's no way out."

"We are going to the Painted Room," the quiet voice said in the darkness. "How should we go there?"

"The left turn after this."

She led on. They made the long circuit, past two false leads, to the passage that branched rightward toward the Painted Room.

"Straight on," she whispered, and now the long unraveling of the darkness went better, for she knew these passages toward the iron door and had counted their turns a hundred times; the strange weight that lay upon her mind could not confuse her about them, if she did not try to think. But all the time they were getting nearer and nearer to that which weighed upon her and pressed against her; and her legs were so tired and heavy that she whimpered once or twice with the labor of making them move. And beside her the man would breathe deep, and hold the breath, again and again, like one making a mighty effort with all the strength of his body. Sometimes his voice broke out, hushed and sharp, in a word or fragment of a word. So they came at last to the iron door; and in sudden terror she put out her hand.

The door was open.

"Quick!" she said, and pulled her companion through. Then, on the further side, she halted.

"Why was it open?" she said.

"Because your Masters need your hands to shut it for them."

"We are coming to. . . ." Her voice failed her.

"To the center of the darkness. I know. Yet we're out of the Labyrinth. What ways out of the Undertomb are there?"

"Only one. The door you entered doesn't open from within. The way goes through the cavern and up passages to a trapdoor in a room behind the Throne. In the Hall of the Throne."

"Then we must go that way."

"But she is there," the girl whispered. "There in the Undertomb. In the cavern. Digging in the empty grave. I cannot pass her, oh, I cannot pass her again!"

"She will have gone by now."

"I cannot go there."

"Tenar, I hold the roof up over our heads, this moment. I keep the walls from closing in upon us. I keep the ground from opening beneath our feet. I have done this since we passed the pit where their servant waited. If I can hold off the earthquake, do you fear to meet one human soul with me? Trust me, as I have trusted you! Come with me now."

They went forward.

The endless tunnel opened out. The sense of a greater air met them, an enlarging of the dark. They had entered the great cave beneath the Tombstones.

They started to circle it, keeping to the right-hand wall. Tenar had gone only a few steps when she paused. "What is it?" she murmured, her voice barely passing her lips. There was a noise in the dead, vast, black bubble of air: a tremor or shaking, a sound heard by the blood and felt in the bones. The time-carven walls beneath her fingers thrummed, thrummed.

"Go forward," the man's voice said, dry and strained. "Hurry, Tenar."

As she stumbled forward she cried out in her mind, which was as dark, as shaken as the subterranean vault, "Forgive me. O my Masters, O unnamed ones, most ancient ones, forgive me, forgive me!"

There was no answer. There had never been an answer.

They came to the passage beneath the Hall, climbed the stairs, came to the last steps up and the trapdoor at their head. It was shut, as she always left it. She pressed the spring that opened it. It did not open.

"It is broken," she said. "It is locked."

He came up past her and put his back against the trap. It did not move.

"It's not locked, but held down by something heavy."

"Can you open it?"

"Perhaps. I think she'll be waiting there. Has she men with her?"

"Duby and Uahto, maybe other wardens—men cannot come there—"

"I can't make a spell of opening, and hold off the people waiting up there, and withstand the will of the darkness, all at one time," said his steady voice, considering. "We must try the other door then, the door in the rocks, by which I came in. She knows that it can't be opened from within?"

"She knows. She let me try it once."

"Then she may discount it. Come. Come, Tenar!"

She had sunk down on the stone steps, which hummed and shivered as if a great

bowstring were being plucked in the depths beneath them.

"What is it—the shaking?"

"Come," he said, so steady and certain that she obeyed, and crept back down the passages and stairs, back to the dreadful cavern.

At the entrance so great a weight of blind and dire hatred came pressing down upon her, like the weight of the earth itself, that she cowered and without knowing it cried out aloud, "They are here! They are here!"

"Then let them know that we are here," the man said, and from his staff and hands leapt forth a white radiance that broke as a sea-wave breaks in sunlight, against the thousand diamonds of the roof and walls: a glory of light, through which the two fled, straight across the great cavern, their shadows racing from them into the white traceries and the glittering crevices and the empty, open grave. To the low doorway they ran, down the tunnel, stooping over, she first, he following. There in the tunnel the rocks boomed, and moved under their feet. Yet the light was with them still, dazzling. As she saw the dead rock-face before her, she heard over the thundering of the earth his voice speaking one word, and as she fell to her knees his staff struck down, over her head, against the red rock of the shut door. The rocks burned white as if afire, and burst asunder.

Outside them was the sky, paling to dawn. A few white stars lay high and cool within it.

Tenar saw the stars and felt the sweet wind on her face; but she did not get up. She crouched on hands and knees there between the earth and sky.

The man, a strange dark figure in that half-light before the dawn, turned and pulled at her arm to make her get up. His face was black and twisted like a demon's. She cowered away from him, shrieking in a thick voice not her own, as if a dead tongue moved in her mouth, "No! No! Don't touch me—leave me—Go!" And she writhed back away from him, into the crumbling, lipless mouth of the Tombs.

His hard grip loosened. He said in a quiet voice, "By the bond you wear I bid you come, Tenar."

She saw the starlight on the silver of the ring on her arm. Her eyes on that, she rose, staggering. She put her hand in his, and came with him. She could not run. They walked down the hill. From the black mouth among the rocks behind them issued forth a long, long, groaning howl of hatred and lament. Stones fell about them. The ground quivered. They went on, she with her eyes still fixed on the glimmer of starlight on her wrist.

They were in the dim valley westward of the Place. Now they began to climb; and all at once he bade her turn. "See—"

She turned, and saw. They were across the valley, on a level now with the Tombstones, the nine great monoliths that stood or lay above the cavern of diamonds and graves. The stones that stood were moving. They jerked, and leaned slowly like the masts of ships. One of them seemed to twitch and rise taller; then a shudder went through it, and it fell. Another fell, smashing crossways on the first. Behind them the low dome of the Hall of the Throne, black against the yellow light in the east, quivered. The walls bulged. The whole great ruinous mass of stone and masonry changed shape like clay in running water, sank in upon itself, and with a roar and sudden storm of splinters and dust slid sideways and collapsed. The earth of the valley rippled and bucked; a kind of wave ran up the hillside, and a huge crack opened among the Tombstones, gaping on the blackness underneath, oozing dust like grey smoke. The stones that still stood upright toppled into it and were swallowed. Then with a crash that seemed to echo off the sky itself, the raw black lips of the crack closed together; and the hills shook once, and grew still.

She looked from the horror of earthquake to the man beside her, whose face she had never seen by daylight. "You held it back," she said, and her voice piped like the wind in a reed, after that mighty bellowing and crying of the earth. "You held back the earthquake, the anger of the dark."

"We must go on," he said, turning away from the sunrise and the ruined Tombs. "I am tired, I am cold. . . ." He stumbled as they went, and she took his arm. Neither could go faster than a dragging walk. Slowly, like two tiny spiders on a great wall, they toiled up the immense slope of the hill, until at the top they stood on dry ground yellowed by the rising sun and streaked with the long, sparse shadows of the sage. Before them the western mountains stood, their feet purple, their upper slopes gold. The two paused a moment, then passed over the crest of the hill, out of sight of the Place of the Tombs, and were gone.

Chapter 11

The Western Mountains

Tenar woke, struggling up from bad dreams, out of places where she had walked so long that all the flesh had fallen from her and she could see the double white bones of her arms glimmer faintly in the dark. She opened her eyes to a golden light, and smelled the pungency of sage. A sweetness came into her as she woke, a pleasure that filled her slowly and wholly till it overflowed, and she sat up, stretching her arms out from the black sleeves of her robe, and looked about her in unquestioning delight.

It was evening. The sun was down behind the mountains that loomed close and high to westward, but its afterglow filled all earth and sky: a vast, clear, wintry sky, a vast, barren, golden land of mountains and wide valleys. The wind was down. It was cold, and absolutely silent. Nothing moved. The leaves of the sagebushes nearby were dry and grey, the stalks of tiny dried-up desert herbs prickled her hand. The huge silent glory of light burned on every twig and withered leaf and stem, on the hills, in the air.

She looked to her left and saw the man lying on the desert ground, his cloak pulled round him, one arm under his head, fast asleep. His face in sleep was stern, almost frowning; but his left hand lay relaxed on the dirt, beside a small thistle that still bore its ragged cloak of grey fluff and its tiny defense of spikes and spines. The man and the small desert thistle; the thistle and the sleeping man. . . .

He was one whose power was akin to, and as strong as, the Old Powers of the earth; one who talked with dragons, and held off earthquakes with his word. And there he lay asleep on the dirt, with a little thistle growing by his hand. It was very strange. Living, being in the world, was a much greater and stranger thing than she had ever dreamed. The glory of the sky touched his dusty hair, and turned the thistle gold for a little while.

The light was slowly fading. As it did so, the cold seemed to grow intenser

minute by minute. Tenar got up and began to gather dry sagebrush, picking up fallen twigs, breaking off the tough branches that grew as gnarled and massive, in their scale, as the limbs of oaks. They had stopped here about noon, when it was warm, and they could go no farther for weariness. A couple of stunted junipers, and the westward slope of the ridge they had just descended, had offered shelter enough; they had drunk a little water from the flask, and lain down, and gone to sleep.

There was a litter of larger branches under the little trees, which she gathered. Scooping out a pit in an angle of earth-embedded rocks, she built up a fire, and lit it with her flint and steel. The tinder of sage leaves and twigs caught at once. Dry branches bloomed into rosy flame, scented with resin. Now it seemed quite dark, all around the fire; and the stars were coming out again in the tremendous sky.

The snap and crack of the flames roused the sleeper. He sat up, rubbing his hands over his grimy face, and at last got up stiffly and came close to the fire.

"I wonder—" he said sleepily.

"I know, but we can't last the night here without a fire. It gets too cold." After a minute she added, "Unless you have some magic that would keep us warm, or that would hide the fire. . . ."

He sat down by the fire, his feet almost in it, his arms round his knees. "Brr," he said. "A fire is much better than magic. I've put a little illusion about us here; if someone comes by, we might look like sticks and stones to him. What do you think? Will they be following us?"

"I fear it, yet I don't think they will. No one but Kossil knew of your being there. Kossil, and Manan. And they are dead. Surely she was in the Hall when it fell. She was waiting at the trapdoor. And the others, the rest, they must think that I was in the Hall or the Tombs, and was crushed in the earthquake." She too put her arms round her knees, and shuddered. "I hope the other buildings didn't fall. It was hard to see from the hill, there was so much dust. Surely all the temples and houses didn't fall, the Big House where all the girls sleep."

"I think not. It was the Tombs that devoured themselves. I saw a gold roof of some temple as we turned away; it still stood. And there were figures down the hill, people running."

"What will they say, what will they think. . . . Poor Penthe! She might have to become the High Priestess of the Godking now. And it was always she who wanted to run away. Not I. Maybe now she'll run away." Tenar smiled. There was a joy in her that no thought nor dread could darken, that same sure joy that had risen in

her, waking in the golden light. She opened her bag and took out two small, flat loaves; she handed one across the fire to Ged, and bit into the other. The bread was tough, and sour, and very good to eat.

They munched together in silence awhile.

"How far are we from the sea?"

"It took me two nights and two days coming. It'll take us longer going."

"I'm strong," she said.

"You are. And valiant. But your companion's tired," he said with a smile. "And we haven't any too much bread."

"Will we find water?"

"Tomorrow, in the mountains."

"Can you find food for us?" she asked, rather vaguely and timidly.

"Hunting takes time, and weapons."

"I meant, with, you know, spells."

"I can call a rabbit," he said, poking the fire with a twisted stick of juniper. "The rabbits are coming out of their holes all around us, now. Evening's their time. I could call one by name, and he'd come. But would you catch and skin and broil a rabbit that you'd called to you thus? Perhaps if you were starving. But it would be a breaking of trust, I think."

"Yes. I thought, perhaps you could just . . ."

"Summon up a supper," he said. "Oh, I could. On golden plates, if you like. But that's illusion, and when you eat illusions you end up hungrier than before. It's about as nourishing as eating your own words." She saw his white teeth flash a moment in the firelight.

"Your magic is peculiar," she said, with a little dignity of equals, Priestess addressing Mage. "It appears to be useful only for large matters."

He laid more wood on the fire, and it flared up on a juniper-scented fireworks of sparks and crackles.

"Can you really call a rabbit?" Tenar inquired suddenly.

"Do you want me to?"

She nodded.

He turned away from the fire and said softly into the immense and starlit dark, *"Kebbo . . . O kebbo . . ."*

Silence. No sound. No motion. Only presently, at the very edge of the flickering firelight, a round eye like a pebble of jet, very near the ground. A curve of furry back; an ear, long, alert, upraised.

Ged spoke again. The ear flicked, gained a sudden partner-ear out of the shadow; then as the little beast turned Tenar saw it entire for an instant, the small, soft, lithe hop of it returning unconcerned to its business in the night.

"Ah!" she said, letting out her breath. "That's lovely." Presently she asked, "Could I do that?"

"Well—"

"It is a secret," she said at once, dignified again.

"The rabbit's *name* is a secret. At least, one should not use it lightly, for no reason. But what is not a secret, but rather a gift, or a mystery, do you see, is the power of calling."

"Oh," she said, "that you have. I know!" There was a passion in her voice, not hidden by pretended mockery. He looked at her and did not answer.

He was indeed still worn out by his struggle against the Nameless Ones; he had spent his strength in the quaking tunnels. Though he had won, he had little spirit left for exultation. He soon curled up again, as near the fire as he could get, and slept.

Tenar sat feeding the fire and watching the blaze of the winter constellations from horizon to horizon until her head grew giddy with splendor and silence, and she dozed off.

They both woke. The fire was dead. The stars she had watched were now far over the mountains and new ones had risen in the east. It was the cold that woke them, the dry cold of the desert night, the wind like a knife of ice. A veil of cloud was coming over the sky from the southwest.

The gathered firewood was almost gone. "Let's walk," Ged said, "it's not long till dawn." His teeth chattered so that she could hardly understand him. They set out, climbing the long slow slope westward. The bushes and rocks showed black in starlight, and it was as easy to walk as in the day. After a cold first while, the walking warmed them; they stopped crouching and shivering, and began to go easier. So by sunrise they were on the first rise of the western mountains, which had walled in Tenar's life till then.

They stopped in a grove of trees whose golden, quivering leaves still clung to the boughs. He told her they were aspens; she knew no trees but juniper, and the sickly poplars by the river-springs, and the forty apple trees of the orchard of the Place. A small bird among the aspens said "dee, dee," in a small voice. Under the trees ran a stream, narrow but powerful, shouting, muscular over its rocks and falls, too hasty to freeze. Tenar was almost afraid of it. She was used to the desert where

things are silent and move slowly: sluggish rivers, shadows of clouds, vultures circling.

They divided a piece of bread and a last crumbling bit of cheese for breakfast, rested a little, and went on.

By evening they were up high. It was overcast and windy, freezing weather. They camped in the valley of another stream, where there was plenty of wood, and this time built up a sturdy fire of logs by which they could keep fairly warm.

Tenar was happy. She had found a squirrel's cache of nuts, exposed by the falling of a hollow tree: a couple of pounds of fine walnuts and a smooth-shelled kind that Ged, not knowing the Kargish name, called *ubir*. She cracked them one by one between a flat stone and a hammerstone, and handed every second nutmeat to the man.

"I wish we could stay here," she said, looking down at the windy, twilit valley between the hills. "I like this place."

"This is a good place," he agreed.

"People would never come here."

"Not often. . . . I was born in the mountains," he said, "on the Mountain of Gont. We shall pass it, sailing to Havnor, if we take the northern way. It's beautiful to see it in winter, rising all white out of the sea, like a greater wave. My village was by just such a stream as this one. Where were you born, Tenar?"

"In the north of Atuan, in Entat, I think. I can't remember it."

"They took you so young?"

"I was five. I remember a fire on a hearth, and . . . nothing else."

He rubbed his jaw, which though it had acquired a sparse beard, was at least clean; despite the cold, both of them had washed in the mountain streams. He rubbed his jaw and looked thoughtful and severe. She watched him, and never could she have said what was in her heart as she watched him, in the firelight, in the mountain dusk.

"What are you going to do in Havnor?" he said, asking the question of the fire, not of her. "You are—more than I had realized—truly reborn."

She nodded, smiling a little. She felt newborn.

"You should learn the language, at least."

"Your language?"

"Yes."

"I'd like to."

"Well, then. This is *kabat*," and he tossed a little stone into the lap of her black

robe.

"Kabat. Is that in the dragon-tongue?"

"No, no. You don't want to work spells, you want to talk with other men and women!"

"But what is a pebble in the dragon's tongue?"

"Tolk," he said. "But I am not making you my apprentice sorcerer. I'm teaching you the language people speak in the Archipelago, the Inner Lands. I had to learn your language before I came here."

"You speak it oddly."

"No doubt. Now, *arkemmi kabat*," and he held out his hands for her to give him the pebble.

"Must I go to Havnor?" she said.

"Where else would you go, Tenar?"

She hesitated.

"Havnor is a beautiful city," he said. "And you bring it the ring, the sign of peace, the lost treasure. They'll welcome you in Havnor as a princess. They'll do you honor for the great gift you bring them, and bid you welcome, and make you welcome. They are a noble and generous people in that city. They'll call you the White Lady because of your fair skin, and they'll love you the more because you are so young. And because you are beautiful. You'll have a hundred dresses like that one I showed you by illusion, but real ones. You'll meet with praise, and gratitude, and love. You who have known nothing but solitude and envy and the dark."

"There was Manan," she said, defensive, her mouth trembling just a little. "He loved me and was kind to me, always. He protected me as well as he knew how, and I killed him for it; he fell into the black pit. I don't want to go to Havnor. I don't want to go there. I want to stay here."

"Here—in Atuan?"

"In the mountains. Where we are now."

"Tenar," he said in his grave, quiet voice, "we'll stay then. I haven't my knife, and if it snows it will be hard. But so long as we can find food—"

"No. I know we can't stay. I'm merely being foolish," Tenar said, and got up, scattering walnut shells, to lay new wood on the fire. She stood thin and very straight in her torn, dirt-stained gown and cloak of black. "All I know is of no use now," she said, "and I haven't learned anything else. I will try to learn."

Ged looked away, wincing as if in pain.

Next day they crossed the summit of the tawny range. In the pass a hard wind blew, with snow in it, stinging and blinding. It was not until they had come down a long way on the other side, out from under the snow clouds of the peaks, that Tenar saw the land beyond the mountain wall. It was all green—green of pines, of grasslands, of sown fields and fallows. Even in the dead of winter, when the thickets were bare and the forests full of grey boughs, it was a green land, humble and mild. They looked down on it from a high, rocky slant of the mountainside. Wordless, Ged pointed to the west, where the sun was getting low behind a thick cream and roil of clouds. The sun itself was hidden, but there was a glitter on the horizon, almost like the dazzle of the crystal walls of the Undertomb, a kind of joyous shimmering off on the edge of the world.

"What is that?" the girl said, and he: "The sea."

Shortly afterward, she saw a less wonderful thing than that, but wonderful enough. They came on a road, and followed it; and it brought them by dusk into a village: ten or a dozen houses strung along the road. She looked at her companion in alarm when she realized they were coming among men. She looked, and did not see him. Beside her, in Ged's clothing, and with his gait, and in his shoes, strode another man. He had a white skin, and no beard. He glanced at her; his eyes were blue. He winked.

"Will I fool 'em?" he said. "How are your clothes?"

She looked down at herself. She had on a countrywoman's brown skirt and jacket, and a large red woolen shawl.

"Oh," she said, stopping short. "Oh, you are—you *are* Ged!" As she said his name she saw him perfectly clearly, the dark, scarred face she knew, the dark eyes; yet there stood the milk-faced stranger.

"Don't say my true name before others. Nor will I say yours. We are brother and sister, come from Tenacbah. And I think I'll ask for a bite of supper if I see a kindly face." He took her hand and they entered the village.

They left it next morning with full stomachs, after a pleasant sleep in a hayloft.

"Do Mages often beg?" asked Tenar, on the road between green fields, where goats and little spotted cattle grazed.

"Why do you ask?"

"You seemed used to begging. In fact you were good at it."

"Well, yes. I've begged all my life, if you look at it that way. Wizards don't own much, you know. In fact nothing but their staff and clothing, if they wander. They

are received and given food and shelter, by most people, gladly. They do make some return."

"What return?"

"Well, that woman in the village. I cured her goats."

"What was wrong with them?"

"They both had infected udders. I used to herd goats when I was a boy."

"Did you tell her you'd cured them?"

"No. How could I? Why should I?"

After a pause she said, "I see your magic is not good only for large things."

"Hospitality," he said, "kindness to a stranger, that's a very large thing. Thanks are enough, of course. But I was sorry for the goats."

In the afternoon they came by a large town. It was built of clay brick, and walled round in the Kargish fashion, with overhanging battlements, watchtowers at the four corners, and a single gate, under which drovers were herding a big flock of sheep. The red tile roofs of a hundred or more houses poked up over the walls of yellowish brick. At the gate stood two guards in the red-plumed helmets of the Godking's service. Tenar had seen men in such helmets come, once a year or so, to the Place, escorting offerings of slaves or money to the Godking's temple. When she told Ged that, as they passed by outside the walls, he said, "I saw them too, as a boy. They came raiding to Gont. They came into my village, to plunder it. But they were driven off. And there was a battle down by Armouth, on the shore; many men were killed, hundreds, they say. Well, perhaps now that the ring is rejoined and the Lost Rune remade, there will be no more such raiding and killing between the Kargish Empire and the Inner Lands."

"It would be foolish if such things went on," said Tenar. "What would the Godking ever do with so many slaves?"

Her companion appeared to ponder this awhile. "If the Kargish lands defeated the Archipelago, you mean?"

She nodded.

"I don't think that would be likely to happen."

"But look how strong the Empire is—that great city, with its walls, and all its men. How could your lands stand against them, if they attacked?"

"That is not a very big city," he said cautiously and gently. "I too would have thought it tremendous, when I was new from my mountain. But there are many, many cities in Earthsea, among which this is only a town. There are many, many lands. You will see them, Tenar."

She said nothing. She trudged along the road, her face set.

“It is marvelous to see them: the new lands rising from the sea as your boat comes toward them. The farmlands and forests, the cities with their harbors and palaces, the marketplaces where they sell everything in the world.”

She nodded. She knew he was trying to hearten her, but she had left joy up in the mountains, in the twilit valley of the stream. There was a dread in her now that grew and grew. All that lay ahead of her was unknown. She knew nothing but the desert and the Tombs. What good was that? She knew the turnings of a ruined maze, she knew the dances danced before a fallen altar. She knew nothing of forests, or cities, or the hearts of men.

She said suddenly, “Will you stay with me there?”

She did not look at him. He was in his illusory disguise, a white-skinned Kargish countryman, and she did not like to see him so. But his voice was unchanged, the same voice that had spoken in the darkness of the Labyrinth.

He was slow to answer. “Tenar, I go where I am sent. I follow my calling. It has not yet let me stay in any land for long. Do you see that? I do what I must do. Where I go, I must go alone. So long as you need me, I’ll be with you in Havnor. And if you ever need me again, call me. I will come. I would come from my grave if you called me, Tenar! But I cannot stay with you.”

She said nothing. After a while he said, “You will not need me long, there. You will be happy.”

She nodded, accepting, silent.

They went on side by side toward the sea.

Chapter 12

Voyage

He had hidden his boat in a cave on the side of a great rocky headland, Cloud Cape it was called by the villagers nearby, one of whom gave them a bowl of fish stew for their supper. They made their way down the cliffs to the beach in the last light of the grey day. The cave was a narrow crack that went back into the rock for about thirty feet; its sandy floor was damp, for it lay just above the high-tide mark. Its opening was visible from sea, and Ged said they should not light a fire lest the night-fishermen out in their small craft along shore should see it and be curious. So they lay miserably on the sand, which seemed so soft between the fingers and was rock-hard to the tired body. And Tenar listened to the sea, a few yards below the cave mouth, crashing and sucking and booming on the rocks, and the thunder of it down the beach eastward for miles. Over and over and over it made the same sounds, yet never quite the same. It never rested. On all the shores of all the lands in all the world, it heaved itself in these unresting waves, and never ceased, and never was still. The desert, the mountains: they stood still. They did not cry out forever in a great, dull voice. The sea spoke forever, but its language was foreign to her. She did not understand.

In the first grey light, when the tide was low, she roused from uneasy sleep and saw the wizard go out of the cave. She watched him walk, barefoot and with belted cloak, on the black-haired rocks below, seeking something. He came back, darkening the cave as he entered. "Here," he said, holding out a handful of wet, hideous things like purple rocks with orange lips.

"What are they?"

"Mussels, off the rocks. And those two are oysters, even better. Look—like this." With the little dagger from her keyring, which she had lent him up in the mountains, he opened a shell and ate the orange mussel with seawater as its sauce.

"You don't even cook it? You ate it alive!"

She would not look at him while he, shamefaced but undeterred, went on opening and eating the shellfish one by one.

When he was done, he went back into the cave to the boat, which lay prow forward, kept from the sand by several long driftwood logs. Tenar had looked at the boat the night before, mistrustfully and without comprehension. It was much larger than she had thought boats were, three times her own length. It was full of objects she did not know the use of, and it looked dangerous. On either side of its nose (which is what she called the prow) an eye was painted; and in her half-sleep she had constantly felt the boat staring at her.

Ged rummaged about inside it a moment and came back with something: a packet of hard bread, well wrapped to keep dry. He offered her a large piece.

"I'm not hungry."

He looked into her sullen face.

He put the bread away, wrapping it as before, and then sat down in the mouth of the cave. "About two hours till the tide's back in," he said. "Then we can go. You had a restless night, why don't you sleep now."

"I'm not sleepy."

He made no answer. He sat there, in profile to her, cross-legged in the dark arch of rocks; the shining heave and movement of the sea was beyond him as she watched him from deeper in the cave. He did not move. He was still as the rocks themselves. Stillness spread out from him, like rings from a stone dropped in water. His silence became not absence of speech, but a thing in itself, like the silence of the desert.

After a long time Tenar got up and came to the mouth of the cave. He did not move. She looked down at his face. It was as if cast in copper—rigid, the dark eyes not shut, but looking down, the mouth serene.

He was as far beyond her as the sea.

Where was he now, on what way of the spirit did he walk? She could never follow him.

He had made her follow him. He had called her by her name, and she had come crouching to his hand, as the little wild desert rabbit had come to him out of the dark. And now that he had the ring, now that the Tombs were in ruin and their priestess forsworn forever, now he didn't need her, and went away where she could not follow. He would not stay with her. He had fooled her, and would leave her desolate.

She reached down and with one swift gesture plucked from his belt the little

steel dagger she had given him. He moved no more than a robbed statue.

The dagger blade was only four inches long, sharp on one side; it was the miniature of a sacrificial knife. It was part of the garments of the Priestess of the Tombs, who must wear it along with the ring of keys, and a belt of horsehair, and other items some of which had no known purpose. She had never used the dagger for anything, except that in one of the dances performed at dark of the moon she would throw and catch it before the Throne. She had liked that dance; it was a wild one, with no music but the drumming of her own feet. She had used to cut her fingers, practicing it, till she got the trick of catching the knife handle every time. The little blade was sharp enough to cut a finger to the bone, or to cut the arteries of a throat. She would serve her Masters still, though they had betrayed her and forsaken her. They would guide and drive her hand in the last act of darkness. They would accept the sacrifice.

She turned upon the man, the knife held back in her right hand behind her hip. As she did so he raised his face slowly and looked at her. He had the look of one come from a long way off, one who has seen terrible things. His face was calm but full of pain. As he gazed up at her and seemed to see her more and more clearly, his expression cleared. At last he said, "Tenar," as if in greeting, and reached up his hand to touch the band of pierced and carven silver on her wrist. He did this as if reassuring himself, trustingly. He did not pay attention to the dagger in her hand. He looked away, at the waves, which heaved deep over the rocks below, and said with effort, "It's time. . . . Time we were going."

At the sound of his voice the fury left her. She was afraid.

"You'll leave them behind, Tenar. You're going free now," he said, getting up with sudden vigor. He stretched, and belted his cloak tight again. "Give me a hand with the boat. She's up on logs, for rollers. That's it, push . . . again. There, there, enough. Now be ready to hop in when I say 'hop.' This is a tricky place to launch from—once more. There! In you go!"—and leaping in after her, he caught her as she overbalanced, sat her down in the bottom of the boat, braced his legs wide, and standing to the oars sent the boat shooting out on an ebb wave over the rocks, out past the roaring foam-drenched head of the cape, and so to sea.

He shipped the oars when they were well away from shoal water, and stepped the mast. The boat looked very small, now that she was inside it and the sea was outside it.

He put up the sail. All the gear had a look of long, hard use, though the dull red sail was patched with great care and the boat was as clean and trim as could be.

They were like their master: they had gone far, and had not been treated gently.

"Now," he said, "now we're away, now we're clear, we're clean gone, Tenar. Do you feel it?"

She did feel it. A dark hand had let go its lifelong hold upon her heart. But she did not feel joy, as she had in the mountains. She put her head down in her arms and cried, and her cheeks were salt and wet. She cried for the waste of her years in bondage to a useless evil. She wept in pain, because she was free.

What she had begun to learn was the weight of liberty. Freedom is a heavy load, a great and strange burden for the spirit to undertake. It is not easy. It is not a gift given, but a choice made, and the choice may be a hard one. The road goes upward toward the light; but the laden traveler may never reach the end of it.

Ged let her cry, and said no word of comfort; nor when she was done with tears and sat looking back toward the low blue land of Atuan, did he speak. His face was stern and alert, as if he were alone; he saw to the sail and the steering, quick and silent, looking always ahead.

In the afternoon he pointed rightward of the sun, toward which they now sailed. "That is Karego-At," he said, and Tenar following his gesture saw the distant loom of hills like clouds, the great island of the Godking. Atuan was out of sight behind them. Her heart was very heavy. The sun beat in her eyes like a hammer of gold.

Supper was dry bread, and dried smoked fish, which tasted vile to Tenar, and water from the boat's cask, which Ged had filled at a stream on Cloud Cape beach the evening before. The winter night came down soon and cold upon the sea. Far off to northward they saw for a while the tiny glitter of lights, yellow firelight in distant villages on the shore of Karego-At. These vanished in a haze that rose up from the ocean, and they were alone in the starless night over deep water.

She had curled up in the stern; Ged lay down in the prow, with the water cask for a pillow. The boat moved on steadily, the low swells slapping her sides a little, though the wind was only a faint breath from the south. Out here, away from the rocky shores, the sea too was silent; only as it touched the boat did it whisper a little.

"If the wind is from the south," Tenar said, whispering because the sea did, "doesn't the boat sail north?"

"Yes, unless we tack. But I've put the mage-wind in her sail, to the west. By tomorrow morning we should be out of Kargish waters. Then I'll let her go by the world's wind."

"Does it steer itself?"

"Yes," Ged replied with gravity, "given the proper instructions. She doesn't need many. She's been in the Open Sea, beyond the farthest isle of the East Reach; she's been to Selidor where Erreth-Akbe died, in the farthest West. She's a wise crafty boat, my *Lookfar*. You can trust her."

In the boat moved by magic over the great deep, the girl lay looking up into the dark. All her life she had looked into the dark; but this was a vaster darkness, this night on the ocean. There was no end to it. There was no roof. It went on out beyond the stars. No earthly Powers moved it. It had been before light, and would be after. It had been before life, and would be after. It went on beyond evil.

In the dark, she spoke: "The little island, where the talisman was given you, is that in this sea?"

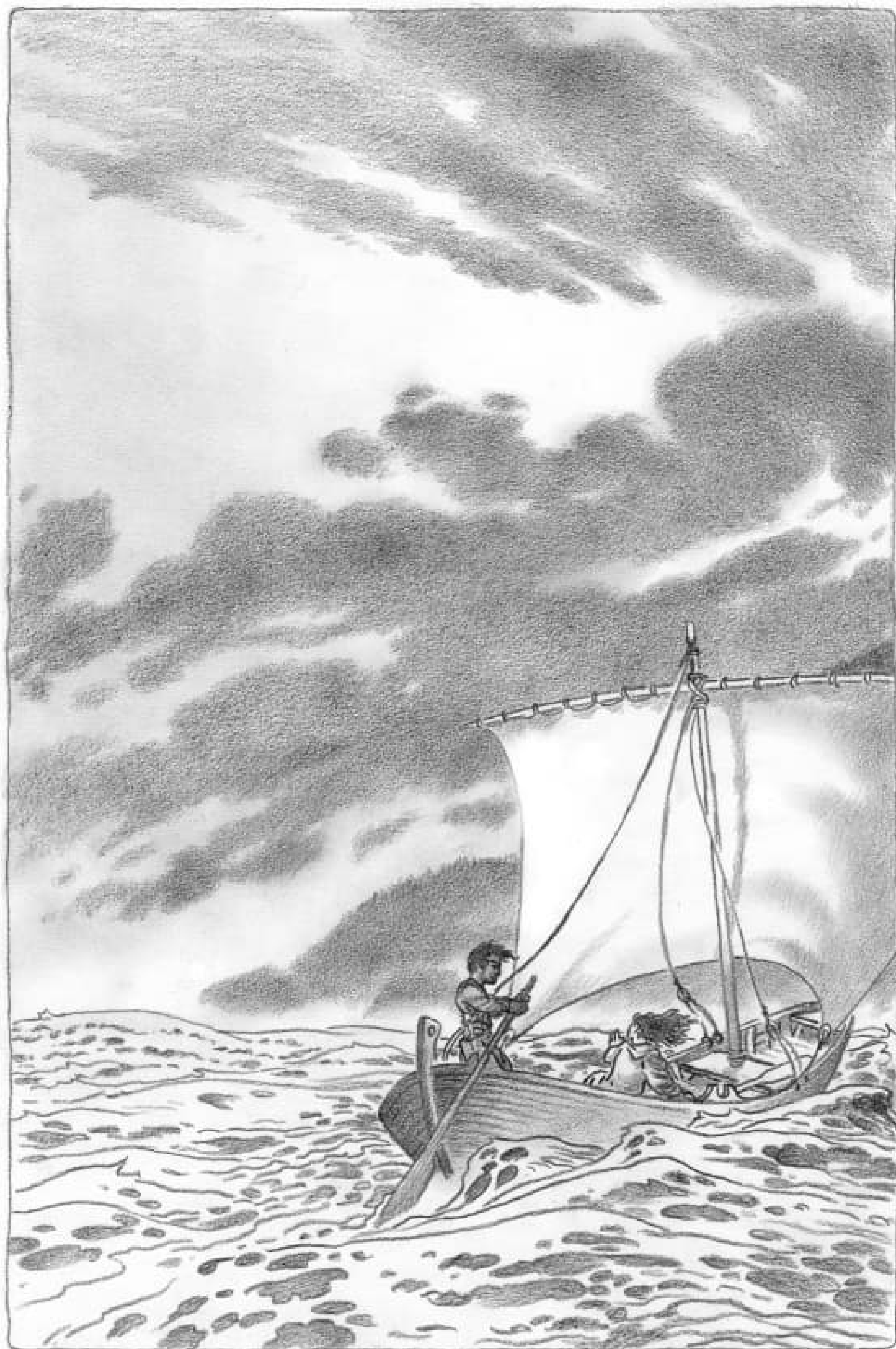
"Yes," his voice answered out of the dark. "Somewhere. To the south, perhaps. I could not find it again."

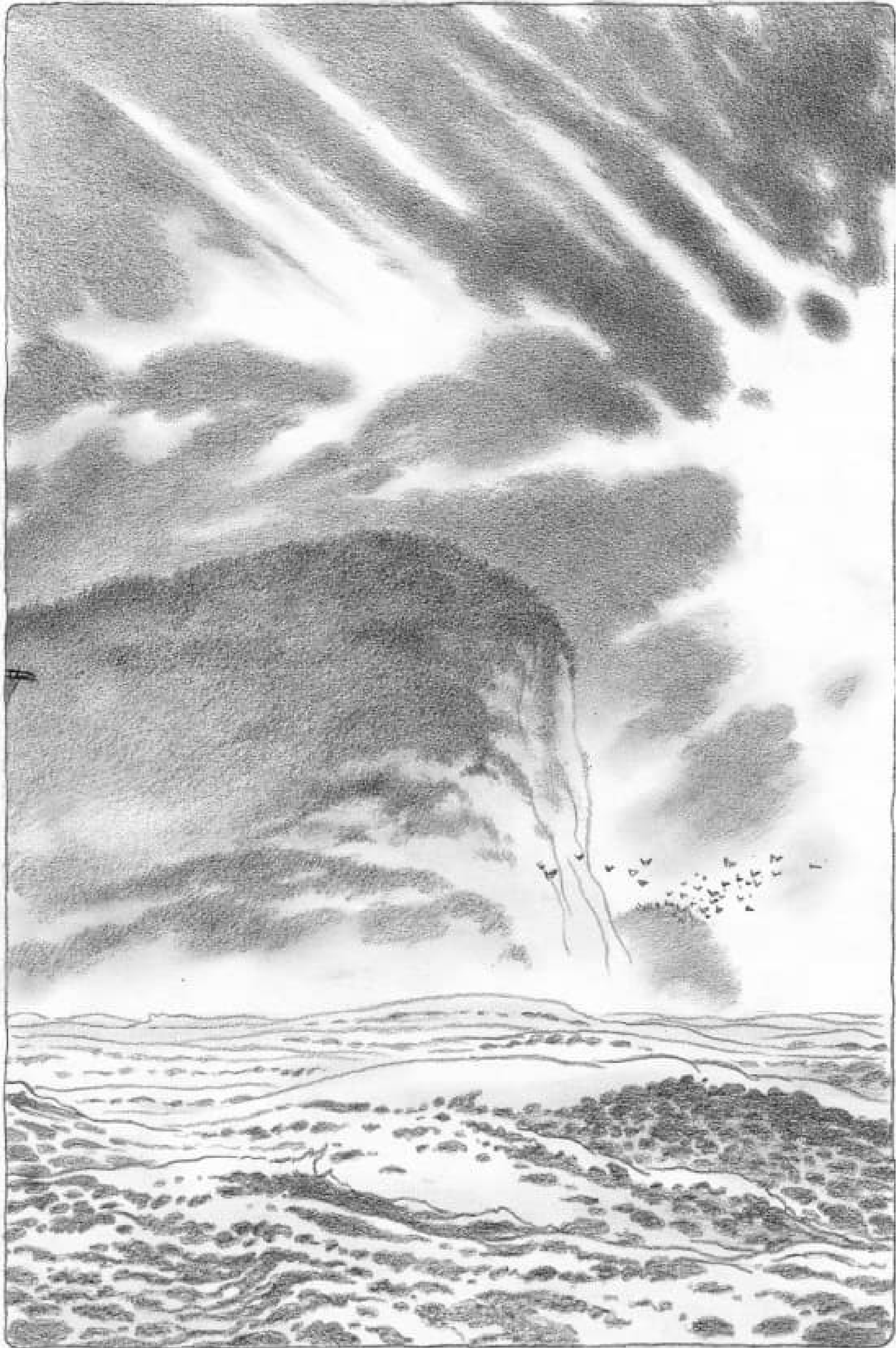
"I know who she was, the old woman who gave you the ring."

"You know?"

"I was told the tale. It is part of the knowledge of the First Priestess. Thar told it to me, first when Kossil was there, then more fully when we were alone; it was the last time she talked to me before she died. There was a noble house in Hupun who fought against the rise of the High Priests in Awabath. The founder of the house was King Thoreg, and among the treasures he left his descendants was the half-ring, which Erreth-Akbe had given him."

"That indeed is told in the *Deed of Erreth-Akbe*. It says . . . in your tongue it says, 'When the ring was broken, half remained in the hand of the High Priest Intathin, and half in the hero's hand. And the High Priest sent the broken half to the Nameless, to the Ancient of the Earth in Atuan, and it went into the dark, into the lost places. But Erreth-Akbe gave the broken half into the hands of the maiden Tiarath, daughter of the wise king, saying: "Let it remain in the light, in the maiden's dowry, let it remain in this land until it be rejoined." So spoke the hero before he sailed to the west.'"





"So it must have gone from daughter to daughter of that house, over all the years. It was not lost, as your people thought. But as the High Priests made themselves into the Priest-Kings, and then when the Priest-Kings made the Empire and began to call themselves Godkings, all this time the house of Thoreg grew poorer and weaker. And at last, so Thar told me, there were only two of the lineage of Thoreg left, little children, a boy and a girl. The Godking in Awabath then was the father of him who rules now. He had the children stolen from their palace in Hupun. There was a prophecy that one of the descendants of Thoreg of Hupun would bring about the fall of the Empire in the end, and that frightened him. He had the children stolen away, and taken to a lonely isle somewhere out in the middle of the sea, and left there with nothing but the clothes they wore and a little food. He feared to kill them by knife or strangling or poison; they were of kingly blood, and murder of kings brings a curse even on the gods. They were named Ensar and Anthil. It was Anthil who gave you the broken ring."

He was silent a long while. "So the story comes whole," he said at last, "even as the ring is made whole. But it is a cruel story, Tenar. The little children, that isle, the old man and woman I saw. . . . They scarcely knew human speech."

"I would ask you something."

"Ask."

"I do not wish to go to the Inner Lands, to Havnor. I do not belong there, in the great cities among foreign men. I do not belong to any land. I betrayed my own people. I have no people. And I have done a very evil thing. Put me alone on an island, as the king's children were left, on a lone isle where there are no people, where there is no one. Leave me, and take the ring to Havnor. It is yours, not mine. It has nothing to do with me. Nor have your people. Let me be by myself!"

Slowly, gradually, yet startling her, a light dawned like a small moonrise in the blackness before her: the wizardly light that came at his command. It clung to the end of his staff, which he held upright as he sat facing her in the prow. It lit the bottom of the sail, and the gunwales, and the planking, and his face, with a silvery glow. He was looking straight at her.

"What evil have you done, Tenar?"

"I ordered that three men be shut into a room beneath the Throne, and starved to death. They died of hunger and thirst. They died, and are buried there in the Undertomb. The Tombstones fell on their graves." She stopped.

"Is there more?"

"Manan."

"That death is on my soul."

"No. He died because he loved me, and was faithful. He thought he was protecting me. He held the sword above my neck. When I was little he was kind to me—when I cried—" She stopped again, for the tears rose hard in her, yet she would cry no more. Her hands were clenched on the black folds of her dress. "I was never kind to him," she said. "I will not go to Havnor. I will not go with you. Find some isle where no one comes, and put me there, and leave me. The evil must be paid for. I am *not* free."

The soft light, greyed by sea mist, glimmered between them.

"Listen, Tenar. Heed me. You were the vessel of evil. The evil is poured out. It is done. It is buried in its own tomb. You were never made for cruelty and darkness; you were made to hold light, as a lamp burning holds and gives its light. I found the lamp unlit; I won't leave it on some desert island like a thing found and cast away. I'll take you to Havnor and say to the princes of Earthsea, 'Look! In the place of darkness I found the light, her spirit. By her an old evil was brought to nothing. By her I was brought out of the grave. By her the broken was made whole, and where there was hatred there will be peace.'"

"I will not," Tenar said in agony. "I cannot. It's not true!"

"And after that," he went on quietly, "I'll take you away from the princes and the rich lords; for it's true that you have no place there. You are too young, and too wise. I'll take you to my own land, to Gont where I was born, to my old master Ogion. He's an old man now, a very great Mage, a man of quiet heart. They call him 'the Silent.' He lives in a small house on the great cliffs of Re Albi, high over the sea. He keeps some goats, and a garden patch. In autumn he goes wandering over the island, alone, in the forests, on the mountainsides, through the valleys of the rivers. I lived there once with him, when I was younger than you are now. I didn't stay long, I hadn't the sense to stay. I went off seeking evil, and sure enough I found it. . . . But you come escaping evil; seeking freedom; seeking silence for a while, until you find your own way. There you will find kindness and silence, Tenar. There the lamp will burn out of the wind awhile. Will you do that?"

The sea mist drifted grey between their faces. The boat lifted lightly on the long waves. Around them was the night and under them the sea.

"I will," she said with a long sigh. And after a long time, "Oh, I wish it were sooner . . . that we could go there now. . . ."

"It won't be long, little one."

"Will you come there, ever?"

“When I can I will come.”

The light had died away; it was all dark around them.

They came, after the sunrises and sunsets, the still days and the icy winds of their winter voyage, to the Inmost Sea. They sailed the crowded lanes among great ships, up the Ebavnor Straits and into the bay that lies locked in the heart of Havnor, and across the bay to Havnor Great Port. They saw the white towers, and all the city white and radiant in snow. The roofs of the bridges and the red roofs of the houses were snow-covered, and the rigging of the hundred ships in the harbor glittered with ice in the winter sun. News of their coming had run ahead of them, for *Lookfar*’s patched red sail was known in those seas; a great crowd had gathered on the snowy quays, and colored pennants cracked above the people in the bright, cold wind.

Tenar sat in the stern, erect, in her ragged cloak of black. She looked at the ring around her wrist, then at the crowded, many-colored shore and the palaces and the high towers. She lifted up her right hand, and sunlight flashed on the silver of the ring. A cheer went up, faint and joyous on the wind, over the restless water. Ged brought the boat in. A hundred hands reached to catch the rope he flung up to the mooring. He leapt up onto the pier and turned, holding out his hand to her. “Come!” he said smiling, and she rose, and came. Gravely she walked beside him up the white streets of Havnor, holding his hand, like a child coming home.

Afterword

People often don't believe me when I say that when I wrote *A Wizard of Earthsea* I had no plans beyond that book. But it's true. I know—it says on the first page of the first book that Ged is going to be a famous mage with songs and epics about him, a dragonlord, Archmage of Earthsea, which all seems to promise sequels; but I just put that there so the reader would know this was a world where magic was powerful, where there were dragons, the world of fantasy. It's good to get that sort of thing clear at the start. I also put it there so the reader (and I) could be sure that this rather unpromising kid did have a future.

I had no idea at all at that point what a dragonlord or an Archmage were. They sounded good. I could find out what they meant later, when I needed to.

In that book, my job was to get young Ged and his Shadow back together. I could leave him, then, ready to set off on his brilliant career. That's where many books about young people stop, after all. Most novels about falling in love don't tell about the marriage, and most novels about growing up don't tell about the grown-up.

So when I wrote the last words of the book—". . . before ever he sailed the Dragons' Run unscathed, or brought back the Ring of Erreth-Akbe from the Tombs of Atuan to Havnor, or came at last to Roke once more, as Archmage of all the islands of the world"—what was in my mind was not a teaser for a sequel, but only a resounding, echoing closure to a story told.

However . . .

A writer sometimes writes a message for herself, to be read when she begins to understand it.

After *A Wizard*, I wrote the science fiction novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*. When that was done, I thought *What next?* and looked around in my mind. There was Ged and his world, Earthsea, vivid and alive, ready to be explored further. And there was that interesting phrase about bringing a ring from the Tombs of Atuan. . . . Atuan was a Kargish island. I hadn't thought much about the Kargs.

Very different people from the Archipelagans. White-skinned barbarians, pirates, untrustworthy folk. But if you were a Karg, who might you be? Whom would you trust? Where would you live? What was Atuan like?

Now came the great, improbable impetus to the book: a road trip to southeastern Oregon, our first visit to Harney County, a high and lonesome land of mountains and great sagebrush plains, of pure skies, far distances, and silence. Coming back from there, after a two-day, weary, dusty drive with our three kids, I knew my novel would be set in that desert. In the car, when we weren't playing Signs Alphabet or singing "Forty-Nine Bottles," I began to dream my story. That land had given it to me. I am forever grateful.

The reason people don't believe that I didn't plan a trilogy from the start is that fantasy now suffers from endemic trilogitis (or the even more serious form of the disease, incurable seriesism). Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is largely responsible for this epidemic, since its six books were printed in three volumes, a trilogy. I expect Earthsea is also to blame, although it ended up as six volumes, too. . . . But when I started *The Tombs of Atuan*, I saw it, as well as I can recall, simply as a sequel.

And a change of gender. Ged would play a part in it, but the person whose story it was would be a girl. A girl who lived far from the cities of the Archipelago, in a remote desert land. A girl who could not seek power, as young Ged could, or find training in the use of it as he did, but who had power forced upon her. A girl whose name was not given to her by a kind teacher, but taken from her by a masked executioner.

The boy Ged, offered wisdom, refused it through his own pride and willfulness; the girl Tenar, given the arbitrary power of a goddess, was taught nothing about living her life as a human being.

When I was writing the story in 1969, I knew of no women heroes of heroic fantasy since those in the works of Ariosto and Tasso in the Renaissance. These days there are plenty, though I wonder about some of them. The women warriors of current fantasy epics—ruthless swordswomen with no domestic or sexual responsibility who gallop about slaughtering baddies—to me they look less like women than like boys in women's bodies in men's armor.

Be that as it may, when I wrote the book, it took more imagination than I had to create a girl character who, offered great power, could accept it as her right and due. Such a situation didn't then seem plausible to me. But since I was writing

about the people who in most societies have *not* been given much power—women—it seemed perfectly plausible to place my heroine in a situation that led her to question the nature and value of power itself.

The word *power* has two different meanings. There is *power to*: strength, gift, skill, art, the mastery of a craft, the authority of knowledge. And there is *power over*: rule, dominion, supremacy, might, mastery of slaves, authority over others.

Ged was offered both kinds of power. Tenar was offered only one.

Heroic fantasy descends to us from an archaic world. I hadn't yet thought much about that archaism. My story took place in the old hierarchy of society, the pyramidal power structure, probably military in origin, in which orders are given from above, with a single figure at the top. This is the world of *power over*, in which women have always been ranked low.

In such a world, I could put a girl at the heart of my story, but I couldn't give her a man's freedom, or chances equal to a man's chances. She couldn't be a hero in the hero-tale sense. Not even in a fantasy? No. Because to me, fantasy isn't wishful thinking, but a way of reflecting, and reflecting on reality. After all, even in a democracy, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, after forty years of feminist striving, the reality is that we live in a top-down power structure that was shaped by, and is still dominated by, men. Back in 1969, that reality seemed almost unshakable.

So I gave Tenar *power over*—dominion, even godhead—but it was a gift of which little good could come. The dark side of the world was what she had to learn, as Ged had to learn the darkness in his own heart.

In *A Wizard of Earthsea* there are hints that the Kargs don't practice magic, considering it evil, but that they are more closely in touch than Ged's people are with the Old Powers of the Earth. In the Archipelago, strong, active magic belongs almost entirely to men, witches being untrained and mistrusted; and the Old Powers are commonly described as misogynists describe women: obscure, dark, weak, and treacherous.

In *The Tombs of Atuan*, the Old Powers, the Nameless Ones, appear as mysterious, ominous, and yet inactive. Arha/Tenar is their priestess, the greatest of all priestesses, whom the Godking himself is supposed to obey: But what is her realm? A prison in the desert. Women guarded by eunuchs. Ancient tombstones, a half-ruined temple, an empty throne. A fearful underground labyrinth where prisoners are left to die of starvation and thirst, where only she can walk the maze,

where light must never come. She rules a dark, empty, useless realm. Her power imprisons her.

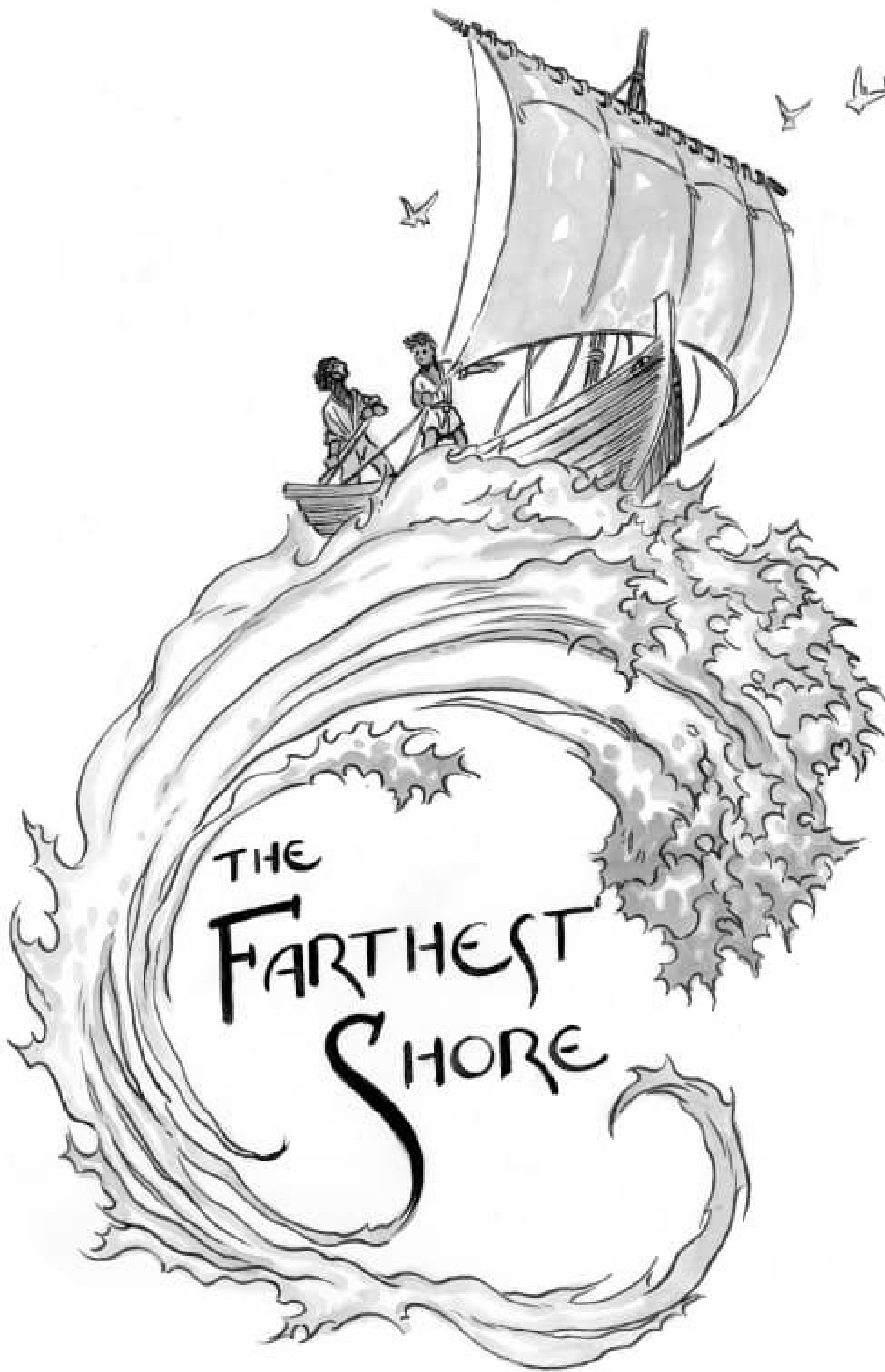
This isn't the rosy reassurance many novels at the time offered adolescents. It's a very bleak picture of what a girl may expect. Arha's life is dreary, unchanging, with almost no experience of kindness except from Manan the eunuch. The third chapter may be the cruelest, most hopeless passage in all the Earthsea books. By consenting to the death of "her" prisoners, Arha locks the prison door upon herself. Her whole life will be lived in a trap.

She is only able to escape when Ged becomes her prisoner. She, for the first time, exerts her *power to*—her freedom of choice. She chooses to let him live. So she gives herself the chance to see that, if she can free him, she can free herself.

Some people have read the story as supporting the idea that a woman needs a man in order to do anything at all (some nodded approvingly, others growled and hissed). Certainly Arha/Tenar would better satisfy feminist idealists if she did everything all by herself. But the truth as I saw it, and as I established it in the novel, was that she couldn't. My imagination wouldn't provide a scenario where she could, because my heart told me incontrovertibly that neither gender could go far without the other. So, in my story, neither the woman nor the man can get free without the other. Not in that trap. Each has to ask for the other's help and learn to trust and depend on the other. A large lesson, a new knowledge for both these strong, willful, lonely souls.

Rereading the book, more than forty years after I wrote it, I wonder about many of its elements. It was the first book I wrote with a woman as the true central character. Tenar's character and the events of the story came from deep within me, so deep that the subterranean and labyrinthine imagery, and a certain volcanic quality, are hardly to be wondered at. But the darkness, the cruelty, the vengefulness . . . After all, I could have just let them go free—why did I destroy the whole Place of the Tombs with an earthquake? It's a kind of huge suicide, the Nameless Ones annihilating their temple in a vast spasm of rage. Maybe it was the whole primitive, hateful idea of the feminine as dark, blind, weak, and evil that I saw shaking itself to pieces, imploding, crumbling into wreckage on a desert ground. And I rejoiced to see it fall. I still do.

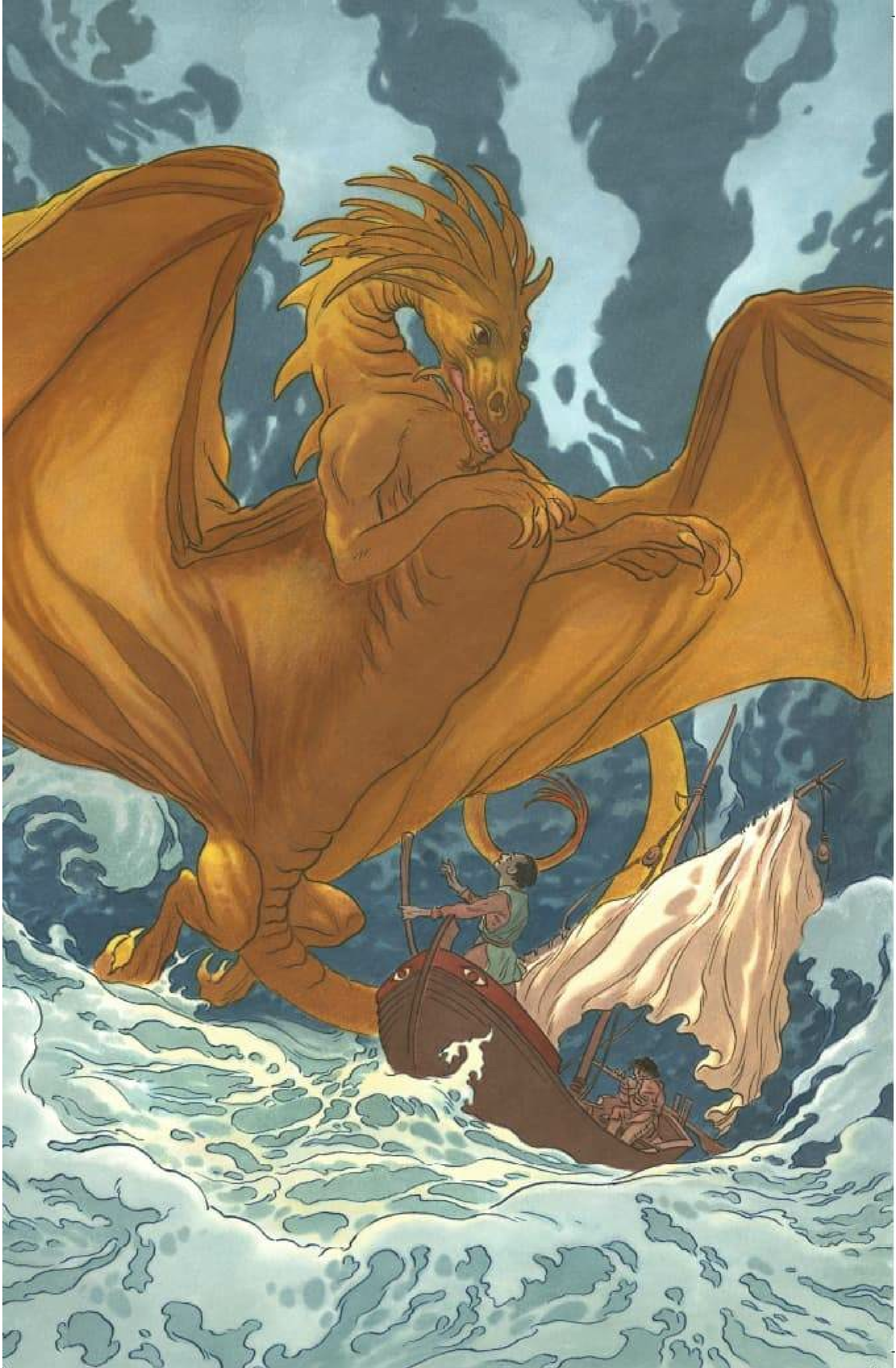
Years later, in the last three books of Earthsea, when I was able to continue Tenar's story and begin to think again about the Old Powers of the Earth, the nature of magic, and the history of Earthsea, both Tenar and I could see all those matters in a different light, under a larger, kinder sky.


THE
FARTHEST
SHORE

For Elisabeth,

Caroline,

and Theodore



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Afterword

Chapter 1

The Rowan Tree

In the court of the fountain the sun of March shone through young leaves of ash and elm, and water leapt and fell through shadow and clear light. About that roofless court stood four high walls of stone. Behind those were rooms and courts, passages, corridors, towers, and at last the heavy outmost walls of the Great House of Roke, which would stand any assault of war or earthquake or the sea itself, being built not only of stone, but of incontestable magic. For Roke is the Isle of the Wise, where the Art Magic is taught; and the Great House is the school and central place of wizardry; and the central place of the House is that small court far within the walls, where the fountain plays and the trees stand in rain or sun or starlight.

The tree nearest the fountain, a well-grown rowan, had humped and cracked the marble pavement with its roots. Veins of bright green moss filled the cracks, spreading up from the grassy plot around the basin. A boy sat there on the low hump of marble and moss, his gaze following the fall of the fountain's central jet. He was nearly a man, but still a boy; slender, dressed richly. His face might have been cast in golden bronze, it was so finely molded and so still.

Behind him, fifteen feet away perhaps, under the trees at the other end of the small central lawn, a man stood, or seemed to stand. It was hard to be certain in that flickering shift of shadow and warm light. Surely he was there, a man in white, standing motionless. As the boy watched the fountain, the man watched the boy. There was no sound or movement but the play of leaves and the play of the water and its continual song.

The man walked forward. A wind stirred the rowan tree and moved its newly opened leaves. The boy leapt to his feet, lithe and startled. He faced the man and bowed to him. "My Lord Archmage," he said.

The man stopped before him, a short, straight, vigorous figure in a hooded cloak of white wool. Above the folds of the laid-down hood his face was reddish-dark,

hawk-nosed, seamed on one cheek with old scars. The eyes were bright and fierce. Yet he spoke gently. "It's a pleasant place to sit, the Court of the Fountain," he said, and, forestalling the boy's apology, "You have traveled far and have not rested. Sit down again."

He knelt on the white rim of the basin and held out his hand to the ring of glittering drops that fell from the higher bowl of the fountain, letting the water run through his fingers. The boy sat down again on the humped tiles, and for a minute neither spoke.

"You are the son of the Prince of Enlad and the Enlades," the Archmage said, "heir of the Principality of Morred. There is no older heritage in all Earthsea, and none fairer. I have seen the orchards of Enlad in the spring, and the golden roofs of Berila. . . . How are you called?"

"I am called Arren."

"That would be a word in the dialect of your land. What is it in our common speech?"

The boy said, "Sword."

The Archmage nodded. There was silence again, and then the boy said, not boldly, but without timidity, "I had thought the Archmage knew all languages."

The man shook his head, watching the fountain.

"And all names. . . ."

"All names? Only Segoy who spoke the First Word, raising up the isles from the deep sea, knew all names. To be sure," and the bright, fierce gaze was on Arren's face, "if I needed to know your true name, I would know it. But there's no need. Arren I will call you; and I am Sparrowhawk. Tell me, how was your voyage here?"

"Too long."

"The winds blew ill?"

"The winds blew fair, but the news I bear is ill, Lord Sparrowhawk."

"Tell it, then," the Archmage said gravely, but like one yielding to a child's impatience; and while Arren spoke, he looked again at the crystal curtain of water drops falling from the upper basin into the lower, not as if he did not listen, but as if he listened to more than the boy's words.

"You know, my lord, that the prince my father is a wizardly man, being of the lineage of Morred, and having spent a year here on Roke in his youth. Some power he has and knowledge, though he seldom uses his arts, being concerned with the ruling and ordering of his realm, the governance of cities and matters of trade. The fleets of our island go out westward, even into the West Reach, trading for

sapphires and ox hides and tin, and early this winter a sea captain returned to our city Berila with a tale that came to my father's ears, so that he had the man sent for and heard him tell it." The boy spoke quickly, with assurance. He had been trained by civil, courtly people, and did not have the self-consciousness of the young.

"The sea captain said that on the isle of Narveduen, which is some five hundred miles west of us by the ship lanes, there was no more magic. Spells had no power there, he said, and the words of wizardry were forgotten. My father asked him if it was that all the sorcerers and witches had left that isle, and he answered, 'No: there were some there who had been sorcerers, but they cast no more spells, not even so much as a charm for kettle-mending or the finding of a lost needle.' And my father asked, 'Were not the folk of Narveduen dismayed?' And the sea captain said again, 'No, they seemed uncaring.' And indeed, he said, there was sickness among them, and their autumn harvest had been poor, and still they seemed careless. He said—I was there, when he spoke to the prince—he said, 'They were like sick men, like a man who has been told he must die within the year, and tells himself it is not true, and he will live forever. They go about,' he said, 'without looking at the world.' When other traders returned, they repeated the tale that Narveduen had become a poor land and had lost the arts of wizardry. But all this was mere tales of the Reach, which are always strange, and only my father gave it much thought.

"Then in the New Year, in the Festival of the Lambs that we hold in Enlad, when the shepherds' wives come into the city bringing the firstlings of the flocks, my father named the wizard Root to say the spells of increase over the lambs. But Root came back to our hall distressed and laid his staff down and said, 'My lord, I cannot say the spells.' My father questioned him, but he could say only, 'I have forgotten the words and the patterning.' So my father went to the marketplace and said the spells himself, and the festival was completed. But I saw him come home to the palace that evening, and he looked grim and weary, and he said to me, 'I said the words, but I do not know if they had meaning.' And indeed there's trouble among the flocks this spring, the ewes dying in birth, and many lambs born dead, and some are . . . deformed." The boy's easy, eager voice dropped; he winced as he said the word and swallowed. "I saw some of them," he said. There was a pause.

"My father believes that this matter, and the tale of Narveduen, show some evil at work in our part of the world. He desires the counsel of the Wise."

"That he sent you proves that his desire is urgent," said the Archmage. "You are his only son, and the voyage from Enlad to Roke is not short. Is there more to tell?"

"Only some old wives' tales from the hills."

"What do the old wives say?"

"That all the fortunes witches read in smoke and water pools tell of ill, and that their love-potions go amiss. But these are people without true wizardry."

"Fortune-telling and love-potions are not of much account, but old women are worth listening to. Well, your message will indeed be discussed by the Masters of Roke. But I do not know, Arren, what counsel they may give your father. For Enlad is not the first land from which such tidings have come."

Arren's trip from the north, down past the great isle Havnor and through the Inmost Sea to Roke, was his first voyage. Only in these last few weeks had he seen lands that were not his own homeland, become aware of distance and diversity, and recognized that there was a great world beyond the pleasant hills of Enlad, and many people in it. He was not yet used to thinking widely, and so it was a while before he understood. "Where else?" he asked then, a little dismayed. For he had hoped to bring a prompt cure home to Enlad.

"In the South Reach, first. Latterly even in the south of the Archipelago, in Wathort. There is no more magic done in Wathort, men say. It is hard to be sure. That land has long been rebellious and piratical, and to hear a Southern trader is to hear a liar, as they say. Yet the story is always the same: the springs of wizardry have run dry."

"But here on Roke—"

"Here on Roke we have felt nothing of this. We are defended here from storm and change and all ill chance. Too well defended, perhaps. Prince, what will you do now?"

"I shall go back to Enlad when I can bring my father some clear word of the nature of this evil and of its remedy."

Once more the Archmage looked at him, and this time, for all his training, Arren looked away. He did not know why, for there was nothing unkind in the gaze of those dark eyes. They were impartial, calm, compassionate.

All in Enlad looked up to his father, and he was his father's son. No man had ever looked at him thus, not as Arren, Prince of Enlad, son of the Ruling Prince, but as Arren alone. He did not like to think that he feared the Archmage's gaze, but he could not meet it. It seemed to enlarge the world yet again around him, and now not only Enlad sank to insignificance, but he himself, so that in the eyes of the Archmage he was only a small figure, very small, in a vast scene of sea-girt lands over which hung darkness.

He sat picking at the vivid moss that grew in the cracks of the marble flagstones,

and presently he said, hearing his voice, which had deepened only in the last couple of years, sound thin and husky: "And I shall do as you bid me."

"Your duty is to your father, not to me," the Archmage said.

His eyes were still on Arren, and now the boy looked up. As he had made his act of submission he had forgotten himself, and now he saw the Archmage: the greatest wizard of all Earthsea, the man who had capped the Black Well of Fundaur and won the Ring of Erreth-Akbe from the Tombs of Atuan and built the deep-founded sea wall of Nepp; the sailor who knew the seas from Astowell to Selidor; the only living Dragonlord. There he knelt beside a fountain, a short man and not young, a quiet-voiced man, with eyes as deep as evening.

Arren scrambled up from sitting and knelt down formally on both knees, all in haste. "My lord," he said, stammering, "let me serve you!"

His self-assurance was gone, his face was flushed, his voice shook.

At his hip he wore a sword in a sheath of new leather figured with inlay of red and gold; but the sword itself was plain, with a worn cross-hilt of silvered bronze. This he drew forth, all in haste, and offered the hilt to the Archmage, as a liegeman to his prince.

The Archmage did not put out his hand to touch the sword hilt. He looked at it and at Arren. "That is yours, not mine," he said. "And you are no man's servant."

"But my father said that I might stay on Roke until I learned what this evil is and maybe some mastery—I have no skill, I don't think I have any power, but there were mages among my forefathers—if I might in some way learn to be of use to you —"

"Before your ancestors were mages," the Archmage said, "they were kings."

He stood up and came with silent, vigorous step to Arren, and taking the boy's hand made him rise. "I thank you for your offer of service, and though I do not accept it now, yet I may, when we have taken counsel on these matters. The offer of a generous spirit is not one to refuse lightly. Nor is the sword of the son of Morred to be lightly turned aside! . . . Now go. The lad who brought you here will see that you eat and bathe and rest. Go on," and he pushed Arren lightly between the shoulder blades, a familiarity no one had ever taken before, and which the young prince would have resented from anyone else; but he felt the Archmage's touch as a thrill of glory. For Arren had fallen in love.

He had been an active boy, delighting in games, taking pride and pleasure in the skills of body and mind, apt at his duties of ceremony and governing, which were neither light nor simple. Yet he had never given himself entirely to anything. All

had come easily to him, and he had done all easily; it had all been a game, and he had played at loving. But now the depths of him were wakened, not by a game or dream, but by honor, danger, wisdom, by a scarred face and a quiet voice and a dark hand holding, careless of its power, the staff of yew that bore near the grip, in silver set in the black wood, the Lost Rune of the Kings.

So the first step out of childhood is made all at once, without looking before or behind, without caution, and nothing held in reserve.

Forgetting courtly farewells he hurried to the doorway, awkward, radiant, obedient. And Ged the Archmage watched him go.

Ged stood awhile by the fountain under the ash tree, then raised his face to the sunwashed sky. "A gentle messenger for bad news," he said half-aloud, as if talking to the fountain. It did not listen, but went on talking in its own silver tongue, and he listened to it awhile. Then, going to another doorway, which Arren had not seen, and which indeed very few eyes would have seen no matter how close they looked, he said, "Master Doorkeeper."

A little man of no age appeared. Young he was not, so that one had to call him old, but the word did not suit him. His face was dry and colored like ivory, and he had a pleasant smile that made long curves in his cheeks. "What's the matter, Ged?" said he.

For they were alone, and he was one of the seven persons in the world who knew the Archmage's name. The others were the Master Namer of Roke; and Ogion the Silent, the wizard of Re Albi, who long ago on the mountain of Gont had given Ged that name; and the White Lady of Gont, Tenar of the Ring; and a village wizard in Iffish called Vetch; and in Iffish again, a house-carpenter's wife, mother of three girls, ignorant of all sorcery but wise in other things, who was called Yarrow; and finally, on the other side of Earthsea, in the farthest west, two dragons: Orm Embar and Kalessin.

"We should meet tonight," the Archmage said. "I'll go to the Patterner. And I'll send to Kurremkarmerruk, so that he'll put his lists away and let his students rest one evening and come to us, if not in flesh. Will you see to the others?"

"Aye," said the Doorkeeper, smiling, and was gone; and the Archmage also was gone; and the fountain talked to itself all serene and never ceasing in the sunlight of early spring.

Somewhere to the west of the Great House of Roke, and often somewhat south of

it, the Immanent Grove is usually to be seen. There is no place for it on maps, and there is no way to it except for those who know the way to it. But even novices and townsfolk and farmers can see it, always at a certain distance, a wood of high trees whose leaves have a hint of gold in their greenness even in the spring. And they consider—the novices, the townsfolk, the farmers—that the Grove moves about in a mystifying manner. But in this they are mistaken, for the Grove does not move. Its roots are the roots of being. It is all the rest that moves.

Ged walked over the fields from the Great House. He took off his white cloak, for the sun was at noon. A farmer plowing a brown hillside raised his hand in salute, and Ged replied the same way. Small birds went up into the air and sang. The sparkweed was just coming into flower in the fallows and beside the roads. Far up, a hawk cut a wide arc on the sky. Ged glanced up, and raised his hand again. Down shot the bird in a rush of windy feathers, and stooped straight to the offered wrist, gripping with yellow claws. It was no sparrowhawk but a big Ender-falcon of Roke, a white-and-brown-barred fishing hawk. It looked sidelong at the Archmage with one round, bright-gold eye, then clashed its hooked beak and stared at him straight on with both round, bright-gold eyes. "Fearless," the Archmage said to it in the tongue of the Making.

The big hawk beat its wings and gripped with its talons, gazing at him.

"Go then, brother, fearless one."

The farmer, away off on the hillside under the bright sky, had stopped to watch. Once last autumn he had watched the Archmage take a wild bird on his wrist, and then in the next moment had seen no man, but two hawks mounting on the wind.

This time they parted as the farmer watched: the bird to the high air, the man walking on across the muddy fields.

He came to the path that led to the Immanent Grove, a path that led always straight and direct no matter how time and the world bent awry about it, and following it came soon into the shadow of the trees.

The trunks of some of these were vast. Seeing them one could believe at last that the Grove never moved: they were like immemorial towers grey with years; their roots were like the roots of mountains. Yet these, the most ancient, were some of them thin of leaf, with branches that had died. They were not immortal. Among the giants grew sapling trees, tall and vigorous with bright crowns of foliage, and seedlings, slight leafy wands no taller than a girl.

The ground beneath the trees was soft, rich with the rotten leaves of all the years. Ferns and small woodland plants grew in it, but there was no kind of tree but

the one, which had no name in the Hardic tongue of Earthsea. Under the branches the air smelled earthy and fresh, and had a taste in the mouth like live spring-water.

In a glade which had been made years before by the falling of an enormous tree, Ged met the Master Patterner, who lived within the Grove and seldom or never came forth from it. His hair was butter-yellow; he was no Archipelagan. Since the restoral of the Ring of Erreth-Akbe, the barbarians of Kargad had ceased their forays and had struck some bargains of trade and peace with the Inner Lands. They were not friendly folk, and held aloof. But now and then a young warrior or merchant's son came westward by himself, drawn by love of adventure or craving to learn wizardry. Such had been the Master Patterner ten years ago, a sword-begirt, red-plumed young savage from Karego-At, arriving at Gont on a rainy morning and telling the Doorkeeper in imperious and scanty Hardic, "I come to learn!" And now he stood in the green-gold light under the trees, a tall man and fair, with long fair hair and strange green eyes, the Master Patterner of Earthsea.

It may be that he, too, knew Ged's name, but if so he never spoke it. They greeted each other in silence.

"What are you watching there?" the Archmage asked, and the other answered, "A spider."

Between two tall grass blades in the clearing a spider had spun a web, a circle delicately suspended. The silver threads caught the sunlight. In the center the spinner waited, a grey-black thing no larger than the pupil of an eye.

"She too is a patterner," Ged said, studying the artful web.

"What is evil?" asked the younger man.

The round web, with its black center, seemed to watch them both.

"A web we men weave," Ged answered.

In this wood no birds sang. It was silent in the noon light and hot. About them stood the trees and shadows.

"There is word from Narveduen and Enlad: the same."

"South and southwest. North and northwest," said the Patterner, never looking from the round web.

"We shall come here this evening. This is the best place for counsel."

"I have no counsel." The Patterner looked now at Ged, and his greenish eyes were cold. "I am afraid," he said. "There is fear. There is fear at the roots."

"Aye," said Ged. "We must look to the deep springs, I think. We have enjoyed the sunlight too long, basking in that peace which the healing of the Ring brought, accomplishing small things, fishing the shallows. Tonight we must question the

depths." And so he left the Patterner alone, gazing still at the spider in the sunny grass.

At the edge of the Grove, where the leaves of the great trees reached out over ordinary ground, he sat with his back against a mighty root, his staff across his knees. He shut his eyes as if resting, and sent a sending of his spirit over the hills and fields of Roke, northward, to the sea-assaulted cape where the Isolate Tower stands.

"Kurremkarmerruk," he said in spirit, and the Master Namer looked up from the thick book of names of roots and herbs and leaves and seeds and petals that he was reading to his pupils and said, "I am here, my lord."

Then he listened, a big, thin old man, white-haired under his dark hood; and the students at their writing-tables in the tower room looked up at him and glanced at one another.

"I will come," Kurremkarmerruk said, and bent his head to his book again, saying, "Now the petal of the flower of moly hath a name, which is *iebera*, and so also the sepal, which is *partonath*; and stem and leaf and root hath each his name. . . ."

But under his tree the Archmage Ged, who knew all the names of moly, withdrew his sending and, stretching out his legs more comfortably and keeping his eyes shut, presently fell asleep in the leaf-spotted sunlight.

Chapter 2

The Masters of Roke

The school on Roke is where boys who show promise in sorcery are sent from all the Inner Lands of Earthsea to learn the highest arts of magic. There they become proficient in the various kinds of sorcery, learning names, and runes, and skills, and spells, and what should and what should not be done, and why. And there, after long practice, and if hand and mind and spirit all keep pace together, they may be named wizard, and receive the staff of power. True wizards are made only on Roke.

Since there are sorcerers and witches on all the isles, and the uses of magic are as needful to their people as bread and as delightful as music, so the School of Wizardry is a place held in reverence. The nine mages who are the Masters of the School are considered the equals of the great princes of the Archipelago. Their master, the warden of Roke, the Archmage, is held to be accountable to no man at all, except the King of All the Isles; and that only by an act of fealty, by heart's gift, for not even a king could constrain so great a mage to serve the common law, if his will were otherwise. Yet even in the kingless centuries, the Archmages of Roke kept fealty and served that common law. All was done on Roke as it had been done for many hundreds of years; a place safe from all trouble it seemed, and the laughter of boys rang in the echoing courts and down the broad, cold corridors of the Great House.

Arren's guide about the school was a stocky lad whose cloak was clasped at the neck with silver, a token that he had passed his novicehood and was a proven sorcerer, studying to gain his staff. He was called Gamble, "because," said he, "my parents had six girls, and the seventh child, my father said, was a gamble against Fate." He was an agreeable companion, quick of mind and tongue. At another time Arren would have enjoyed his humor, but today his mind was too full. He did not pay him very much attention, in fact. And Gamble, with a natural wish to be given

credit for existence, began to take advantage of the guest's absentmindedness. He told him strange facts about the school, and then told him strange lies about the school, and to all of them Arren said, "Oh, yes" or "I see," until Gamble thought him a royal idiot.

"Of course they don't cook in here," he said, showing Arren past the huge stone kitchens all alive with the glitter of copper cauldrons and the clatter of chopping-knives and the eye-prickling smell of onions. "It's just for show. We come to the refectory, and everybody charms up whatever he wants to eat. Saves dishwashing too."

"Yes, I see," said Arren politely.

"Of course novices who haven't learnt the spells yet often lose a good deal of weight, their first months here; but they learn. There's one boy from Havnor who always tries for roast chicken, but all he ever gets is millet mush. He can't seem to get his spells past millet mush. He did get a dried haddock along with it, yesterday." Gamble was getting hoarse with the effort to push his guest into incredulity. He gave up and stopped talking.

"Where . . . what land does the Archmage come from?" said that guest, not even looking at the mighty gallery through which they were walking, all carven on wall and arched ceiling with the Thousand-Leaved Tree.

"Gont," said Gamble. "He was a village goatherd there."

Now, at this plain and well-known fact, the boy from Enlad turned and looked with disapproving unbelief at Gamble. "A goatherd?"

"That's what most Gontishmen are, unless they're pirates or sorcerers. I didn't say he was a goatherd now, you know!"

"But how would a goatherd become archmage?"

"The same way a prince would! By coming to Roke and outdoing all the Masters, by stealing the Ring in Atuan, by sailing the Dragons' Run, by being the greatest wizard since Erreth-Akbe—how else?"

They came out of the gallery by the north door. Late afternoon lay warm and bright on the furrowed hills and the roofs of Thwil Town and the bay beyond. There they stood to talk. Gamble said, "Of course that's all long ago, now. He hasn't done much since he was named Archmage. They never do. They just sit on Roke and watch the Equilibrium, I suppose. And he's quite old now."

"Old? How old?"

"Oh, forty or fifty."

"Have you seen him?"

"Of course I've seen him," Gamble said sharply. The royal idiot seemed also to be a royal snob.

"Often?"

"No. He keeps to himself. But when I first came to Roke I saw him, in the Fountain Court."

"I spoke with him there today," Arren said.

His tone made Gamble look at him and then answer him fully: "It was three years ago. And I was so frightened I never really looked at him. I was pretty young, of course. But it's hard to see things clearly in there. I remember his voice, mostly, and the fountain running." After a moment he added, "He does have a Gontish accent."

"If I could speak to dragons in their own language," Arren said, "I wouldn't care about my accent."

At that Gamble looked at him with a degree of approval, and asked, "Did you come here to join the school, prince?"

"No. I carried a message from my father to the Archmage."

"Enlad is one of the Principalities of the Kingship, isn't it?"

"Enlad, Ilien, and Way. Havnor and Eá, once, but the line of descent from the kings has died out in those lands. Ilien traces the descent from Gemal Sea-born through Maharion, who was King of All the Isles. Way, from Akambar and the House of Shelieth. Enlad, the oldest, from Morred through his son Serriadh and the House of Enlad."

Arren recited these genealogies with a dreamy air, like a well-trained scholar whose mind is on another subject.

"Do you think we'll see a king in Havnor again in our lifetime?"

"I never thought about it much."

"In Ark, where I come from, people think about it. We're part of the Principality of Ilien now, you know, since peace was made. How long has it been, seventeen years or eighteen, since the Ring of the King's Rune was returned to the Tower of the Kings in Havnor? Things were better for a while then, but now they're worse than ever. It's time there was a king again on the throne of Earthsea, to wield the Sign of Peace. People are tired of wars and raids and merchants who overprice and princes who overtax and all the confusion of unruly powers. Roke guides, but it can't rule. The Balance lies here, but the Power should lie in the King's hands."

Gamble spoke with real interest, all foolery set aside, and Arren's attention was finally caught. "Enlad is a rich and peaceful land," he said slowly. "It has never

entered into these rivalries. We hear of the troubles in other lands. But there's been no king on the throne in Havnor since Maharion died: eight hundred years. Would the lands indeed accept a king?"

"If he came in peace and in strength; if Roke and Havnor recognized his claim."

"And there is a prophecy that must be fulfilled, isn't there? Maharion said that the next king must be a mage."

"The Master Chanter's a Havnorian and interested in the matter, and he's been dinning the words into us for three years now. Maharion said, *He shall inherit my throne who has crossed the dark land living and come to the far shores of the day*."

"Therefore a mage."

"Yes, since only a wizard or mage can go among the dead in the dark land and return. Though they do not *cross* it. At least, they always speak of it as if it had only one boundary, and beyond that, no end. What are the *far shores of the day*, then? But so runs the prophecy of the Last King, and therefore someday one will be born to fulfill it. And Roke will recognize him, and the fleets and armies and nations will come together to him. Then there will be majesty again in the center of the world, in the Tower of the Kings in Havnor. I would come to such a one: I would serve a true king with all my heart and all my art," said Gamble, and then laughed and shrugged, lest Arren think he spoke with overmuch emotion. But Arren looked at him with friendliness, thinking, He would feel toward the King as I do toward the Archmage. Aloud he said, "A king would need such men as you about him."

They stood, each thinking his own thoughts, yet companionable, until a gong rang sonorous in the Great House behind them.

"There!" said Gamble. "Lentil and onion soup tonight. Come on."

"I thought you said they didn't cook," said Arren, still dreamy, following.

"Oh, sometimes—by mistake—"

No magic was involved in the dinner, though plenty of substance was. After it they walked out over the fields in the soft blue of the dusk. "This is Roke Knoll," Gamble said, as they began to climb a rounded hill. The dewy grass brushed their legs, and down by the marshy Thwilburn there was a chorus of little toads to welcome the first warmth and the shortening, starry nights.

There was a mystery in that ground. Gamble said softly, "This hill was the first that stood above the sea, when the First Word was spoken."

"And it will be the last to sink, when all things are unmade," said Arren.

"Therefore a safe place to stand on," Gamble said, shaking off awe; but then he cried, awestruck, "Look! The Grove!"

South of the Knoll a great light was revealed on the earth, like moonrise, but the thin moon was already setting westward over the hill's top; and there was a flickering in this radiance, like the movement of leaves in the wind.

"What is it?"

"It comes from the Grove—the Masters must be there. They say it burnt so, with a light like moonlight, all night, when they met to choose the Archmage five years ago. But why are they meeting now? Is it the news you brought?"

"It may be," said Arren.

Gamble, excited and uneasy, wanted to return to the Great House to hear any rumor of what the Council of the Masters portended. Arren went with him, but looked back often at that strange radiance till the slope hid it, and there was only the new moon setting and the stars of spring.

Alone in the dark in the stone cell that was his sleeping-room, Arren lay with eyes open. He had slept on a bed all his life, under soft furs; even in the twenty-oared galley in which he had come from Enlad they had provided their young prince with more comfort than this—a straw pallet on the stone floor and a ragged blanket of felt. But he noticed none of it. I am at the center of the world, he thought. The Masters are talking in the holy place. What will they do? Will they weave a great magic to save magic? Can it be true that wizardry is dying out of the world? Is there a danger that threatens even Roke? I will stay here. I will not go home. I would rather *sweep* his room than be a prince in Enlad. Would he let me stay as a novice? But perhaps there will be no more teaching of the Art Magic, no more learning of the true names of things. My father has the gift of wizardry, but I do not; perhaps it is indeed dying out of the world. Yet I would stay near *him*, even if he lost his power and his art. Even if I never saw him. Even if he never said another word to me. But his ardent imagination swept him on past that, so that in a moment he saw himself face-to-face with the Archmage once more in the court beneath the rowan tree, and the sky was dark and the tree leafless and the fountain silent; and he said, "My lord, the storm is on us, yet I will stay by thee and serve thee," and the Archmage smiled at him. . . . But there imagination failed, for he had not seen that dark face smile.

In the morning he rose, feeling that yesterday he had been a boy, today he was a man. He was ready for anything. But when it came, he stood gaping. "The Archmage wishes to speak to you, Prince Arren," said a little novice-lad at his doorway, who waited a moment and ran off before Arren could collect his wits to answer.

He made his way down the tower staircase and through stone corridors toward the Fountain Court, not knowing where he should go. An old man met him in the corridor, smiling so that deep furrows ran down his cheeks from nose to chin: the same who had met him yesterday at the door of the Great House when he first came up from the harbor, and had required him to say his true name before he entered. "Come this way," said the Master Doorkeeper.

The halls and passages in this part of the building were silent, empty of the rush and racket of the boys that enlivened the rest. Here one felt the great age of the walls. The enchantment with which the ancient stones were laid and protected was here palpable. Runes were graven on the walls at intervals, cut deep, some inlaid with silver. Arren had learned the Runes of Hardic from his father, but none of these did he know, though certain of them seemed to hold a meaning that he almost knew, or had known and could not quite remember.

"Here you are, lad," said the Doorkeeper, who made no account of titles such as Lord or Prince. Arren followed him into a long, low-beamed room, where on one side a fire burnt in a stone hearth, its flames reflecting in the oaken floor, and on the other side pointed windows let in the cold, soft light of fog. Before the hearth stood a group of men. All looked at him as he entered, but among them he saw only one, the Archmage. He stopped, and bowed, and stood dumb.

"These are the Masters of Roke, Arren," said the Archmage, "seven of the nine. The Patterner will not leave his Grove, and the Namer is in his tower, thirty miles to the north. All of them know your errand here. My lords, this is the son of Morred."

No pride roused in Arren at that phrase, but only a kind of dread. He was proud of his lineage, but thought of himself only as an heir of princes, one of the House of Enlad. Morred, from whom that house descended, had been dead two thousand years. His deeds were matter of legends, not of this present world. It was as if the Archmage had named him son of myth, inheritor of dreams.

He did not dare look up at the faces of the eight mages. He stared at the iron-shod foot of the Archmage's staff, and felt the blood ringing in his ears.

"Come, let us breakfast together," said the Archmage, and led them to a table set beneath the windows. There was milk and sour beer, bread, new butter, and cheese. Arren sat with them and ate.

He had been among noblemen, landholders, rich merchants, all his life. His father's hall in Berila was full of them: men who owned much, who bought and sold much, who were rich in the things of the world. They ate meat and drank wine and

talked loudly; many disputed, many flattered, most sought something for themselves. Young as he was, Arren had learned a good deal about the manners and disguises of humanity. But he had never been among such men as these. They ate bread and talked little, and their faces were quiet. If they sought something, it was not for themselves. Yet they were men of great power: that, too, Arren recognized.

Sparrowhawk the Archmage sat at the head of the table and seemed to listen to what was said, and yet there was a silence about him, and no one spoke to him. Arren was let alone also, so that he had time to recover himself. On his left was the Doorkeeper, and on his right a grey-haired man with a kindly look, who said to him at last, "We are countrymen, Prince Arren. I was born in eastern Enlad, by the Forest of Aol."

"I have hunted in that forest," Arren replied, and they spoke together a little of the woods and towns of the Isle of the Myths, so that Arren was comforted by the memory of his home.

When the meal was done, they drew together once more before the hearth, some sitting and some standing, and there was a little silence.

"Last night," the Archmage said, "we met in council. Long we talked, yet resolved nothing. I would hear you say now, in the morning light, whether you uphold or gainsay your judgment of the night."

"That we resolved nothing," said the Master Herbal, a stocky, dark-skinned man with calm eyes, "is itself a judgment. In the Grove are patterns found; but we found nothing there but argument."

"Only because we could not see the pattern plain," said the grey-haired mage of Enlad, the Master Changer. "We do not know enough. Rumors from Wathort; news from Enlad. Strange news, and should be looked to. But to raise a great fear on so little a foundation is unneedful. Our power is not threatened only because a few sorcerers have forgotten their spells."

"So say I," said a lean, keen-eyed man, the Master Windkey. "Have we not all our powers? Do not the trees of the Grove grow and put forth leaves? Do not the storms of heaven obey our word? Who can fear for the art of wizardry, which is the oldest of the arts of man?"

"No man," said the Master Summoner, deep-voiced and tall, young, with a dark and noble face, "no man, no power, can bind the action of wizardry or still the words of power. For they are the very words of the Making, and one who could silence them could unmake the world."

"Aye, and one who could do that would not be on Wathort or Narveduen," said the Changer. "He would be here at the gates of Roke, and the end of the world would be at hand! We've not come to that pass yet."

"Yet there is something wrong," said another, and they looked at him: deep-chested, solid as an oaken cask, he sat by the fire, and the voice came from him soft and true as the note of a great bell. He was the Master Chanter. "Where is the king that should be in Havnor? Roke is not the heart of the world. That tower is, on which the sword of Erreth-Akbe is set, and in which stands the throne of Serriadh, of Akambar, of Maharion. Eight hundred years has the heart of the world been empty! We have the crown, but no king to wear it. We have the Lost Rune, the King's Rune, the Rune of Peace, restored to us, but have we peace? Let there be a king upon the throne, and we will have peace, and even in the farthest Reaches the sorcerers will practice their arts with untroubled minds, and there will be order and a due season to all things."

"Aye," said the Master Hand, a slight, quick man, modest of bearing but with clear and seeing eyes. "I am with you, Chanter. What wonder that wizardry goes astray, when all else goes astray? If the whole flock wanders, will our black sheep stay by the fold?"

At that the Doorkeeper laughed, but he said nothing.

"Then to you all," said the Archmage, "it seems that there is nothing very wrong; or if there is, it lies in this, that our lands are ungoverned or ill-governed, so that all the arts and high skills of men suffer from neglect. With that much I agree. Indeed it is because the South is all but lost to peaceful commerce that we must depend on rumor; and who has any safe word from the West Reach, save this from Narveduen? If ships went forth and came back safely as of old, if our lands of Earthsea were well-knit, we might know how things stand in the remote places, and so could act. And I think we would act! For, my lords, when the Prince of Enlad tells us that he spoke the words of the Making in a spell and yet did not know their meaning as he spoke them; when the Master Patterner says that there is fear at the roots and will say no more: is this so little a foundation for anxiety? When a storm begins, it is only a little cloud on the horizon."

"You have a sense for the black things, Sparrowhawk," said the Doorkeeper. "You ever did. Say what you think is wrong."

"I do not know. There is a weakening of power. There is a want of resolution. There is a dimming of the sun. I feel, my lords—I feel as if we who sit here talking were all wounded mortally, and while we talk and talk our blood runs softly from

our veins. . . .”

“And you would be up and doing.”

“I would,” said the Archmage.

“Well,” said the Doorkeeper, “can the owls keep the hawk from flying?”

“But where would you go?” the Changer asked, and the Chanter answered him: “To seek our king and bring him to his throne!”

The Archmage looked keenly at the Chanter, but answered only, “I would go where the trouble is.”

“South or west,” said the Master Windkey.

“And north and east if need be,” said the Doorkeeper.

“But you are needed here, my lord,” said the Changer. “Rather than to go seeking blindly among unfriendly peoples on strange seas, would it not be wiser to stay here, where all magic is strong, and find out by your arts what this evil or disorder is?”

“My arts do not avail me,” the Archmage said. There was that in his voice which made them all look at him, sober and with uneasy eyes. “I am the Warder of Roke. I do not leave Roke lightly. I wish that your counsel and my own were the same; but that is not to be hoped for now. The judgment must be mine: and I must go.”

“To that judgment we yield,” said the Summoner.

“And I go alone. You are the Council of Roke, and the Council must not be broken. Yet one I will take with me, if he will come.” He looked at Arren. “You offered me your service, yesterday. Last night the Master Patterner said, ‘Not by chance does any man come to the shores of Roke. Not by chance is a son of Morred the bearer of this news.’ And no other word had he for us all the night. Therefore I ask you, Arren, will you come with me?”

“Yes, my lord,” said Arren, with a dry throat.

“The Prince, your father, surely would not let you go into this peril,” said the Changer somewhat sharply, and to the Archmage, “The lad is young and not trained in wizardry.”

“I have years and spells enough for both of us,” Sparrowhawk said in a dry voice. “Arren, what of your father?”

“He would let me go.”

“How can you know?” asked the Summoner.

Arren did not know where he was being required to go, nor when, nor why. He was bewildered and abashed by these grave, honest, terrible men. If he had had time to think he could not have said anything at all. But he had no time to think;

and the Archmage had asked him, “Will you come with me?”

“When my father sent me here he said to me, ‘I fear a dark time is coming on the world, a time of danger. So I send you rather than any other messenger, for you can judge whether we should ask the help of the Isle of the Wise in this matter, or offer the help of Enlad to them.’ So if I am needed, therefore I am here.”

At that he saw the Archmage smile. There was great sweetness in the smile, though it was brief. “Do you see?” he said to the seven mages. “Could age or wizardry add anything to this?”

Arren felt that they looked on him approvingly then, but with a kind of pondering or wondering look, still. The Summoner spoke, his arched brows straightened to a frown: “I do not understand it, my lord. That you are bent on going, yes. You have been caged here five years. But always before you were alone; you have always gone alone. Why, now, companioned?”

“I never needed help before,” said Sparrowhawk, with an edge of threat or irony in his voice. “And I have found a fit companion.” There was a dangerousness about him, and the tall Summoner asked him no more questions, though he still frowned.

But the Master Herbal, calm-eyed and dark like a wise and patient ox, rose from his seat and stood monumental. “Go, my lord,” he said, “and take the lad. And all our trust goes with you.”

One by one the others gave assent quietly, and by ones and twos withdrew, until only the Summoner was left of the seven. “Sparrowhawk,” he said, “I do not seek to question your judgment. Only I say: if you are right, if there is imbalance and the peril of great evil, then a voyage to Wathort, or into the West Reach, or to world’s end, will not be far enough. Where you may have to go, can you take this companion, and is it fair to him?”

They stood apart from Arren, and the Summoner’s voice was lowered, but the Archmage spoke openly: “It is fair.”

“You are not telling me all you know,” the Summoner said.

“If I knew, I would speak. I know nothing. I guess much.”

“Let me come with you.”

“One must guard the gates.”

“The Doorkeeper does that—”

“Not only the gates of Roke. Stay here. Stay here, and watch the sunrise to see if it be bright, and watch at the wall of stones to see who crosses it and where their faces are turned. There is a breach, Thorion, there is a break, a wound, and it is

this I go to seek. If I am lost, then maybe you will find it. But wait. I bid you wait for me." He was speaking now in the Old Speech, the language of the Making, in which all true spells are cast and on which all the great acts of magic depend; but very seldom is it spoken in conversation, except among the dragons. The Summoner made no further argument or protest, but bowed his tall head quietly both to the Archmage and to Arren and departed.

The fire crackled in the hearth. There was no other sound. Outside the windows the fog pressed formless and dim.

The Archmage stared into the flames, seeming to have forgotten Arren's presence. The boy stood at some distance from the hearth, not knowing if he should take his leave or wait to be dismissed, irresolute and somewhat desolate, feeling again like a small figure in a dark, illimitable, confusing space.

"We'll go first to Hort Town," said Sparrowhawk, turning his back to the fire. "News gathers there from all the South Reach, and we may find a lead. Your ship still waits in the bay. Speak to the master; let him carry word to your father. I think we should leave as soon as may be. At daybreak tomorrow. Come to the steps by the boathouse."

"My lord, what—" His voice stuck a moment. "What is it you seek?"

"I don't know, Arren."

"Then—"

"Then how shall I seek it? Neither do I know that. Maybe it will seek me." He grinned a little at Arren, but his face was like iron in the grey light of the windows.

"My lord," Arren said, and his voice was steady now, "it is true I come of the lineage of Morred, if any tracing of lineage so old be true. And if I can serve you I will account it the greatest chance and honor of my life, and there is nothing I would rather do. But I fear that you mistake me for something more than I am."

"Maybe," said the Archmage.

"I have no great gifts or skills. I can fence with the short sword and the noble sword. I can sail a boat. I know the court dances and the country dances. I can mend a quarrel between courtiers. I can wrestle. I am a poor archer, and I am skillful at the game of net-ball. I can sing, and play the harp and lute. And that is all. There is no more. What use will I be to you? The Master Summoner is right—"

"Ah, you saw that, did you? He's jealous. He claims the privilege of older loyalty."

"And greater skill, my lord."

"Then you'd rather he went with me, and you stayed behind?"

"No! But I fear—"

"Fear what?"

Tears sprang to the boy's eyes. "To fail you," he said.

The Archmage turned around again to the fire. "Sit down, Arren," he said, and the boy came to the stone cornerseat of the hearth. "I did not mistake you for a wizard or a warrior or any finished thing. What you are I do not know, though I'm glad to know that you can sail a boat. . . . What you will be, no one knows. But this much I do know: you are the son of Morred and of Serriadh."

Arren was silent. "That is true, my lord," he said at last. "But . . ." The Archmage said nothing, and he had to finish his sentence: "But I am not Morred. I am only myself."

"You take no pride in your lineage?"

"Yes, I take pride in it—because it makes me a prince; it is a responsibility, a thing that must be lived up to—"

The Archmage nodded once, sharply. "That is what I meant. To deny the past is to deny the future. A man does not make his destiny: he accepts it or denies it. If the rowan's roots are shallow, it bears no crown." At this Arren looked up startled, for his true name, Lebannen, meant the rowan tree. But the Archmage had not said his name. "Your roots are deep," he went on. "You have strength and you must have room, room to grow. Thus I offer you, instead of a safe trip home to Enlad, an unsafe voyage to an unknown end. You need not come. The choice is yours. But I offer you the choice. For I am tired of safe places, and roofs, and walls around me." He ended abruptly, looking about him with piercing, unseeing eyes. Arren saw the deep restlessness of the man, and it frightened him. Yet fear sharpens exhilaration, and it was with a leap of the heart that he answered, "My lord, I choose to go with you."

Arren left the Great House with his heart and mind full of wonder. He told himself that he was happy, but the word did not seem to suit. He told himself that the Archmage had called him strong, a man of destiny, and that he was proud of such praise; but he was not proud. Why not? The most powerful wizard in the world told him, "Tomorrow we sail to the edge of doom," and he nodded his head and came: should he not feel pride? But he did not. He felt only wonder.

He went down through the steep, wandering streets of Thwil Town, found his ship's master on the quays, and said to him, "I sail tomorrow with the Archmage, to Wathort and the South Reach. Tell the Prince my father that when I am released from this service I will come home to Berila."

The ship's captain looked dour. He knew how the bringer of such news might be received by the Prince of Enlad. "I must have writing about it from your hand, prince," he said. Seeing the justice in that, Arren hurried off—he felt that all must be done instantly—and found a strange little shop where he purchased inkstone and brush and a piece of soft paper, thick as felt; then he hurried back to the quays and sat down on the wharfside to write his parents. When he thought of his mother holding this piece of paper, reading the letter, a distress came into him. She was a blithe, patient woman, but Arren knew that he was the foundation of her contentment, that she longed for his quick return. There was no way to comfort her for his long absence. His letter was dry and brief. He signed with the sword-rune, sealed the letter with a bit of pitch from a caulking-pot nearby, and gave it to the ship's master. Then, "Wait!" he said, as if the ship were ready to set sail that instant, and ran back up the cobbled streets to the strange little shop. He had trouble finding it, for there was something shifty about the streets of Thwil; it almost seemed that the turnings were different every time. He came on the right street at last and darted into the shop under the strings of red clay beads that ornamented its doorway. When he was buying ink and paper he had noticed, on a tray of clasps and brooches, a silver brooch in the shape of a wild rose; and his mother was called Rose. "I'll buy that," he said, in his hasty, princely way.

"Ancient silverwork of the Isle of O. I can see you are a judge of the old crafts," said the shopkeeper, looking at the hilt—not the handsome sheath—of Arren's sword. "That will be four in ivory."

Arren paid the rather high price unquestioning; he had in his purse plenty of the ivory counters that serve as money in the Inner Lands. The idea of a gift for his mother pleased him; the act of buying pleased him; as he left the shop he set his hand on the pommel of his sword, with a touch of swagger.

His father had given him that sword on the eve of his departure from Enlad. He had received it solemnly and had worn it, as if it were a duty to wear it, even aboard ship. He was proud of the weight of it at his hip, the weight of its great age on his spirit. For it was the sword of Serriadh who was the son of Morred and Elfarran; there was none older in the world except the sword of Erreth-Akbe, which was set atop the Tower of the Kings in Havnor. The sword of Serriadh had never been laid away or hoarded up, but worn; yet was unworn by the centuries, unweakened, because it had been forged with a great power of enchantment. Its history said that it never had been drawn, nor ever could be drawn, except in the service of life. For no purpose of blood-lust or revenge or greed, in no war for gain, would it let itself

be wielded. From it, the great treasure of his family, Arren had received his use-name: Arrendek he had been called as a child, "the little Sword."

He had not used the sword, nor had his father, nor his grandfather. There had been peace in Enlad for a long time.

And now, in the street of the strange town of the Wizards' Isle, the sword's handle felt strange to him when he touched it. It was awkward to his hand and cold. Heavy, the sword hindered his walk, dragged at him. And the wonder he had felt was still in him, but had gone cold. He went back down to the quay, and gave the brooch to the ship's master for his mother, and bade him farewell and a safe voyage home. Turning away he pulled his cloak over the sheath that held the old, unyielding weapon, the deadly thing he had inherited. He did not feel like swaggering anymore. "What am I doing?" he said to himself as he climbed the narrow ways, not hurrying now, to the fortress-bulk of the Great House above the town. "How is it that I'm not going home? Why am I seeking something I don't understand, with a man I don't know?"

And he had no answer to his questions.

Chapter 3

Hort Town

In the darkness before dawn Arren dressed in clothing that had been given him, seaman's garb, well-worn but clean, and hurried down through the silent halls of the Great House to the eastern door, carven of horn and dragon's tooth. There the Doorkeeper let him out and pointed the way that he should take, smiling a little. He followed the topmost street of the town and then a path that led down to the boathouses of the school, south along the bay shore from the docks of Thwil. He could just make out his way. Trees, roofs, hills bulked as dim masses within dimness; the dark air was utterly still and very cold; everything held still, held itself withdrawn and obscure. Only over the dark sea eastward was there one faint, clear line: the horizon, tipping momently toward the unseen sun.

He came to the boathouse steps. No one was there; nothing moved. In his bulky sailor's coat and wool cap he was warm enough, but he shivered, standing on the stone steps in the darkness, waiting.

The boathouses loomed black above black water, and suddenly from them came a dull, hollow sound, a booming knock, repeated three times. Arren's hair stirred on his scalp. A long shadow glided out onto the water, silently. It was a boat, and it slid softly toward the pier. Arren ran down the steps onto the pier and leapt down into the boat.

"Take the tiller," said the Archmage, a lithe, shadowy figure in the prow, "and hold her steady while I get the sail up."

They were out on the water already, the sail opening like a white wing from the mast, catching the growing light. "A west wind to save us rowing out of the bay, that's a parting gift from the Master Windkey, I don't doubt. Watch her, lad, she steers very light! So then. A west wind and a clear dawn for the Balance-Day of spring."

"Is this boat *Lookfar*?" Arren had heard of the Archmage's boat in songs and

tales.

"Aye," said the other, busy with ropes. The boat bucked and veered as the wind freshened; Arren set his teeth and tried to keep her steady.

"She steers very light, but somewhat willful, lord."

The Archmage laughed. "Let her have her will; she is wise also. Listen, Arren," and he paused, kneeling on the thwart to face Arren, "I am no lord now, nor you a prince. I am a trader called Hawk, and you're my nephew, learning the seas with me, called Arren; for we hail from Enlad. From what town? A large one, lest we meet a townsman."

"Temere, on the south coast? They trade to all the Reaches."

The Archmage nodded.

"But," said Arren cautiously, "you don't have quite the accent of Enlad."

"I know. I have a Gontish accent," his companion said, and laughed, looking up at the brightening east. "But I think I can borrow what I need from you. So we come from Temere in our boat *Dolphin*, and I am neither lord nor mage nor Sparrowhawk, but—how am I called?"

"Hawk, my lord."

Then Arren bit his tongue.

"Practice, nephew," said the Archmage. "It takes practice. You've never been anything but a prince. While I have been many things, and last of all, and maybe least, an archmage. . . . We go south looking for emmelstone, that blue stuff they carve charms of. I know they value it in Enlad. They make it into charms against rheums, sprains, stiff necks, and slips of the tongue."

After a moment Arren laughed, and as he lifted his head, the boat lifted on a long wave, and he saw the rim of the sun against the edge of the ocean, a flare of sudden gold, before them.

Sparrowhawk stood with one hand on the mast, for the little boat leapt on the choppy waves, and facing the sunrise of the equinox of spring he chanted. Arren did not know the Old Speech, the tongue of wizards and dragons, but he heard praise and rejoicing in the words, and there was a great striding rhythm in them like the rise and fall of tides or the balance of the day and night each succeeding each forever. Gulls cried on the wind, and the shores of Thwil Bay slid past to right and left, and they entered on the long waves, full of light, of the Inmost Sea.

From Roke to Hort Town is no great voyage, but they spent three nights at sea. The Archmage had been urgent to be gone, but once gone, he was more than patient. The winds turned contrary as soon as they were away from the charmed weather of Roke, but he did not call a magewind into their sail, as any weatherworker could have done; instead, he spent hours teaching Arren how to manage the boat in a stiff headwind, in the rock-fanged sea east of Issel. The second night out it rained, the rough, cold rain of March, but he said no spell to keep it off them. On the next night, as they lay outside the entrance to Hort Harbor in a calm, cold, foggy darkness, Arren thought about this, and reflected that in the short time he had known him, the Archmage had done no magic at all.

He was a peerless sailor, though. Arren had learned more in three days' sailing with him than in ten years of boating and racing on Berila Bay. And mage and sailor are not so far apart; both work with the powers of sky and sea, and bend great

winds to the uses of their hands, bringing near what was remote. Archmage or Hawk the sea-trader, it came to much the same thing.

He was a rather silent man, though perfectly good-humored. No clumsiness of Arren's fretted him; he was companionable; there could be no better shipmate, Arren thought. But he would go into his own thoughts and be silent for hours on end, and then when he spoke there was a harshness in his voice, and he would look right through Arren. This did not weaken the love the boy felt for him, but maybe it lessened liking somewhat; it was a little awesome. Perhaps Sparrowhawk felt this, for in that foggy night off the shores of Wathort he began to talk to Arren, rather haltingly, about himself. "I do not want to go among men again tomorrow," he said. "I've been pretending that I am free. . . . That nothing's wrong in the world. That I'm not Archmage, not even sorcerer. That I'm Hawk of Temere, without responsibilities or privileges, owing nothing to anyone. . . ." He stopped and after a while went on, "Try to choose carefully, Arren, when the great choices must be made. When I was young, I had to choose between the life of being and the life of doing. And I leapt at the latter like a trout to a fly. But each deed you do, each act, binds you to itself and to its consequences, and makes you act again and yet again. Then very seldom do you come upon a space, a time like this, between act and act, when you may stop and simply be. Or wonder who, after all, you are."

How could such a man, thought Arren, be in doubt as to who and what he was? He had believed such doubts were reserved for the young, who had not done anything yet.

The boat rocked in the great, cool darkness.

"That's why I like the sea," said Sparrowhawk's voice in that darkness.

Arren understood him; but his own thoughts ran ahead, as they had been doing all these three days and nights, to their quest, the aim of their sailing. And since his companion was in a mood to talk at last, he asked, "Do you think we will find what we seek in Hort Town?"

Sparrowhawk shook his head, perhaps meaning no, perhaps meaning that he did not know.

"Can it be a kind of pestilence, a plague, that drifts from land to land, blighting the crops and the flocks and men's spirits?"

"A pestilence is a motion of the great Balance, of the Equilibrium itself; this is different. There is the stink of evil in it. We may suffer for it when the balance of things rights itself, but we do not lose hope and forego art and forget the words of the Making. Nature is not unnatural. This is not a righting of the Balance, but an

upsetting of it. There is only one creature who can do that."

"A man?" Arren said, tentative.

"We men."

"How?"

"By an unmeasured desire for life."

"For life? But it isn't wrong to want to live?"

"No. But when we crave power over life—endless wealth, unassailable safety, immortality—then desire becomes greed. And if knowledge allies itself to that greed, then comes evil. Then the balance of the world is swayed, and ruin weighs heavy in the scale."

Arren brooded over this awhile and said at last, "Then you think it is a man we seek?"

"A man, and a mage. Aye, I think so."

"But I had thought, from what my father and teachers taught, that the great arts of wizardry were dependent on the Balance, the Equilibrium of things, and so could not be used for evil."

"That," said Sparrowhawk somewhat wryly, "is a debatable point. *Infinite are the arguments of mages*. . . . Every land of Earthsea knows of witches who cast unclean spells, sorcerers who use their art to win riches. But there is more. The Firelord, who sought to undo the darkness and stop the sun at noon, was a great mage; even Erreth-Akbe could scarcely defeat him. The Enemy of Morred was another such. Where he came, whole cities knelt to him; armies fought for him. The spell he wove against Morred was so mighty that even when he was slain it could not be halted, and the island of Soléa was overwhelmed by the sea, and all on it perished. Those were men in whom great strength and knowledge served the will to evil and fed upon it. Whether the wizardry that serves a better end may always prove the stronger, we do not know. We hope."

There is a certain bleakness in finding hope where one expected certainty. Arren found himself unwilling to stay on these cold summits. He said after a little while, "I see why you say that only men do evil, I think. Even sharks are innocent; they kill because they must."

"That is why nothing else can resist us. Only one thing in the world can resist an evil-hearted man. And that is another man. In our shame is our glory. Only our spirit, which is capable of evil, is capable of overcoming it."

"But the dragons," said Arren. "Do they not do great evil? Are they innocent?"

"The dragons! The dragons are avaricious, insatiable, treacherous; without pity,

without remorse. But are they evil? Who am I, to judge the acts of dragons? . . . They are wiser than men are. It is with them as with dreams, Arren. We men dream dreams, we work magic, we do good, we do evil. The dragons do not dream. They are dreams. They do not work magic: it is their substance, their being. They do not do; they are."

"In Serilune," said Arren, "is the skin of Bar Oth, killed by Keor, Prince of Enlad, three hundred years ago. No dragons have ever come to Enlad since that day. I saw the skin of Bar Oth. It is heavy as iron and so large that if it were spread out it would cover all the marketplace of Serilune, they said. The teeth are as long as my forearm. Yet they said Bar Oth was a young dragon, not full-grown."

"There is a desire in you," said Sparrowhawk, "to see dragons."

"Yes."

"Their blood is cold and venomous. You must not look into their eyes. They are older than mankind. . . ." He was silent awhile and then went on, "And though I came to forget or regret all I have ever done, yet would I remember that once I saw the dragons aloft on the wind at sunset above the western isles; and I would be content."

Both were silent then, and there was no sound but the whispering of the water with the boat, and no light. So at last, there on the deep waters, they slept.

In the bright haze of morning they came into Hort Harbor, where a hundred craft were moored or setting forth: fishermen's boats, crabbers, trawlers, trading-ships, two galleys of twenty oars, one great sixty-oared galley in bad repair, and some lean, long sailing-ships with high triangular sails designed to catch the upper airs in the hot calms of the South Reach. "Is that a ship of war?" Arren asked as they passed one of the twenty-oared galleys, and his companion answered, "A slaver, I judge from the chain-bolts in her hold. They sell men in the South Reach."

Arren pondered this a minute, then went to the gear-box and took from it his sword, which he had wrapped well and stowed away on the morning of their departure. He uncovered it; he stood indecisive, the sheathed sword on his two hands, the belt dangling from it.

"It's no sea-trader's sword," he said. "The scabbard is too fine."

Sparrowhawk, busy at the tiller, shot him a look. "Wear it if you like."

"I thought it might be wise."

"As swords go, that one is wise," said his companion, his eyes alert on their passage through the crowded bay. "Is it not a sword reluctant to be used?"

Arren nodded. "So they say. Yet it has killed. It has killed men." He looked down at the slender, hand-worn hilt. "It has, but I have not. It makes me feel a fool. It is too much older than I. . . . I shall take my knife," he ended, and rewrapping the sword, shoved it down deep in the gear-box. His face was perplexed and angry.

Sparrowhawk said nothing till he asked, "Will you take the oars now, lad? We're heading for the pier there by the stairs."

Hort Town, one of the Seven Great Ports of the Archipelago, rose from its noisy waterfront up the slopes of three steep hills in a jumble of color. The houses were of clay plastered in red, orange, yellow, and white; the roofs were of purplish-red tile; pendick trees in flower made masses of dark red along the upper streets. Gaudy, striped awnings stretched from roof to roof, shading narrow marketplaces. The quays were bright with sunlight; the streets running back from the waterfront were like dark slots full of shadows and people and noise.

When they had tied up the boat, Sparrowhawk stooped over beside Arren as if to check the knot, and he said, "Arren, there are people in Wathort who know me pretty well; so watch me, that you may know me." When he straightened up there was no scar on his face. His hair was quite grey; his nose was thick and somewhat snubbed; and instead of a yew staff his own height, he carried a wand of ivory, which he tucked away inside his shirt. "Dost know me?" he said to Arren with a broad smile, and he spoke with the accent of Enlad. "Hast never seen thy nuncle before this?"

Arren had seen wizards at the court of Berila change their faces when they mimed the *Deed of Morred*, and knew it was only illusion; he kept his wits about him, and was able to say, "Oh aye, nuncle Hawk!"

But, while the mage dickered with a harbor guardsman over the fee for docking and guarding the boat, Arren kept looking at him to make sure that he did know him. And as he looked, the transformation troubled him more, not less. It was too complete; this was not the Archmage at all, this was no wise guide and leader. . . . The guardsman's fee was high, and Sparrowhawk grumbled as he paid, and strode away with Arren, still grumbling. "A test of my patience," he said. "Pay that swag-bellied thief to guard my boat! When half a spell would do twice the job! Well, this is the price of disguise. . . . And I've forgot my proper speech, have I not, nevvy?"

They were walking up a crowded, smelly, gaudy street lined with shops, little more than booths, whose owners stood in the doorways among heaps and festoons of wares, loudly proclaiming the beauty and cheapness of their pots, hosiery, hats, spades, pins, purses, kettles, baskets, firehooks, knives, ropes, bolts, bed-linens,

and every other kind of hardware and drygoods.

"Is it a fair?"

"Eh?" said the snub-nosed man, bending his grizzled head.

"Is it a fair, nuncle?"

"Fair? No, no. They keep it up all year round, here. Keep your fishcakes, mistress, I have breakfasted!" And Arren tried to shake off a man with a tray of little brass vases, who followed at his heels whining, "Buy, try, handsome young master, they won't fail you, breath as sweet as the roses of Numima, charming the women to you, try them, young sea-lord, young prince. . . ."

All at once Sparrowhawk was between Arren and the peddler, saying, "What charms are these?"

"Not charms!" the man whined, shrinking away from him. "I sell no charms, sea-master! Only syrups to sweeten the breath after drink or hazia-root—only syrups, great prince!" He cowered right down onto the pavement stones, his tray of vases clinking and clattering, some of them tipping so that a drop of the sticky stuff inside oozed out, pink or purple, over the lip.

Sparrowhawk turned away without speaking and went on with Arren. Soon the crowds thinned and the shops grew wretchedly poor, little kennels displaying as all their wares a handful of bent nails, a broken pestle, and an old carding-comb. This poverty disgusted Arren less than the rest; in the rich end of the street he had felt choked, suffocated, by the pressure of things to be sold and voices screaming to him to buy, buy. And the peddler's abjectness had shocked him. He thought of the cool, bright streets of his Northern town. No man in Berila, he thought, would have grovelled to a stranger like that. "These are a foul folk!" he said.

"This way, nevvy," was all his companion's answer. They turned aside into a passage between high, red, windowless house walls, which ran along the hillside and through an archway garlanded with decaying banners, out again into the sunlight in a steep square, another marketplace, crowded with booths and stalls and swarming with people and flies.

Around the edges of the square, a number of men and women were sitting or lying on their backs, motionless. Their mouths had a curious blackish look, as if they had been bruised, and around their lips flies swarmed and gathered in clusters like bunches of dried currants.

"So many," said Sparrowhawk's voice, low and hasty as if he too had gotten a shock; but when Arren looked at him there was the blunt, bland face of the hearty trader Hawk, showing no concern.

“What’s wrong with those people?”

“Hazia. It soothes and numbs, letting the body be free of the mind. And the mind roams free. But when it returns to the body it needs more hazia. . . . And the craving grows and the life is short, for the stuff is poison. First there is a trembling, and later paralysis, and then death.”

Arren looked at a woman sitting with her back to a sun-warmed wall; she had raised her hand as if to brush away the flies from her face, but the hand made a jerky, circular motion in the air, as if she had quite forgotten about it and it was moved only by the repeated surging of a palsy or shaking in the muscles. The gesture was like an incantation emptied of all intention, a spell without meaning.

Hawk was looking at her too, expressionless. “Come on!” he said.

He led on across the marketplace to an awning-shaded booth. Stripes of sunlight colored green, orange, lemon, crimson, azure, fell across the cloths and shawls and woven belts displayed, and danced multitudinous in the tiny mirrors that bedecked the high, feathered headdress of the woman who sold the stuff. She was big and she chanted in a big voice, “Silks, satins, canvases, furs, felts, woolens, fleecefells of Gont, gauzes of Sowl, silks of Lorbanery! Hey, you Northern men, take off your duffle-coats; don’t you see the sun’s out? How’s this to take home to a girl in far Havnor? Look at it, silk of the South, fine as the mayfly’s wing!” She had flipped open with deft hands a bolt of gauzy silk, pink shot with threads of silver.

“Nay, mistress, we’re not wed to queens,” said Hawk, and the woman’s voice rose to a blare: “So what do you dress your womenfolk in, burlap? Sailcloth? Misers that won’t buy a bit of silk for a poor woman freezing in the everlasting Northern snow! How’s this then, a Gontish fleecefell, to help you keep her warm on winter nights!” She flung out over the counterboard a great cream and brown square, woven of the silky hair of the goats of the northeastern isles. The pretended trader put out his hand and felt it, and he smiled.

“Aye, you’re a Gontishman?” said the blaring voice, and the headdress nodding sent a thousand colored dots spinning over the canopy and the cloth.

“This is Andradean work; see? There’s but four warp-strings to the finger’s width. Gont uses six or more. But tell me why you’ve turned from working magic to selling fripperies. When I was here years since, I saw you pulling flames out of men’s ears, and then you made the flames turn into birds and golden bells, and that was a finer trade than this one.”

“It was no trade at all,” the big woman said, and for a moment Arren was aware of her eyes, hard and steady as agates, looking at him and Hawk from out of the

glitter and restlessness of her nodding feathers and flashing mirrors.

"It was pretty, that pulling fire out of ears," said Hawk in a dour but simple-minded tone. "I thought to show it to my nevvy."

"Well now, look you," said the woman less harshly, leaning her broad, brown arms and heavy bosom on the counter. "We don't do those tricks anymore. People don't want 'em. They've seen through 'em. These mirrors now, I see you remember my mirrors," and she tossed her head so that the reflected dots of colored light whirled dizzily about them. "Well, you can puzzle a man's mind with the flashing of the mirrors and with words and with other tricks I won't tell you, till he thinks he sees what he don't see, what isn't there. Like the flames and golden bells, or the suits of clothes I used to deck sailormen in, cloth of gold with diamonds like apricots, and off they'd swagger like the King of All the Isles. . . . But it was tricks, fooleries. You can fool men. They're like chickens charmed by a snake, by a finger held before 'em. Men are like chickens. But then in the end they know they've been fooled and fuddled and they get angry and lose their pleasure in such things. So I turned to this trade, and maybe all the silks aren't silks nor all the fleeces Gontish, but all the same they'll wear—they'll wear! They're real and not mere lies and air like the suits of cloth of gold."

"Well, well," said Hawk, "then there's none left in all Hort Town to pull fire out of ears, or do any magic like they did?"

At his last words the woman frowned; she straightened up and began to fold the fleecefell carefully. "Those who want lies and visions chew hazia," she said. "Talk to them if you like!" She nodded at the unmoving figures around the square.

"But there were sorcerers, they that charmed the winds for seamen and put spells of fortune on their cargoes. Are they all turned to other trades?"

But she in sudden fury came blaring in over his words, "There's a sorcerer if you want one, a great one, a wizard with a staff and all—see him there? He sailed with Egre himself, making winds and finding fat galleys, so he said, but it was all lies, and Captain Egre gave him his just reward at last; he cut his right hand off. And there he sits now, see him, with his mouth full of hazia and his belly full of air. Air and lies! Air and lies! That's all there is to your magic, Seacaptain Goat!"

"Well, well, mistress," said Hawk with obdurate mildness, "I was only asking." She turned her broad back with a great dazzle of whirling mirror-dots, and he ambled off, Arren beside him.

His amble was purposeful. It brought them near the man she had pointed out. He sat propped against a wall, staring at nothing; the dark, bearded face had been

very handsome once. The wrinkled wrist-stump lay on the pavement stones in the hot, bright sunlight, shameful.

There was some commotion among the booths behind them, but Arren found it hard to look away from the man; a loathing fascination held him. "Was he really a wizard?" he asked very low.

"He may be the one called Hare, who was weather-worker for the pirate Egre. They were famous thieves—Here, stand clear, Arren!" A man running full-tilt out from among the booths nearly slammed into them both. Another came trotting by, struggling under the weight of a great folding tray loaded with cords and braids and laces. A booth collapsed with a crash; awnings were being pushed over or taken down hurriedly; knots of people shoved and wrestled through the marketplace; voices rose in shouts and screams. Above them all rang the blaring yell of the woman with the headdress of mirrors. Arren glimpsed her wielding some kind of pole or stick against a bunch of men, fending them off with great sweeps like a swordsman at bay. Whether it was a quarrel that had spread and become a riot, or an attack by a gang of thieves, or a fight between two rival lots of peddlers, there was no telling. People rushed by with armfuls of goods that could be loot or their own property saved from looting. There were knife-fights, fist-fights, and brawls all over the square. "That way," said Arren, pointing to a side street that led out of the square near them. He started for the street, for it was clear that they had better get out at once, but his companion caught his arm. Arren looked back and saw that the man Hare was struggling to his feet. When he got himself erect, he stood swaying a moment, and then without a look around him set off around the edge of the square, trailing his single hand along the house walls as if to guide or support himself. "Keep him in sight," Sparrowhawk said, and they set off following. No one molested them or the man they followed, and in a minute they were out of the market-square, going downhill in the silence of a narrow, twisting street.

Overhead the attics of the houses almost met across the street, cutting out light; underfoot the stones were slippery with water and refuse. Hare went along at a good pace, though he kept trailing his hand along the walls like a blind man. They had to keep pretty close behind him lest they lose him at a cross-street. The excitement of the chase came into Arren suddenly; his senses were all alert, as they were during a stag-hunt in the forests of Enlad; he saw vividly each face they passed, and breathed in the sweet stink of the city: a smell of garbage, incense, carrion, and flowers. As they threaded their way across a broad, crowded street he heard a drumbeat and caught a glimpse of a line of naked men and women, chained

each to the next by wrist and waist, matted hair hanging over their faces: one glimpse and they were gone, as he dodged after Hare down a flight of steps and out into a narrow square, empty but for a few women gossiping at the fountain.

There Sparrowhawk caught up with Hare and set a hand on his shoulder, at which Hare cringed as if scalded, wincing away, and backed into the shelter of a massive doorway. There he stood shivering and stared at them with the unseeing eyes of the hunted.

"Are you called Hare?" asked Sparrowhawk, and he spoke in his own voice, which was harsh in quality, but gentle in intonation. The man said nothing, seeming not to heed or not to hear. "I want something of you," Sparrowhawk said. Again no response. "I'll pay for it."

A slow reaction: "Ivory or gold?"

"Gold."

"How much?"

"The wizard knows the spell's worth."

Hare's face flinched and changed, coming alive for an instant, so quickly that it seemed to flicker, then clouding again into blankness. "That's all gone," he said, "all gone." A coughing fit bent him over; he spat black. When he straightened up he stood passive, shivering, seeming to have forgotten what they were talking about.

Again Arren watched him in fascination. The angle in which he stood was formed by two giant figures flanking a doorway, statues whose necks were bowed under the weight of a pediment and whose knot-muscled bodies emerged only partially from the wall, as if they had tried to struggle out of stone into life and had failed partway. The door they guarded was rotten on its hinges; the house, once a palace, was derelict. The gloomy, bulging faces of the giants were chipped and lichen-grown. Between these ponderous figures the man called Hare stood slack and fragile, his eyes as dark as the windows of the empty house. He lifted up his maimed arm between himself and Sparrowhawk and whined, "Spare a little for a poor cripple, master. . . ."

The mage scowled as if in pain or shame; Arren felt he had seen his true face for a moment under the disguise. He put his hand again on Hare's shoulder and said a few words, softly, in the wizardly tongue that Arren did not understand.

But Hare understood. He clutched at Sparrowhawk with his one hand and stammered, "You can still speak—speak—Come with me, come—"

The mage glanced at Arren, then nodded.

They went down by steep streets into one of the valleys between Hort Town's three hills. The ways became narrower, darker, quieter as they descended. The sky was a pale strip between the overhanging eaves, and the house walls to either hand were dank. At the bottom of the gorge a stream ran, stinking like an open sewer; between arched bridges, houses crowded along the banks. Into the dark doorway of one of these houses Hare turned aside, vanishing like a candle blown out. They followed him.

The unlit stairs creaked and swayed under their feet. At the head of the stairs Hare pushed open a door, and they could see where they were: an empty room with a straw-stuffed mattress in one corner and one unglazed, shuttered window that let in a little dusty light.

Hare turned to face Sparrowhawk and caught at his arm again. His lips worked. He said at last, stammering, "Dragon . . . dragon . . ."

Sparrowhawk returned his look steadily, saying nothing.

"I cannot speak," Hare said, and he let go his hold on Sparrowhawk's arm and crouched down on the empty floor, weeping.

The mage knelt by him and spoke to him softly in the Old Speech. Arren stood by the shut door, his hand on his knife-hilt. The grey light and the dusty room, the two kneeling figures, the soft, strange sound of the mage's voice speaking the language of the dragons, all came together as does a dream, having no relation to what happens outside it or to time passing.

Slowly Hare stood up. He dusted his knees with his single hand and hid the maimed arm behind his back. He looked around him, looked at Arren; he was seeing what he looked at now. He turned away presently and sat down on his mattress. Arren remained standing, on guard; but, with the simplicity of one whose childhood had been totally without furnishings, Sparrowhawk sat down cross-legged on the bare floor. "Tell me how you lost your craft and the language of your craft," he said.

Hare did not answer for a while. He began to beat his mutilated arm against his thigh in a restless, jerky way, and at last he said, forcing the words out in bursts, "They cut off my hand. I can't weave the spells. They cut off my hand. The blood ran out, ran dry."

"But that was after you'd lost your power, Hare, or else they could not have done it."

"Power . . ."

"Power over the winds and the waves and men. You called them by their names

and they obeyed you."

"Yes. I remember being alive," the man said in a soft, hoarse voice. "And I knew the words and the names . . ."

"Are you dead now?"

"No. Alive. Alive. Only once I was a dragon. . . . I'm not dead. I sleep sometimes. Sleep comes very close to death, everyone knows that. The dead walk in dreams, everyone knows that. They come to you alive, and they say things. They walk out of death into the dreams. There's a way. And if you go on far enough there's a way back all the way. All the way. You can find it if you know where to look. And if you're willing to pay the price."

"What price is that?" Sparrowhawk's voice floated on the dim air like the shadow of a falling leaf.

"Life—what else? What can you buy life with, but life?" Hare rocked back and forth on his pallet, a cunning, uncanny brightness in his eyes. "You see," he said, "they can cut off my hand. They can cut off my head. It doesn't matter. I can find the way back. I know where to look. Only men of power can go there."

"Wizards, you mean?"

"Yes." Hare hesitated, seeming to attempt the word several times; he could not say it. "Men of power," he repeated. "And they must—and they must give it up. Pay."

Then he fell sullen, as if the word "pay" had at last roused associations, and he had realized that he was giving information away instead of selling it. Nothing more could be got from him, not even the hints and stammers about "a way back" which Sparrowhawk seemed to find meaningful, and soon enough the mage stood up. "Well, half-answers beat no answers," he said, "and the same with payment," and, deft as a conjuror, he flipped a gold piece onto the pallet in front of Hare.

Hare picked it up. He looked at it and Sparrowhawk and Arren, with jerky movements of his head. "Wait," he stammered. As soon as the situation changed he lost his grip of it and now groped miserably after what he wanted to say. "Tonight," he said at last. "Wait. Tonight. I have hazia."

"I don't need it."

"To show you—To show you the way. Tonight. I'll take you. I'll show you. You can get there, because you . . . you're . . ." He groped for the word until Sparrowhawk said, "I am a wizard."

"Yes! So we can—we can get there. To the way. When I dream. In the dream. See? I'll take you. You'll go with me, to the . . . to the way."

Sparrowhawk stood, solid and pondering, in the middle of the dim room. "Maybe," he said at last. "If we come, we'll be here by dark." Then he turned to Arren, who opened the door at once, eager to be gone.

The dank, overshadowed street seemed bright as a garden after Hare's room. They struck out for the upper city by the shortest way, a steep stairway of stone between ivy-grown house walls. Arren breathed in and out like a sea lion—"Ugh!—Are you going back there?"

"Well, I will, if I can't get the same information from a less risky source. He's likely to set an ambush for us."

"But aren't you defended against thieves and so on?"

"Defended?" said Sparrowhawk. "What do you mean? D'you think I go about wrapped up in spells like an old woman afraid of the rheumatism? I haven't the time for it. I hide my face to hide our quest; that's all. We can look out for each other. But the fact is we're not going to be able to keep out of danger on this journey."

"Of course not," Arren said stiffly, angry, angered in his pride. "I did not seek to do so."

"That's just as well," the mage said, inflexible, and yet with a kind of good humor that appeased Arren's temper. Indeed he was startled by his own anger; he had never thought to speak thus to the Archmage. But then, this was and was not the Archmage, this Hawk with the snubbed nose and square, ill-shaven cheeks, whose voice was sometimes one man's voice and sometimes another's: a stranger, unreliable.

"Does it make sense, what he told you?" Arren asked, for he did not look forward to going back to that dim room above the stinking river. "All that fiddle-faddle about being alive and dead and coming back with his head cut off?"

"I don't know if it makes sense. I wanted to talk with a wizard who had lost his power. He says that he hasn't lost it but given it—traded it. For what? Life for life, he said. Power for power. No, I don't understand him, but he is worth listening to."

Sparrowhawk's steady reasonableness shamed Arren further. He felt himself petulant and nervous, like a child. Hare had fascinated him, but now that the fascination was broken he felt a sick disgust, as if he had eaten something vile. He resolved not to speak again until he had controlled his temper. Next moment he missed his step on the worn, slick stairs, slipped, and recovered himself, scraping his hands on the stones. "Oh curse this filthy town!" he broke out in rage. And the

mage replied dryly, “No need to, I think.”

There was indeed something wrong about Hort Town, wrong in the very air, so that one might think seriously that it lay under a curse; and yet this was not a presence of any quality, but rather an absence, a weakening of all qualities, like a sickness that soon infected the spirit of any visitor. Even the warmth of the afternoon sun was sickly, too heavy a heat for March. The squares and streets bustled with activity and business, but there was neither order nor prosperity. Goods were poor, prices high, and the markets were unsafe for vendors and buyers alike, being full of thieves and roaming gangs. Not many women were on the streets, and the few there were appeared mostly in groups. It was a city without law or governance. Talking with people, Arren and Sparrowhawk soon learned that there was in fact no council or mayor or lord left in Hort Town. Some of those who had used to rule the city had died, and some had resigned, and some had been assassinated; various chiefs lorded it over various quarters of the city, the harbor guardsmen ran the port and lined their pockets, and so on.

There was no center left to the city. The people, for all their restless activity, seemed purposeless. Craftsmen seemed to lack the will to work well; even the robbers robbed because it was all they knew how to do. All the brawl and brightness of a great port-city was there, on the surface, but all about the edges of it sat the hazia-eaters, motionless. And under the surface, things did not seem entirely real, not even the faces, the sounds, the smells. They would fade from time to time during that long, warm afternoon while Sparrowhawk and Arren walked the streets and talked with this person and that. They would fade quite away. The striped awnings, the dirty cobbles, the colored walls, and all the vividness of being would be gone, leaving the city a dream city, empty and dreary in the hazy sunlight.

Only at the top of the town where they went to rest awhile in late afternoon did this sickly mood of daydream break for a while. “This is not a town for luck,” Sparrowhawk had said some hours ago, and now after hours of aimless wandering and fruitless conversations with strangers, he looked tired and grim. His disguise was wearing a little thin; a certain hardness and darkness could be seen through the bluff sea-trader’s face. Arren had not been able to shake off the morning’s irritability. They sat down on the coarse turf of the hilltop under the leaves of a grove of pendick trees, dark-leaved and budded thickly with red buds, some open. From there they saw nothing of the city but its tile roofs multitudinously scaling downward to the sea. The bay opened its arms wide, slate blue beneath the spring haze, reaching on to the edge of air. No lines were drawn, no boundaries. They sat

gazing at that immense blue space. Arren's mind cleared, opening out to meet and celebrate the world.

When they went to drink from a little stream nearby, running clear over brown rocks from its spring in some princely garden on the hill behind them, he drank deep and doused his head right under the cold water. Then he got up and declaimed the lines from the *Deed of Morred*.

> *Praised are the Fountains of Shelieth, the silver harp of the waters,*
> *But blest in my name forever this stream that stanched my thirst!*

Sparrowhawk laughed at him, and he also laughed. He shook his head like a dog, and the bright spray flew out fine in the last gold sunlight.

They had to leave the grove and go down into the streets again, and when they had made their supper at a stall that sold greasy fishcakes, night was getting heavy in the air. Darkness came fast in the narrow streets. "We'd better go, lad," said Sparrowhawk, and Arren said, "To the boat?" but knew it was not to the boat but to the house above the river and the empty, dusty, terrible room.

Hare was waiting for them in the doorway.

He lighted an oil lamp to show them up the black stairs. Its tiny flame trembled continually as he held it, throwing vast, quick shadows up the walls.

He had got another sack of straw for his visitors to sit on, but Arren took his place on the bare floor by the door. The door opened outward, and to guard it he should have sat himself down outside it: but that pitch-black hall was more than he could stand, and he wanted to keep an eye on Hare. Sparrowhawk's attention and perhaps his powers were going to be turned on what Hare had to tell him or show him; it was up to Arren to keep alert for trickery.

Hare held himself straighter and trembled less; he had cleaned his mouth and teeth; he spoke sanely enough at first, though with excitement. His eyes in the lamplight were so dark that they seemed, like the eyes of animals, to show no whites. He disputed earnestly with Sparrowhawk, urging him to eat hazia. "I want to take you, take you with me. We've got to go the same way. Before long I'll be going, whether you're ready or not. You must have the hazia to follow me."

"I think I can follow you."

"Not where I'm going. This isn't . . . spell-casting." He seemed unable to say the words "wizard" or "wizardry." "I know you can get to the—the place, you know,

the wall. But it isn't there. It's a different way."

"If you go, I can follow."

Hare shook his head. His handsome, ruined face was flushed; he glanced over at Arren often, including him, though he spoke only to Sparrowhawk. "Look: there are two kinds of men, aren't there? Our kind and the rest. The . . . the dragons and the others. People without power are only half-alive. They don't count. They don't know what they dream; they're afraid of the dark. But the others, the lords of men, aren't afraid to go into the dark. We have strength."

"So long as we know the names of things."

"But names don't matter there—that's the point, that's the point! It isn't what you do, what you know, that you need. Spells are no good. You have to forget all that, to let it go. That's where eating hazia helps; you forget the names, you let the forms of things go, you go straight to the reality. I'm going to be going pretty soon now; if you want to find out where, you ought to do as I say. I say as he does. You must be a lord of men to be a lord of life. You have to find the secret. I could tell you its name but what's a name? A name isn't real, the real, the real forever. Dragons can't go there. Dragons die. They all die. I took so much tonight you'll never catch me. Not a patch on me. Where I get lost you can lead me. Remember what the secret is? Remember? No death. No death—no! No sweaty bed and rotting coffin, no more, never. The blood dries up like the dry river and it's gone. No fear. No death. The names are gone and the words and the fear, gone. Show me where I get lost, show me, lord. . . ."

So he went on, in a choked rapture of words that was like the chanting of a spell, and yet made no spell, no whole, no sense. Arren listened, listened, striving to understand. If only he could understand! Sparrowhawk should do as he said and take the drug, this once, so that he could find out what Hare was talking about, the mystery that he would not or could not speak. Why else were they here? But then (Arren looked from Hare's ecstatic face to the other profile) perhaps the mage understood already. . . . Hard as rock, that profile. Where was the snubbed nose, the bland look? Hawk the sea-trader was gone, forgotten. It was the mage, the Archmage, who sat there.

Hare's voice now was a crooning mumble, and he rocked his body as he sat cross-legged. His face had grown haggard and his mouth slack. Facing him, in the tiny, steady light of the oil lamp set on the floor between them, the other never spoke, but he had reached out and taken Hare's hand, holding him. Arren had not seen him reach out. There were gaps in the order of events, gaps of nonexistence—

drowsiness, it must be. Surely some hours had passed; it might be near midnight. If he slept, would he too be able to follow Hare into his dream and come to the place, the secret way? Perhaps he could. It seemed quite possible now. But he was to guard the door. He and Sparrowhawk had scarcely spoken of it, but both were aware that in having them come back at night Hare might have planned some ambush; he had been a pirate; he knew robbers. They had said nothing, but Arren knew that he was to stand guard, for while the mage made this strange journey of the spirit he would be defenseless. But like a fool he had left his sword on board the boat, and how much good would his knife be if that door swung suddenly open behind him? But that would not happen: he could listen and hear. Hare was not speaking anymore. Both men were utterly silent; the whole house was silent. Nobody could come up those swaying stairs without some noise. He could speak, if he heard a noise: shout aloud, and the trance would break, and Sparrowhawk would turn and defend himself and Arren with all the vengeful lightning of a wizard's rage. . . . When Arren had sat down at the door, Sparrowhawk had looked at him, only a glance, approval: approval and trust. He was the guard. There was no danger if he kept on guard. But it was hard, hard to keep watching those two faces, the little pearl of the lamp-flame between them on the floor, both silent now, both still, their eyes open but not seeing the light or the dusty room, not seeing the world, but some other world of dream or death . . . to watch them and not to try to follow them. . . .

There, in the vast, dry darkness, there one stood beckoning. *Come*, he said, the tall lord of shadows. In his hand he held a tiny flame no larger than a pearl, held it out to Arren, offering life. Slowly Arren took one step toward him, following.

Chapter 4

Magelight

Dry, his mouth was dry. There was the taste of dust in his mouth. His lips were covered with dust.

Without lifting his head from the floor, he watched the shadow-play. There were the big shadows that moved and stooped, swelled and shrank, and fainter ones that ran around the walls and ceiling swiftly, mocking them. There was a shadow in the corner and a shadow on the floor, and neither of these moved.

The back of his head began to hurt. At the same time, what he saw came clear to his mind, in one flash, frozen in an instant: Hare slumped in a corner with his head on his knees, Sparrowhawk sprawled on his back, a man kneeling over Sparrowhawk, another tossing gold pieces into a bag, a third standing watching. The third man held a lantern in one hand and a dagger in the other, Arren's dagger.

If they talked, he did not hear them. He heard only his own thoughts, which told him immediately and unhesitatingly what to do. He obeyed them at once. He crawled forward very slowly a couple of feet, darted out his left hand and grabbed the bag of loot, leapt to his feet, and made for the stairs with a hoarse yell. He plunged downstairs in the blind dark without missing a step, without even feeling them under his feet, as if he were flying. He broke out onto the street and ran full-speed into the dark.

The houses were black hulks against the stars. Starlight gleamed faintly on the river to his right, and though he could not see where the streets led, he could make out street-crossings and so turn and double on his track. They had followed him; he could hear them behind him, not very far behind. They were unshod, and their panting breathing was louder than their footfalls. He would have laughed if he had had time; he knew at last what it was like to be the hunted instead of the hunter, the quarry instead of the leader of the chase. It was to be alone and to be free. He

swerved to the right and dodged, stooping across a high-parapetted bridge, slipped into a side street, around a corner, back to the riverside and along it for a way, across another bridge. His shoes were loud on the cobblestones, the only sound in all the city; he paused at the bridge abutment to unlace them, but the strings were knotted, and the hunt had not lost him. The lantern glittered a second across the river; the soft, heavy, running feet came on. He could not get away from them. He could only outrun them; keep going, keep ahead, and get them away from the dusty room, far away. . . .

They had stripped his coat off him, along with his dagger, and he was in shirt-sleeves, light and hot, his head swimming, and the pain in the back of his skull pointing and pointing with each stride, and he ran and he ran. . . . The bag hindered him. He flung it down suddenly, a loose gold piece flying out and striking the stones with a clear ring. "Here's your money!" he yelled, his voice hoarse and gasping. He ran on. And at once the street ended. No cross-streets, no stars before him, a dead end. Without pausing he turned back and ran at his pursuers. The lantern swung wild in his eyes, and he yelled defiance as he came at them.

There was a lantern swinging back and forth before him, a faint spot of light in a great, moving greyness. He watched it for a long time. It grew fainter, and at last a shadow passed before it, and when the shadow went on the light was gone. He grieved for it a little; or perhaps he was grieving for himself, because he knew he must wake up now.

The lantern, dead, still swung against the mast to which it was fixed. All around, the sea brightened with the coming sun. A drumbeat. Oars creaked heavily, regularly; a man up in the prow called something to the sailors behind him. The men chained with Arren in the after hold were all silent. Each wore an iron band around his waist and manacles on his wrists, and both these bonds were linked by a short, heavy chain to the bonds of the next man; the belt of iron was also chained to a bolt in the deck, so that the man could sit or crouch, but could not stand. They were too close together to lie down, jammed together in the small cargo-hold. Arren was in the forward port corner. If he lifted his head high, his eyes were on a level with the deck between hold and rail, a couple of feet wide.

He did not remember much of last night past the chase and the dead-end street. He had fought and been knocked down and trussed up and carried somewhere. A man with a strange whispering voice had spoken; there had been a place like a smithy, a forge-fire leaping red. . . . He could not recall it. He knew, though, that

this was a slave-ship, and that he had been taken to be sold.

It did not mean much to him. He was too thirsty. His body ached and his head hurt. When the sun rose the light sent lances of pain into his eyes.

Along in midmorning they were given a quarter-loaf of bread each and a long drink from a leather flask, held to their lips by a man with a sharp, hard face. His neck was clasped by a broad, gold-studded leather band like a dog's collar, and when Arren heard him speak he recognized the weak, strange, whistling voice.

Drink and food eased his bodily wretchedness for a while and cleared his head. He looked for the first time at the faces of his fellow slaves, three in his row and four close behind. Some sat with their heads on their raised knees; one was slumped over, sick or drugged. The one next to Arren was a fellow of twenty or so with a broad, flat face. "Where are they taking us?" Arren said to him.

The fellow looked at him—their faces were not a foot apart—and grinned, shrugging, and Arren thought he meant he did not know; but then he jerked his manacled arms as if to gesture and opened his still-grinning mouth wide to show, where the tongue should be, only a black root.

"It'll be Showl," said one behind Arren; and another, "Or the Market at Amrun," and then the man with the collar, who seemed to be everywhere on the ship, was bending above the hold, hissing, "Be still if you don't want to be shark bait," and all of them were still.

Arren tried to imagine these places, Showl, the Market of Amrun. They sold slaves there. They stood them out in front of the buyers, no doubt, like oxen or rams for sale in Berila Marketplace. He would stand there wearing chains. Somebody would buy him and lead him home and they would give him an order; and he would refuse to obey. Or obey and try to escape. And he would be killed, one way or the other. It was not that his soul rebelled at the thought of slavery; he was much too sick and bewildered for that. It was simply that he knew he could not do it; that within a week or two he would die or be killed. Though he saw and accepted this as a fact, it frightened him, so that he stopped trying to think ahead. He stared down at the foul, black planking of the hold between his feet and felt the heat of the sun on his naked shoulders and felt the thirst drying out his mouth and narrowing his throat again.

The sun sank. Night came on clear and cold. The sharp stars came out. The drum beat like a slow heart, keeping the oar-stroke, for there was no breath of wind. Now the cold became the greatest misery. Arren's back gained a little warmth from the cramped legs of the man behind him and his left side from the mute beside

him, who sat hunched up, humming a grunting rhythm all on one note. The rowers changed shift; the drum beat again. Arren had longed for the darkness, but he could not sleep. His bones ached, and he could not change position. He sat aching, shivering, parched, staring up at the stars, which jerked across the sky with every stroke the oarsmen took, slid to their places, and were still, jerked again, slid, paused. . . .

The man with the collar and another man stood between the after hold and the mast; the little swinging lantern on the mast sent gleams between them and silhouetted their heads and shoulders. "Fog, you pig's bladder," said the weak, hateful voice of the man with the collar, "what's a fog doing in the Southing Straits this time of year? Curse the luck!"

The drum beat. The stars jerked, slid, paused. Beside Arren the tongueless man shuddered all at once and, raising his head, let out a nightmare scream, a terrible, formless noise. "Quiet there!" roared the second man by the mast. The mute shuddered again and was silent, munching with his jaws.

Stealthily the stars slid forward into nothingness.

The mast wavered and vanished. A cold, grey blanket seemed to drop over Arren's back. The drum faltered and then resumed its beat, but slower.

"Thick as curdled milk," said the hoarse voice somewhere above Arren. "Keep up the stroke there! There's no shoals for twenty miles!" A horny, scarred foot appeared out of the fog, paused an instant close to Arren's face, then with one step vanished.

In the fog there was no sense of forward motion, only of swaying and the tug of the oars. The throb of the stroke-drum was muffled. It was clammy cold. The mist condensing in Arren's hair ran down into his eyes; he tried to catch the drops with his tongue and breathed the damp air with open mouth, trying to assuage his thirst. But his teeth chattered. The cold metal of a chain swung against his thigh and burnt like fire where it touched. The drum beat, and beat, and ceased.

It was silent.

"Keep the beat! What's amiss?" roared the hoarse, whistling voice from the prow. No answer came.

The ship rolled a little on the quiet sea. Beyond the dim rails was nothing: blank. Something grated against the ship's side. The noise was loud in that dead, weird silence and darkness. "We're aground," one of the prisoners whispered, but the silence closed in on his voice.

The fog grew bright, as if a light were blooming in it. Arren saw the heads of the

men chained by him clearly, the tiny moisture-drops shining in their hair.

Again the ship swayed, and he strained as far up as his chains would let him, stretching his neck, to see forward in the ship. The fog glowed over the deck like the moon behind thin clouds, cold and radiant. The oarsmen sat like carved statues. Crewmen stood in the waist of the ship, their eyes shining a little. Alone on the port side stood a man, and it was from him that the light came, from the face and hands and staff that burned like molten silver.

At the feet of the radiant man a dark shape was crouched.

Arren tried to speak and could not. Clothed in that majesty of light, the Archmage came to him and knelt down on the deck. Arren felt the touch of his hand and heard his voice. He felt the bonds on his wrists and body give way; all through the hold there was a rattling of chains. But no man moved; only Arren tried to stand, but he could not, being cramped with long immobility. The Archmage's strong grip was on his arm, and with that help he crawled up out of the cargo-hold and huddled on the deck.

The Archmage strode away from him, and the misty splendor glowed on the unmoving faces of the oarsmen. He halted by the man who had crouched down by the port rail.

"I do not punish," said the hard, clear voice, cold as the cold magelight in the fog. "But in the cause of justice, Egre, I take this much upon myself: I bid your voice be dumb until the day you find a word worth speaking."

He came back to Arren and helped him to get to his feet. "Come on now, lad," he said, and with his help Arren managed to hobble forward, and half-scramble, half-fall down into the boat that rocked there below the ship's side: *Lookfar*, her sail like a moth's wing in the fog.

In the same silence and dead calm the light died away, and the boat turned and slipped from the ship's side. Almost at once the galley, the dim mast-lantern, the immobile oarsmen, the hulking black side, were gone. Arren thought he heard voices break out in cries, but the sound was thin and soon lost. A little longer, and the fog began to thin and tatter, blowing by in the dark. They came out under the stars, and silent as a moth *Lookfar* fled through the clear night over the sea.

Sparrowhawk had covered Arren with blankets and given him water; he sat with his hand on the boy's shoulder when Arren fell suddenly to weeping. Sparrowhawk said nothing, but there was a gentleness, a steadiness, in the touch of his hand. Comfort came slowly into Arren: warmth, the soft motion of the boat, heart's ease.

He looked up at his companion. No unearthly radiance clung to the dark face. He could barely see him against the stars.

The boat fled on, charm-guided. Waves whispered as if in surprise along her sides.

"Who is the man with the collar?"

"Lie still. A sea-robber, Egre. He wears that collar to hide a scar where his throat was slit once. It seems his trade has sunk from piracy to slaving. But he took the bear's cub this time." There was a slight ring of satisfaction in the dry, quiet voice.

"How did you find me?"

"Wizardry, bribery. . . . I wasted time. I did not like to let it be known that the Archmage and Warden of Roke was ferreting about the slums of Hort Town. I wish still I could have kept up my disguise. But I had to track down this man and that man, and when at last I found that the slaver had sailed before daybreak, I lost my temper. I took *Lookfar* and spoke the wind into her sail in the dead calm of the day and glued the oars of every ship in that bay fast into the oarlocks—for a while. How they'll explain that, if wizardry's all lies and air, is their problem. But in my haste and anger I missed and overpassed Egre's ship, which had gone east of south to miss the shoals. Ill done was all I did this day. There is no luck in Hort Town. . . . Well, I made a spell of finding at last, and so came on the ship in the darkness. Should you not sleep now?"

"I'm all right. I feel much better." A light fever had replaced Arren's chill, and he did indeed feel well, his body languid but his mind racing lightly from one thing to another. "How soon did you wake up? What happened to Hare?"

"I woke with daylight; and lucky I have a hard head; there's a lump and a cut like a split cucumber behind my ear. I left Hare in the drug-sleep."

"I failed my guard—"

"But not by falling asleep."

"No." Arren hesitated. "It was—I was—"

"You were ahead of me: I saw you," Sparrowhawk said strangely. "And so they crept in and tapped us on the head like lambs at the shambles, took gold, good clothes, and the salable slave, and left. It was you they were after, lad. You'd fetch the price of a farm in Amrun Market."

"They didn't tap me hard enough. I woke up. I did give them a run. I spilt their loot all over the street, too, before they cornered me." Arren's eyes glittered.

"You woke while they were there—and ran? Why?"

"To get them away from you." The surprise in Sparrowhawk's voice suddenly

struck Arren's pride, and he added fiercely, "I thought it was you they were after. I thought they might kill you. I grabbed their bag so they'd follow me, and shouted out and ran. And they did follow me."

"Aye—they would!" That was all Sparrowhawk said, no word of praise, though he sat and thought awhile. Then he said, "Did it not occur to you I might be dead already?"

"No."

"Murder first and rob after, is the safer course."

"I didn't think of that. I only thought of getting them away from you."

"Why?"

"Because you might be able to defend us, to get us both out of it, if you had time to wake up. Or get yourself out of it, anyway. I was on guard, and I failed my guard. I tried to make up for it. You are the one I was guarding. You are the one that matters. I'm along to guard, or whatever you need—it's you who'll lead us, who can get to wherever it is we must go, and put right what's gone wrong."

"Is it?" said the mage. "I thought so myself, until last night. I thought I had a follower, but I followed you, my lad." His voice was cool and perhaps a little ironic. Arren did not know what to say. He was indeed completely confused. He had thought that his fault of falling into sleep or trance on guard could scarcely be atoned by his feat of drawing off the robbers from Sparrowhawk: it now appeared that the latter had been a silly act, whereas going into trance at the wrong moment had been wonderfully clever.

"I am sorry, my lord," he said at last, his lips rather stiff and the need to cry not easily controlled again, "that I failed you. And you have saved my life—"

"And you mine, maybe," said the mage harshly. "Who knows? They might have slit my throat when they were done. No more of that, Arren. I am glad you are with me."

He went to their stores-box then and lit their little charcoal stove and busied himself with something. Arren lay and watched the stars, and his emotions cooled and his mind ceased racing. And he saw then that what he had done and what he had not done were not going to receive judgment from Sparrowhawk. He had done it; Sparrowhawk accepted it as done. "I do not punish," he had said, cold-voiced, to Egre. Neither did he reward. But he had come for Arren in all haste across the sea, unleashing the power of his wizardry for his sake; and he would do so again. He was to be depended on.

He was worth all the love Arren had for him, and all the trust. For the fact was

that he trusted Arren. What Arren did was right.

He came back now, handing Arren a cup of steaming hot wine. "Maybe that'll put you to sleep. Take care, it'll scald your tongue."

"Where did the wine come from? I never saw a wineskin aboard—"

"There's more in *Lookfar* than meets the eye," Sparrowhawk said, sitting down again beside him, and Arren heard him laugh, briefly and almost silently, in the dark.

Arren sat up to drink the wine. It was very good, refreshing body and spirit. He said, "Where are we going now?"

"Westward."

"Where did you go with Hare?"

"Into the darkness. I never lost him, but he was lost. He wandered on the outer borders, in the endless barrens of delirium and nightmare. His soul piped like a bird in those dreary places, like a seagull crying far from the sea. He is no guide. He has always been lost. For all his craft in sorcery he has never seen the way before him, seeing only himself."

Arren did not understand all of this; nor did he want to understand it, now. He had been drawn a little way into that "darkness" of which wizards spoke, and he did not want to remember it; it was nothing to do with him. Indeed he did not want to sleep, lest he see it again in dream and see that dark figure, a shadow holding out a pearl, whispering, "Come."

"My lord," he said, his mind veering away rapidly to another subject, "why—"

"Sleep!" said Sparrowhawk with mild exasperation.

"I can't sleep, my lord. I wondered why you didn't free the other slaves."

"I did. I left none bound on that ship."

"But Egre's men had weapons. If you had bound *them*—"

"Aye, if I had bound them? There were but six. The oarsmen were chained slaves, like you. Egre and his men may be dead by now, or chained by the others to be sold as slaves; but I left them free to fight or bargain. I am no slave-taker."

"But you knew them to be evil men—"

"Was I to join them therefore? To let their acts rule my own? I will not make their choices for them, nor will I let them make mine for me!"

Arren was silent, pondering this. Presently the mage said, speaking softly, "Do you see, Arren, how an act is not, as young men think, like a rock that one picks up and throws, and it hits or misses, and that's the end of it. When that rock is lifted, the earth is lighter; the hand that bears it heavier. When it is thrown, the circuits of

the stars respond, and where it strikes or falls the universe is changed. On every act the Balance of the Whole depends. The winds and seas, the powers of water and earth and light, all that these do, and all that the beasts and green things do, is well done, and rightly done. All these act within the Equilibrium. From the hurricane and the great whale's sounding to the fall of a dry leaf and the gnat's flight, all they do is done within the Balance of the Whole. But we, insofar as we have power over the world and over one another, we must *learn* to do what the leaf and the whale and the wind do of their own nature. We must learn to keep the Balance. Having intelligence, we must not act in ignorance. Having choice, we must not act without responsibility. Who am I—though I have the power to do it—to punish and reward, playing with men's destinies?"

"But then," the boy said, frowning at the stars, "is the Balance to be kept by doing nothing? Surely a man must act, even not knowing all the consequences of his act, if anything is to be done at all?"

"Never fear. It is much easier for men to act than to refrain from acting. We will continue to do good and to do evil. . . . But if there were a king over us all again and he sought counsel of a mage, as in the days of old, and I were that mage, I would say to him: My lord, do nothing because it is righteous or praiseworthy or noble to do so; do nothing because it seems good to do so; do only that which you must do and which you cannot do in any other way."

There was that in his voice which made Arren turn to watch him as he spoke. He thought that the radiance of light was shining again from his face, seeing the hawk nose and the scarred cheek, the dark, fierce eyes. And Arren looked at him with love, but also with fear, thinking, He is too far above me. Yet as he gazed he became aware at last that it was no magelight, no cold glory of wizardry, that lay shadowless on every line and plane of the man's face, but light itself: morning, the common light of day. There was a power greater than the mage's. And the years had been no kinder to Sparrowhawk than to any man. Those were lines of age, and he looked tired, as the light grew ever stronger. He yawned. . . .

So gazing and wondering and pondering, Arren fell asleep at last. But Sparrowhawk sat by him, watching the dawn come and the sun rise, even as one might study a treasure for something gone amiss in it, a jewel flawed, a child sick.

Chapter 5

Sea Dreams

Late in the morning Sparrowhawk took the magewind from the sail and let his boat go by the world's wind, which blew softly to the south and west. Far off to the right, the hills of southern Wathort slipped away and fell behind, growing blue and small, like misty waves above the waves.

Arren woke. The sea basked in the hot, gold noon, endless water under endless light. In the stern of the boat Sparrowhawk sat naked except for a loincloth and a kind of turban made from sailcloth. He was singing softly, striking his palms on the thwart as if it were a drum, in a light, monotonous rhythm. The song he sang was no spell of wizardry, no chant or deed of heroes or kings, but a lilting drone of nonsense words, such as a boy might sing as he herded goats through the long, long afternoons of summer, in the high hills of Gont, alone.

From the sea's surface a fish leapt up and glided through the air for many yards on stiff, shimmering vanes like the wings of dragonflies.

"We're in the South Reach," Sparrowhawk said when his song was done. "A strange part of the world, where the fish fly and the dolphins sing, they say. But the water's mild for swimming, and I have an understanding with the sharks. Wash the touch of the slave-taker from you."

Arren was sore in every muscle and loath to move at first. Also he was an unpracticed swimmer, for the seas of Enlad are bitter, so that one must fight with them rather than swim in them and is soon exhausted. This bluer sea was cold at first plunge, then delightful. Aches dropped away from him. He thrashed by *Lookfar*'s side like a young sea-serpent. Spray flew up in fountains. Sparrowhawk joined him, swimming with a firmer stroke. Docile and protective, *Lookfar* waited for them, white-winged on the shining water. A fish leapt from sea to air; Arren pursued it; it dived, leapt up again, swimming in air, flying in the sea, pursuing him.

Golden and supple, the boy played and basked in the water and the light until the sun touched the sea. And dark and spare, with the economy of gesture and the terse strength of age, the man swam, and kept the boat on course, and rigged up an awning of sailcloth, and watched the swimming boy and the flying fish with an impartial tenderness.

"Where are we heading?" Arren asked in the late dusk, after eating largely of salt meat and hard bread, and already sleepy again.

"Lorbanery," Sparrowhawk replied, and the soft syllables formed the last word Arren heard that night, so that his dreams of the early night wove themselves about it. He dreamt he was walking in drifts of soft, pale-colored stuff, shreds and threads of pink and gold and azure, and felt a foolish pleasure; someone told him, "These are the silk-fields of Lorbanery, where it never gets dark." But later, in the fag-end of night, when the stars of autumn shone in the sky of spring, he dreamt that he was in a ruined house. It was dry there. Everything was dusty, and festooned with ragged, dusty webs. Arren's legs were tangled in the webs, and they drifted across his mouth and nostrils, stopping his breath. And the worst horror of it was that he knew the high, ruined room was that hall where he had breakfasted with the Masters, in the Great House on Roke.

He woke all in dismay, his heart pounding, his legs cramped against a thwart. He sat up, trying to get away from the evil dream. In the east there was not yet light, but a dilution of darkness. The mast creaked; the sail, still taut to the northeast breeze, glimmered high and faint above him. In the stern his companion slept sound and silent. Arren lay down again and dozed till clear day woke him.

This day the sea was bluer and quieter than he had ever imagined it could be, the water so mild and clear that swimming in it was half like gliding or floating upon air; strange it was and dreamlike.

In the noontime he asked, "Do wizards make much account of dreams?"

Sparrowhawk was fishing. He watched his line attentively. After a long time he said, "Why?"

"I wondered if there's ever truth in them."

"Surely."

"Do they foretell truly?"

But the mage had a bite, and ten minutes later, when he had landed their lunch, a splendid silver-blue sea bass, the question was clean forgotten.

In the afternoon as they lazed under the awning rigged to give shelter from the imperious sun, Arren asked, "What do we seek in Lorbanery?"

“That which we seek,” said Sparrowhawk.

“In Enlad,” said Arren after a while, “we have a story about the boy whose schoolmaster was a stone.”

“Aye? . . . What did he learn?”

“Not to ask questions.”

Sparrowhawk snorted, as if suppressing a laugh, and sat up. “Very well!” he said. “Though I prefer to save talking till I know what I’m talking about. Why is there no more magic done in Hort Town and in Narveduen and maybe throughout all the Reaches? That’s what we seek to learn, is it not?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know the old saying, *Rules change in the Reaches*? Seamen use it, but it is a wizards’ saying, and it means that wizardry itself depends on place. A true spell on Roke may be mere words on Iffish. The language of the Making is not everywhere remembered; here one word, there another. And the weaving of spells is itself interwoven with the earth and the water, the winds and the fall of light of the place where it is cast. I once sailed far into the East, so far that neither wind nor water heeded my command, being ignorant of their true names; or more likely it was I who was ignorant.

“The world is very large, the Open Sea going on past all knowledge; and there are worlds beyond the world. Over these abysses of space and in the long extent of time, I doubt whether any word that can be spoken would bear, everywhere and forever, its weight of meaning and its power; unless it were that First Word which Segoy spoke, making all, or the Final Word, which has not been nor will be spoken until all things are unmade. . . . So, even within this world of our Earthsea, the little islands that we know, there are differences and mysteries and changes. And the place least known and fullest of mysteries is the South Reach. Few wizards of the Inner Lands have come among these people. They do not welcome wizards, having—so it is believed—their own kinds of magic. But the rumors of these are vague, and it may be that the Art Magic was never well known there, nor fully understood. If so, it would be easily undone by one who set himself to the undoing of it, and sooner weakened than our wizardry of the Inner Lands. And then we might hear tales of the failure of magic in the South.

“For discipline is the channel in which our acts run strong and deep; where there is no direction, the deeds of men run shallow and wander and are wasted. So that fat woman of the mirrors has lost her art and thinks she never had it. And so Hare takes his hazia and thinks he has gone farther than the greatest mages go,

when he has barely entered the fields of dream and is already lost. . . . But where is it that he *thinks* he goes? What is it he looks for? What is it that has swallowed up his wizardry? We have had enough of Hort Town, I think, so we go farther south, to Lorbanery, to see what the wizards do there, to find out what it is that we must find out. . . . Does that answer you?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then let the stone be still awhile!" said the mage. And he sat by the mast in the yellowish, glowing shade of the awning and looked out to sea, to the west, as the boat sailed softly southward through the afternoon. He sat erect and still. The hours passed. Arren swam a couple of times, slipping quietly into the water from the stern of the boat, for he did not like to cross the line of that dark gaze which, looking west over the sea, seemed to see far beyond the bright horizon-line, beyond the blue of air, beyond the boundaries of light.

Sparrowhawk came back from his silence at last and spoke, though not more than a word at a time. Arren's upbringing had made him quick to sense mood disguised by courtesy or by reserve; he knew his companion's heart was heavy. He asked no more questions and in the evening he said, "If I sing, will it disturb your thoughts?" Sparrowhawk replied with an effort at joking, "That depends upon the singing."

Arren sat with his back against the mast and sang. His voice was no longer high and sweet as when the music master of the Hall of Berila had trained it years ago, striking the harmonies on his tall harp; nowadays the higher tones of it were husky, and the deep tones had the resonance of a viol, dark and clear. He sang the Lament for the White Enchanter, that song which Elfarran made when she knew of Morred's death and waited for her own. Not often is that song sung, nor lightly. Sparrowhawk listened to the young voice, strong, sure, and sad between the red sky and the sea, and the tears came into his eyes, blinding.

Arren was silent for a while after that song; then he began to sing lesser, lighter tunes, softly, beguiling the great monotony of windless air and heaving sea and failing light, as night came on.

When he ceased to sing everything was still, the wind down, the waves small, wood and rope barely creaking. The sea lay hushed, and over it the stars came out one by one. Piercing bright to the south a yellow light appeared and sent a shower and splintering of gold across the water.

"Look! A beacon!" Then after a minute, "Can it be a star?"

Sparrowhawk gazed at it awhile and finally said, "I think it must be the star

Gobardon. It can be seen only in the South Reach. Gobardon means Crown. . . . Kurremkarmerruk taught us that, sailing still farther south would bring, one by one, eight more stars clear of the horizon under Gobardon, making a great constellation, some say of a running man, others say of the Rune Agnen. The Rune of Ending."

They watched it clear the restless sea-horizon and shine forth steadily.

"You sang Elfarran's song," Sparrowhawk said, "as if you knew her grief, and you'd made me know it too. . . . Of all the histories of Earthsea, that one has always held me most. The great courage of Morred against despair; and Serriadh who was born beyond despair, the gentle king. And her, Elfarran. When I did the greatest evil I have ever done, it was to her beauty that I thought I turned; and I saw her—for a moment I saw Elfarran."

A cold thrill went up Arren's back. He swallowed and sat silent, looking at the splendid, baleful, topaz-yellow star.

"Which of the heroes is yours?" the mage asked, and Arren answered with a little hesitancy, "Erreth-Akbe."

"Because he was the greatest?"

"Because he might have ruled all Earthsea, but chose not to, and went on alone and died alone, fighting the dragon Orm on the shore of Selidor."

They sat awhile, each following his own thoughts, and then Arren asked, still watching yellow Gobardon, "Is it true, then, that the dead can be brought back into life and made to speak to living souls, by magery?"

"By the spells of Summoning. It is in our power. But it is seldom done, and I doubt that it is ever wisely done. In this the Master Summoner agrees with me; he does not use or teach the Lore of Paln, in which such spells are contained. The greatest of them were made by one called the Grey Mage of Paln, a thousand years ago. He summoned up the spirits of the heroes and mages, even Erreth-Akbe, to give counsel to the Lords of Paln in their wars and government. But the counsel of the dead is not profitable to the living. Paln came on evil times, and the Grey Mage was driven forth; he died nameless."

"Is it a wicked thing, then?"

"I should call it a misunderstanding, rather. A misunderstanding of life. Death and life are the same thing—like the two sides of my hand, the palm and the back. And still the palm and the back are not the same. . . . They can be neither separated, nor mixed."

"Then no one uses those spells now?"

“I have known only one man who used them freely, not reckoning their risk. For they are risky, dangerous beyond any other magery. Death and life are like the two sides of my hand, I said, but the truth is we do not know what life is or what death is. To claim power over what you do not understand is not wise, nor is the end of it likely to be good.”

“Who was the man who used them?” Arren asked. He had not found Sparrowhawk so willing to answer questions before, in this quiet, thoughtful mood; both of them were consoled by their talk, dark though the subject of it was.

“He lived in Havnor. They accounted him a mere sorcerer, but in native power he was a great mage. He made money from his art, showing any who paid him whatever spirit they asked to see, dead wife or husband or child, filling his house with unquiet shadows of old centuries, the fair women of the days of the Kings. I saw him summon from the Dry Land my own old master who was Archmage in my youth, Nemmerle, for a mere trick to entertain the idle. And that great soul came at his call, like a dog to heel. I was angry and challenged him—I was not Archmage then—saying, ‘You compel the dead to come into your house: will you come with me to theirs?’ And I made him go with me into the Dry Land, though he fought me with all his will and changed his shape and wept aloud when nothing else would do.”

“So you killed him?” Arren whispered, enthralled.

“No! I made him follow me into the land of the dead, and return with me from it. He was afraid. He who summoned the dead to him so easily was more afraid of death—of his own death—than any man I ever knew. At the wall of stones. . . . But I tell you more than a novice ought to know. And you’re not even a novice.” Through the dusk the keen eyes returned Arren’s gaze for a moment, abashing him. “No matter,” said the Archmage. “There is a wall of stones, then, at a certain place on the bourne. Across it the spirit goes at death, and across it a living man may go and return again, if he is a mage. . . . By the wall of stones this man crouched down, on the side of the living, and tried to withstand my will, and could not. He clung to the stones with his hands and cursed and screamed. I have never seen a fear like that; it sickened me with its own sickness. I should have known by that that I did wrong. I was possessed by anger and by vanity. For he was very strong, and I was eager to prove that I was stronger.”

“What did he do afterward—when you came back?”

“Grovelled, and swore never to use the Pelnish Lore again; kissed my hand and would have killed me if he dared. He went from Havnor into the West, to Paln

perhaps; I heard years later that he had died. He was white-haired when I knew him, though long-armed and quick like a wrestler. What made me fall to talking of him? I cannot even bring to mind his name."

"His true name?"

"No! That I can remember—" Then he paused, and for the space of three heartbeats was utterly still.

"They called him Cob in Havnor," he said in a changed, careful voice. It had grown too dark for expression to be seen. Arren saw him turn and look at the yellow star, now higher above the waves and casting across them a broken trail of gold as slender as a spider's thread. After a long silence he said, "It's not only in dreams, you see, that we find ourselves facing what is yet to be in what was long forgotten, and speaking what seems nonsense because we will not see its meaning."

Chapter 6

Lorbanery

Seen across ten miles of sunlit water, Lorbanery was green, green as the bright moss by a fountain's rim. Nearby, it broke up into leaves, and tree-trunks, and shadows, and roads, and houses, and the faces and clothing of people, and dust, and all that goes to make up an island inhabited by men. Yet still, over all, it was green: for every acre of it that was not built or walked upon was given up to the low, round-topped hurbah trees, on the leaves of which feed the little worms that spin the silk that is made into thread and woven by the men and women and children of Lorbanery. At dusk the air there is full of small grey bats who feed on the little worms. They eat many, but are suffered to do so and are not killed by the silk-weavers, who indeed account it a deed of very evil omen to kill the grey-winged bats. For if human beings live off the worms, they say, surely small bats have the right to do so.

The houses were curious, with little windows set randomly, and thatches of hurbah-twigs, all green with moss and lichens. It had been a wealthy isle, as isles of the Reach go, and this was still to be seen in the well-painted and well-furnished houses, in the great spinning wheels and looms in the cottages and worksheds, and in the stone piers of the little harbor of Sosara, where several trading galleys might have docked. But there were no galleys in the harbor. The paint on the houses was faded, there was no new furniture, and most of the wheels and looms were still, with dust on them, and spiderwebs between pedal and pedal, between warp and frame.

"Sorcerers?" said the mayor of Sosara village, a short man with a face as hard and brown as the soles of his bare feet. "There's no sorcerers in Lorbanery. Nor ever was."

"Who'd have thought it?" said Sparrowhawk admiringly. He was sitting with eight or nine of the villagers, drinking hurbah-berry wine, a thin and bitter vintage.

He had of necessity told them that he was in the South Reach hunting emmelstone, but he had in no way disguised himself or his companion, except that Arren had left his sword hidden in the boat, as usual, and if Sparrowhawk had his staff about him it was not to be seen. The villagers had been sullen and hostile at first and were disposed to turn sullen and hostile again at any moment; only Sparrowhawk's adroitness and authority had forced a grudging acceptance from them. "Wonderful men with trees you must have here," he said now. "What do they do about a late frost on the orchards?"

"Nothing," said a skinny man at the end of the row of villagers. They all sat in a line with their backs against the inn wall, under the eaves of the thatch. Just past their bare feet the large, soft rain of April pattered on the earth.

"Rain's the peril, not frost," the mayor said. "Rots the worm cases. No man's going to stop rain falling. Nor ever did." He was belligerent about sorcerers and sorcery; some of the others seemed more wistful on the subject. "Never did used to rain this time of year," one of them said, "when the old fellow was alive."

"Who? Old Mildi? Well, he's not alive. He's dead," said the mayor.

"Used to call him the Orcharder," the skinny man said. "Aye. Called him the Orcharder," said another one. Silence descended, like the rain.

Inside the window of the one-roomed inn Arren sat. He had found an old lute hung on the wall, a long-necked, three-stringed lute such as they play in the Isle of Silk, and he was playing with it now, learning to draw its music from it, not much louder than the patter of the rain on the thatch.

"In the markets in Hort Town," said Sparrowhawk, "I saw stuff sold as silk of Lorbanery. Some of it was silk. But none of it was silk of Lorbanery."

"The seasons have been poor," said the skinny man. "Four years, five years now."

"Five years it is since Fallows Eve," said an old man in a munching, self-satisfied voice, "since old Mildi died, aye, die he did, and not near the age I am. Died on Fallows Eve he did."

"Scarcity puts up the prices," said the mayor. "For one bolt of semi-fine blue-dyed we get now what we used to get for three bolts."

"If we get it. Where's the ships? And the blue's false," said the skinny man, thus bringing on a half-hour argument concerning the quality of the dyes they used in the great worksheds.

"Who makes the dyes?" Sparrowhawk asked, and a new hassle broke out. The upshot of it was that the whole process of dyeing had been overseen by a family

who, in fact, called themselves wizards; but if they ever had been wizards they had lost their art, and nobody else had found it, as the skinny man remarked sourly. For they all agreed, except the mayor, that the famous blue dyes of Lorbanery and the unmatchable crimson, the "dragon's fire" worn by queens in Havnor long ago, were not what they had been. Something had gone out of them. The unseasonable rains were at fault, or the dye-earths, or the refiners. "Or the eyes," said the skinny man, "of men who couldn't tell the true azure from blue mud," and he glared at the mayor. The mayor did not take up the challenge; they fell silent again.

The thin wine seemed only to acidify their tempers, and their faces looked glum. There was no sound now but the rustle of rain on the uncountable leaves of the orchards of the valley, and the whisper of the sea down at the end of the street, and the murmur of the lute in the darkness within doors.

"Can he sing, that girlish lad of yours?" asked the mayor.

"Aye, he can sing. Arren! Sing a measure for us, lad."

"I cannot get this lute to play out of the minor," said Arren at the window, smiling. "It wants to weep. What would you hear, my hosts?"

"Something new," growled the mayor.

The lute thrilled a little; he had the touch of it already. "This might be new here," he said. Then he sang.

By the white straits of Soléa
and the bowed red branches
that bent their blossoms over
her bowed head, heavy
with sorrow for the lost lover,
by the red branch and the white branch
and the sorrow unceasing
do I swear, Serriadh,
son of my mother and of Morred,
to remember the wrong done
forever, forever.

They were still: the bitter faces and the shrewd, the hard-worked hands and bodies. They sat still in the warm rainy Southern dusk, and heard that song like the cry of the grey swan of the cold seas of Eá, yearning, bereft. For a while after the

song was over they kept still.

“That’s a queer music,” said one, uncertainly.

Another, reassured as to the absolute centrality of the isle of Lorbanery in all time and space, said, “Foreign music’s always queer and gloomy.”

“Give us some of yours,” said Sparrowhawk. “I’d like to hear a cheery stave myself. The lad will always sing of old dead heroes.”

“I’ll do that,” said the last speaker, and hemmed a bit, and started out to sing about a lusty, trusty barrel of wine, and a hey, ho, and about we go! But nobody joined him in the chorus, and he went flat on the hey, ho.

“There’s no more proper singing,” he said angrily. “It’s the young people’s fault, always chopping and changing the way things are done, and not learning the old songs.”

“It’s not that,” said the skinny man. “There’s no more proper anything. Nothing goes right anymore.”

“Aye, aye, aye,” wheezed the oldest one, “the luck’s run out. That’s what. The luck’s run out.”

After that there was not much to say. The villagers departed by twos and threes, until Sparrowhawk was left alone outside the window and Arren inside it. And then Sparrowhawk laughed, at last. But it was not a merry laugh.

The innkeeper’s shy wife came and spread out beds for them on the floor and went away, and they lay down to sleep. But the high rafters of the room were an abode of bats. In and out the unglazed window the bats flew all night long, chittering very high. Only at dawn did they all return and settle, each composing itself in a little, neat, grey package hanging from a rafter upside down.

Perhaps it was the restlessness of the bats that made Arren’s sleep uneasy. It was many nights now since he had slept ashore; his body was not used to the immobility of earth and insisted to him as he fell asleep that he was rocking, rocking . . . and then the world would fall out from underneath him and he would wake with a great start. When at last he got to sleep, he dreamt he was chained in the hold of the slaver’s ship; there were others chained with him, but they were all dead. He woke from this dream more than once, struggling to get free of it, but falling to sleep at once reentered it. At last it seemed to him that he was all alone on the ship, but still chained so that he could not move. Then a curious, slow voice spoke in his ear. “Loose your bonds,” it said. “Loose your bonds.” He tried to move then, and moved: he stood up. He was on some vast, dim moor, under a heavy sky. There was horror in the earth and in the thick air, an enormity of

horror. This place was fear, was fear itself; and he was in it, and there were no paths. He must find the way, but there were no paths, and he was tiny, like a child, like an ant, and the place was huge, endless. He tried to walk, stumbled, woke.

The fear was inside him, now that he was awake, and he was not inside it: yet it was no less huge and endless. He felt choked by the black darkness of the room, and looked for stars in the dim square that was the window, but though the rain had ceased there were no stars. He lay awake and was afraid, and the bats flew in and out on noiseless leather wings. Sometimes he heard their thin voices at the very limit of his hearing.

The morning came bright, and they were up early. Sparrowhawk inquired earnestly for emmelstone. Though none of the townsfolk knew what emmelstone was, they all had theories about it and quarreled over them; and he listened, though he listened for news of something other than emmelstone. At last he and Arren took a way that the mayor suggested to them, toward the quarries where the blue dye-earth was dug. But on the way Sparrowhawk turned aside.

"This will be the house," he said. "They said that that family of dyers and discredited magicians lives on this road."

"Is it any use to talk to them?" said Arren, remembering Hare all too well.

"There is a center to this bad luck," said the mage, harshly. "There is a place where the luck runs out. I need a guide to that place!" And he went on, and Arren must follow.

The house stood apart among its own orchards, a fine building of stone, but it and all its acreage had gone long uncared for. Cocoons of ungathered silkworms hung discolored among the ragged branches, and the ground beneath was thick with a papery litter of dead grubs and moths. All about the house under the close-set trees there hung an odor of decay, and as they came to it Arren suddenly remembered the horror that had been on him in the night.

Before they reached the door it was flung open. Out charged a grey-haired woman, glaring with reddened eyes and shouting, "Out, curse you, thieves, slanderers, lack-wits, liars, and misbegotten fools! Get out, out, go! The ill chance be on you forever!"

Sparrowhawk stopped, looking somewhat amazed, and quickly raised his hand in a curious gesture. He said one word, "Avert!"

At that the woman stopped yelling. She stared at him.

"Why did you do that?"

"To turn your Curse aside."

She stared awhile longer and said at last, hoarsely, “Foreigners?”

“From the North.”

She came forward. At first Arren had been inclined to laugh at her, an old woman screeching on her doorstep, but close to her he felt only shame. She was foul and ill-clothed, and her breath stank, and her eyes had a terrible stare of pain.

“I have no power to curse,” she said. “No power.” She imitated Sparrowhawk’s gesture. “They still do that, where you come from?”

He nodded. He watched her steadily, and she returned his gaze. Presently her face began to work and change, and she said, “Where’s thy stick?”

“I do not show it here, sister.”

“No, you should not. It will keep you from life. Like my power: it kept me from life. So I lost it. I lost all the things I knew, all the words and names. They came by little strings like spiderwebs out of my eyes and mouth. There is a hole in the world, and the light is running out of it. And the words go with the light. Did you know that? My son sits staring all day at the dark, looking for the hole in the world. He says he would see better if he were blind. He has lost his hand as a dyer. We were the Dyers of Lorbanery. Look!” She shook before them her muscular, thin arms, stained to the shoulder with a faint, streaky mixture of ineradicable dyes. “It never comes off the skin,” she said, “but the mind washes clean. It won’t hold the colors. Who are you?”

Sparrowhawk said nothing. Again his eyes held the woman’s; and Arren, standing aside, watched uneasily.

All at once she trembled and said in a whisper, “I know thee—”

“Aye. Like knows like, sister.”

It was strange to see how she pulled away from the mage in terror, wanting to flee him, and yearned toward him as if to kneel at his feet.

He took her hand and held her. “Would you have your power back, the skills, the names? I can give you that.”

“You are the Great Man,” she whispered. “You are the King of the Shadows, the Lord of the Dark Place—”

“I am not. I am no king. I am a man, a mortal, your brother and your like.”

“But you will not die?”

“I will.”

“But you will come back and live forever.”

“Not I. Nor any man.”

“Then you are not—not the Great One in the darkness,” she said, frowning, and looking at him a little askance, with less fear. “But you are a Great One. Are there two? What is your name?”

Sparrowhawk’s stern face softened a moment. “I cannot tell you that,” he said gently.

“I’ll tell you a secret,” she said. She stood straighter now, facing him, and there was the echo of an old dignity in her voice and bearing. “I do not want to live and live and live forever. I would rather have back the names of things. But they are all gone. Names don’t matter now. There are no more secrets. Do you want to know my name?” Her eyes filled with light, her fists clenched, she leaned forward and whispered: “My name is Akaren.” Then she screamed aloud, “Akaren! Akaren! My name is Akaren! Now they all know my secret name, my true name, and there are no secrets, and there is no truth, and there is no death—death—death!” She screamed the word sobbing, and spittle flew from her lips.

“Be still, Akaren!”

She was still. Tears ran down her face, which was dirty, and streaked with locks of her uncombed, grey hair.

Sparrowhawk took that wrinkled, tear-blubbered face between his hands and very lightly, very tenderly, kissed her on the eyes. She stood motionless, her eyes closed. Then with his lips close to her ear he spoke a little in the Old Speech, once more kissed her, and let her go.

She opened clear eyes and looked at him awhile with a brooding, wondering gaze. So a newborn child looks at its mother; so a mother looks at her child. She turned slowly and went to her door, entered it, and closed it behind her: all in silence, with the still look of wonder on her face.

In silence the mage turned and started back toward the road. Arren followed him. He dared ask no question. Presently the mage stopped, there in the ruined

orchard, and said, "I took her name from her and gave her a new one. And thus in some sense a rebirth. There was no other help or hope for her."

His voice was strained and stifled.

"She was a woman of power," he went on. "No mere witch or potion-maker, but a woman of art and skill, using her craft for the making of the beautiful, a proud woman and honorable. That was her life. And it is all wasted." He turned abruptly away, walked off into the orchard aisles, and there stood beside a tree-trunk, his back turned.

Arren waited for him in the hot, leaf-speckled sunlight. He knew that Sparrowhawk was ashamed to burden Arren with his emotion; and indeed there was nothing the boy could do or say. But his heart went out utterly to his companion, not now with that first romantic ardor and adoration, but painfully, as if a link were drawn forth from the very inmost of it and forged into an unbreaking bond. For in this love he now felt there was compassion: without which love is untempered, and is not whole, and does not last.

Presently Sparrowhawk returned to him through the green shade of the orchard. Neither said anything, and they went on side by side. It was hot already; last night's rain had dried, and dust rose under their feet on the road. Earlier the day had seemed dreary and insipid to Arren, as if infected by his dreams; now he took pleasure in the bite of the sunlight and the relief of shade, and enjoyed walking without brooding about their destination.

This was just as well, for they accomplished nothing. The afternoon was spent in talking with the men who mined the dye-ores, and bargaining for some bits of what was said to be emmelstone. As they trudged back to Sosara with the late sun pounding on their heads and necks, Sparrowhawk remarked, "It's blue malachite; but I doubt they'll know the difference in Sosara either."

"They're strange here," Arren said. "It's that way with everything; they don't know the difference. Like what one of them said to the headman last night, 'You wouldn't know the true azure from blue mud. . . .' They complain about bad times, but they don't know when the bad times began; they say the work's shoddy, but they don't improve it; they don't even know the difference between an artisan and a spell-worker, between handicraft and the Art Magic. It's as if they had no lines and distinctions and colors clear in their heads. Everything's the same to them; everything's grey."

"Aye," said the mage, thoughtfully. He stalked along for a while, his head hunched between his shoulders, hawklike; though a short man, he walked with a

long stride. "What is it they're missing?"

Arren said without hesitation, "Joy in life."

"Aye," said Sparrowhawk again, accepting Arren's statement and pondering it for some time. "I'm glad," he said at last, "that you can think for me, lad. . . . I feel tired and stupid. I've been sick at heart since this morning, since we talked to her who was Akaren. I do not like waste and destruction. I do not want an enemy. If I must have an enemy, I do not want to seek him, and find him, and meet him. . . . If one must hunt, the prize should be a treasure, not a detestable thing."

"An enemy, my lord?" said Arren.

Sparrowhawk nodded.

"When she talked about the Great Man, the King of Shadows—?"

Sparrowhawk nodded again. "I think so," he said. "I think we must come not only to a place, but to a person. This is evil, evil, what passes on this island: this loss of craft and pride, this joylessness, this waste. This is the work of an evil will. But a will not even bent here, not even noticing Akaren or Lorbanery. The track we hunt is a track of wreckage, as if we followed a runaway cart down a mountainside and watched it set off an avalanche."

"Could she—Akaren—tell you more about this enemy—who he is and where he is, or *what* he is?"

"Not now, lad," the mage said in a soft but rather bleak voice. "No doubt she could have. In her madness there was still wizardry. Indeed her madness was her wizardry. But I could not hold her to answer me. She was in too much pain."

And he walked on with his head somewhat hunched between his shoulders, as if himself enduring, and longing to avoid, some pain.

Arren turned, hearing a scuffle of feet behind them on the road. A man was running after them, a good way off but catching up fast. The dust of the road and his long, wiry hair made aureoles of red about him in the westering light, and his long shadow hopped fantastically along the trunks and aisles of the orchards by the road. "Listen!" he shouted. "Stop! I found it! I found it!"

He caught up with them in a rush. Arren's hand went first to the air where his sword hilt might have been, then to the air where his lost knife had been, and then made itself into a fist, all in half a second. He scowled and moved forward. The man was a full head taller than Sparrowhawk, and broad-shouldered: a panting, raving, wild-eyed madman. "I found it!" he kept saying, while Arren, trying to dominate him by a stern, threatening voice and attitude, said, "What do you want?" The man tried to get around him, to Sparrowhawk; Arren stepped in front

of him again.

"You are the Dyer of Lorbanery," Sparrowhawk said.

Then Arren felt he had been a fool, trying to protect his companion; and he stepped aside, out of the way. For at six words from the mage, the madman stopped his panting and the clutching gesture of his big, stained hands; his eyes grew quieter; he nodded his head.

"I was the Dyer," he said, "but now I can't dye." Then he looked askance at Sparrowhawk and grinned; he shook his head with its reddish, dusty bush of hair. "You took away my mother's name," he said. "Now I don't know her, and she doesn't know me. She loves me well enough still, but she's left me. She's dead."

Arren's heart contracted, but he saw that Sparrowhawk merely shook his head a little. "No, no," he said, "she's not dead."

"But she will be. She'll die."

"Aye. That's a consequence of being alive," the mage said. The Dyer seemed to puzzle this over for a minute, and then came right up to Sparrowhawk, seized his shoulders, and bent over him. He moved so fast that Arren could not prevent him, but Arren did come up very close, and so heard his whisper, "I found the hole in the darkness. The King was standing there. He watches it; he rules it. He had a little flame, a little candle in his hand. He blew on it and it went out. Then he blew on it again and it burned! It burned!"

Sparrowhawk made no protest at being held and whispered at. He simply asked, "Where were you when you saw that?"

"In bed."

"Dreaming?"

"No."

"Across the wall?"

"No," the Dyer said, in a suddenly sober tone, and as if uncomfortable. He let the mage go, and took a step back from him. "No, I—I don't know where it is. I found it. But I don't know where."

"That's what I'd like to know," said Sparrowhawk.

"I can help you."

"How?"

"You have a boat. You came here in it and you're going on. Are you going on west? That's the way. The way to the place where he comes out. There has to be a place, a place *here*, because he's alive—not just the spirits, the ghosts, that come over the wall, not like that—you can't bring anything but souls over the wall, but

this is the body; this is the flesh immortal. I saw the flame rise in the darkness at his breath, the flame that was out. I saw that." The man's face was transfigured, a wild beauty in it in the long, red-gold light. "I know that he has overcome death. I know it. I gave my wizardry to know it. I was a wizard once! And you know it, and you are going there. Take me with you."

The same light shone on Sparrowhawk's face, but left it unmoved and harsh. "I am trying to go there," he said.

"Let me go with you!"

Sparrowhawk nodded briefly. "If you're ready when we sail," he said, as coldly as before.

The Dyer backed away from him another step and stood watching him, the exaltation in his face clouding slowly over until it was replaced by a strange, heavy look; it was as if reasoning thought were laboring to break through the storm of words and feelings and visions that confused him. Finally he turned around without a word and began to run back down the road, into the haze of dust that had not yet settled on his tracks. Arren drew a long breath of relief.

Sparrowhawk also sighed, though not as if his heart were any easier. "Well," he said. "Strange roads have strange guides. Let's go on."

Arren fell into step beside him. "You won't take him with us?" he asked.

"That's up to him."

With a flash of anger Arren thought: It's up to me, also. But he did not say anything, and they went on together in silence.

They were not well-received on their return to Sosara. Everything on a little island like Lorbanery is known as soon as it is done, and no doubt they had been seen turning aside to the Dyers' House and talking to the madman on the road. The innkeeper served them uncivilly, and his wife acted scared to death of them. In the evening when the men of the village came to sit under the eaves of the inn, they made much display of not speaking to the foreigners and being very witty and merry among themselves. But they had not much wit to pass around and soon ran short of jollity. They all sat in silence for a long time, and at last the mayor said to Sparrowhawk, "Did you find your blue rocks?"

"I found some blue rocks," Sparrowhawk replied politely.

"Sopli showed you where to find 'em, no doubt."

"Ha, ha, ha," went the other men, at this masterstroke of irony.

"Sopli would be the red-haired man?"

"The madman. You called on his mother in the morning."

“I was looking for a wizard,” said the wizard.

The skinny man, who sat nearest him, spat into the darkness. “What for?”

“I thought I might find out about what I’m looking for.”

“People come to Lorbanery for silk,” the mayor said. “They don’t come for stones. They don’t come for charms. Or arm-wavings and jibber-jabber and sorcerers’ tricks. Honest folk live here and do honest work.”

“That’s right. He’s right,” said others.

“And we don’t want any other sort here, people from foreign parts snooping about and prying into our business.”

“That’s right. He’s right,” came the chorus.

“If there was any sorcerer around that wasn’t crazy, we’d give him an honest job in the sheds, but they don’t know how to do honest work.”

“They might, if there were any to do,” said Sparrowhawk. “Your sheds are empty, the orchards are untended, the silk in your warehouses was all woven years ago. What do you do, here in Lorbanery?”

“We look after our own business,” the mayor snapped, but the skinny man broke in excitedly, “Why don’t the ships come, tell us that! What are they doing in Hort Town? Is it because our work’s been shoddy—?” He was interrupted by angry denials. They shouted at one another, jumped to their feet, the mayor shook his fist in Sparrowhawk’s face, another drew a knife. Their mood had gone wild. Arren was on his feet at once. He looked at Sparrowhawk, expecting to see him stand up in the sudden radiance of the magelight and strike them dumb with his revealed power. But he did not. He sat there and looked from one to another and listened to their menaces. And gradually they fell quiet, as if they could not keep up anger any more than they could keep up merriment. The knife was sheathed; the threats turned to sneers. They began to go off like dogs leaving a dog-fight, some strutting and some sneaking.

When the two were left alone Sparrowhawk got up, went inside the inn, and took a long draft of water from the jug beside the door. “Come, lad,” he said. “I’ve had enough of this.”

“To the boat?”

“Aye.” He put down two trade-counters of silver on the windowsill to pay for their lodging, and hoisted up their light pack of clothing. Arren was tired and sleepy, but he looked around the room of the inn, stuffy and bleak, and all a-flitter up in the rafters with the restless bats; he thought of last night in that room and followed Sparrowhawk willingly. He thought, too, as they went down Sosara’s one,

dark street, that going now they would give the madman Sopli the slip. But when they came to the harbor he was waiting for them on the pier.

"There you are," said the mage. "Get aboard, if you want to come."

Without a word, Sopli got down into the boat and crouched beside the mast, like a big, unkempt dog. At this Arren rebelled. "My lord!" he said. Sparrowhawk turned; they stood face-to-face on the pier above the boat.

"They are all mad on this island, but I thought you were not. Why do you take him?"

"As a guide."

"A guide—to more madness? To death by drowning, or a knife in the back?"

"To death, but by what road I do not know."

Arren spoke with heat, and though Sparrowhawk answered quietly, there was something of a fierce note in his voice. He was not used to being questioned. But ever since Arren had tried to protect him from the madman on the road that afternoon and had seen how vain and unneeded his protection was, he had felt a bitterness, and all that uprush of devotion he had felt in the morning was spoilt and wasted. He was unable to protect Sparrowhawk; he was not permitted to make any decisions; he was unable, or was not permitted, even to understand the nature of their quest. He was merely dragged along on it, useless as a child. But he was not a child.

"I would not quarrel with you, my lord," he said as coldly as he could. "But this—this is beyond reason!"

"It is beyond all reason. We go where reason will not take us. Will you come, or will you not?"

Tears of anger sprang into Arren's eyes. "I said I would come with you and serve you. I do not break my word."

"That is well," the mage said grimly and made as if to turn away. Then he faced Arren again. "I need you, Arren; and you need me. For I will tell you now that I believe this way we go is yours to follow, not out of obedience or loyalty to me, but because it was yours to follow before you ever saw me; before you ever set foot on Roke; before you sailed from Enlad. You cannot turn back from it."

His voice had not softened. Arren answered him as grimly, "How should I turn back, with no boat, here on the edge of the world?"

"This the edge of the world? No, that is farther on. We may yet come to it."

Arren nodded once and swung down into the boat. Sparrowhawk loosed the line and spoke a light wind into the sail. Once away from the looming, empty docks

of Lorbanery the air blew cool and clean out of the dark north, and the moon broke silver from the sleek sea before them and rode upon their left as they turned southward to coast the isle.

Chapter 7

The Madman

The madman, the Dyer of Lorbanery, sat huddled up against the mast, his arms wrapped around his knees and his head hunched down. His mass of wiry hair looked black in the moonlight. Sparrowhawk had rolled himself up in a blanket and gone to sleep in the stern of the boat. Neither of them stirred. Arren sat up in the prow; he had sworn to himself to watch all night. If the mage chose to assume that their lunatic passenger would not assault him or Arren in the night, that was all very well for him; Arren, however, would make his own assumptions and undertake his own responsibilities.

But the night was very long and very calm. The moonlight poured down, changeless. Huddled by the mast, Sopli snored, long, soft snores. Softly the boat moved onward; softly Arren slid into sleep. He started awake once and saw the moon scarcely higher; he abandoned his self-righteous guardianship, made himself comfortable, and went to sleep.

He dreamt again, as he seemed always to do on this voyage, and at first the dreams were fragmentary but strangely sweet and reassuring. In place of *Lookfar*'s mast a tree grew, with great, arching arms of foliage; swans guided the boat, swooping on strong wings before it; far ahead, over the beryl-green sea, shone a city of white towers. Then he was in one of those towers, climbing the steps which spiralled upward, running up them lightly and eagerly. These scenes changed and recurred and led into others, which passed without trace; but suddenly he was in the dreaded, dull twilight on the moors, and the horror grew in him until he could not breathe. But he went forward, because he must go forward. After a long time he realized that to go forward here was to go in a circle and come round on one's own tracks again. Yet he must get out, get away. It grew more and more urgent. He began to run. As he ran, the circles narrowed in and the ground began to slant. He was running in the darkening gloom, faster and faster, around the sinking inner lip

of a pit, an enormous whirlpool sucking down to darkness: and as he knew this, his foot slipped and he fell.

"What's the matter, Arren?"

Sparrowhawk spoke to him from the stern. Grey dawn held the sky and sea still.

"Nothing."

"The nightmare?"

"Nothing."

Arren was cold, and his right arm ached from having been cramped under him. He shut his eyes against the growing light and thought, He hints of this and hints of that, but he will never tell me clearly where we're going, or why, or why I should go there. And now he drags this madman with us. Which is maddest, the lunatic or I, for coming with him? The two of them may understand each other; it's the wizards who are mad now, Sopli said. I could have been at home by now, at home in the Hall in Berila, in my room with the carven walls and the red rugs on the floor and a fire in the hearth, waking up to go out a-hawking with my father. Why did I come with him? Why did he bring me? Because it's my way to go, he says, but that's wizard's talk, making things seem great by great words. But the meaning of the words is always somewhere else. If I have any way to go, it's to my home, not wandering senselessly across the Reaches. I have duties at home and am shirking them. If he really thinks there is some enemy of wizardry at work, why did he come alone, with me? He might have brought another mage to help him—a hundred of them. He could have brought an army of warriors, a fleet of ships. Is this how a great peril is met, by sending out an old man and a boy in a boat? This is mere folly. He is mad himself; it is as he said, he seeks death. He seeks death, and wants to take me with him. But I am not mad and not old; I will not die; I will not go with him.

He sat up on his elbow, looking forward. The moon that had risen before them as they left Sosara Bay was again before them, sinking. Behind, in the east, day came wan and dull. There were no clouds, but a faint, sickly overcast. Later in the day the sun grew hot, but it shone veiled, without splendor.

All day long they coasted Lorbanery, low and green to their right hand. A light wind blew off the land and filled their sail. Toward evening they passed a long last cape; the breeze died down. Sparrowhawk spoke the magewind into the sail, and like a falcon loosed from the wrist, *Lookfar* started and fled forward eagerly, putting the Isle of Silk behind.

Sopli the Dyer had cowered in the same place all day, evidently afraid of the boat

and afraid of the sea, seasick and wretched. He spoke now, hoarsely. "Are we going west?"

The sunset was right in his face; but Sparrowhawk, patient with his stupidest questions, nodded.

"To Obehol?"

"Obehol lies west of Lorbanery."

"A long way west. Maybe the place is there."

"What is it like, the place?"

"How do I know? How could I see it? It's not on Lorbanery! I hunted for it for years, four years, five years, in the dark, at night, shutting my eyes, always with him calling *Come, come*, but I couldn't come. I'm no lord of wizards who can tell the ways in the dark. But there's a place to come to in the light, under the sun too. That's what Mildi and my mother wouldn't understand. They kept looking in the dark. Then old Mildi died, and my mother lost her mind. She forgot the spells we use in the dyeing, and it affected her mind. She wanted to die, but I told her to wait. Wait till I find the place. There must be a place. If the dead can come back to life in the world, there must be a place in the world where it happens."

"Are the dead coming back to life?"

"I thought you knew such things," Sopli said after a pause, looking askance at Sparrowhawk.

"I seek to know them."

Sopli said nothing. The mage suddenly looked at him, a direct, compelling gaze, though his tone was gentle: "Are you looking for a way to live forever, Sopli?"

Sopli returned his gaze for a moment; then he hid his shaggy, brownish-red head in his arms, locking his hands across his ankles, and rocked himself a little back and forth. It seemed that when he was frightened he took this position; and when he was in it, he would not speak or take any notice of what was said. Arren turned away from him in despair and disgust. How could they go on, with Sopli, for days or weeks, in an eighteen-foot boat? It was like sharing a body with a diseased soul. . . .

Sparrowhawk came up beside Arren in the prow and knelt with one knee on the thwart, looking into the sallow evening. He said, "The man has a gentle spirit."

Arren did not answer this. He asked coldly, "What is Obehol? I never heard the name."

"I know its name and place on the charts; no more. . . . Look there: the companions of Gobardon!"

The great topaz-colored star was higher in the south now, and beneath it, just clearing the dim sea, shone a white star to the left and a bluish-white one to the right, forming a triangle.

"Have they names?"

"The Master Namer did not know. Maybe the men of Obehol and Wellogy have names for them. I do not know. We go now into strange seas, Arren, under the Sign of Ending."

The boy did not answer, looking with a kind of loathing at the bright, nameless stars above the endless water.

As they sailed westward day after day, the warmth of the southern spring lay on the waters, and the sky was clear. Yet it seemed to Arren that there was a dullness in the light, as if it fell aslant through glass. The sea was lukewarm when he swam, bringing little refreshment. Their salt food had no savor. There was no freshness or brightness in anything, unless it was at night, when the stars burned with a greater radiance than he had ever seen in them. He would lie and watch them till he slept. Sleeping, he would dream: always the dream of the moors or the pit or a valley hemmed round by cliffs or a long road going downward under a low sky; always the dim light, and the horror in him, and the hopeless effort to escape.

He never spoke of this to Sparrowhawk. He did not speak of anything important to him, nothing but the small daily incidents of their sailing; and Sparrowhawk, who had always had to be drawn out, was now habitually silent.

Arren saw now what a fool he had been to entrust himself body and soul to this restless and secretive man, who let impulse move him and made no effort to control his life, nor even to save it. For now the fey mood was on him; and that, Arren thought, was because he dared not face his own failure—the failure of wizardry as a great power among men.

It was clear now that to those who knew the secrets, there were not many secrets to that Art Magic from which Sparrowhawk, and all the generations of sorcerers and wizards, had made much fame and power. There was not much more to it than the use of wind and weather, the knowledge of healing herbs, and a skillful show of such illusions as mists and lights and shape-changes, which could awe the ignorant, but which were mere tricks. Reality was not changed. There was nothing in magery that gave a man true power over men; nor was it any use against death. The mages lived no longer than ordinary men. All their secret words could not put off for one hour the coming of their deaths.

Even in small matters magery was not worth counting on. Sparrowhawk was always miserly about employing his arts; they went by the world's wind whenever they might, they fished for food, and they spared their water, like any sailors. After four days of interminable tacking into a fitful headwind, Arren asked him if he would not speak a little following wind into the sail, and when he shook his head, said, "Why not?"

"I would not ask a sick man to run a race," said Sparrowhawk, "nor lay a stone on an overburdened back." It was not clear whether he spoke of himself or of the world at large. Always his answers were grudging, hard to understand. There, thought Arren, lay the very heart of wizardry: to hint at mighty meanings while saying nothing at all, and to make doing nothing at all seem the very crown of wisdom.

Arren had tried to ignore Sopli, but it was impossible; and in any case he soon found himself in a kind of alliance with the madman. Sopli was not so mad, or not so simply mad, as his wild hair and fragmented talk made him appear. Indeed the maddest thing about him was perhaps his terror of the water. To come into a boat had taken desperate courage, and he never really got the edge worn off his fear; he kept his head down so much so that he would not have to see the water heaving and lapping about him. To stand up in the boat made him giddy; he clung to the mast. The first time Arren decided on a swim and dived off the prow, Sopli shouted out in horror; when Arren came climbing back into the boat, the poor man was green with shock. "I thought you were drowning yourself," he said, and Arren had to laugh.

That afternoon, when Sparrowhawk sat meditating, unheeding and unhearing, Sopli came hitching cautiously over the thwarts to Arren. He said in a low voice, "You don't want to die, do you?"

"Of course not."

"He does," Sopli said, with a little shift of his lower jaw toward Sparrowhawk.

"Why do you say that?"

Arren took a lordly tone, which indeed came naturally to him, and Sopli accepted it as natural, though he was ten or fifteen years older than Arren. He replied with ready civility, though in his usual fragmentary way, "He wants to get to the secret place. But I don't know why. He doesn't want. . . . He doesn't believe in . . . the promise."

"What promise?"

Sopli glanced up at him sharply, something of his ruined manhood in his eyes;

but Arren's will was stronger. He answered very low, "You know. Life. Eternal life."

A great chill went through Arren's body. He remembered his dreams: the moor, the pit, the cliffs, the dim light. That was death; that was the horror of death. It was from death he must escape, must find the way. And on the doorsill stood the figure crowned with shadow, holding out a little light no larger than a pearl, the glimmer of immortal life.

Arren met Sopli's eyes for the first time: light brown eyes, very clear; in them he saw that he had understood at last, and that Sopli shared his knowledge.

"He," the Dyer said, with his twitch of the jaw toward Sparrowhawk, "he won't give up his name. Nobody can take his name through. The way is too narrow."

"Have you seen it?"

"In the dark, in my mind. That's not enough. I want to get there: I want to see it. In the world, with my eyes. What if I—what if I died and couldn't find the way, the place? Most people can't find it; they don't even know it's there. There's only some of us have the power. But it's hard, because you have to give the power up to get there. . . . No more words. No more names. It is too hard to do in the mind. And when you—die, your mind—dies." He stuck each time on the word. "I want to *know* I can come back. I want to be there. On the side of life. I want to live, to be safe. I hate—I hate this water. . . ."

The Dyer drew his limbs together as a spider does when falling, and hunched his wiry-red head down between his shoulders, to shut out the sight of the sea.

But Arren did not shun his conversation after that, knowing that Sopli shared not only his vision, but his fear; and that, if worse came to worst, Sopli might aid him against Sparrowhawk.

Always they sailed, slowly in the calms and fitful breezes, to the west, where Sparrowhawk pretended that Sopli guided them. But Sopli did not guide them—he who knew nothing of the sea, had never seen a chart, never been in a boat, dreaded the water with a sick dread. It was the mage who guided them and led them deliberately astray. Arren saw this now and saw the reason of it. The Archmage knew that they and others like them were seeking eternal life, had been promised it or drawn toward it, and might find it. In his pride, his overweening pride as Archmage, he feared lest they might gain it; he envied them, and feared them, and would have no man greater than himself. He meant to sail out onto the Open Sea beyond all lands until they were utterly astray and could never come back to the world, and there they would die of thirst. For he would die himself, to prevent

them from eternal life.

Every now and then there would come a moment when Sparrowhawk spoke to Arren of some small matter of managing the boat or swam with him in the warm sea or bade him good night under the great stars, when all these ideas seemed utter nonsense to the boy. He would look at his companion and see him, that hard, harsh, patient face, and he would think, This is my lord and friend. And it seemed unbelievable to him that he had doubted. But a little while later he would be doubting again, and he and Sopli would exchange glances, warning each other of their mutual enemy.

Every day the sun shone hot, yet dull. Its light lay like a gloss on the slow-heaving sea. The water was blue, the sky blue without change or shading. The breezes blew and died, and they turned the sail to catch them and slowly crept on toward no end.

One afternoon they had at last a light following wind; and Sparrowhawk pointed upward, near sunset, saying, "Look." High above the mast a line of sea-geese wavered like a black rune drawn across the sky. The geese flew westward: and following, *Lookfar* came on the next day in sight of a great island.

"That's it," Sopli said. "That land. We must go there."

"The place you seek is there?"

"Yes. We must land there. This is as far as we can go."

"This land will be Obehol. Beyond it in the South Reach is another island, Wellogy. And in the West Reach are islands lying farther west than Wellogy. Are you certain, Sopli?"

The Dyer of Lorbanery grew angry, so that the wincing look came back into his eyes; but he did not talk madly, Arren thought, as he had when they first spoke with him many days ago on Lorbanery. "Yes. We must land here. We have gone far enough. The place we seek is here. Do you want me to swear that I know it? Shall I swear by my name?"

"You cannot," Sparrowhawk said, his voice hard, looking up at Sopli, who was taller than he; Sopli had stood up, holding on tight to the mast, to look at the land ahead. "Don't try, Sopli."

The Dyer scowled as if in rage or pain. He looked at the mountains lying blue with distance before the boat, over the heaving, trembling plain of water, and said, "You took me as guide. This is the place. We must land here."

"We'll land in any case; we must have water," said Sparrowhawk, and went to the tiller. Sopli sat down in his place by the mast, muttering. Arren heard him say,

"I swear by my name. By my name," many times, and each time he said it, he scowled again as if in pain.

They beat closer to the island on a north wind and coasted it seeking a bay or landing, but the breakers beat thunderous in the hot sunlight on all the northern shore. Inland green mountains stood baking in that light, tree-clothed to the peaks.

Rounding a cape, they came at last in sight of a deep crescent bay with white sand beaches. Here the waves came in quietly, their force held off by the cape, and a boat might land. No sign of human life was visible on the beach or in the forests above it; they had not seen a boat, a roof, a wisp of smoke. The light breeze dropped as soon as *Lookfar* entered the bay. It was still, silent, hot. Arren took the oars, Sparrowhawk steered. The creak of the oars in the locks was the only sound. The green peaks loomed above the bay, closing in around. The sun laid sheets of white-hot light on the water. Arren heard the blood drumming in his ears. Sopli had left the safety of the mast and crouched in the prow, holding on to the gunwales, staring and straining forward to the land. Sparrowhawk's dark, scarred face shone with sweat as if it had been oiled; his glance shifted continually from the low breakers to the foliage-screened bluffs above.

"Now," he said to Arren and the boat. Arren took three great strokes with the oars, and lightly *Lookfar* came up on the sand. Sparrowhawk leapt out to push the boat clear up on the last impetus of the waves. As he put his hands out to push, he stumbled and half-fell, catching himself against the stern. With a mighty strain he dragged the boat back into the water on the outward wash of the wave, and floundered in over the gunwale as she hung between sea and shore. "Row!" he gasped out, and crouched on all fours, streaming with water and trying to get his breath. He was holding a spear—a bronze-headed throwing spear two feet long. Where had he gotten it? Another spear appeared as Arren hung bewildered on the oars; it struck a thwart edgewise, splintering the wood, and rebounded end over end. On the low bluffs over the beach, under the trees, figures moved, darting and crouching. There were little whistling, whirring noises in the air. Arren suddenly bent his head between his shoulders, bent his back, and rowed with powerful strokes: two to clear the shallows, three to turn the boat, and away.

Sopli, in the prow of the boat behind Arren's back, began to shout. Arren's arms were seized suddenly so that the oars shot up out of the water. The butt of one struck him in the pit of the stomach, so that for a moment he was blind and breathless. "Turn back! Turn back!" Sopli was shouting. The boat leapt in the water all at once, and rocked. Arren turned as soon as he had got his grip on the

oars again, furious. Sopli was not in the boat.

All around them the deep water of the bay heaved and dazzled in the sunlight.

Stupidly, Arren looked behind him again, then at Sparrowhawk crouching in the stern. "There," Sparrowhawk said, pointing alongside, but there was nothing, only the sea and the dazzle of the sun. A spear from a throwing-stick fell short of the boat by a few yards, entered the water noiselessly, and vanished. Arren rowed ten or twelve hard strokes, then backed water and looked once more at Sparrowhawk.

Sparrowhawk's hands and left arm were bloody; he held a wad of sailcloth to his shoulder. The bronze-headed spear lay in the bottom of the boat. He had not been holding it when Arren first saw it; it had been standing out from the hollow of his shoulder where the point had gone in. He was scanning the water between them and the white beach, where some tiny figures hopped and wavered in the heat-glare. At last he said, "Go on."

"Sopli—"

"He never came up."

"Is he drowned?" Arren asked, unbelieving.

Sparrowhawk nodded.

Arren rowed on until the beach was only a white line beneath the forests and the great green peaks. Sparrowhawk sat by the tiller, holding the wad of cloth to his shoulder but paying no heed to it.

"Did a spear hit him?"

"He jumped."

"But he—he couldn't swim. He was afraid of the water!"

"Aye. Mortally afraid. He wanted. . . . He wanted to come to land."

"Why did they attack us? Who are they?"

"They must have thought us enemies. Will you . . . give me a hand with this a moment?" Arren saw then that the cloth he held pressed against his shoulder was soaked and vivid.

The spear had struck between the shoulder-joint and collarbone, tearing one of the great veins, so that it bled heavily. Under Sparrowhawk's direction, Arren tore strips from a linen shirt and made shift to bandage the wound. Sparrowhawk asked him for the spear, and when Arren laid it on his knees he put his right hand over the blade, long and narrow like a willow leaf, of crudely hammered bronze; he made as if to speak, but after a minute he shook his head. "I have no strength for spells," he said. "Later. It will be all right. Can you get us out of this bay, Arren?"

Silently the boy returned to the oars. He bent his back to the work, and soon, for there was strength in his smooth, lithe frame, he brought *Lookfar* out of the crescent bay into open water. The long noon calm of the Reach lay on the sea. The sail hung slack. The sun glared through a veil of haze, and the green peaks seemed to shake and throb in the great heat. Sparrowhawk had stretched out in the bottom of the boat, his head propped against the thwart by the tiller; he lay still, lips and eyelids half-parted.

Arren did not like to look at his face, but stared over the boat's stern. Heat-haze wavered above the water, as if veils of cobweb were spun out over the sky. His arms trembled with fatigue, but he rowed on.

"Where are you taking us?" Sparrowhawk asked hoarsely, sitting up a little. Turning, Arren saw the crescent bay curving its green arms about the boat once more, the white line of the beach ahead, and the mountains gathered in the air above. He had turned the boat around without knowing it.

"I can't row anymore," he said, stowing the oars and going to crouch in the prow. He kept thinking Sopli was behind him in the boat, by the mast. They had been many days together, and his death had been too sudden, too reasonless to be understood. Nothing was to be understood.

The boat hung swaying on the water, the sail slack on the spar. The tide, beginning to enter the bay, turned *Lookfar* slowly broadside to the current and pushed her by little nudges in and in, toward the distant white line of the beach.

"Lookfar," the mage said caressingly, and a word or two in the Old Speech; and softly the boat rocked and nosed outward and slipped over the blazing sea away from the arms of the bay.

But as slowly and softly, in less than an hour, she ceased to make way, and again the sail hung slack. Arren looked back in the boat and saw his companion lying as before, but his head had dropped back a little, and his eyes were closed.

All this while Arren had felt a heavy, sickly horror, which grew on him and held him from action as if winding his body and mind in fine threads. No courage rose up in him to fight against the fear; only a kind of dull resentment against his lot.

He should not let the boat drift here near the rocky shores of a land whose people attacked strangers; this was clear to his mind, but it did not mean much. What was he to do instead? Row the boat back to Roke? He was lost, utterly lost beyond hope, in the vastness of the Reach. He could never bring the boat back through those weeks of voyage to any friendly land. Only with the mage's guidance could he do it, and Sparrowhawk was hurt and helpless, as suddenly and

meaninglessly as Sopli was dead. His face was changed, lax-featured and yellowish; he might be dying. Arren thought that he should go move him under the awning to keep the sunlight off him, and give him water; men who had lost blood needed to drink. But they had been short of water for days; the barrel was almost empty. What did it matter? There was no good in anything, no use. The luck had run out.

Hours went by, the sun beat down, and the greyish heat wrapped Arren round. He sat unmoving.

A breath of cool passed across his forehead. He looked up. It was evening: the sun was down, the west dull red. *Lookfar* moved slowly under a mild breeze from the east, skirting the steep, wooded shores of Obehol.

Arren went back into the boat and looked after his companion, arranging him a pallet under the awning and giving him water to drink. He did these things hurriedly, keeping his eyes from the bandage, which was in need of changing, for the wound had not wholly ceased to bleed. Sparrowhawk, in the languor of weakness, did not speak; even as he drank eagerly, his eyes closed and he slipped into sleep again, that being the greater thirst. He lay silent; and when in the darkness the breeze died, no magewind replaced it, and again the boat rocked idly on the smooth, heaving water. But now the mountains that loomed to the right were black against a sky gorgeous with stars, and for a long time Arren gazed at them. Their outlines seemed familiar to him, as if he had seen them before, as if he had known them all his life.

When he lay down to sleep he faced southward, and there, well up in the sky above the blank sea, burned the star Gobardon. Beneath it were the two forming a triangle with it, and beneath these, three had risen in a straight line, forming a greater triangle. Then, slipping free of the liquid plains of black and silver, two more followed as the night wore on; they were yellow like Gobardon, though fainter, slanting from right to left from the right base of the triangle. So there were eight of the nine stars that were supposed to make the figure of a man, or the Hardic rune Agnen. To Arren's eyes there was no man in the pattern, unless, as star-figures are, he was strangely distorted; but the rune was plain, with hooked arm and cross-stroke, all but the foot, the last stroke to complete it, the star that had not yet risen.

Watching for it, Arren slept.

When he woke in the dawn, *Lookfar* had drifted farther from Obehol. A mist hid the shores and all but the peaks of the mountains, and thinned out into a haze above the violet waters of the south, dimming the last stars.

He looked at his companion. Sparrowhawk breathed unevenly, as when pain moves under the surface of sleep not quite breaking it. His face was lined and old in the cold, shadowless light. Arren looking at him saw a man with no power left in him, no wizardry, no strength, not even youth, nothing. He had not saved Sopli, nor turned away the spear from himself. He had brought them into peril and had not saved them. Now Sopli was dead, and he dying, and Arren would die. Through this man's fault; and in vain, for nothing.

So Arren looked at him with the clear eyes of despair and saw nothing.

No memory stirred in him of the fountain under the rowan tree, or of the white magelight on the slave-ship in the fog, or of the weary orchards of the House of the Dyers. Nor did any pride or stubbornness of will wake in him. He watched dawn come over the quiet sea, where low, great swells ran colored like pale amethyst, and it was all like a dream, pallid, with no grip or vigor of reality. And at the depths of the dream and of the sea, there was nothing—a gap, a void. There were no depths.

The boat moved forward irregularly and slowly, following the fitful humor of the wind. Behind, the peaks of Obehol shrank black against the rising sun, from which the wind came, bearing the boat away from land, away from the world, out onto the open sea.

Chapter 8

The Children of the Open Sea

Toward the middle of that day Sparrowhawk stirred and asked for water. When he had drunk he asked, "Where are we heading?" For the sail was taut above him, and the boat dipped like a swallow on the long swells.

"West, or north by west."

"I'm cold," Sparrowhawk said. The sun blazed down, filling the boat with heat.

Arren said nothing.

"Try to hold west. Wellogy, west of Obehol. Land there. We need water."

The boy looked forward, over the empty sea.

"What's the matter, Arren?"

He said nothing.

Sparrowhawk tried to sit up, and failing that, to reach his staff that lay by the gear-box; but it was out of his reach, and when he tried to speak again the words halted on his dry lips. The blood broke out anew under the soaked and crusted bandage, making a little spider's thread of crimson on the dark skin of his chest. He drew breath sharply and closed his eyes.

Arren looked at him, but without feeling, and not for long. He went forward and resumed his crouching position in the prow, gazing forward. His mouth was very dry. The east wind that now blew steady over the open sea was as dry as a desert wind. There were only two or three pints of water left in their cask; these were, in Arren's mind, for Sparrowhawk, not for himself; it never occurred to him to drink from that water. He had set out fishing lines, having learned since they left Lorbanery that raw fish fulfills both thirst and hunger; but there was never anything on the lines. It did not matter. The boat moved on over the desert of water. Over the boat, slowly, yet winning the race in the end by all the width of heaven, the sun moved also from east to west.

Once Arren thought he saw a blue height in the south that might have been land

or cloud; the boat had been running somewhat north of west for hours. He did not try to tack and turn, but let her go on. The land might or might not be real; it did not matter. To him all the vast, fiery glory of wind and light and ocean was dim and false.

Darkness came, and light again, and dark, and light, like drumbeats on the tight-stretched canvas of the sky.

He trailed his hand in the water over the side of the boat. For an instant he saw that, vivid: his hand pale greenish beneath the living water. He bent and sucked the wet off his fingers. It was bitter, burning his lips painfully, but he did it again. Then he was sick, and crouched down vomiting, but only a little bile burned his throat. There was no more water to give Sparrowhawk, and he was afraid to go near him. He lay down, shivering despite the heat. It was all silent, dry, and bright: terribly bright. He hid his eyes from the light.

They stood in the boat, three of them, stalk-thin and angular, great-eyed, like strange dark herons or cranes. Their voices were thin, like birds' voices. He did not understand them. One knelt above him with a dark bladder on his arm and tipped from it into Arren's mouth: it was water. Arren drank avidly, choked, drank again till he had drained the container. Then he looked about and struggled to his feet, saying, "Where is, where is he?" For in *Lookfar* with him were only the three strange, slender men.

They looked at him uncomprehending.

"The other man," he croaked, his raw throat and stiff-caked lips unfit to form the words, "my friend—"

One of them understood his distress if not his words, and putting a slight hand on his arm, pointed with the other. "There," he said, reassuring.

Arren looked. And he saw, ahead of the boat and northward of her, some gathered in close and others strung far out across the sea, rafts—so many rafts that they lay like autumn leaves on a pool. Low to the water, each bore one or two cabins or huts near the center, and several had masts stepped. Like leaves they floated, rising and falling very softly as the vast swells of the western ocean passed under them.

The lanes of water shone like silver between them, and over them towered great violet and golden rainclouds, darkening the west.

"There," the man said, pointing to a great raft near *Lookfar*.

"Alive?"

They all looked at him, and at last one understood. "Alive. He is alive." At this Arren began to weep, a dry sobbing, and one of the men took his wrist in a strong and narrow hand and drew him out of *Lookfar* and onto a raft to which the boat had been made fast. The raft was so great and buoyant that it did not dip even slightly to their weight. The man led Arren across it, while one of the others reached out with a heavy gaff tipped with a curving whaleshark's tooth and hauled a nearby raft closer, till they could step the gap. There he led Arren to the shelter or cabin, which was open on one side and closed with woven screens on the other three. "Lie down," he said, and beyond that Arren knew nothing at all.

He was lying on his back, stretched out flat, gazing up at a rough green roof dappled with tiny dots of light. He thought he was in the apple orchards of Semermine, where the princes of Enlad pass their summers, in the hills behind Berila; he thought he was lying in the thick grass at Semermine, looking up at the sunlight between apple boughs.

After a while he heard the slap and jostle of water in the hollow places underneath the raft, and the thin voices of the raft-people speaking a tongue that was the common Hardic of the Archipelago, but much changed in sounds and rhythms, so that it was hard to understand; and so he knew where he was—out beyond the Archipelago, beyond the Reach, beyond all isles, lost on the open sea. But still he was untroubled, lying as comfortably as if he lay in the grass in the orchards of his home.

He thought after a while that he ought to get up, and did so, finding his body very thin and burnt-looking and his legs shaky but serviceable. He pushed aside the woven hanging that made the walls of the shelter and stepped out into the afternoon. It had rained while he slept. The wood of the raft, great, smooth-shapen, squared logs, fit close and caulked, was dark with wet, and the hair of the thin, half-naked people was black and lank from the rain. But half the sky was clear where the sun stood in the west, and the clouds now rode to the far northeast in heaps of silver.

One of the men came up to Arren warily, stopping some feet from him. He was slight and short, no taller than a boy of twelve; his eyes were long, large, and dark. He carried a spear with a barbed ivory head.

Arren said to him, "I owe my life to you and your people."

The man nodded.

"Will you take me to my companion?"

Turning away, the raft-man raised his voice in a high, piercing cry like the call of a sea bird. Then he squatted down on his heels as if to wait, and Arren did the same.

The rafts had masts, though the mast of the one they were on was not stepped. On these, sails could be run up, small compared to the breadth of the raft. The sails were of a brown material, not canvas or linen, but a fibrous stuff that looked not woven but beaten together, as felt is made. A raft some quarter mile away let the brown sail down from the crosstree by ropes and slowly worked its way, gaffing and poling off the other rafts between, till it came alongside the one Arren was on. When there was only three feet of water between, the man beside Arren got up and nonchalantly hopped across. Arren did the same and landed awkwardly on all fours; there was no spring left in his knees. He picked himself up and found the little man looking at him, not with amusement, but with approval: Arren's composure had evidently won his respect.

This raft was larger and higher out of the water than any other, made of logs forty feet in length and four or five feet wide, blackened and smooth with use and weather. Strangely carven statues of wood stood about the several shelters or enclosures on it, and tall poles bearing tufts of sea birds' feathers stood at the four corners. His guide took him to the smallest of the shelters, and there he saw Sparrowhawk lying asleep.

Arren sat down inside the shelter. His guide went back to the other raft, and nobody bothered him. After an hour or so a woman brought him food: a kind of cold fish stew with bits of some transparent green stuff in it, salty but good; and a small cup of water, stale, tasting pitchy from the caulking of the barrel. He saw by the way she gave him the water that it was a treasure that she gave him, a thing to be honored. He drank it respectfully and asked for no more, though he could have drunk ten times the cupful.

Sparrowhawk's shoulder had been skillfully bandaged; he slept deeply and easily. When he woke up, his eyes were clear. He looked at Arren and smiled the sweet, joyous smile that was always startling on his hard face. Arren felt suddenly like weeping again. He put his hand on Sparrowhawk's hand and said nothing.

One of the raft-folk approached and squatted down in the shade of the large shelter nearby: a kind of temple, it appeared to be, with a square design of great complexity above the doorway, and the doorjambs made of logs carved in the shape of grey whales sounding. This man was short and thin like the others, boylike in frame, but his face was strong-featured and weathered by the years. He

wore nothing but a loincloth, but dignity clothed him amply. “He must sleep,” he said, and Arren left Sparrowhawk and came to him.

“You are the chief of this folk,” Arren said, knowing a prince when he saw one.

“I am,” the man said, with a short nod. Arren stood before him, erect and unmoving. Presently the man’s dark eyes met his briefly: “You are a chief also,” he observed.

“I am,” Arren answered. He would have liked very much to know how the raft-man knew it, but remained impassive. “But I serve my lord, there.”

The chief of the raft-folk said something Arren did not understand at all: certain words changed out of recognition or names he did not know; then he said, “Why came you into Balatran?”

“Seeking—”

But Arren did not know how much to say, nor indeed what to say. All that had happened, and the matter of their quest, seemed very long ago and was confused in his mind. At last he said, “We came to Obehol. They attacked us when we came to land. My lord was hurt.”

“And you?”

“I was not hurt,” Arren said, and the cold self-possession he had learnt in his courtly childhood served him well. “But there was—there was something like a madness. One who was with us drowned himself. There was a fear—” He stopped, and stood silent.

The chief watched him with black, opaque eyes. At last he said, “You come by chance here, then.”

“Yes. Are we still in the South Reach?”

“Reach? No. The islands—” The chief moved his slender black hand in an arc, no more than a quarter of the compass, north to east. “The islands are there,” he said. “All the islands.” Then showing all the evening sea before them, from north through west to south, he said, “The sea.”

“What land are you from, lord?”

“No land. We are the Children of the Open Sea.”

Arren looked at his keen face. He looked about him at the great raft with its temple and its tall idols, each carved from a single tree, great god-figures mixed of dolphin, fish, man, and sea bird; at the people busy at their work, weaving, carving, fishing, cooking on raised platforms, tending babies; at the other rafts, seventy at least, scattered out over the water in a great circle perhaps a mile across. It was a town: smoke rising in thin wisps from distant houses, the voices of children high

on the wind. It was a town, and under its floors was the abyss.

"Do you never come to land?" the boy asked in a low voice.

"Once each year. We go to the Long Dune. We cut wood there and refit the rafts. That is in autumn, and after that we follow the grey whales north. In winter we go apart, each raft alone. In the spring we come to Balatran and meet. There is going from raft to raft then, there are marriages, and the Long Dance is held. These are the Roads of Balatran; from here the great current bears south. In summer we drift south upon the great current until we see the Great Ones, the grey whales, turning northward. Then we follow them, returning at last to the beaches of Emah on the Long Dune, for a little while."

"This is most wonderful, my lord," said Arren. "Never did I hear of such a people as yours. My home is very far from here. Yet there too, on the island of Enlad, we dance the Long Dance on midsummer eve."

"You stamp the earth down and make it safe," the chief said dryly. "We dance on the deep sea."

After a time he asked, "How is he called, your lord?"

"Sparrowhawk," Arren said. The chief repeated the syllables, but they clearly had no meaning for him. And that more than any other thing made Arren understand that the tale was true, that these people lived on the sea year in, year out, on the open sea past any land or scent of land, beyond the flight of the land birds, outside the knowledge of men.

"There was death in him," the chief said. "He must sleep. You go back to Star's raft: I will send for you." He stood up. Though perfectly sure of himself, he was apparently not quite sure what Arren was; whether he should treat him as an equal or as a boy. Arren preferred the latter, in this situation, and accepted his dismissal, but then faced a problem of his own. The rafts had drifted apart again, and a hundred yards of satiny water rippled between the two.

The chief of the Children of the Open Sea spoke to him once more, briefly. "Swim," he said.

Arren let himself gingerly into the water. Its cool was pleasant on his sun-baked skin. He swam across and hauled himself out on the other raft, to find a group of five or six children and young people watching him with undisguised interest. A very small girl said, "You swim like a fish on a hook."

"How should I swim?" asked Arren, a little mortified, but polite; indeed he could not have been rude to a human being so very small. She looked like a polished mahogany statuette, fragile, exquisite. "Like this!" she cried, and dived

like a seal into the dazzle and liquid roil of the waters. Only after a long time, and at an improbable distance, did he hear her shrill cry and see her black, sleek head above the surface.

"Come on," said a boy who was probably Arren's age, though he looked not more than twelve in height and build: a grave-faced fellow, with a blue crab tattooed all across his back. He dived, and all dived, even the three-year-old; so Arren had to and did so, trying not to splash.

"Like an eel," said the boy, coming up by his shoulder.

"Like a dolphin," said a pretty girl with a pretty smile, and vanished in the depths.

"Like me!" squeaked the three-year-old, bobbing like a bottle.

So that evening until dark, and all the next long golden day and the days that followed, Arren swam and talked and worked with the young people of Star's raft. And of all the events of his voyage since that morning of the equinox when he and Sparrowhawk left Roke, this seemed to him in some way the strangest; for it had nothing to do with all that had gone before, in the voyage or in all his life; and even less to do with what was yet to come. At night, lying down to sleep among the others under the stars, he thought, It is as if I were dead, and this is an afterlife, here in the sunlight, beyond the edge of the world, among the sons and daughters of the sea. . . .

Before he slept he would look in the far south for the yellow star and the figure of the Rune of Ending, and always he saw Gobardon and the lesser or the greater triangle; but it rose later now, and he could not keep his eyes open till the whole figure stood free of the horizon. By night and by day the rafts drifted southward, but there was never any change in the sea, for the ever-changing does not change; the rainstorms of May passed over, and at night the stars shone, and all day the sun.

He knew that their life could not be lived always in this dreamlike ease. He asked of winter, and they told him of the long rains and the mighty swells, the single rafts, each separated from all the rest, drifting and plunging along through the grey and darkness, week after week after week. Last winter in a month-long storm they had seen waves so great they were "like thunderclouds," they said, for they had not seen hills. From the back of one wave the next could be seen, immense, miles away, rushing hugely toward them. Could the rafts ride such seas? he asked, and they said yes, but not always. In the spring when they gathered at the Roads of Balatran there would be two rafts missing, or three, or six. . . .

They married very young. Bluecrab, the boy tattooed with his namesake, and

the pretty girl Albatross were man and wife, though he was just seventeen and she two years younger; there were many such marriages between the rafts. Many babies crept and toddled about the rafts, tied by long leashes to the four posts of the central shelter, all crawling into it in the heat of the day and sleeping in wriggling heaps. The older children tended the younger, and men and women shared in all the work. All took their turn at gathering the great, brown-leaved seaweeds, the *nilgu* of the Roads, fringed like fern and eighty or a hundred feet long. All worked together at pounding the nilgu into cloth and braiding the coarse fibers for ropes and nets; at fishing and drying the fish and shaping whale-ivory into tools, and all the other tasks of the rafts. But there was always time for swimming and for talking, and never a time by which a task must be finished. There were no hours: only whole days, whole nights. After a few such days and nights it seemed to Arren that he had lived on the raft for time uncountable, and Obehol was a dream, and behind that were fainter dreams, and in some other world he had lived on land and been a prince in Enlad.

When he was summoned at last to the chief's raft, Sparrowhawk looked at him awhile and said, "You look like that Arren whom I saw in the Court of the Fountain: sleek as a golden seal. It suits you here, lad."

"Aye, my lord."

"But where is here? We have left places behind us. We have sailed off the maps. . . . Long ago I heard tell of the raft-folk, but thought it only one more tale of the South Reach, a fancy without substance. Yet we were rescued by that fancy, and our lives saved by a myth."

He spoke smilingly, as though he had shared in that timeless ease of life in the summer light; but his face was gaunt, and in his eyes lay an unlighted darkness. Arren saw that and faced it.

"I betrayed—" he said, and stopped. "I betrayed your trust in me."

"How so, Arren?"

"There—at Obehol. When for once you needed me. You were hurt and needed my help. I did nothing. The boat drifted, and I let her drift. You were in pain, and I did nothing for you. I saw land—I saw land, and did not even try to turn the boat —"

"Be still, lad," the mage said with such firmness that Arren obeyed. And presently, "Tell me what you thought at that time."

"Nothing, my lord—nothing! I thought there was no use in doing anything. I thought your wizardry was gone—no, that it had never been. That you had tricked

me." The sweat broke out on Arren's face and he had to force his voice, but he went on. "I was afraid of you. I was afraid of death. I was so afraid of it I would not look at you, because you might be dying. I could think of nothing, except that there was—there was a way of not dying for me, if I could find it. But all the time life was running out, as if there was a great wound and the blood running from it—such as you had. But this was in everything. And I did nothing, nothing, but try to hide from the horror of dying."

He stopped, for saying the truth aloud was unendurable. It was not shame that stopped him, but fear, the same fear. He knew now why this tranquil life in sea and sunlight on the rafts seemed to him like an afterlife or a dream, unreal. It was because he knew in his heart that reality was empty: without life or warmth or color or sound: without meaning. There were no heights or depths. All this lovely play of form and light and color on the sea and in the eyes of men, was no more than that: a playing of illusions on the shallow void.

They passed, and there remained the shapelessness and the cold. Nothing else.

Sparrowhawk was looking at him, and he had looked down to avoid that gaze. But there spoke in Arren unexpectedly a little voice of courage or of mockery: it was arrogant and pitiless, and it said, "Coward! Coward! Will you throw even this away?"

So he looked up, with a great effort of his will, and met his companion's eyes. Sparrowhawk reached out and took his hand in a hard grasp, so that both by eye and by flesh they touched. He said Arren's true name, which he had never spoken:

"Lebannen." Again he said it: "Lebannen, this is. And thou art. There is no safety, and there is no end. The word must be heard in silence; there must be darkness to see the stars. The dance is always danced above the hollow place, above the terrible abyss."

Arren clenched his hands and bent his forehead down till it pressed against Sparrowhawk's hand. "I failed you," he said. "I will fail you again and fail myself. I have not strength enough!"

"You have strength enough." The mage's voice was tender, but beneath tenderness was that same hardness that had risen in the depths of Arren's own shame, and mocked him. "What you love, you will love. What you undertake, you will complete. You are a fulfiller of hope; you are to be relied on. But seventeen years give little armor against despair. . . . Consider, Arren. To refuse death is to refuse life."

"But I sought death—yours and mine!" Arren lifted his head and stared at

Sparrowhawk. “Like Sopli who drowned himself—”

“Sopli was not seeking death. He sought to escape from it and from life. He sought safety: an end to fear—to the fear of death.”

“But there is—there is a way. There is a way beyond death. Back to life. To life beyond death, life without death. That is—what they seek. Hare and Sopli, the ones who were wizards. That is what we seek. You—you above all must know—must know of that way—”

The mage’s strong hand was still on his. “I do not,” Sparrowhawk said. “Aye, I know what they think they seek. But I know it to be a lie. Listen to me, Arren. You will die. You will not live forever. Nor will any man nor anything. Nothing is immortal. But only to us is it given to know that we must die. And that is a great gift: the gift of selfhood. For we have only what we know we must lose, what we are willing to lose. . . . That selfhood which is our torment, and our treasure, and our humanity, does not endure. It changes; it is gone, a wave on the sea. Would you have the sea grow still and the tides cease, to save one wave, to save yourself? Would you give up the craft of your hands, and the passion of your heart, and the light of sunrise and sunset, to buy safety for yourself—safety forever? That is what they seek to do on Wathort and Lorbanery and elsewhere. That is the message that those who know how to hear have heard: by denying life you may deny death and live forever!—And this message I do not hear, Arren, for I will not hear it. I will not take the counsel of despair. I am deaf; I am blind. You are my guide. You in your innocence and your courage, in your unwisdom and your loyalty, you are my guide—the child I send before me into the dark. It is your fear, your pain, I follow. You have thought me harsh to you, Arren; you never knew how harsh. I use your love as a man burns a candle, burns it away, to light his steps. And we must go on. We must go on. We must go all the way. We must come to the place where the sea runs dry and joy runs out, the place to which your mortal terror draws you.”

“Where is it, my lord?”

“I do not know.”

“I cannot lead you there. But I will come with you.”

The mage’s gaze on him was somber, unfathomable.

“But if I should fail again and betray you—”

“I will trust you, son of Morred.”

Then both were silent.

Above them the tall, carven idols rocked very slightly against the blue southern sky: dolphin bodies, gulls’ wings folded, human faces with staring eyes of shell.

Sparrowhawk got up stiffly, for he was still far from being fully healed of his wound. “I am tired of sitting about,” he said. “I shall grow fat in idleness.” He began to pace the length of the raft, and Arren joined him. They talked a little as they walked; Arren told Sparrowhawk how he spent his days, who his friends among the raft-folk were. Sparrowhawk’s restlessness was greater than his strength, which soon gave out. He stopped by a girl who was weaving nilgu on her loom behind the House of the Great Ones, asking her to seek out the chief for him, and then returned to his shelter. There the chief of the raft-folk came, greeting him with courtesy, which the mage returned; and all three of them sat down together on the spotted sealskin rugs of the shelter.

“I have thought,” the chief began, slowly and with a civil solemnity, “of the things you have told me. Of how men think to come back from death into their own bodies, and seeking to do this forget the worship of the gods and neglect their bodies and go mad. This is an evil matter and a great folly. Also I have thought, What has it to do with us? We have nothing to do with other men, their islands and their ways, their makings and unmakings. We live on the sea and our lives are the sea’s. We do not hope to save them; we do not seek to lose them. Madness does not come here. We do not come to land; nor do the landfolk come to us. When I was young, we spoke sometimes with men who came on boats to the Long Dune, when we were there to cut the raft logs and build the winter shelters. Often we saw sails from Ohol and Welwai (so he called Obehol and Wellogy) following the grey whales in the autumn. Often they followed our rafts from afar, for we know the roads and meeting places of the Great Ones in the sea. But that is all I ever saw of the landfolk, and now they come no longer. Maybe they have all gone mad and fought with one another. Two years ago on the Long Dune looking north to Welwai we saw for three days the smoke of a great burning. And if that were so, what is it to us? We are the Children of the Open Sea. We go the sea’s way.”

“Yet seeing a landsman’s boat adrift you came to it,” said the mage.

“Some among us said it was not wise to do so, and would have let the boat drift on to sea’s end,” the chief answered in his high, impassive voice.

“You were not one of them.”

“No. I said, though they be landfolk, yet we will help them, and so it was done. But with your undertakings we have nothing to do. If there is a madness among the landfolk, the landfolk must deal with it. We follow the road of the Great Ones. We cannot help you in your search. So long as you wish to stay with us, you are welcome. It is not many days till the Long Dance; after it we return northward,

following the eastern current that by summer's end will bring us round again to the seas by the Long Dune. If you will stay with us and be healed of your hurt, this will be well. Or if you will take your boat and go your way, this too will be well."

The mage thanked him, and the chief got up, slight and stiff as a heron, and left them alone together.

"In innocence there is no strength against evil," said Sparrowhawk, a little wryly. "But there is strength in it for good. . . . We shall stay with them awhile, I think, till I am cured of this weakness."

"That is wise," said Arren. Sparrowhawk's physical frailty had shocked and moved him; he had determined to protect the man from his own energy and urgency, to insist that they wait at least until he was free of pain before they went on.

The mage looked at him, somewhat startled by the compliment.

"They are kind here," Arren pursued, not noticing. "They seem to be free of that sickness of soul they had in Hort Town and the other islands. Maybe there is no island where we would have been helped and welcomed, as these lost people have done."

"You may well be right."

"And they lead a pleasant life in summer. . . ."

"They do. Though to eat cold fish one's whole life long, and never to see a pear tree in blossom or taste of a running spring, would be wearisome at last!"

So Arren returned to Star's raft, worked and swam and basked with the other young people, talked with Sparrowhawk in the cool of the evening, and slept under the stars. And the days wore on toward the Long Dance of midsummer's eve, and the great rafts drifted slowly southward on the currents of the open sea.

Chapter 9

Orm Embar

All night long, the shortest night of the year, torches burned on the rafts, which lay gathered in a great circle under the thick-starred sky, so that a ring of fires flickered on the sea. The raft-folk danced, using no drum or flute or any music but the rhythm of bare feet on the great, rocking rafts, and the thin voices of their chanters ringing plaintive in the vastness of their dwelling place the sea. There was no moon that night, and the bodies of the dancers were dim in the starlight and torchlight. Now and again one flashed like a fish leaping, a youth vaulting from one raft to the next: long leaps and high, and they vied with one another, trying to circle all the ring of rafts and dance on each, and so come round before the break of day.

Arren danced with them, for the Long Dance is held on every isle of the Archipelago, though the steps and songs may vary. But as the night drew on, and many dancers dropped out and settled down to watch or doze, and the voices of the chanters grew husky, he came with a group of high-leaping lads to the chief's raft and there stopped, while they went on.

Sparrowhawk sat with the chief and the chief's three wives, near the temple. Between the carven whales that made its doorway sat a chanter whose high voice had not flagged all night long. Tireless he sang, tapping his hands on the wooden deck to keep the time.

"What does he sing of?" Arren asked the mage, for he could not follow the words, which were all held long, with trills and strange catches on the notes.

"Of the grey whales and the albatross and the storm. . . . They do not know the songs of the heroes and the kings. They do not know the name of Erreth-Akbe. Earlier he sang of Segoy, how he established the lands amid the sea; that much they remember of the lore of men. But the rest is all of the sea."

Arren listened: he heard the singer imitate the whistling cry of the dolphin, weaving his song about it. He watched Sparrowhawk's profile against the

torchlight, black and firm as rock, saw the liquid gleam of the chief's wives' eyes as they chatted softly, felt the long, slow dip of the raft on the quiet sea, and slipped gradually toward sleep.

He roused all at once: the chanter had fallen silent. Not only the one near whom they sat, but all the others, on the rafts near and far. The thin voices had died away like a far-off piping of sea birds, and it was still.

Arren looked over his shoulder to the east, expecting dawn. But only the old moon rode low, just rising, golden among the summer stars.

Then looking southward he saw, high up, yellow Gobardon, and below it the eight companions, even to the last: the Rune of Ending clear and fiery above the sea. And turning to Sparrowhawk, he saw the dark face turned to those same stars.

"Why do you cease?" the chief was asking the singer. "It is not daybreak, not even dawn."

The man stammered and said, "I do not know."

"Sing on! The Long Dance is not ended."

"I do not know the words," the chanter said, and his voice rose high as if in terror. "I cannot sing. I have forgotten the song."

"Sing another, then!"

"There are no more songs. It is ended," the chanter cried, and bent forward till he crouched on the decking; and the chief stared at him in amazement.

The rafts rocked beneath their sputtering torches, all silent. The silence of the ocean enclosed the small stir of life and light upon it and swallowed it. No dancer moved.

It seemed to Arren then that the splendor of the stars dimmed, and yet no daylight was in the east. A horror came on him, and he thought, There will be no sunrise. There will be no day.

The mage stood up. As he did so a faint light, white and quick, ran along his staff, burning clearest in the rune that was set in silver in the wood. "The dance is not ended," he said, "nor the night. Arren, sing."

Arren would have said, "I cannot, lord!"—but instead he looked at the nine stars in the south, drew a deep breath, and sang. His voice was soft and husky at first, but it grew stronger as he sang, and the song was that oldest song, of the Creation of Eá, and the balancing of the dark and the light, and the making of green lands by Him who spoke the first word, the Eldest Lord, Segoy.

Before the song was ended, the sky had paled to greyish-blue, and in it only the moon and Gobardon still burned faintly. The torches hissed in the wind of dawn.

Then, the song done, Arren was silent; and the dancers who had gathered to listen returned quietly from raft to raft, as the light brightened in the east.

"That is a good song," the chief said. His voice was uncertain, though he strove to speak impassively. "It would not be well to end the Long Dance before it is completed. I will have the lazy chanters beaten with nilgu thongs."

"Comfort them, rather," Sparrowhawk said. He was still afoot, and his tone was stern. "No singer chooses silence. Come with me, Arren."

He turned to go to the shelter, and Arren followed him. But the strangeness of that daybreak was not yet done, for even then, as the eastern rim of the sea grew white, there came from the north flying a great bird: so high up that its wings caught the sunlight that had not shone upon the world yet and beat in strokes of gold upon the air. Arren cried out, pointing. The mage looked up, startled. Then his face became fierce and exulting, and he shouted out aloud, *"Nam hietha arw Ged arkvaissaf!"*—which in the Speech of the Making is, If thou seekest Ged here find him.

And like a golden plummet dropped, with wings held high outstretched, vast and thundering on the air, with talons which might seize an ox as if it were a mouse, with a curl of steamy flame streaming from long nostrils, the dragon stooped like a falcon on the rocking raft.

The raft-folk cried out; some cowered down, some leapt into the sea, and some stood still, watching, in a wonder that surpassed fear.

The dragon hovered above them. Ninety feet, maybe, was he from tip to tip of his vast membranous wings, that shone in the new sunlight like gold-shot smoke, and the length of his body was no less, but lean, arched like a greyhound, clawed like a lizard, and snake-scaled. Along the narrow spine went a row of jagged darts, like rose-thorns in shape, but at the hump of the back three feet in height, and so diminishing that the last at the tail-tip was no longer than the blade of a little knife. These thorns were grey, and the scales of the dragon were iron-grey, but there was a glitter of gold in them. His eyes were green and slitted.

Moved by fear for his people to forget fear for himself, the chief of the raft-folk came from his shelter with a harpoon such as they used in the hunt of whales: it was longer than himself and pointed with a great, barbed point of ivory. Poising it on his small, sinewy arm, he ran forward to gain the impetus to hurl it up and strike the dragon's narrow, light-mailed belly that hung above the raft. Arren waking from stupor saw him, and plunging forward caught his arm and came down in a heap with him and the harpoon. "Would you anger him with your silly pins?" he

gasped. "Let the Dragonlord speak first!"

The chief, half the wind knocked out of him, stared stupidly at Arren and at the mage and at the dragon. But he did not say anything. And then the dragon spoke.

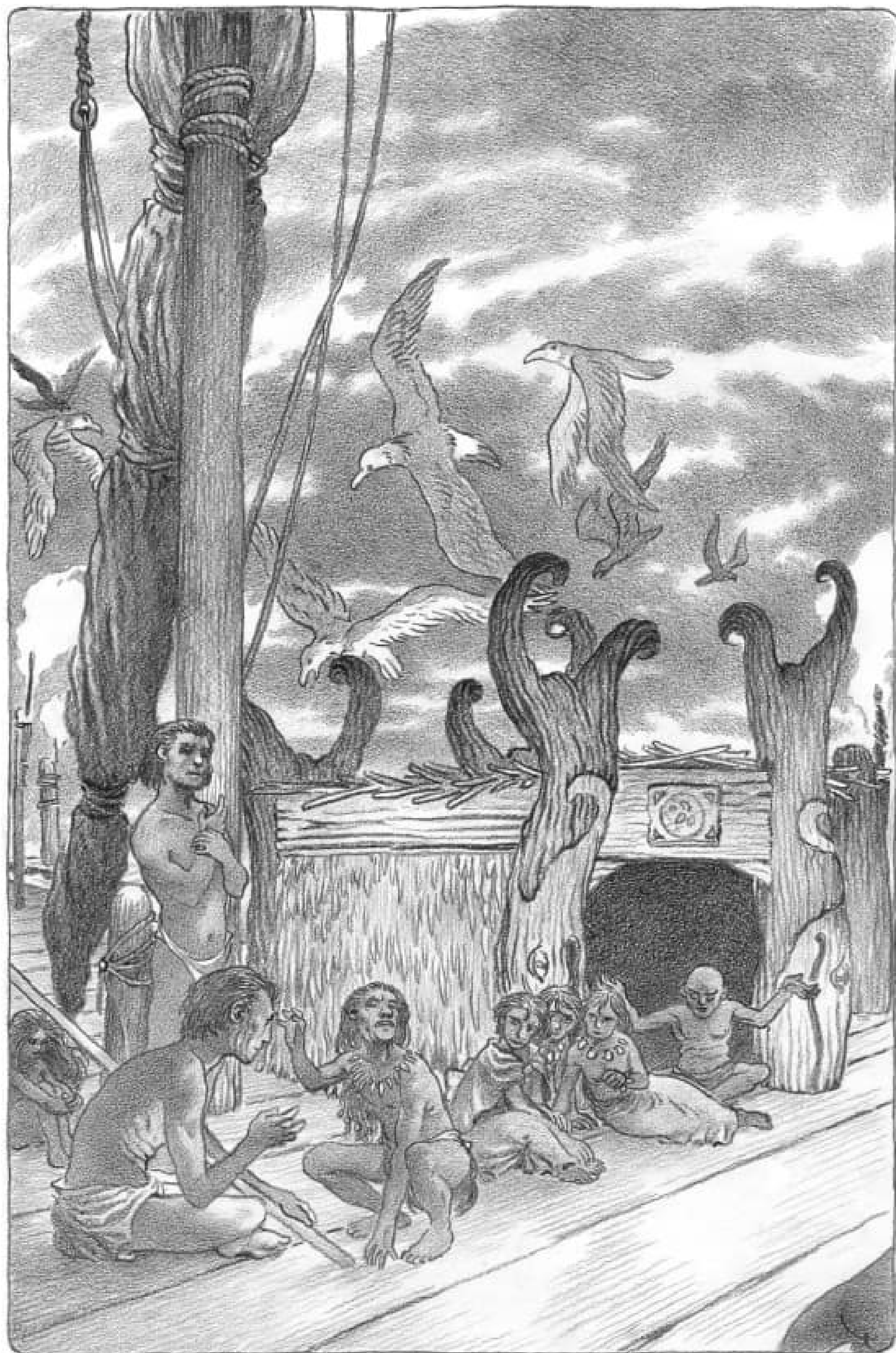
None there but Ged to whom it spoke could understand it, for dragons speak only in the Old Speech, which is their tongue. The voice was soft and hissing, almost like a cat's when he cries out softly in rage, but huge, and there was a terrible music in it. Whoever heard that voice stopped still and listened.

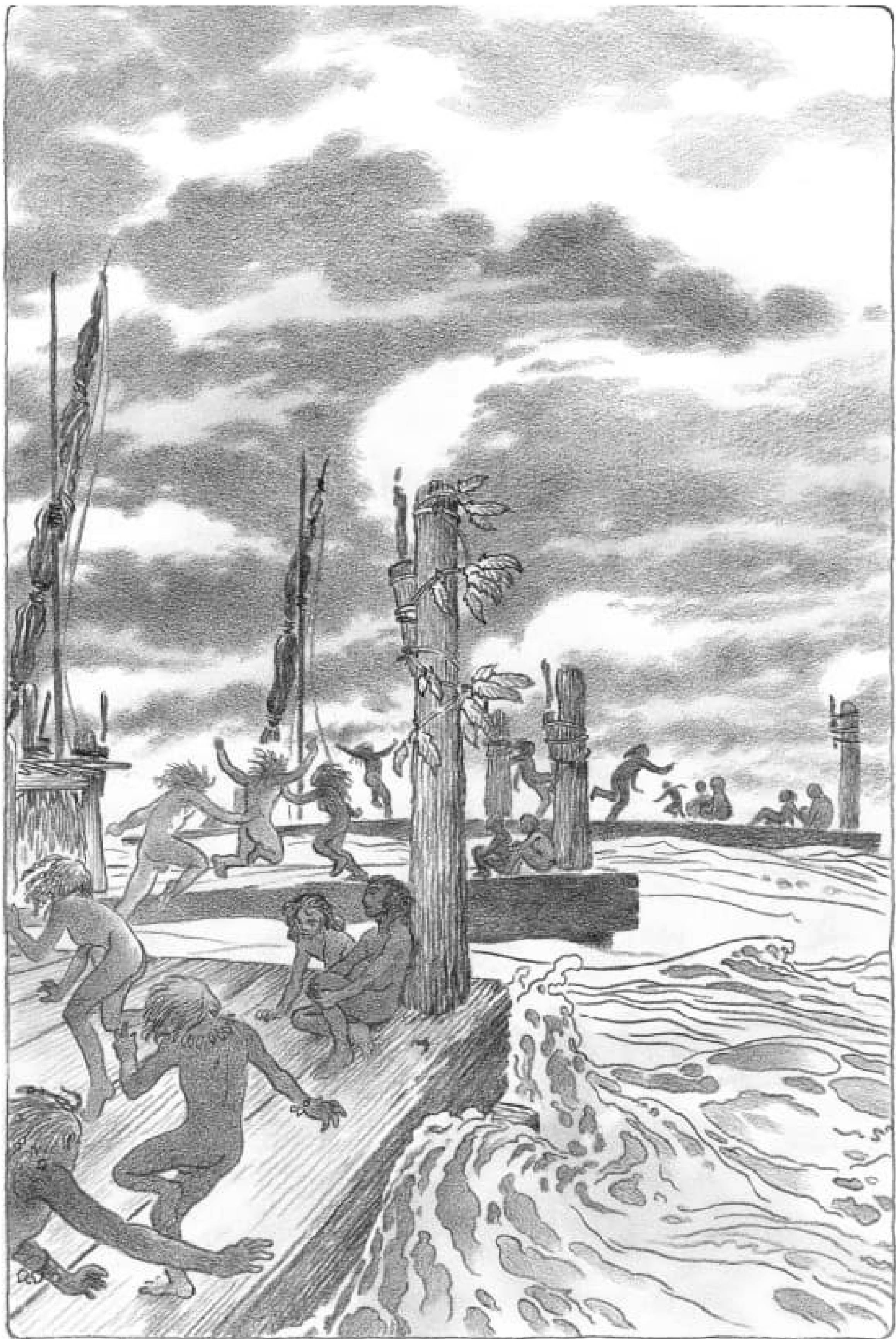
The mage answered briefly, and again the dragon spoke, poising above him on slight-shifting wings: even, thought Arren, like a dragonfly poised on the air.

Then the mage answered one word, *"Memeas,"* I will come; and he lifted up his staff of yew-wood. The dragon's jaws opened, and a coil of smoke escaped them in a long arabesque. The gold wings clapped like thunder, making a great wind that smelled of burning, and he wheeled and flew hugely to the north.

It was quiet on the rafts, with a little thin piping and wailing of children, and women comforting them. Men climbed aboard out of the sea somewhat shamefaced; and the forgotten torches burned in the first rays of the sun.

The mage turned to Arren. His face had a light in it that might have been joy or stark anger, but he spoke quietly. "Now we must go, lad. Say your farewells and come." He turned to thank the chief of the raft-folk and bid him farewell, and then went from the great raft across three others, for they still lay close ingathered for the dancing, till he came to the one to which *Lookfar* was tied. So the boat had followed the raft-town in its long, slow drift into the south, rocking along empty behind; but the Children of the Open Sea had filled its empty cask with hoarded rainwater and made up its stock of provisions, wishing thus to honor their guests, for many of them believed Sparrowhawk to be one of the Great Ones, who had taken on the form of a man instead of the form of a whale. When Arren joined him, he had the sail up. Arren loosed the rope and leapt into the boat, and in that instant she veered from the raft and her sail stiffened as in a high wind, though only the breeze of sunrise blew. She heeled turning and sped off northward on the dragon's track, light as a blown leaf on the wind.





When Arren looked back, he saw the raft-town as a tiny scattering, little sticks and chips of wood afloat: the shelters and the torch-poles. Soon these were lost in the dazzle of early sunlight on the water. *Lookfar* fled forward. When her bow bit the waves, fine crystal spray flew, and the wind of her going flung back Arren's hair and made him squint.

Under no wind of earth could that small boat have sailed so fast, unless in storm, and then it might have foundered in the storm-waves. This was no wind of earth, but the mage's word and power, that sent her forth so fleet.

He stood a long time by the mast, with watchful eyes. At last he sat down in his old place by the tiller, laying one hand upon it, and looked at Arren.

"That was Orm Embar," he said, "the Dragon of Selidor, kin to that great Orm who slew Erreth-Akbe and was slain by him."

"Was he hunting, lord?" said Arren; for he was not certain whether the mage had spoken to the dragon in welcome or in threat.

"Hunting me. What dragons hunt, they find. He came to ask my help." He laughed shortly. "And that's a thing I would not believe if any told me: that a dragon turned to a man for help. And of them all, that one! He is not the oldest, though he is very old, but he is the mightiest of his kind. He does not hide his name, as dragons and men must do. He has no fear that any can gain power over him. Nor does he deceive, in the way of his kind. Long ago, on Selidor, he let me live, and he told me a great truth: he told me how the Rune of the Kings might be refound. To him I owe the Ring of Erreth-Akbe. But never did I think to repay such a debt, to such a creditor!"

"What does he ask?"

"To show me the way I seek," said the mage, more grimly. And after a pause, "He said, 'In the west there is another Dragonlord; he works destruction on us, and his power is greater than ours.' I said, 'Even than thine, Orm Embar?' and he said, 'Even than mine. I need thee: follow in haste.' And so bid, I obeyed."

"You know no more than that?"

"I will know more."

Arren coiled up the mooring line, stowed it, and saw to other small matters about the boat, but all the while the tension of excitement sang in him like a tightened bowstring, and it sang in his voice when he spoke at last. "This is a better guide," he said, "than the others!"

Sparrowhawk looked at him and laughed. "Aye," he said. "This time we will not go astray, I think."

So those two began their great race across the ocean. A thousand miles and more it was from the uncharted seas of the raft-folk to the island Selidor, which lies of all the lands of Earthsea the farthest west. Day after day rose shining from the clear horizon and sank into the red west, and under the gold arch of the sun and the silver wheeling of the stars the boat ran northward, all alone on the sea.

Sometimes the thunderclouds of high summer massed far off, casting purple shadows down on the horizon; then Arren would watch the mage as he stood up and with voice and hand called those clouds to drift toward them and to loosen their rain down on the boat. The lightning would leap among the clouds, and the thunder would bellow. Still the mage stood with upraised hand, until the rain came pouring down on him and on Arren and into the vessels they had set out and into the boat and onto the sea, flattening the waves with its violence. He and Arren would grin with pleasure, for of food they had enough, if none to spare, but water they needed. And the furious splendor of the storm that obeyed the mage's word delighted them.

Arren wondered at this power which his companion now used so lightly, and once he said, "When we began our voyage, you used to work no charms."

"The first lesson on Roke, and the last, is *Do what is needful.* And no more!"

"The lessons in between, then, must consist in learning what is needful."

"They do. One must consider the Balance. But when the Balance itself is broken—then one considers other things. Above all, haste."

"But how is it that all the wizards of the South—and elsewhere by now, even the chanters of the rafts—all have lost their art, but you keep yours?"

"Because I desire nothing beyond my art," Sparrowhawk said.

And after some time he added, more cheerfully, "And if I am soon to lose it, I shall make the best of it while it lasts."

There was indeed a kind of lightheartedness in him now, a pure pleasure in his skill, which Arren, seeing him always so careful, had not guessed. The mind of the magician takes delight in tricks; a mage is a trickster. Sparrowhawk's disguise in Hort Town, which had so troubled Arren, had been a game to him; a very slight game, too, for one who could transform not just his face and voice at will, but his body and very being, becoming as he chose a fish, a dolphin, a hawk. And once he said, "Look, Arren: I'll show you Gont," and had him look at the surface of their water-cask, which he had opened, and which was full to the brim. Many simple sorcerers can cause an image to appear on the water-mirror, and so he had done: a great peak, cloud-wreathed, rising from a grey sea. Then the image changed, and

Arren saw plainly a cliff on that mountain isle. It was as if he were a bird, a gull or a falcon, hanging on the wind offshore and looking across the wind at that cliff that towered from the breakers for two thousand feet. On the high shelf of it was a little house. "That is Re Albi," said Sparrowhawk, "and there lives my master Ogion, he who stilled the earthquake long ago. He tends his goats, and gathers herbs, and keeps his silence. I wonder if he still walks on the mountain; he is very old now. But I would know, surely I would know, even now, if Ogion died. . . ." There was no certainty in his voice; for a moment the image wavered, as if the cliff itself were falling. It cleared, and his voice cleared: "He used to go up into the forests alone in late summer and in autumn. So he came first to me, when I was a brat in a mountain village, and gave me my name. And my life with it." The image of the water-mirror now showed as if the watcher were a bird among the forest branches, looking out to steep, sunlit meadows beneath the rock and snow of the peak, looking inward along a steep road going down in a green, gold-shot darkness. "There is no silence like the silence of those forests," Sparrowhawk said, yearning.

The image faded, and there was nothing but the blinding disk of the noon sun reflected in the water in the cask.

"There," Sparrowhawk said, looking at Arren with a strange, mocking look, "there, if I could ever go back there, not even you could follow me."

Land lay ahead, low and blue in the afternoon like a bank of mist. "Is it Selidor?" Arren asked, and his heart beat fast, but the mage answered, "Obb, I think, or Jessage. We're not halfway yet, lad."

That night they sailed the straits between those two islands. They saw no lights, but there was a reek of smoke in the air, so heavy that their lungs grew raw with breathing it. When day came and they looked back, the eastern isle, Jessage, looked burnt and black as far as they could see inland from the shore, and a haze hung blue and dull above it.

"They have burnt the fields," Arren said.

"Aye. And the villages. I have smelled that smoke before."

"Are they savages, here in the West?"

Sparrowhawk shook his head. "Farmers; townsmen."

Arren stared at the black ruin of the land, the withered trees of orchards against the sky; and his face was hard. "What harm have the trees done them?" he said. "Must they punish the grass for their own faults? Men are savages, who would set a land afire because they have a quarrel with other men."

"They have no guidance," Sparrowhawk said. "No king; and the kingly men and the wizardly men, all turned aside and drawn into their minds, are hunting the door through death. So it was in the South, and so I guess it to be here."

"And this is one man's doing—the one the dragon spoke of? It seems not possible."

"Why not? If there were a King of the Isles, he would be one man. And he would rule. One man may as easily destroy as govern: be King or Anti-King."

There was again that note in his voice of mockery or challenge which roused Arren's temper.

"A king has servants, soldiers, messengers, lieutenants. He governs through his servants. Where are the servants of this—Anti-King?"

"In our minds, lad. In our minds. The traitor, the self; the self that cries *I want to live; let the world burn so long as I can live!* The little traitor soul in us, in the dark, like the worm in the apple. He talks to all of us. But only some understand him. The wizards and the sorcerers. The singers; the makers. And the heroes, the ones who seek to be themselves. To be one's self is a rare thing and a great one. To be one's self *forever*: is that not better still?"

Arren looked straight at Sparrowhawk. "You would say to me that it is not better. But tell me why. I was a child when I began this voyage, a child who did not believe in death. You think me a child still, but I have learnt something, not much, maybe, but something: I have learnt that death exists and that I am to die. But I have not learnt to rejoice in the knowledge, to welcome my death or yours. If I love life, shall I not hate the end of it? Why should I not desire immortality?"

Arren's fencing-master in Berila had been a man of about sixty, short and bald and cold. Arren had disliked him for years, though he knew him to be an extraordinary swordsman. But one day in practice he had caught his master off guard and nearly disarmed him, and he had never forgotten the incredulous, incongruous happiness that had suddenly gleamed in the master's cold face, the hope, the joy—an equal, at last an equal! From that moment on, the fencing-master had trained him mercilessly, and whenever they fenced, that same relentless smile would be on the old man's face, brightening as Arren pressed him harder. And it was on Sparrowhawk's face now, the flash of steel in sunlight.

"Why should you not desire immortality? How should you not? Every soul desires it, and its health is in the strength of its desire. But be careful; you are one who might achieve your desire."

"And then?"

"And then this: a false king ruling, the arts of man forgotten, the singer tongueless, the eye blind. This! This blight and plague on the lands, this sore we seek to heal. There are two, Arren, two that make one: the world and the shadow, the light and the dark. The two poles of the Balance. Life rises out of death, death rises out of life; in being opposite they yearn to each other, they give birth to each other and are forever reborn. And with them all is reborn, the flower of the apple tree, the light of the stars. In life is death. In death is rebirth. What then is life without death? Life unchanging, everlasting, eternal? What is it but death—death without rebirth?"

"If so much hinges on it, then, my lord, if one man's life might wreck the Balance of the Whole, surely it is not possible—it would not be allowed—" He halted, confused.

"Who allows? Who forbids?"

"I do not know."

"Nor I. But I know how much evil one man, one life, can do. I know it all too well. I know it because I have done it. I have done the same evil, in the same folly of pride. I opened the door between the worlds just a crack, just a little crack, just to show that I was stronger than death itself. . . . I was young and had not met death—like you. . . . It took the strength of the Archmage Nemmerle, it took his mastery and his life, to shut that door. You can see the mark that night left on me, on my face; but him it killed. Oh, the door between the light and the darkness can be opened, Arren; it takes strength, but it can be done. But to shut it again, there's a different story."

"But, my lord, what you speak of surely is different from this—"

"Why? Because I am a good man?" That coldness of steel, of the falcon's eye, was in Sparrowhawk's look again. "What is a good man, Arren? Is a good man one who would not do evil, who would not open a door to the darkness, who has no darkness in him? Look again, lad. Look a little farther; you will need what you learn, to go where you must go. Look into yourself! Did you not hear a voice say *Come?* Did you not follow?"

"I did. I—I have not forgotten. But I thought . . . I thought that voice was . . . his."

"Aye, it was his. And it was yours. How could he speak to you, across the seas, but in your own voice? How is it that he calls to those who know how to listen, the mages and the makers and the seekers, who heed the voice within them? How is it that he does not call to me? It is because I will not listen: I will not hear that voice

again. You were born to power, Arren, as I was; power over men, over men's souls; and what is that but power over life and death? You are young, you stand on the borders of possibility, on the shadowland, in the realm of dream, and you hear the voice saying *Come*. But I, who am old, who have done what I must do, who stand in the daylight facing my own death, the end of all possibility, I know that there is only one power that is real and worth the having. And that is the power, not to take, but to accept."

Jessage was far behind them now, a blue smudge on the sea, a stain.

"Then I am his servant," Arren said.

"You are. And I am yours."

"But who is he, then? What is he?"

"A man, I think—even as you and I."

"That man you spoke of once—the wizard of Havnor, who summoned up the dead? Is it he?"

"It may well be. He had great power, and it was all bent on denying death. And he knew the Great Spells of the Lore of Paln. I was young and a fool when I used that lore, and I brought ruin on myself. But if an old man and a strong one used it, careless of all consequence, he might bring ruin on us all."

"Were you not told that that man was dead?"

"Aye," said Sparrowhawk, "I was."

And they said no more.

That night the sea was full of fire. The sharp waves thrown back by *Lookfar*'s prow and the movement of every fish through the surface water were all outlined and alive with light. Arren sat with his arm on the gunwale and his head on his arm, watching those curves and whorls of silver radiance. He put his hand in the water and raised it again, and light ran softly from his fingers. "Look," he said, "I too am a wizard."

"That gift you have not," said his companion.

"Much good I shall be to you without it," said Arren, gazing at the restless shimmer of the waves, "when we meet our enemy."

For he had hoped—from the very beginning he had hoped—that the reason the Archmage had chosen him and him alone for this voyage was that he had some inborn power, descended from his ancestor Morred, which would in the ultimate need and the blackest hour be revealed: and so he would save himself and his lord and all the world from the enemy. But lately he had looked once more at that hope, and it was as if he saw it from a great distance; it was like remembering that, when

he was a very little boy, he had had a burning desire to try on his father's crown, and had wept when he was forbidden to. This hope was as ill-timed, as childish. There was no magery in him. There never would be.

The time might come, indeed, when he could, when he must, put on his father's crown and rule as Prince of Enlad. But that seemed a small thing now, and his home a small place, and remote. There was no disloyalty in this. Only his loyalty had grown greater, being fixed upon a greater model and a broader hope. He had learned his own weakness also, and by it had learned to measure his strength; and he knew that he was strong. But what use was strength if he had no gift, nothing to offer, still, to his lord but his service and his steady love? Where they were going, would those be enough?

Sparrowhawk said only, "To see a candle's light, one must take it into a dark place." With that Arren tried to comfort himself; but he did not find it very comforting.

Next morning when they awoke, the air was grey and the water was grey. Over the mast the sky brightened to the blue of an opal, for the fog lay low. To Northern men such as Arren of Enlad and Sparrowhawk of Gont, the fog was welcome, like an old friend. Softly it enclosed the boat so that they could not see far, and it was to them like being in a familiar room after many weeks of bright and barren space and the wind blowing. They were coming back into their own climate, and were now perhaps at the latitude of Roke.

Some seven hundred miles east of those fog-clad waters where *Lookfar* sailed, clear sunlight shone on the leaves of the trees of the Immanent Grove, on the green crown of Roke Knoll, and on the high slate roofs of the Great House.

In a room in the south tower, a magician's workroom cluttered with retorts and alembics and great-bellied, crook-necked bottles, thick-walled furnaces and tiny heating-lamps, tongs, bellows, stands, pliers, pipes, a thousand boxes and vials and stoppered jugs marked with Hardic or more secret runes, and all such paraphernalia of alchemy, glass-blowing, metal-refining, and the arts of healing, in that room among the much-encumbered tables and benches stood the Master Changer and the Master Summoner of Roke.

In his hands the grey-haired Changer held a great stone like a diamond uncarved. It was a rock-crystal, colored faintly deep within with amethyst and rose,

but clear as water. Yet as the eye looked into that clarity, it found unclarity, and neither reflection nor image of what was real round about, but only planes and depths ever farther, ever deeper, until it was led quite into dream and found no way out. This was the Stone of Shelieth. It had long been kept by the princes of Way, sometimes as a mere bauble of their treasury, sometimes as a charm for sleep, sometimes for a more baneful purpose: for those who looked too long and without understanding into that endless depth of crystal might go mad. The Archmage Gensher of Way, coming to Roke, had brought with him the Stone of Shelieth, for in the hands of a mage it held the truth.

Yet the truth varies with the man.

Therefore the Changer, holding the stone and looking through its bossed, uneven surface into the infinite, paler-colored, shimmering depths, spoke aloud to tell what he saw. "I see the earth, even as though I stood on Mount Onn in the center of the world and beheld all beneath my feet, even to the farthest isle of the farthest Reaches, and beyond. And all is clear. I see ships in the lanes of Ilien, and the hearthfires of Torheven, and the roofs of this tower where we stand now. But past Roke, nothing. In the south, no lands. In the west, no lands. I cannot see Wathort where it should be, nor any isle of the West Reach, even so close as Pendor. And Osskil and Ebosskil, where are they? There is a mist on Enlad, a greyness, like a spider's web. Each time I look, more islands are gone, and the sea where they were is empty and unbroken, even as it was before the Making—" and his voice stumbled on the last word as if it came with difficulty to his lips.

He set the stone down on its ivory stand and stood away from it. His kindly face looked drawn. He said, "Tell me what you see."

The Master Summoner took up the crystal in his hands and turned it slowly as if seeking on its rough, glassy surface an entrance of vision. A long time he handled it, his face intent. At last he set it down and said, "Changer, I see little. Fragments, glimpses, making no whole."

The grey-haired Master clenched his hands. "Is that not strange in itself?"

"How so?"

"Are your eyes often blind?" the Changer cried, as if enraged. "Do you not see that there is . . ."—and he stammered several times before he could speak—"Do you not see that there is a hand upon your eyes, even as there is a hand over my mouth?"

The Summoner said, "You are overwrought, my lord."

"Summon the Presence of the Stone," said the Changer, controlling himself, but

speaking in a somewhat stifled voice.

"Why?"

"Why, because I ask you."

"Come, Changer, do you dare me—like boys before a bear's den? Are we children?"

"Yes! Before what I see in the Stone of Shelieth, I am a child—a frightened child. Summon the Presence of the Stone. Must I beg you, my lord?"

"No," said the tall Master, but he frowned, and turned from the older man. Then stretching wide his arms in the great gesture that begins the spells of his art, he raised his head and spoke the syllables of invocation. As he spoke, a light grew within the Stone of Shelieth. The room darkened about it; shadows gathered. When the shadows were deep and the stone was very bright, he brought his hands together, lifted the crystal before his face, and looked into its radiance.

He was silent some while and then spoke. "I see the Fountains of Shelieth," he said softly. "The pools and basins and the waterfalls, the silver-curtained dripping caves where ferns grow in banks of moss, the rippled sands, the leaping up of the waters and the running of them, the outwelling of deep springs from earth, the mystery and sweetness of the source, the spring." He fell silent again, and stood so for a time, his face pale as silver in the light of the stone. Then he cried aloud wordlessly, and dropping the crystal with a crash, fell to his knees, his face hidden in his hands.

There were no shadows. Summer sunlight filled the jumbled room. The great stone lay beneath a table in the dust and litter, unharmed.

The Summoner reached out blindly, catching at the other man's hand like a child. He drew a deep breath. At last he got up, leaning a little on the Changer, and said with unsteady lips and some attempt to smile, "I will not take your dares again, my lord."

"What saw you, Thorion?"

"I saw the fountains. I saw them sink down, and the streams run dry, and the lips of the springs of water draw back. And underneath all was black and dry. You saw the sea before the Making, but I saw the . . . what comes after . . . I saw the Unmaking." He wet his lips. "I wish that the Archmage were here," he said.

"I wish that we were there with him."

"Where? There is none that can find him now." The Summoner looked up at the windows that showed the blue, untroubled sky. "No sending can come to him, no summoning reach him. He is there where you saw an empty sea. He is coming

to the place where the springs run dry. He is where our arts do not avail. . . . Yet maybe even now there are spells that might reach to him, some of those in the Lore of Paln."

"But those are spells whereby the dead are brought among the living."

"Some bring the living among the dead."

"You do not think him dead?"

"I think he goes toward death and is drawn toward it. And so are we all. Our power is going from us, and our strength, and our hope and luck. The springs are running dry."

The Changer gazed at him awhile with a troubled face. "Do not seek to send to him, Thorion," he said at last. "He knew what he sought long before we knew it. To him the world is even as this Stone of Shelieth: he looks and sees what is and what must be. . . . We cannot help him. The great spells have grown very perilous, and of all there is most danger in the Lore of which you spoke. We must stand fast as he bade us and look to the walls of Roke and the remembering of the Names."

"Aye," said the Summoner. "But I must go and think on this." And he left the tower room, walking somewhat stiffly and holding his noble, dark head high.

In the morning the Changer sought him. Entering his room after vain knocking, he found him stretched asprawl on the stone floor, as if he had been hurled backward by a heavy blow. His arms were flung wide as if in the gesture of invocation, but his hands were cold, and his open eyes saw nothing. Though the Changer knelt by him and called him with a mage's authority, saying his name, Thorion, thrice over, yet he lay still. He was not dead, but there was in him only so much life as kept his heart beating very slowly, and a little breath in his lungs. The Changer took his hands and, holding them, whispered, "O Thorion, I forced you to look into the Stone. This is my doing!" Then going hastily from the room he said aloud to those he met, Masters and students, "The enemy has reached among us, into Roke the well-defended, and has stricken our strength at its heart!" Though he was a gentle man, he looked so fey and cold that those who saw him feared him. "Look to the Master Summoner," he said. "Though who will summon back his spirit, since he the master of his art is gone?"

He went toward his own chamber, and they all drew back to let him pass.

The Master Healer was sent for. He had them lay Thorion the Summoner abed and cover him warmly; but he brewed no herb of healing, nor did he sing any of the chants that aid the sick body or the troubled mind. One of his pupils was with him, a young boy not yet made sorcerer, but promising in the arts of healing, and he

asked, “Master, is there nothing to be done for him?”

“Not on this side of the wall,” said the Master Healer. Then, recalling to whom he spoke, he said, “He is not ill, lad; but even if this were a fever or illness of the body, I do not know if our craft would much avail. It seems there is no savor in my herbs of late; and though I say the words of our spells, there is no virtue in them.”

“That is like what the Master Chanter said yesterday. He stopped in the middle of a song he was teaching us, and said, ‘I do not know what the song means.’ And he walked out of the room. Some of the boys laughed, but I felt as if the floor had sunk out from under me.”

The Healer looked at the boy’s blunt, clever face, and then down at the Summoner’s face, cold and rigid. “He will come back to us,” he said. “The songs will not be forgotten.”

That night the Changer went from Roke. No one saw the manner of his going. He slept in a room with a window looking out into a garden; the window was open in the morning, and he was gone. They thought he had transformed himself with his own skill of form-change into a bird or beast, or a mist or wind even, for no shape or substance was beyond his art, and so had fled from Roke, perhaps to seek for the Archmage. Some, knowing how the shape-changer may be caught in his own spells if there is any failure of skill or will, feared for him, but they said nothing of their fears.

So there were three of the Masters lost to the Council of the Wise. As the days passed and no news ever came of the Archmage, and the Summoner lay like one dead, and the Changer did not return, a chill and gloom grew in the Great House. The boys whispered among themselves, and some of them spoke of leaving Roke, for they were not being taught what they had come to learn. “Maybe,” said one, “they were all lies from the beginning, these secret arts and powers. Of the Masters, only the Master Hand still does his tricks, and these, we all know, are frank illusion. And now the others hide or refuse to do anything, because their tricks have been revealed.” Another, listening, said, “Well, what is wizardry? What is this Art Magic, beyond a show of seeming? Has it ever saved a man from death, or given long life, even? Surely if the mages have the power they claim to have, they’d all live forever!” And he and the other boy fell to telling over the deaths of the great mages, how Morred had been killed in battle, and Nereger by the Grey Mage, and Erreth-Akbe by a dragon, and Gensher, the last archmage, by mere sickness, in his bed, like any man. Some of the boys listened gladly, having envious hearts; others listened and were wretched.

All this time the Master Patterner stayed alone in the Grove and let none enter it.

But the Doorkeeper, though seldom seen, had not changed. He bore no shadow in his eyes. He smiled, and kept the doors of the Great House ready for its lord's return.

Chapter 10

The Dragons' Run

On the seas of the outermost West Reach, that Lord of the Island of the Wise, waking cramped and stiff in a small boat on a cold, bright morning, sat up and yawned. And after a moment, pointing north, he said to his yawning companion, "There! Two islands, do you see them? The southmost of the isles of the Dragons' Run."

"You have a hawk's eyes, lord," said Arren, peering through sleep over the sea and seeing nothing.

"Therefore I am the Sparrowhawk," the mage said; he was still cheerful, seeming to shrug off forethought and foreboding. "Can't you see them?"

"I see gulls," said Arren, after rubbing his eyes and searching all the blue-grey horizon before the boat.

The mage laughed. "Could even a hawk see gulls at twenty miles' distance?"

As the sun brightened above the eastern mists, the tiny wheeling flecks in the air that Arren watched seemed to sparkle, like gold-dust shaken in water, or dust-motes in a sunbeam. And then Arren realized that they were dragons.

As *Lookfar* approached the islands, Arren saw the dragons soaring and circling on the morning wind, and his heart leapt up with them with a joy, a joy of fulfillment, that was like pain. All the glory of mortality was in that flight. Their beauty was made up of terrible strength, utter wildness, and the grace of reason. For these were thinking creatures, with speech and ancient wisdom: in the patterns of their flight there was a fierce, willed concord.

Arren did not speak, but he thought: I do not care what comes after; I have seen the dragons on the wind of morning.

At times the patterns jarred, and the circles broke, and often in flight one dragon or another would jet from its nostrils a long streak of fire that curved and hung on the air a moment, repeating the curve and brightness of the dragon's long, arching

body. Seeing that, the mage said, “They are angry. They dance their anger on the wind.”

And presently he said, “Now we’re in the hornet’s nest.” For the dragons had seen the little sail on the waves, and first one, then another, broke from the whirlwind of their dancing and came stretched long and level on the air, rowing with great wings, straight toward the boat.

The mage looked at Arren, who sat at the tiller, since the waves ran rough and counter. The boy held it steady with a steady hand, though his eyes were on the beating of those wings. As if satisfied, Sparrowhawk turned again, and standing by the mast, let the magewind drop from the sail. He lifted up his staff and spoke aloud.

At the sound of his voice and the words of the Old Speech, some of the dragons wheeled in midflight, scattering, and returned to the isles. Others halted and hovered, the swordlike claws of their forearms outstretched but checked. One, dropping low over the water, flew slowly on toward them: in two wing-strokes it was over the boat. The mailed belly scarcely cleared the mast. Arren saw the wrinkled, unarmored flesh between the inner shoulder-joint and breast, which, with the eye, is the dragon’s only vulnerable part, unless the spear that strikes is mightily enchanted. The smoke that roiled from the long, toothed mouth choked him, and with it came a carrion stench that made him wince and retch.

The shadow passed. It returned, as low as before, and this time Arren felt the furnace-blast of breath before the smoke. He heard Sparrowhawk’s voice, clear and fierce. The dragon passed over. Then all were gone, streaming back to the isles like fiery cinders on a gust of wind.

Arren caught his breath and wiped his forehead, which was covered with cold sweat. Looking at his companion, he saw his hair gone white: the dragon’s breath had burnt and crisped the ends of the hairs. And the heavy cloth of the sail was scorched brown along one side.

“Your head is somewhat singed, lad.”

“So is yours, lord.”

Sparrowhawk passed his hand over his hair, surprised. “So it is!—That was an insolence; but I seek no quarrel with these creatures. They seem mad or bewildered. They did not speak. Never have I met a dragon who did not speak before it struck, if only to torment its prey. . . . Now we must go forward. Do not look them in the eye, Arren. Turn aside your face if you must. We’ll go with the world’s wind; it blows fair from the south, and I may need my art for other things.

Hold her as she goes."

Lookfar moved forward and soon had on her left a distant island and on her right the twin isles they had seen first. These rose up into low cliffs, and all the stark rock was whitened with the droppings of the dragons and of the little, blackheaded terns that nested fearlessly among them.

The dragons had flown up high, and circled in the upper air as vultures circle. Not one stooped down again to the boat. Sometimes they cried out to one another, high and harsh across the gulfs of air, but if there were words in their crying, Arren could not make them out.

The boat rounded a short promontory, and he saw on the shore what he took for a moment to be a ruined fortress. It was a dragon. One black wing was bent under it and the other stretched out vast across the sand and into the water, so that the come and go of waves moved it a little to and fro in a mockery of flight. The long snake-body lay full length on the rock and sand. One foreleg was missing, the armor and flesh were torn from the great arch of the ribs, and the belly was torn open, so that the sand for yards about was blackened with the poisoned dragon-blood. Yet the creature still lived. So great a life is in dragons that only an equal power of wizardry can kill them swiftly. The green-gold eyes were open, and as the boat sailed by, the lean, huge head moved a little, and with a rattling hiss, steam mixed with bloody spray shot from the nostrils.

The beach between the dying dragon and the sea's edge was tracked and scored by the feet and heavy bodies of his kind, and his entrails were trodden into the sand.

Neither Arren nor Sparrowhawk spoke until they were well clear of that island and heading across the choppy, restless channel of the Dragons' Run, full of reefs and pinnacles and shapes of rock, toward the northern islands of the double chain. Then Sparrowhawk said, "That was an evil sight," and his voice was bleak and cold.

"Do they . . . eat their own kind?"

"No. No more than we do. They have been driven mad. Their speech has been taken from them. They who spoke before men spoke, they who are older than any living thing, the Children of Segoy—they have been driven to the dumb terror of the beasts. Ah! Kalessin! Where have your wings borne you? Have you lived to see your race learn shame?" His voice rang like struck iron, and he looked upward, searching the sky. But the dragons were behind, circling lower now above the rocky isles and the blood-stained beach, and overhead was nothing but the blue

sky and the sun of noon.

There was then no man living who had sailed the Dragons' Run or seen it, except the Archmage. Twenty years before and more, he had sailed the length of it from east to west and back again. It was a nightmare and a marvel, to a sailor. The water was a maze of blue channels and green shoals, and among these, by hand and word and most vigilant care, he and Arren now picked their boat's way, between the rocks and reefs. Some of these lay low, under or half-under the wash of the waves, covered with anemone and barnacle and ribbony sea fern; like water-monsters, shelled or sinuous. Others stood up in cliff and pinnacle sheer from the sea, and these were arches and half-arches, carven towers, fantastic shapes of animals, boar's backs and serpent's heads, all huge, deformed, diffuse, as if life writhed half-conscious in the rock. The sea-waves beat on them with a sound like breathing, and they were wet with the bright, bitter spray. In one such rock from the south there was plainly visible the hunched shoulders and heavy, noble head of a man, stooped in pondering thought above the sea; but when the boat had passed it, looking back from the north, all man was gone from it, and the massive rocks revealed a cave in which the sea rose and fell making a hollow, clapping thunder. There seemed to be a word, a syllable, in that sound. As they sailed on, the garbling echoes lessened and this syllable came more clearly, so that Arren said, "Is there a voice in the cave?"

"The sea's voice."

"But it speaks a word."

Sparrowhawk listened; he glanced at Arren and back at the cave. "How do you hear it?"

"As saying the sound *ahm*."

"In the Old Speech that signifies the beginning, or long ago. But I hear it as *ohb*, which is a way of saying the end.—Look ahead there!" he ended abruptly, even as Arren warned him, "Shoal water!" And, though *Lookfar* picked her way like a cat among the dangers, they were busy with the steering for some while, and slowly the cave forever thundering out its enigmatic word fell behind them.

Now the water deepened, and they came out from among the phantasmagoria of the rocks. Ahead of them loomed an island like a tower. Its cliffs were black and made up of many cylinders or great pillars pressed together, with straight edges and plane surfaces, rising three hundred feet sheer from the water.

"That is the Keep of Kalessin," said the mage. "So the dragons named it to me, when I was here long ago."

“Who is Kalessin?

“The eldest . . .”

“Did he build this place?”

“I do not know. I don’t know if it was built. Nor how old he is. I say ‘he,’ but I do not even know that. . . . To Kalessin, Orm Embar is like a yearling kid. And you and I are like mayflies.” He scanned the terrific palisades, and Arren looked up at them uneasily, thinking how a dragon might drop from that far, black rim and be upon them almost with its shadow. But no dragon came. They passed slowly through the still waters in the lee of the rock, hearing nothing but the whisper and clap of shadowed waves on the columns of basalt. The water here was deep, without reef or rock; Arren handled the boat, and Sparrowhawk stood up in the prow, searching the cliffs and the bright sky ahead.

The boat passed out at last from the shadow of the Keep of Kalessin into the sunlight of late afternoon. They were across the Dragons’ Run. The mage lifted his head, like one who sees what he had looked to see, and across that great space of gold before them came on golden wings the dragon Orm Embar.

Arren heard Sparrowhawk’s cry to him: *“Aro Kalessin?”* He guessed the meaning of that, but could make no sense of what the dragon answered. Yet hearing the Old Speech he felt always that he was on the point of understanding, almost understanding: as if it were a language he had forgotten, not one he had never known. In speaking it the mage’s voice was much clearer than when he spoke Hardic, and seemed to make a kind of silence about it, as does the softest touch on a great bell. But the dragon’s voice was like a gong, both deep and shrill, or the hissing thrum of cymbals. Arren watched his companion stand there in the narrow prow, speaking with the monstrous creature that hovered above him filling half the sky; and a kind of rejoicing pride came into the boy’s heart, to see how small a thing a man is, how frail and how terrible. For the dragon could have torn the man’s head from his shoulders with one stroke of his taloned foot, he could have crushed and sunk the boat as a stone sinks a floating leaf, if it were only size that mattered. But Sparrowhawk was as dangerous as Orm Embar, and the dragon knew it.

The mage turned his head. “Lebannen,” he said, and the boy got up and came forward, though he wanted to go not one step closer to those fifteen-foot jaws and the long, slit-pupilled, yellow-green eyes that burned upon him from the air.

Sparrowhawk said nothing to him, but put a hand on his shoulder, and spoke again to the dragon, briefly.

"Lebannen," said the vast voice with no passion in it. "*Agni* Lebannen!"

He looked up; the pressure of the mage's hand reminded him, and he avoided the gaze of the green-gold eyes.

He could not speak the Old Speech, but he was not dumb. "I greet thee, Orm Embar, Lord Dragon," he said clearly, as one prince greets another.

Then there was a silence, and Arren's heart beat hard and labored. But Sparrowhawk, standing by him, smiled.

After that the dragon spoke again, and Sparrowhawk replied; and this seemed long to Arren. At last it was over, suddenly. The dragon sprang aloft with a wingbeat that all but heeled the boat over, and was off. Arren looked at the sun and found it seemed no nearer setting than before; the time had not really been long. But the mage's face was the color of wet ashes, and his eyes glittered as he turned to Arren. He sat down on the thwart.

"Well done, lad," he said hoarsely. "It is not easy—talking to dragons."

Arren got them food, for they had not eaten all day; and the mage said no more until they had eaten and drunk. By then the sun was low to the horizon, though in these northern latitudes, and not long past midsummer, night came late and slowly.

"Well," he said at last, "Orm Embar has, after his fashion, told me much. He says that the one we seek is and is not on Selidor. . . . It is hard for a dragon to speak plainly. They do not have plain minds. And even when one of them would speak the truth to a man, which is seldom, he does not know how truth looks to a man. So I asked him, 'Even as thy father Orm is on Selidor?' For as you know, there Orm and Erreth-Akbe died in their battle. And he answered, 'No and yes. You will find him on Selidor, but not on Selidor.'" Sparrowhawk paused and pondered, chewing on a crust of hard bread. "Maybe he meant that though the man is not on Selidor, yet I must go there to get to him. Maybe. . . .

"I asked him then of the other dragons. He said that this man has been among them, having no fear of them, for though killed he returns from death in his body, alive. Therefore they fear him as a creature outside nature. Their fear gives his wizardry hold over them, and he takes the Speech of the Making from them, leaving them prey to their own wild nature. So they devour one another or take their own lives, plunging into the sea—a loathly death for the fireserpent, the beast of wind and fire. Then I said, 'Where is thy lord Kalessin?' and all he would answer was, 'In the West,' which might mean that Kalessin has flown away to the other lands, which dragons say lie farther than ever ship has sailed; or it may not mean that.

"So then I ceased my questions, and he asked his, saying, 'I flew over Kaltuel returning north, and over the Toringates. On Kaltuel I saw villagers killing a baby on an altar stone, and on Ingat I saw a sorcerer killed by his townsfolk throwing stones at him. Will they eat the baby, think you, Ged? Will the sorcerer come back from death and throw stones at his townsfolk?' I thought he mocked me and was about to speak in anger, but he was not mocking. He said, 'The sense has gone out of things. There is a hole in the world and the sea is running out of it. The light is running out. We will be left in the Dry Land. There will be no more speaking and no more dying.' So at last I saw what he would say to me."

Arren did not see it, and moreover was sorely troubled. For Sparrowhawk, in repeating the dragon's words, had named himself by his own true name, unmistakably. This brought unwelcome into Arren's mind the memory of that tormented woman of Lorbanery crying out, "My name is Akaren!" If the powers of wizardry, and of music, and speech, and trust, were weakening and withering among men, if an insanity of fear was coming on them so that, like the dragons bereft of reason, they turned on each other to destroy: if all this were so, would his lord escape it? Was he so strong?

He did not look strong, sitting hunched over his supper of bread and smoked fish, with hair greyed and fire-singed, and slight hands, and a tired face.

Yet the dragon feared him.

"What irks you, lad?"

Only the truth would do, with him.

"My lord, you spoke your name."

"Oh, aye. I forgot I had not done so earlier. You will need my true name, if we go where we must go." He looked up, chewing, at Arren. "Did you think I grew senile and went about babbling my name, like old bleared men past sense and shame? Not yet, lad!"

"No," said Arren, so confused that he could say nothing else. He was very weary; the day had been long, and full of dragons. And the way ahead grew dark.

"Arren," said the mage. "No; Lebannen: where we go, there is no hiding. There all bear their own true names."

"The dead cannot be hurt," said Arren somberly.

"But it is not only there, not in death only, that men take their names. Those who can be most hurt, the most vulnerable: those who have given love and do not take it back, they speak each other's names. The faithful-hearted, the givers of life. . . . You are worn out, lad. Lie down and sleep. There's nothing to do now but

keep the course all night. And by morning we shall see the last island of the world."

In his voice was an insuperable gentleness. Arren curled up in the prow, and sleep began to come into him at once. He heard the mage begin a soft, almost whispering chant, not in the Hardic tongue but in the words of the Making; and as he began to understand at last and to remember what the words meant, just before he understood them, he fell fast asleep.

Silently the mage stowed away their bread and meat, looked to the lines, made all trim in the boat, and then, taking the guide-line of the sail in hand and sitting down on the after-thwart, he set the magewind strong in the sail. Tireless, *Lookfar* sped north, an arrow over the sea.

He looked down at Arren. The boy's sleeping face was lit red-gold by the long sunset, the rough hair was wind-stirred. The soft, easy, princely look of the boy who had sat by the fountain of the Great House a few months since was gone; this was a thinner face, harder, and much stronger. But it was not less beautiful.

"I have found none to follow in my way," Ged the Archmage said aloud to the sleeping boy or to the empty wind. "None but thee. And thou must go thy way, not mine. Yet will thy kingship be, in part, my own. For I knew thee first. I knew thee first! They will praise me more for that in after-days than for anything I did of magery. . . . If there will be after-days. For first we two must stand upon the balance point, the very fulcrum of the world. And if I fall, you fall, and all the rest. . . . For a while, for a while. No darkness lasts forever. And even there, there are stars. . . . Oh, but I should like to see thee crowned in Havnor, and the sunlight shining on the Tower of the Sword and on the Ring we brought for thee from Atuan, from the dark tombs, Tenar and I, before ever thou wast born!"

He laughed then, and turning to face the north, he said to himself in the common tongue, "A goatherd to set the heir of Morred on his throne! Will I never learn?"

Presently, as he sat with the guide-rope in his hand and watched the full sail strain reddened in the last light of the west, he spoke again softly. "Not in Havnor would I be and not in Roke. It is time to be done with power. To drop the old toys and go on. It is time that I went home. I would see Tenar. I would see Ogion and speak with him before he dies, in the house on the cliffs of Re Albi. I crave to walk on the mountain, the mountain of Gont, in the forests, in the autumn when the leaves are bright. There is no kingdom like the forests. It is time I went there, went in silence, went alone. And maybe there I would learn at last what no act or art or power can teach me, what I have never learned."

The whole west blazed, up in a fury and glory of red, so that the sea was crimson and the sail above it bright as blood; and then the night came quietly on. All that night long the boy slept and the man waked, gazing forward steadily into the dark. There were no stars.

Chapter 11

Selidor

Waking in the morning Arren saw before the boat, dim and low along the blue west, the shores of Selidor.

In the Hall in Berila were old maps that had been made in the days of the Kings, when traders and explorers had sailed from the Inner Lands and the Reaches had been better known. A great map of the North and West was laid in mosaic on two walls of the Prince's throne-room, with the isle of Enlad in gold and grey above the throne. Arren saw it in his mind's eye as he had seen it a thousand times in boyhood. North of Enlad was Osskil, and west of it Ebosskil, and south of that Semel and Paln. There the Inner Lands ended, and there was nothing but the pale blue-green mosaic of the empty sea, set here and there with a tiny dolphin or a whale. Then at last, after the corner where the north wall met the west wall, there was Narveduen, and beyond it three lesser islands. And then the empty sea again, on and on; until the very edge of the wall and the end of the map, and there was Selidor, and beyond it, nothing.

He could recall it vividly, the curving shape of it, with a great bay in the heart of it, opening narrowly to the east. They had not come so far north as that, but were steering now for a deep cove in the southernmost cape of the island, and there, while the sun was still low in the haze of morning, they came to land.

So ended their great run from the Roads of Balatran to the Western Isle. The stillness of the earth was strange to them when they had beached *Lookfar* and walked after so long on solid ground.

Ged climbed a low dune, grass-crowned, the crest of it leaning out over the steep slope, bound into cornices by the tough roots of the grass. When he reached the summit he stood still, looking west and north. Arren stopped at the boat to put on his shoes, which he had not worn for many days, and he took his sword out of the gear-box and buckled it on, this time with no questions in his mind as to whether

or not he should do so. Then he climbed up beside Ged to look at the land.

The dunes ran inland, low and grassy, for half a mile or so, and then there were lagoons, thick with sedge and salt-reeds, and beyond those, low hills lay yellow-brown and empty to the end of sight. Beautiful and desolate was Selidor. Nowhere on it was there any mark of man, his work or habitation. There were no beasts to be seen, and the reed-filled lakes bore no flocks of gulls or wild geese or any bird.

They descended the inland side of the dune, and the slope of sand cut off the noise of the breakers and the sound of the wind, so that it became still.

Between the outmost dune and the next was a dell of clean sand, sheltered, the morning sun shining warm on its western slope. "Lebannen," the mage said, for he used Arren's true name now, "I could not sleep last night, and now I must. Stay with me and keep watch." He lay down in the sunlight, for the shade was cold; put his arm over his eyes; sighed, and slept. Arren sat down beside him. He could see nothing but the white slopes of the dell, and the dune-grass bowing at the top against the misty blue of the sky, and the yellow sun. There was no sound except the muted murmur of the surf, and sometimes the wind gusting moved the particles of sand a little with a faint whispering.

Arren saw what might have been an eagle flying very high, but it was not an eagle. It circled and stooped, and down it came with that thunder and shrill whistle of outspread golden wings. It alighted on huge talons on the summit of the dune. Against the sun the great head was black, with fiery glints.

The dragon crawled a little way down the slope and spoke. "*Agni* Lebannen," it said.

Standing between it and Ged, Arren answered: "Orm Embar." And he held his bare sword in his hand.

It did not feel heavy now. The smooth, worn hilt was comfortable in his hand; it fitted. The blade had come lightly, eagerly, from the sheath. The power of it, the age of it, were on his side, for he knew now what use to make of it. It was his sword.

The dragon spoke again, but Arren could not understand. He glanced back at his sleeping companion, whom all the rush and thunder had not awakened, and said to the dragon, "My lord is weary; he sleeps."

At that Orm Embar crawled and coiled on down to the bottom of the dell. He was heavy on the ground, not lithe and free as when he flew, but there was a sinister grace in the slow placing of his great, taloned feet and the curving of his thorny tail. Once there he drew his legs beneath him, lifted up his huge head, and was still: like a dragon carved on a warrior's helm. Arren was aware of his yellow

eye, not ten feet away, and of the faint reek of burning that hung about him. This was no carrion stink; dry and metallic, it accorded with the faint odors of the sea and the salt sand, a clean, wild smell.

The sun rising higher struck the flanks of Orm Embar, and he burnt like a dragon made of iron and gold.

Still Ged slept, relaxed, taking no more notice of the dragon than a sleeping farmer of his hound.

So an hour passed, and Arren, starting, found the mage had sat up beside him.

"Have you got so used to dragons that you fall asleep between their paws?" said Ged, and laughed, yawning.

Then, rising, he spoke to Orm Embar in the dragons' speech.

Before Orm Embar answered, he, too, yawned—perhaps in sleepiness, perhaps in rivalry—and that was a sight that few have lived to remember: the rows of yellow-white teeth as long and sharp as swords, the forked, red, fiery tongue twice the length of a man's body, the fuming cavern of the throat.

Orm Embar spoke, and Ged was about to answer, when both turned to look at Arren. They had heard, clear in the silence, the hollow whisper of steel on sheath. Arren was looking up at the lip of the dune behind the mage's head, and his sword was ready in his hand.

There stood, bright lit by sunlight, the faint wind stirring his garments slightly, a man. He stood still as a carven figure except for that flutter of the hem and hood of his light cloak. His hair was long and black, falling in a mass of glossy curls; he was broad-shouldered and tall, a strong, comely man. His eyes seemed to look out over them, at the sea. He smiled.

"Orm Embar I know," he said. "And you also I know, though you have grown old since I last saw you, Sparrowhawk. You are archmage now, they tell me. You have grown great, as well as old. And you have a young servant with you: a prentice mage, no doubt, one of those who learn wisdom on the Isle of the Wise. What do you two here, so far from Roke and the invulnerable walls that protect the Masters from all harm?"

"There is a breach in greater walls than those," said Ged, clasping both hands on his staff and looking up at the man. "But will you not come to us in the flesh, so that we may greet one whom we have long sought?"

"In the flesh?" said the man, and smiled again. "Is mere flesh, body, butcher's meat, of such account between two mages? No, let us meet mind-to-mind, Archmage."

“That, I think, we cannot do. Lad, put up your sword. It is but a sending, an appearance, no true man. As well draw blade against the wind. In Havnor, when your hair was white, you were called Cob. But that was only a use-name. How shall we call you when we meet you?”

“You will call me Lord,” said the tall figure on the dune’s edge.

“Aye, and what else?”

“King and Master.”

At that Orm Embar hissed, a loud and hideous sound, and his great eyes gleamed; yet he turned his head away from the man, and sank crouching in his tracks, as if he could not move.

“And where shall we come to you and when?”

“In my domain and at my pleasure.”

“Very well,” said Ged, and lifting up his staff moved it a little toward the tall man —and the man was gone, like a candle-flame blown out.

Arren stared, and the dragon rose up mightily on his four crooked legs, his mail clanking and the lips writhing back from his teeth. But the mage leaned on his staff again.

“It was only a sending. A presentment or image of the man. It can speak and hear, but there’s no power in it, save what our fear may lend it. Nor is it even true in seeming, unless the sender so wishes. We have not seen what he now looks like, I guess.”

“Is he near, do you think?”

“Sendings do not cross water. He is on Selidor. But Selidor is a great island: broader than Roke or Gont and near as long as Enlad. We may seek him long.”

Then the dragon spoke. Ged listened and turned to Arren. “Thus says the Lord of Selidor: ‘I have come back to my own land, nor will I leave it. I will find the Unmaker and bring you to him, that together we may abolish him.’ And have I not said that what a dragon hunts, he finds?”

Thereupon Ged went down on one knee before the great creature, as a liegeman kneels before a king, and thanked him in his own tongue. The breath of the dragon, so close, was hot on his bowed head.

Orm Embar dragged his scaly weight up the dune once more, beat his wings, and took the air.

Ged brushed the sand from his clothes and said to Arren, “Now you have seen me kneel. And maybe you’ll see me kneel once more, before the end.”

Arren did not ask what he meant; in their long companionship he had learned

that there was reason in the mage's reserve. Yet it seemed to him that there was evil omen in the words.

They crossed over the dune to the beach once more to make sure the boat lay high above the reach of tide or storm, and to take from her cloaks for the night and what food they had left. Ged paused a minute by the slender prow which had borne him over strange seas so long, so far; he laid his hand on it, but he set no spell and said no word. Then they struck inland, northward, once again, toward the hills.

They walked all day, and at evening camped by a stream that wound down toward the reed-choked lakes and marshes. Though it was full summer the wind blew chill, coming from the west, from the endless, landless reaches of the open sea. A mist veiled the sky, and no stars shone above the hills on which no hearth-fire or window-light had ever gleamed.

In the darkness Arren woke. Their small fire was dead, but a westering moon lit the land with a grey, misty light. In the stream-valley and on the hillside about it stood a great multitude of people, all still, all silent, their faces turned toward Ged and Arren. Their eyes caught no light of the moon.

Arren dared not speak, but he put his hand on Ged's arm. The mage stirred and sat up, saying, "What's the matter?" He followed Arren's gaze and saw the silent people.

They were all clothed darkly, men and women alike. Their faces could not be clearly seen in the faint light, but it seemed to Arren that among those who stood nearest them in the valley, across the little stream, there were some whom he knew, though he could not say their names.

Ged stood up, the cloak falling from him. His face and hair and shirt shone silvery pale, as if the moonlight gathered itself to him. He held out his arm in a wide gesture and said aloud, "O you who have lived, go free! I break the bond that holds you: *Anvassa mane harw pennodathe*!"

For a moment they stood still, the multitude of silent people. They turned away slowly, seeming to walk into the grey darkness, and were gone.

Ged sat down. He drew a deep breath. He looked at Arren and put his hand on the boy's shoulder, and his touch was warm and firm. "There's nothing to fear, Lebannen," he said gently, mockingly. "They were only the dead."

Arren nodded, though his teeth were chattering and he felt cold to his very bones. "How did," he began, but his jaw and lips would not obey him yet.

Ged understood him. "They came at his summoning. This is what he promises:

eternal life. At his word they may return. At his bidding they must walk upon the hills of life, though they cannot stir a blade of grass."

"Is he—is he then dead, too?"

Ged shook his head, brooding. "The dead cannot summon the dead back into the world. No, he has the powers of a living man, and more. . . . But if any thought to follow him, he tricked them. He keeps his power for himself. He plays King of the Dead; and not only of the dead. . . . But they were only shadows."

"I don't know why I fear them," Arren said with shame.

"You fear them because you fear death, and rightly: for death is terrible and must be feared," the mage said. He laid new wood on the fire and blew on the small coals under the ashes. A little flare of brightness bloomed on the twigs of brushwood, a grateful light to Arren. "And life also is a terrible thing," Ged said, "and must be feared and praised."

They both sat back, wrapping their cloaks close about them. They were silent awhile. Then Ged spoke very gravely. "Lebannen, how long he may tease us here with sendings and with shadows, I do not know. But you know where he will go at last."

"Into the dark land."

"Aye. Among them."

"I have seen them now. I will go with you."

"Is it faith in me that moves you? You may trust my love, but do not trust my strength. For I think I have met my match."

"I will go with you."

"But if I am defeated, if my power or my life is spent, I cannot guide you back; you cannot return alone."

"I will return with you."

At that Ged said, "You enter your manhood at the gate of death." And then he said that word or name by which the dragon had twice called Arren, speaking it very low: "*Agni—Agni* Lebannen."

After that they spoke no more, and presently sleep came back into them, and they lay down by their small and briefly burning fire.

The next morning they walked on, going north and west; this was Arren's decision, not Ged's, who said, "Choose us our way, lad; the ways are all alike to me." They made no haste, for they had no goal, waiting for some sign from Orm Embar. They followed the lowest, outmost range of hills, mostly within sight of the ocean. The grass was dry and short, blowing and blowing forever in the wind. The

hills rose up golden and forlorn upon their right, and on their left lay the salt marshes and the western sea. Once they saw swans flying, far away in the south. No other breathing creature did they see all that day. A kind of weariness of dread, of waiting for the worst, grew in Arren all day long. Impatience and a dull anger rose in him. He said, after hours of silence, "This land is as dead as the land of death itself!"

"Do not say that," the mage said sharply. He strode on awhile and then went on, in a changed voice, "Look at this land; look about you. This is your kingdom, the kingdom of life. This is your immortality. Look at the hills, the mortal hills. They do not endure forever. The hills with the living grass on them, and the streams of water running. . . . In all the world, in all the worlds, in all the immensity of time, there is no other like each of those streams, rising cold out of the earth where no eye sees it, running through the sunlight and the darkness to the sea. Deep are the springs of being, deeper than life, than death. . . ."

He stopped, but in his eyes as he looked at Arren and at the sunlit hills there was a great, wordless, grieving love. And Arren saw that, and seeing it saw him, saw him for the first time whole, as he was.

"I cannot say what I mean," Ged said unhappily.

But Arren thought of that first hour in the Fountain Court, of the man who had knelt by the running water of the fountain; and joy, as clear as that remembered water, welled up in him. He looked at his companion and said, "I have given my love to what is worthy of love. Is that not the kingdom and the unperishing spring?"

"Aye, lad," said Ged, gently and with pain.

They went on together in silence. But Arren saw the world now with his companion's eyes and saw the living splendor that was revealed about them in the silent, desolate land, as if by a power of enchantment surpassing any other, in every blade of the wind-bowed grass, every shadow, every stone. So when one stands in a cherished place for the last time before a voyage without return, he sees it all whole, and real, and dear, as he has never seen it before and never will see it again.

As evening came on serried lines of clouds rose from the west, borne on great winds from the sea, and burnt fiery before the sun, reddening it as it sank. As he gathered brushwood for their fire in a creek-valley, in that red light, Arren glanced up and saw a man standing not ten feet from him. The man's face looked vague and strange, but Arren knew him, the Dyer of Lorbanery, Sopli, who was dead.

Behind him stood others, all with sad, staring faces. They seemed to speak, but

Arren could not hear their words, only a kind of whispering blown away by the west wind. Some of them came toward him slowly.

He stood and looked at them, and again at Sopli; and then he turned his back on them, stooped, and picked up one more stick of brushwood, though his hands shook. He added it to his load, and picked up another, and one more. Then he straightened and looked back. There was no one in the valley, only the red light burning on the grass. He returned to Ged and set down his load of firewood, but he said nothing of what he had seen.

All that night, in the misty darkness of that land empty of living souls, when he woke from fitful sleep he heard about him the whispering of the souls of the dead. He steadied his will, and did not listen, and slept again.

Both he and Ged woke late, when the sun, already a hand's breadth above the hills, broke free at last from fog and brightened the cold land. As they ate their small morning meal the dragon came, wheeling above them in the air. Fire shot from his jaws, and smoke and sparks from his red nostrils; his teeth gleamed like blades of ivory in that lurid glare. But he said nothing, though Ged hailed him, crying in his language, "Hast found him, Orm Embar?"

The dragon threw back his head and arched his body strangely, raking the wind with his razor talons. Then he set off flying fast to the west, looking back at them as he went.

Ged gripped his staff and struck it on the ground. "He cannot speak," he said. "He cannot speak! The words of the Making are taken from him, and he is left like an adder, like a tongueless worm, his wisdom dumb. Yet he can lead, and we can follow!" Swinging up their light packs on their backs, they strode westward across the hills, as Orm Embar had flown.

Eight miles or more they went, not slackening that first, swift, steady pace. Now the sea lay on either hand, and they walked on a long, falling ridge-back that ran down at last through dry reeds and winding creek-beds to an outcurving beach of sand, colored like ivory. This was the westernmost cape of all the lands, the end of earth.

Orm Embar crouched on that ivory sand, his head low like an angry cat's and his breath coming in gasps of fire. Some way before him, between him and the long, low breakers of the sea, stood a thing like a hut or shelter, white, as if built of long-bleached driftwood. But there was no driftwood on this shore which faced no other land. As they came closer Arren saw that the ramshackle walls were built up of great bones: whales' bones, he thought at first, and then saw the white triangles

edged like knives, and knew they were the bones of a dragon.

They came to the place. Sunlight on the sea glittered through crevices between the bones. The lintel of the doorway was a thighbone longer than a man. On it stood a human skull, staring with hollow eyes at the hills of Selidor.

They stopped there, and as they looked up at the skull a man came out of the doorway under it. He wore an armor of gilt bronze of ancient fashion; it was rent as if by hatchet blows, and the jeweled scabbard of his sword was empty. His face was stern, with arched, black brows and narrow nose; his eyes were dark, keen, and sorrowful. There were wounds on his arms and in his throat and side; they bled no longer, but they were mortal wounds. He stood erect and still, and looked at them.

Ged took one step toward him. They were somewhat alike, thus face-to-face.

"Thou art Erreth-Akbe," Ged said. The other gazed at him steadily and nodded once, but did not speak.

"Even thou, even thou must do his bidding." Rage was in Ged's voice. "O my lord, and best and bravest of us all, rest in thy honor and in death!" And raising his hands, Ged brought them down in a great gesture, saying again those words he had spoken to the multitudes of the dead. His hands left behind on the air a moment a broad, bright track. When it was gone, the armored man was gone, and only the sun dazzled on the sand where he had stood.

Ged struck at the house of bones with his staff, and it fell and vanished away. Nothing of it was left but one great rib bone that stuck up out of the sand.

He turned to Orm Embar. "Is it here, Orm Embar? Is this the place?"

The dragon opened his mouth and made a huge, gasping hiss.

"Here on the last shore of the world. That is well!" Then holding his black yew staff in his left hand, Ged opened his arms in the gesture of invocation, and spoke. Though he spoke in the language of the Making, yet Arren understood, at last, as all who hear that invocation must understand, for it has power over all: "Now do I summon you and here, my enemy, before my eyes and in the flesh, and bind you by the word that will not be spoken till time's end, to come!"

But where the name of him summoned should have been spoken, Ged said only: *My enemy*.

A silence followed, as if the sound of the sea had faded. It seemed to Arren that the sun failed and dimmed, though it stood high in a clear sky. A darkness came over the beach, as though one looked through smoked glass; directly before Ged it grew very dark, and it was hard to see what was there. It was as if nothing was there, nothing the light could fall on, a formlessness.

Out of it came a man, suddenly. It was the same man they had seen upon the dune, black-haired and long-armed, lithe and tall. He held now a long rod or blade of steel, graven all down its length with runes, and he tilted this toward Ged as he faced him. But there was something strange in the look of his eyes, as if they were sun-dazzled and could not see.

"I come," he said, "at my own choosing, in my own way. You cannot summon me, Archmage. I am no shadow. I am alive. I only am alive! You think you are, but you are dying, dying. Do you know what this is I hold? It is the staff of the Grey Mage, he who silenced Nereger; the Master of my art. But I am the Master now. And I have had enough of playing games with you." With that he suddenly reached out the steel blade to touch Ged, who stood as if he could not move and could not speak. Arren stood a pace behind him, and all his will was to move, but he could not stir, he could not even put his hand on his sword-hilt, and his voice was stopped in his throat.

But over Ged and Arren, over their heads, vast and fiery, the great body of the dragon came in one writhing leap and plunged down full-force upon the other, so that the charmed steel blade entered into the dragon's mailed breast to its full length: but the man was borne down under his weight and crushed and burnt.

Rising up again from the sand, arching his back and beating his vaned wings, Orm Embar vomited out gouts of fire and screamed. He tried to fly, but he could not fly. Malign and cold, the metal lay in his heart. He crouched, and the blood ran black and poisonous, steaming, from his mouth, and the fire died in his nostrils till they became like pits of ash. He laid down his great head on the sand.

So died Orm Embar where his forefather Orm died, on the bones of Orm buried in the sand.

But where Orm had struck his enemy to earth, there lay something ugly and shriveled, like the body of a big spider dried up in its web. It had been burned by the dragon's breath and crushed by his taloned feet. Yet, as Arren watched, it moved. It crawled away a little from the dragon.

The face lifted up toward them. There was no comeliness left in it, only ruin, old age that had outlived old age. The mouth was withered. The sockets of the eyes were empty and had long been empty. So Ged and Arren saw at last the living face of their enemy.

It turned away. The burnt, blackened arms reached out, and a darkness gathered into them, that same shapeless darkness that swelled and dimmed the sunlight. Between the arms of the Unmaker it was like an archway or a gate, though

dim and without outline; and through it was neither pale sand nor ocean, but a long slope of darkness going down into the dark.

There the crushed, crawling figure went, and when it came into the darkness it seemed suddenly to rise up and move swiftly, and it was gone.

"Come, Lebannen," said Ged, laying his right hand on the boy's arm, and they went forward into the dry land.

Chapter 12

The Dry Land

The yew-wood staff in the Mage's hand shone in the dull, lowering darkness with a silver gleam. Another slight glimmering movement caught Arren's eye: a flicker of light along the blade of the sword he held naked in his hand. As the dragon's act and death had broken the binding-spell, he had drawn his sword, there on the beach of Selidor. And here, though he was no more than a shadow, he was a living shadow, and bore the shadow of his sword.

There was no other brightness anywhere. It was like a late twilight under clouds at the end of November, a dour, chill, dull air in which one could see, but not clearly and not far. Arren knew the place, the moors and barrens of his hopeless dreams; but it seemed to him that he was farther, immensely farther, than he had ever been in dream. He could make out nothing distinctly, except that he and his companion stood on the slope of a hill, and before them was a low wall of stones, no higher than a man's knee.

Ged still kept his right hand on Arren's arm. He moved forward now, and Arren went with him; they stepped over the wall of stones.

Formless, the long slope fell away before them, descending into the dark.

But overhead, where Arren had thought to see a heavy overcast of clouds, the sky was black, and there were stars. He looked at them, and it seemed as if his heart shrank small and cold within him. They were no stars that he had ever seen. Unmoving they shone, unwinking. They were those stars that do not rise or set, nor are they ever hidden by any cloud, nor does any sunrise dim them. Still and small they shine on the dry land.

Ged set off walking down the far side of the hill of being, and pace by pace Arren went with him. There was terror in him, and yet so resolved was his heart and so intent his will that the fear did not rule him, nor was he even very clearly aware of it. It was only as if something deep within him grieved, like an animal shut up in a

room and chained.

It seemed that they walked down that hill-slope for a long way, but perhaps it was a short way; for there was no passing of time there, where no wind blew and the stars did not move. They came then into the streets of one of the cities that are there, and Arren saw the houses with windows that are never lit, and in certain doorways standing, with quiet faces and empty hands, the dead.

The marketplaces were all empty. There was no buying and selling there, no gaining and spending. Nothing was used; nothing was made. Ged and Arren went through the narrow streets alone, though a few times they saw a figure at the turning of another way, distant and hardly to be seen in the gloom. At sight of the first of these, Arren started and raised his sword to point, but Ged shook his head and went on. Arren saw then that the figure was a woman who moved slowly, not fleeing from them.

All those whom they saw—not many, for the dead are many, but that land is large—stood still, or moved slowly and with no purpose. None of them bore wounds, as had the semblance of Erreth-Akbe summoned into daylight at the place of his death. No marks of illness were on them. They were whole and healed. They were healed of pain and of life. They were not loathesome as Arren had feared they would be, not frightening in the way he had thought they would be. Quiet were their faces, freed from anger and desire, and there was in their shadowed eyes no hope.

Instead of fear, then, great pity rose up in Arren, and if fear underlay it, it was not for himself, but for all people. For he saw the mother and child who had died together, and they were in the dark land together; but the child did not run, nor did it cry, and the mother did not hold it or ever look at it. And those who had died for love passed each other in the streets.

The potter's wheel was still, the loom empty, the stove cold. No voice ever sang.

The dark streets between dark houses led on and on, and they passed through them. The sound of their feet was the only sound. It was cold. Arren had not noticed that cold at first, but it crept into his spirit, which was, here, also his flesh. He felt very weary. They must have come a long way. Why go on? he thought, and his steps lagged a little.

Ged stopped suddenly, turning to face a man who stood at the crossing of two streets. He was slender and tall, with a face that Arren thought he had seen, though he could not remember where. Ged spoke to him, and no other voice had broken the silence since they stepped across the wall of stones: "O Thorion, my friend,

how come you here?"

And he put out his hands to the Summoner of Roke.

Thorion made no answering gesture. He stood still, and his face was still; but the silvery light on Ged's staff struck deep in his enshadowed eyes, making a little light there or meeting it. Ged took the hand he did not offer and said again, "What do you here, Thorion? You are not of this kingdom yet. Go back!"

"I followed the undying one. I lost my way." The Summoner's voice was soft and dull, like that of a man who speaks in sleep.

"Upward: toward the wall," said Ged, pointing the way he and Arren had come, the long, dark, descending street. At that there was a tremor in Thorion's face, as if some hope had entered into him like a sword, intolerable.

"I cannot find the way," he said. "My lord, I cannot find the way."

"Maybe thou shalt," Ged said, and embraced him, and then went forward. Thorion stood still at the crossroads, behind him.

As they went on, it seemed to Arren that in this timeless dusk there was, in truth, neither forward nor backward, neither east nor west, no way to go. Was there a way out? He thought how they had come down the hill, always descending, no matter how they turned; and still in the dark city the streets went downward, so that to return to the wall of stones they need only climb, and at the hill's top they would find it. But they did not turn. Side by side, they went on. Did he follow Ged? Or did he lead him?

They came out of the city. The country of the innumerable dead was empty. No tree or thorn or blade of grass grew in the stony earth under the unsetting stars.

There was no horizon, for the eye could not see so far into the gloom; but ahead of them the small, still stars were absent from the sky over a long space above the ground, and this starless space was jagged and sloped like a chain of mountains. As they went on, the shapes were more distinct: high peaks, weathered by no wind or rain. There was no snow on them to gleam in starlight. They were black. The sight of them struck desolation into Arren's heart. He looked away from them. But he knew them; he recognized them; his eyes were drawn back to them. Each time he looked at those peaks he felt a cold weight in his breast, and his nerve came near to failing. Still he walked on, always downward, for the land fell away, descending toward the mountains' feet. At last he said, "My lord, what are . . ." He pointed at the mountains, for he could not go on speaking; his throat was dry.

"They border on the world of light," Ged answered, "even as does the wall of stones. They have no name but Paln. There is a road across them. It is forbidden to

the dead. It is not long. But it is a bitter road."

"I am thirsty," Arren said, and his companion answered, "Here they drink dust."

They went on.

It seemed to Arren that his companion's gait had slowed somewhat, and sometimes he hesitated. He himself felt no more hesitation, though the weariness had not ceased to grow in him. They must go down; they must go on. They went on.

Sometimes they passed through other towns of the dead, where the dark roofs made angles against the stars, which stood forever in the same place above them. After the towns was the empty land again, where nothing grew. As soon as they had come out of a town, it was lost in the darkness. Nothing could be seen, before or behind, except the mountains that grew ever nearer, towering before them. To their right the formless slope fell away as it had done—how long ago?—when they crossed the wall of stones. "What lies that way?" Arren murmured to Ged, for he craved the sound of speech, but the mage shook his head: "I do not know. It may be a way without an end."

In the direction they went, the slope seemed to be growing less and always less. The ground under their feet gritted harshly, like lava-dust. Still they went on, and now Arren never thought of returning or of how they might return. Nor did he think of stopping, though he was very weary. Once he tried to lighten the numb darkness and weariness and horror within him by thinking of his home; but he could not remember what sunlight looked like or his mother's face. There was nothing to do but to go on. And he went on.

He felt the ground level under his feet; and beside him Ged hesitated. Then he too stopped. The long descent was over; this was the end; there was no way farther, no need to go on.

They were in the valley directly under the Mountains of Pain. There were rocks underfoot and boulders about them, rough to the touch like scoria. It was as if this narrow valley might be the dry bed of a river of water that had once run here or the course of a river of fire, long since cold, from the volcanoes that reared their black, unmerciful peaks above.

He stood still, there in the narrow valley in the dark, and Ged stood still beside him. They stood like the aimless dead, gazing at nothing, silent. Arren thought, with a little dread but not much, We have come too far.

It did not seem to matter much.

Speaking his thought, Ged said, “We have come too far to turn back.” His voice was soft, but the ring of it was not wholly muted by the great, gloomy hollowness around them, and at the sound of it Arren roused a little. Had they not come here to meet the one they sought?

A voice in the darkness said, “You have come too far.”

Arren answered it, saying, “Only too far is far enough.”

“You have come to the Dry River,” said the voice. “You cannot go back to the wall of stones. You cannot go back to life.”

“Not that way,” said Ged, speaking into the darkness. Arren could hardly see him, though they stood side by side, for the mountains under which they stood cut out half the starlight, and it seemed as if the current of the Dry River were darkness itself. “But we would learn your way.”

There was no answer.

“We meet as equals here. If you are blind, Cob, yet we are in the dark.”

There was no answer.

“We cannot hurt you here; we cannot kill you. What is there to fear?”

“I have no fear,” said the voice in the darkness. Then slowly, glimmering a little as with that light that sometimes clung to Ged’s staff, the man appeared, standing some way upstream from Ged and Arren, among the great, dim masses of the boulders. He was tall, broad-shouldered and long-armed, like that figure which had appeared to them on the dune and on the beach of Selidor, but older; the hair was white and thickly matted over the high forehead. So he appeared in the spirit, in the kingdom of death, not burnt by the dragon’s fire, not maimed; but not whole. The sockets of his eyes were empty.

“I have no fear,” he said. “What should a dead man fear?” He laughed. The sound of laughter rang so false and uncanny, there in that narrow, stony valley under the mountains, that Arren’s breath failed him for a moment. But he gripped his sword and listened.

“I do not know what a dead man should fear,” Ged answered. “Surely not death? Yet it seems you fear it. Even though you have found a way to escape from it.”

“I have. I live: my body lives.”

“Not well,” the mage said dryly. “Illusion might hide age; but Orm Embar was not gentle with that body.”

“I can mend it. I know secrets of healing and of youth, no mere illusions. What do you take me for? Because you are called Archmage, do you take me for a village

sorcerer? I who alone among all mages found the Way of Immortality, which no other ever found!"

"Maybe we did not seek it," said Ged.

"You sought it. All of you. You sought it and could not find it, and so made wise words about acceptance and balance and the equilibrium of life and death. But they were words—lies to cover your failure—to cover your fear of death! What man would not live forever, if he could? And I can. I am immortal. I did what you could not do and therefore I am your master; and you know it. Would you know how I did it, Archmage?"

"I would."

Cob came a step closer. Arren noticed that, though the man had no eyes, his manner was not quite that of the stone-blind; he seemed to know exactly where Ged and Arren stood and to be aware of both of them, though he never turned his head to Arren. Some wizardly second-sight he might have, such as that hearing and seeing that sendings and presentments had: something that gave him an awareness, though it might not be true sight.

"I was in Paln," he said to Ged, "after you, in your pride, thought you had humbled me and taught me a lesson. Oh, a lesson you taught me, indeed, but not the one you meant to teach! There I said to myself: I have seen death now, and I will not accept it. Let all stupid nature go its stupid course, but I am a man, better than nature, above nature. I will not go that way, I will not cease to be myself! And so determined, I took the Pelnish Lore again, but found only hints and smatterings of what I needed. So I rewove it and remade it, and made a spell—the greatest spell that has ever been made. The greatest and the last!"

"In working that spell, you died."

"Yes! I died. I had the courage to die, to find what you cowards could never find —the way back from death. I opened the door that had been shut since the beginning of time. And now I come freely to this place and freely return to the world of the living. Alone of all men in all time I am Lord of the Two Lands. And the door I opened is open not only here, but in the minds of the living, in the depths and unknown places of their being, where we are all one in the darkness. They know it, and they come to me. And the dead too must come to me, all of them, for I have not lost the magery of the living: they must climb over the wall of stones when I bid them, all the souls, the lords, the mages, the proud women; back and forth from life to death, at my command. All must come to me, the living and the dead, I who died and live!"

"Where do they come to you, Cob? Where is it that you are?"

"Between the worlds."

"But that is neither life nor death. What is life, Cob?"

"Power."

"What is love?"

"Power," the blind man repeated heavily, hunching up his shoulders.

"What is light?"

"Darkness!"

"What is your name?"

"I have none."

"All in this land bear their true name."

"Tell me yours, then!"

"I am named Ged. And you?"

The blind man hesitated, and said, "Cob."

"That was your use-name, not your name. Where is your name? Where is the truth of you? Did you leave it in Pain where you died? You have forgotten much, O Lord of the Two Lands. You have forgotten light, and love, and your own name."

"I have your name now, and power over you, Ged the Archmage—Ged who was archmage when he was alive!"

"My name is no use to you," Ged said. "You have no power over me at all. I am a living man; my body lies on the beach of Selidor, under the sun, on the turning earth. And when that body dies, I will be here: but only in name, in name alone, in shadow. Do you not understand? Did you never understand, you who called up so many shadows from the dead, who summoned all the hosts of the perished, even my lord Erreth-Akbe, wisest of us all? Did you not understand that he, even he, is but a shadow and a name? His death did not diminish life. Nor did it diminish him. He is there—*there*, not here! Here is nothing, dust and shadows. There, he is the earth and sunlight, the leaves of trees, the eagle's flight. He is alive. And all who ever died, live; they are reborn and have no end, nor will there ever be an end. All, save you. For you would not have death. You lost death, you lost life, in order to save yourself. Yourself! Your immortal self. What is it? Who are you?"

"I am myself. My body will not decay and die—"

"A living body suffers pain, Cob; a living body grows old; it dies. Death is the price we pay for our life and for all life."

"I do not pay it! I can die and in that moment live again! I cannot be killed: I am immortal. I alone am myself forever!"

"Who are you, then?"

"The Immortal One."

"Say your name."

"The King."

"Say my name. I told it to you but a minute since. Say my name!"

"You are not real. You have no name. Only I exist."

"You exist: without name, without form. You cannot see the light of day; you cannot see the dark. You sold the green earth and the sun and stars to save yourself. But you have no self. All that which you sold, that is yourself. You have given everything for nothing. And so now you seek to draw the world to you, all that light and life you lost, to fill up your nothingness. But it cannot be filled. Not all the songs of earth, not all the stars of heaven, could fill your emptiness."

Ged's voice rang like iron, there in the cold valley under the mountains, and the blind man cringed away from him. He lifted up his face, and the dim starlight shone on it; he looked as if he wept, but he had no tears, having no eyes. His mouth opened and shut, full of darkness, but no words came out of it, only a groaning. At last he said one word, barely shaping it with his contorted lips, and the word was "Life."

"I would give you life if I could, Cob. But I cannot. You are dead. But I can give you death."

"No!" the blind man screamed aloud, and then he said, "No, no," and crouched down sobbing, though his cheeks were as dry as the stony rivercourse where only night, and no water, ran. "You cannot. No one can ever set me free. I opened the door between the worlds and I cannot shut it. No one can shut it. It will never be shut again. It draws, it draws me. I must come back to it. I must go through it and come back here, into the dust and cold and silence. It sucks at me and sucks at me. I cannot leave it. I cannot close it. It will suck all the light out of the world in the end. All the rivers will be like the Dry River. There is no power anywhere that can close the door I opened!"

Very strange was the mixture of despair and vindictiveness, terror and vanity, in his words and voice.

Ged said only, "Where is it?"

"That way. Not far. You can go there. But you cannot do anything there. You cannot shut it. If you spent all your power in that one act, it would not be enough. Nothing is enough."

"Maybe," Ged answered. "Though you chose despair, remember we have not

yet done so. Take us there."

The blind man raised his face, in which fear and hatred struggled visibly. Hatred triumphed. "I will not," he said.

At that Arren stepped forward, and he said, "You will."

The blind man held still. The cold silence and the darkness of the realm of the dead surrounded them, surrounded their words.

"Who are you?"

"My name is Lebannen."

Ged spoke: "You who call yourself King, do you not know who this is?"

Again Cob held utterly still. Then he said, gasping a little as he spoke, "But he is dead—You are dead. You cannot go back. There is no way out. You are caught here!" As he spoke, the glimmer of light died away from him, and they heard him turn in the darkness and go away from them into it, hastily. "Give me light, my lord!" Arren cried, and Ged held up his staff above his head, letting the white light break open that old darkness, full of rocks and shadows, among which the tall, stooped figure of the blind man hurried and dodged, going upstream from them with a strange, unseeing, unhesitating gait. After him Arren came, sword in hand; and after him, Ged.

Soon Arren had outdistanced his companion, and the light was very faint, much interrupted by the boulders and the turnings of the riverbed; but the sound of Cob's going, the sense of his presence ahead, was guide enough. Arren drew closer slowly, as the way became steeper. They were climbing in a steep gorge choked with stones; the Dry River, narrowing to its head, wound between sheer banks. Rocks clattered under their feet and under their hands, for they had to clamber. Arren sensed the final narrowing-in of the banks, and with a lunge forward came up to Cob and caught his arm, halting him there: at a kind of basin of rocks five or six feet wide, what might have been a pool if ever water ran there; and above it a tumbled cliff of rock and slag. In that cliff there was a black hole, the source of the Dry River.

Cob did not try to pull away from him. He stood quite still, while the light of Ged's approach brightened on his eyeless face. He had turned that face to Arren. "This is the place," he said at last, a kind of smile forming on his lips. "This is the place you seek. See it? There you can be reborn. All you need do is follow me. You will live immortally. We shall be kings together."

Arren looked at that dry, dark springhead, the mouth of dust, the place where a dead soul, crawling into earth and darkness, was born again dead: abominable it

was to him, and he said in a harsh voice, struggling with deadly sickness, "Let it be shut!"

"It will be shut," Ged said, coming beside them: and the light blazed up now from his hands and face as if he were a star fallen on earth in that endless night. Before him the dry spring, the door, yawned open. It was wide and hollow, but whether deep or shallow there was no telling. There was nothing in it for the light to fall on, for the eye to see. It was void. Through it was neither light nor dark, neither life nor death. It was nothing. It was a way that led nowhere.

Ged raised up his hands and spoke.

Arren still held Cob's arm; the blind man had laid his free hand against the rocks of the cliff-wall. Both stood still, caught in the power of the spell.

With all the skill of his life's training and with all the strength of his fierce heart, Ged strove to shut that door, to make the world whole once more. And under his voice and the command of his shaping hands the rocks drew together, painfully, trying to be whole, to meet. But at the same time the light weakened and weakened, dying out from his hands and from his face, dying out from his yew staff, until only a little glimmer of it clung there. By that faint light Arren saw that the door was nearly closed.

Under his hand the blind man felt the rocks move, felt them come together: and felt also the art and power giving itself up, spending itself, spent—and all at once he shouted, "No!" and broke from Arren's grasp, lunged forward, and caught Ged in his blind, powerful grasp. Bearing Ged down under his weight, he closed his hands on his throat to strangle him.

Arren raised up the sword of Serriadh and brought the blade down straight and hard on the bowed neck beneath the matted hair.

The living spirit has weight in the world of the dead, and the shadow of his sword has an edge. The blade made a great wound, severing Cob's spine. Black blood leapt out, lit by the sword's own light.

But there is no good in killing a dead man, and Cob was dead, years dead. The wound closed, swallowing its blood. The blind man stood up very tall, groping out with his long arms at Arren, his face writhing with rage and hatred: as if he had just now perceived who his true enemy and rival was.

So horrible to see was this recovery from a death-blow, this inability to die, more horrible than any dying, that a rage of loathing swelled up in Arren, a berserk fury, and swinging up the sword he struck again with it, a full, terrible, downward blow. Cob fell with skull split open and face masked with blood, yet Arren was upon him at once, to strike again, before the wound could close, to strike until he killed. . . .

Beside him Ged, struggling to his knees, spoke one word.

At the sound of his voice Arren was stopped, as if a hand had grasped his sword-arm. The blind man, who had begun to rise, also held utterly still. Ged got to his feet; he swayed a little. When he could hold himself erect, he faced the cliff.

"Be thou made whole!" he said in a clear voice, and with his staff he drew in lines of fire across the gate of rocks a figure: the rune Agnen, the Rune of Ending, which closes roads and is drawn on coffin lids. And there was then no gap or void place among the boulders. The door was shut.

The earth of the Dry Land trembled under their feet, and across the unchanging, barren sky a long roll of thunder ran and died away.

"By the word that will not be spoken until time's end I summoned thee. By the word that was spoken at the making of things I now release thee. Go free!" And bending over the blind man, who was crouched on his knees, Ged whispered in his ear, under the white, tangled hair.

Cob stood up. He looked about him slowly, with seeing eyes. He looked at Arren and then at Ged. He spoke no word, but gazed at them with dark eyes. There was no anger in his face, no hate, no grief. Slowly he turned, went off down

the course of the Dry River, and soon was gone to sight.

There was no more light on Ged's yew staff or in his face. He stood there in the darkness. When Arren came to him he caught at the young man's arm to hold himself upright. For a moment a spasm of dry sobbing shook him. "It is done," he said. "It is all gone."

"It is done, dear lord. We must go."

"Aye. We must go home."

Ged was like one bewildered or exhausted. He followed Arren back down the river-course, stumbling along slowly and with difficulty among the rocks and boulders. Arren stayed with him. When the banks of the Dry River were low and the ground was less steep, he turned toward the way they had come, the long, formless slope that led up into the dark. Then he turned away.

Ged said nothing. As soon as they halted, he had sunk down, sitting on a lava-boulder, forspent, his head hanging.

Arren knew that the way they had come was closed to them. They could only go on. They must go all the way. Even too far is not far enough, he thought. He looked up at the black peaks, cold and silent against the unmoving stars, terrible; and once more that ironic, mocking voice of his will spoke in him, unrelenting: "Will you stop halfway, Lebannen?"

He went to Ged and said very gently, "We must go on, my lord."

Ged said nothing, but he stood up.

"We must go by the mountains, I think."

"Thy way, lad," Ged said in a hoarse whisper. "Help me."

So they set out up the slopes of dust and scoria into the mountains, Arren helping his companion along as well as he could. It was black dark in the combes and gorges, so that he had to feel the way ahead, and it was hard for him to give Ged support at the same time. Walking was hard, a stumbling matter; but when they had to climb and clamber as the slopes grew steeper, that was harder still. The rocks were rough, burning the hands like molten iron. Yet it was cold and got colder as they went higher. There was a torment in the touch of this earth. It seared like live coals: a fire burned within the mountains. But the air was always cold and always dark. There was no sound. No wind blew. The sharp rocks broke under their hands, and gave way under their feet. Black and sheer, the spurs and chasms went up in front of them and fell away beside them into blackness. Behind, below, the kingdom of the dead was lost. Ahead, above, the peaks and rocks stood out against the stars. And nothing moved in all the length and breadth of those black

mountains, except the two mortal souls.

Ged often stumbled or missed his footing, in weariness. His breath came harder and harder, and when his hands came hard against the rocks, he gasped in pain. To hear him cry out wrung Arren's heart. He tried to keep him from falling. But often the way was too narrow for them to go abreast, or Arren had to go in front to seek out footing. And at last, on a high slope that ran up to the stars, Ged slipped and fell forward, and did not get up.

"My lord," Arren said, kneeling by him, and then spoke his name. "Ged."

He did not move or answer.

Arren lifted him in his arms and carried him up that high slope. At the end of it there was level ground for some way ahead. Arren laid his burden down and dropped down beside him, exhausted and in pain, past hope. This was the summit of the pass between the two black peaks, for which he had been struggling. This was the pass and the end. There was no way farther. The end of the level ground was the edge of a cliff: beyond it the darkness went on forever, and the small stars hung unmoving in the black gulf of the sky.

Endurance may outlast hope. He crawled forward, when he was able to do so, doggedly. He looked over the edge of darkness. And below him, only a little way below, he saw the beach of ivory sand; the white and amber waves were curling and breaking in foam on it, and across the sea the sun was setting in a haze of gold.

Arren turned back to the dark. He went back. He lifted Ged up as best he could and struggled forward with him until he could not go any farther. There all things ceased to be: thirst, and pain, and the dark, and the sun's light, and the sound of the breaking sea.

Chapter 13

The Stone of Pain

When Arren woke, a grey fog hid the sea and the dunes and hills of Selidor. The breakers came murmuring in a low thunder out of the fog and withdrew murmuring into it again. The tide was in, and the beach much narrower than when they had first come there; the last, small foam-lines of the waves came and licked at Ged's outflung left hand as he lay facedown on the sand. His clothes and hair were wet, and Arren's clothes clung icily to his body, as if once at least the sea had broken over them. Of Cob's dead body there was no trace. Maybe the waves had drawn it out to sea. But behind Arren, when he turned his head, huge and dim in the mist the grey body of Orm Embar bulked like a ruined tower.

Arren got up, shuddering with chill; he could barely stand, for cold and stiffness and a dizzy weakness like that which comes of lying a long time unmoving. He staggered like a drunken man. As soon as he could control his limbs he went to Ged and managed to pull him a little way up the sand above the waves' reach, but that was all he could do. Very cold, very heavy, Ged seemed to him; he had borne him over the boundary from death into life, but maybe in vain. He put his ear to Ged's breast, but could not still the shaking in his own limbs and the chattering of his teeth to listen for the heartbeat. He stood up again and tried to stamp to bring some warmth back into his legs and finally, trembling and dragging his legs like an old man, set off to find their packs. They had dropped them beside a little stream running down from the ridge of the hills, a long time ago, when they came down to the house of bones. It was that stream he sought, for he could not think of anything but water, fresh water.

Before he expected it, he came to the stream, as it descended onto the beach and wandered mazy and branching like a tree of silver to the sea's edge. There he dropped down and drank, with his face in the water and his hands in the water, sucking up the water into his mouth and into his spirit.

At last he sat up, and as he did so he saw on the far side of the stream, immense, a dragon.

Its head, the color of iron, stained as with red rust at nostril and eye-socket and jowl, hung facing him, almost over him. The talons sank deep into the soft, wet sand on the edge of the stream. The folded wings were partly visible, like sails, but the length of the dark body was lost in the fog.

It did not move. It might have been crouching there for hours, or for years, or for centuries. It was carven of iron, shaped from rock—but the eyes, the eyes he dared not look into, the eyes like oil coiling on water, like yellow smoke behind glass, the opaque, profound, yellow eyes watched Arren.

There was nothing he could do; so he stood up. If the dragon would kill him, it would; and if it did not, he would try to help Ged, if there was any help for him. He stood up and started to walk up the rivulet to find their packs.

The dragon did nothing. It crouched unmoving and watched. Arren found the packs, filled both the skin bottles at the stream, and went back across the sand to Ged. After he had taken only a few steps away from the stream, the dragon was lost in the thick fog.

He gave Ged water, but could not rouse him. He lay lax and cold, his head heavy on Arren's arm. His dark face was greyish, the nose and cheek-bones and the old scar standing out harshly. Even his body looked thin and burnt, as if half-consumed.

Arren sat there on the damp sand, his companion's head on his knees. The fog made a vague, soft sphere about them, lighter overhead. Somewhere in the fog was the dead dragon Orm Embar, and the live dragon waiting by the stream. And somewhere across Selidor the boat *Lookfar*, with no provisions in her, lay on another beach. And then the sea, eastward. Three hundred miles to any other land of the West Reach, maybe; a thousand to the Inmost Sea. A long way. "As far as Selidor," they used to say on Enlad. The old stories told to children, the myths, began, "As long ago as forever and as far away as Selidor, there lived a prince. . . ."

He was the prince. But in the old stories, that was the beginning; and this seemed to be the end.

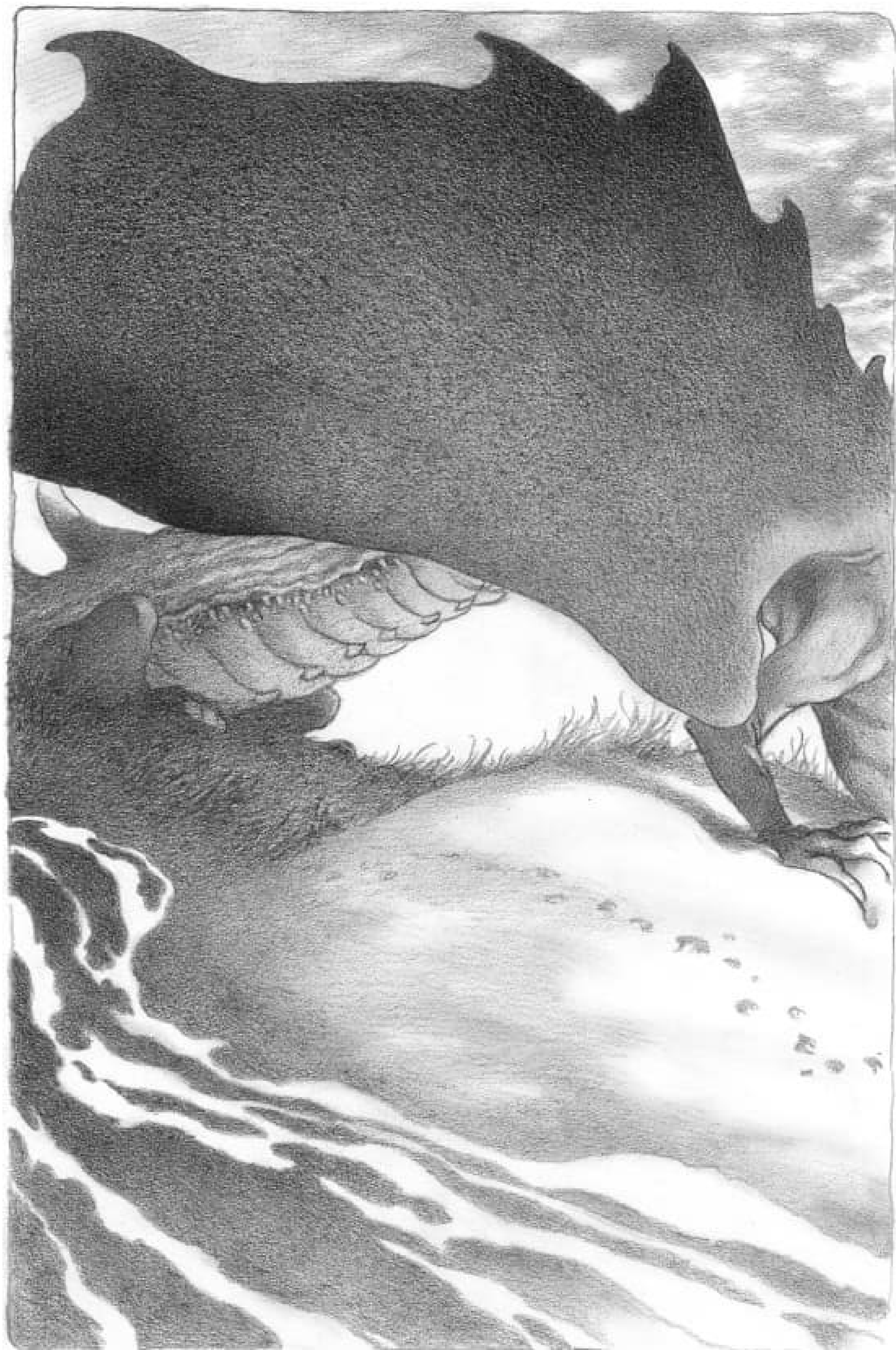
He was not downcast. Though very tired, and grieving for his companion, he felt not the least bitterness or regret. Only there was no longer anything he could do. It had all been done.

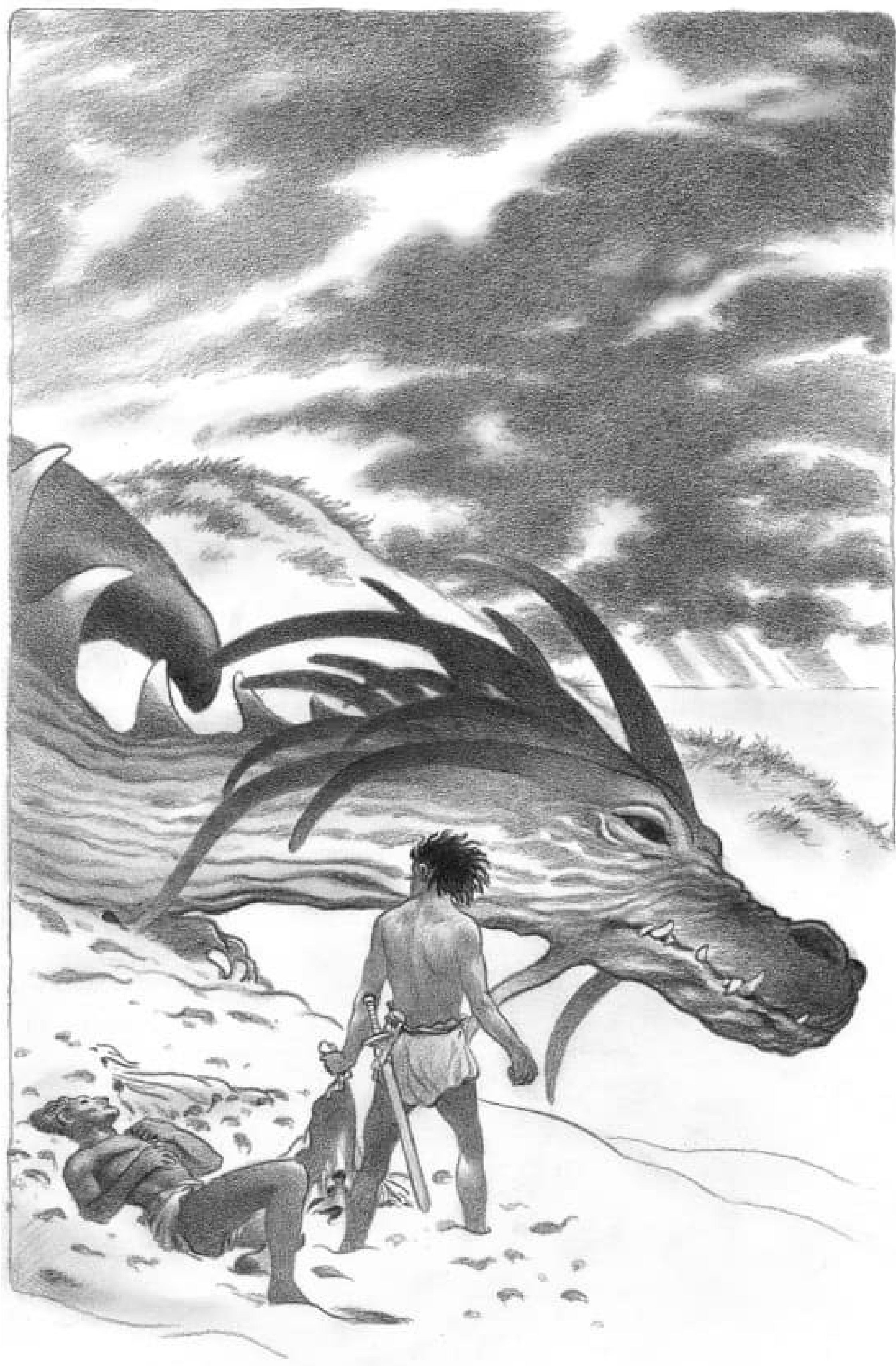
When his strength came back into him, he thought, he would try surf-fishing with the line from his pack; for once his thirst was quenched he had begun to feel

the gnawing of hunger, and their food was gone, all but one packet of hard bread. He would save that, for if he soaked and softened it in water he might be able to feed some of it to Ged.

And that was all there was left to do. Beyond that he could not see; the mist was all about him.

He felt about in his pockets as he sat there, huddled with Ged in the fog, to see if he had anything useful. In his tunic pocket was a hard, sharp-edged thing. He drew it forth and looked at it, puzzled. It was a small stone, black, porous, hard. He almost tossed it away. Then he felt the edges of it in his hand, rough and searing, and felt the weight of it, and knew it for what it was: a bit of rock from the Mountains of Pain. It had caught in his pocket as he climbed or when he crawled to the edge of the pass with Ged. He held it in his hand, the unchanging thing, the stone of Pain. He closed his hand on it and held it. And he smiled then, a smile both somber and joyous, knowing, for the first time in his life, alone, unpraised, and at the end of the world, victory.





The mists thinned and moved. Far out through them he saw sunlight on the open sea. The dunes and hills came and went, colorless and enlarged by the veils of fog. Sunlight struck bright on the body of Orm Embar, magnificent in death.

The iron-black dragon crouched, never moving, on the far side of the stream.

Past noon the sun grew clear and warm, burning the last blur of mist out of the air. Arren threw off his wet clothes and let them dry, and went naked save for his sword-belt and sword. He let the sun dry Ged's clothing likewise, but though the great, healing, comfortable flood of heat and light poured down on Ged, yet he lay still.

There was a noise as of metal rubbing against metal, the grating whisper of crossed swords. The iron-colored dragon had risen on its crooked legs. It moved and crossed the rivulet, with a soft hissing sound as it dragged its long body through the sand. Arren saw the wrinkles at the shoulder joints, the mail of the flanks scored and scarred like the armor of Erreth-Akbe, and the long teeth yellowed and blunt. In all this, and in its sure, ponderous movements, and in a deep and frightening calmness that it had, he saw the sign of age: of great age, of years beyond remembering. So when the dragon stopped some few feet from where Ged lay, and Arren stood up between the two, he said, in Hardic for he did not know the Old Speech, "Art thou Kalessin?"

The dragon said no word, but it seemed to smile. Then, lowering its huge head and sticking out its neck, it looked down at Ged, and spoke his name.

Its voice was huge, and soft, and smelt like a blacksmith's forge.

Again it spoke, and once more; and at the third time, Ged opened his eyes. After a while he tried to sit up, but could not. Arren knelt by him and supported him. Then Ged spoke. "Kalessin," he said, *"senvanissai'n ar Roke!"* He had no more strength after speaking; he leaned his head on Arren's shoulder and shut his eyes.

The dragon made no reply. It crouched as before, not moving. The fog was coming in again, dimming the sun as it went down to the sea.

Arren dressed and wrapped Ged in his cloak. The tide which had drawn far out was coming in again, and he thought to carry his companion up to dryer ground on the dunes, for he felt his strength coming back.

But as he bent to lift Ged up, the dragon put out a great, mailed foot, almost touching him. The talons of that foot were four, with a spur behind such as a cock's foot has, but these were spurs of steel, and as long as scythe-blades.

"Sobriost," said the dragon, like a January wind through frozen reeds.

“Let my lord be. He has saved us all, and doing so has spent his strength and maybe his life with it. Let him be!”

So Arren spoke, fiercely and with command. He had been overawed and frightened too much, he had been filled up with fear, and had got sick of it and would not have it anymore. He was angry with the dragon for its brute strength and size, its unjust advantage. He had seen death, he had tasted death, and no threat had power over him.

The old dragon Kalessin looked at him from one long, awful, golden eye. There were ages beyond ages in the depths of that eye; the morning of the world was deep in it. Though Arren did not look into it, he knew that it looked upon him with profound and mild hilarity.

“Arw sobriost,” said the dragon, and its rusty nostrils widened so that the banked and stifled fire deep within them glittered.

Arren had his arm under Ged’s shoulders, having been in the act of lifting him when Kalessin’s movement stopped him, and now he felt Ged’s head turn a little and heard his voice: “It means, mount here.”

For a while Arren did not move. This was all folly. But there was the great, taloned foot, set like a step in front of him; and above it, the crook of the elbow joint; and above that, the jutting shoulder and the musculature of the wing where it sprang from the shoulder blade: four steps, a stairway. And there in front of the wings and the first great iron thorn of the spine-armor, in the hollow of the neck there was a place for a man to sit astride, or two men. If they were mad and past hope and given up to folly.

“Mount!” said Kalessin in the speech of the Making.

So Arren stood up and helped his companion to stand. Ged held his head erect, and with Arren’s arms to guide him, climbed up those strange steps. Both sat down astride in the rough-mailed hollow of the dragon’s neck, Arren behind, ready to support Ged if he needed it. Both felt a warmth come into them, a welcome heat like the sun’s heat, where they touched the dragon’s hide: life burnt in fire beneath that iron armor.

Arren saw that they had left the mage’s staff of yew lying half-buried in the sand; the sea was creeping in to take it. He made to get down for it, but Ged stopped him. “Leave it. I spent all wizardry at that dry spring, Lebannen. I am no mage now.”

Kalessin turned and looked at them sidelong; the ancient laughter was in its eye. Whether Kalessin was male or female, there was no telling; what Kalessin thought,

there was no knowing. Slowly the wings lifted and unfurled. They were not gold like Orm Embar's wings but red, dark red, dark as rust or blood or the crimson silk of Lorbanery. The dragon raised its wings carefully, lest it unseat its puny riders. Carefully it gathered in the spring of its great haunches, and leapt like a cat up into the air, and the wings beat down and bore them above the fog that drifted over Selidor.

Rowing with those crimson wings in the evening air, Kalessin wheeled out over the open sea, turned to the east, and flew.

In the days of high summer on the island of Ully a great dragon was seen flying low, and later in Usidero and in the north of Ontuego. Though dragons are dreaded in the West Reach, where people know them all too well, yet after this one had passed over and the villagers had come out of their hiding places, those who had seen it said, "The dragons are not all dead, as we thought. Maybe the wizards are not all dead, either. Surely there was a great splendor in that flight; maybe it was the Eldest."

Where Kalessin touched to land none saw. In those far islands there are forests and wild hills to which few men ever come, and where even the descent of a dragon may go unseen.

But in the Ninety Isles there was screaming and disarray. Men rowed westward among the little islands crying, "Hide! Hide! The Dragon of Pendor has broken his word! The Archmage has perished, and the Dragon is come devouring!"

Without landing, without looking down, the great iron-colored worm flew over the little islands and the little towns and farms, and deigned not even a belch of fire for such small fry. So it passed over Geath and over Serd, and crossed the straits of the Inmost Sea, and came within sight of Roke.

Never in the memory of man, scarcely in the memory of legend, had any dragon braved the walls visible and invisible of the well-defended isle. Yet this one did not hesitate, but flew on ponderous wings and heavily over the western shore of Roke, above the villages and fields, to the green hill that rises over Thwil Town. There at last it stooped softly to the earth, raised its red wings and folded them, and crouched on the summit of Roke Knoll.

The boys came running out of the Great House. Nothing could have stopped them. But for all their youth they were slower than their Masters and came second

to the Knoll. When they came, the Patterner was there, come from his Grove, his fair hair bright in the sun. With him was the Changer, who had returned two nights before in the shape of a great sea-osprey, lame-winged and weary; long he had been caught by his own spells in that form and could not come into his own shape again until he came into the Grove, on that night when the Balance was restored and the broken was made whole. The Summoner, gaunt and frail, only one day risen from his bed, had come; and beside him stood the Doorkeeper. And the other Masters of the Isle of the Wise were there.

They saw the riders dismount, one aiding the other. They saw them look about with a look of strange contentment, grimness, and wonder. The dragon crouched like stone while they clambered down from its back and stood beside it. It turned its head a little while the Archmage spoke to it, and briefly answered him. Those who watched saw the sidelong look of the yellow eye, cold and full of laughter. Those who understood heard the dragon say, "I have brought the young king to his kingdom, and the old man to his home."

"A little farther yet, Kalessin," Ged replied. "I have not gone where I must go." He looked down at the roofs and towers of the Great House in the sunlight, and he seemed to smile a little. Then he turned to Arren, who stood tall and slight, in worn clothes, and not wholly steady on his legs from the weariness of the long ride and the bewilderment of all that had passed. In the sight of them all, Ged knelt to him, down on both knees, and bowed his grey head.

Then he stood up and kissed the young man on the cheek, saying, "When you come to your throne in Havnor, my lord and dear companion, rule long and well."

He looked again at the Masters and the young wizards and the boys and the townsfolk gathered on the slopes and at the foot of the Knoll. His face was quiet, and in his eyes there was something like that laughter in the eyes of Kalessin. Turning from them all, he mounted up again by the dragon's foot and shoulder, and took his seat reinless between the great peaks of the wings, on the neck of the dragon. The red wings lifted with a drumming rattle, and Kalessin the Eldest sprang into the air. Fire came from the dragon's jaws, and smoke, and the sound of thunder and the stormwind was in the beating of its wings. It circled the hill once and flew off, north and eastward, toward that quarter of Earthsea where stands the mountain isle of Gont.

The Doorkeeper, smiling, said, "He has done with doing. He goes home."

And they watched the dragon fly between the sunlight and the sea till it was out of sight.

The Deed of Ged tells that he who had been archmage came to the crowning of the King of All the Isles in the Tower of the Sword in Havnor at the world's heart. The song tells that when the ceremony of the crowning was over and the festival began, he left the company and went down alone to the port of Havnor. There lay out on the water a boat, worn and beaten by storm and the weather of years; she had no sail up, and was empty. Ged called the boat by name, *Lookfar*, and she came to him. Entering the boat from the pier Ged turned his back on land, and without wind or sail or oar the boat moved; it took him from harbor and from haven, westward among the isles, westward over sea; and no more is known of him.

But in the island of Gont they tell the story otherwise, saying that it was the young king, Lebannen, who came seeking Ged to bring him to the coronation. But he did not find him at Gont Port or at Re Albi. No one could say where he was, only that he had gone afoot up into the forests of the mountain. Often he went so, they said, and did not return for many months, and no man knew the roads of his solitude. Some offered to seek for him, but the King forbade them, saying, "He rules a greater kingdom than I do." And so he left the mountain, and took ship, and returned to Havnor to be crowned.

Afterword

Before I wrote the first of these books, I'd written a couple of short stories set on islands where wizardry was practiced and dragons were feared. As I've said, when I began to conceive that first book of Earthsea, I realized those islands belonged to a great archipelago, a world of islands, and I drew the map.

All the islands were on it, but I knew nothing of them except their names, their shapes, the bays and mountains and rivers I had marked, the names of cities on some of them. They all remained to be discovered, one by one.

There are still many islands that I've never been to. I can look at the map and wonder about them, just as I wonder about Tenerife or Zanzibar. And even though I've been to the Outer Hebrides or the Windward Isles, to Roke or Havnor, I can still wonder about them; there's always more to learn.

The poet Roethke said, "I learn by going where I have to go." It is a sentence that has meant a great deal to me. Sometimes it tells me that by going where it is necessary for us to go, by following our own path, we learn our way through the world. Sometimes it tells me that we can only learn our way through the world by just starting out and going.

Understood either way, it describes how I learned Earthsea.

When I first arrived, I knew very little about wizardry and even less about dragons. Ogion and the Masters of Roke educated me about what wizards did. But I had a lot of pictures and notions about dragons in my head that I had to work through, get rid of, or borrow from, before I could see my own dragons clearly.

There are many kinds of dragon in the world, and growing up I'd learned something about a good many of them. There was the kind of dragon, in fairy tales and the Norse lore, who eats maidens and hoards jewelry. A close relative was St. George's dragon, often a rather pathetic specimen, which I knew mostly from paintings where the saint is about to slay it, or has already slain it and is standing with one armored foot planted smugly on it. Then there were the far more impressive Chinese dragons, coiling imperially through the clouds with a fiery

jewel in their claws. There were the lovable dragons of Pern. There was, barely hinted but unforgettable, the dragon whose tooth forms a great gateway in one of Lord Dunsany's tales. There was, magnificently, Smaug.

All rich, all excellent. I plundered freely. Smaug, the great Worms of the North, and aerial Chinese dragons are certainly ancestors of the Dragons of Pendor in the first book of Earthsea.

But, by going with Ged where he had to go, I still had much to learn about the dragons of Earthsea, their history, their kinship with human beings. In *The Farthest Shore*, I began to see them clearly. Ged told me what to see, when he said to Arren, "And though I came to forget or regret all I have ever done, yet I would remember that once I saw the dragons aloft on the wind at sunset above the western isles; and I would be content."

The dragons are, perhaps above all, beautiful.

As tigers are beautiful. Could anyone regret having seen a tiger? Unless, of course, they had a little while to regret it while the tiger ate them.

The dragons are beautiful, and also mortal, as tigers are. Long-lived, but not indestructible. Terrible, but not monstrous. Fierce, fiery, careless of human life, sometimes careless of their own lives. Destructive when angry, very much to be feared, and untamably wild. Mysterious, as all great wild creatures are mysterious.

But not incomprehensible. Speech is natural to them, inborn: they don't have to learn it, as we do. Their language, the only one they will speak, is the tongue the wizards must learn, the tongue that works magic, the True Speech, the language of the Making.

When I wrote *The Farthest Shore*, I saw the dragons as wildness itself, and thus as utterly other than human. And yet, looking back, I see that I already felt their otherness as not absolute. They share a language with us, or some of us, as no animal does. And when Cob's desire for immortality leads him to make a breach in the human world from which life and light drain out like water through a breach in a dyke, the dragons are damaged by it just as human beings are, losing their reason, their power of speech, their magic.

I didn't understand why that was so, when I wrote the book, but I knew it was so.

People like to believe that writers know exactly what they are doing and have their story under control, thought out, plotted from beginning to end. It makes sense of the whole strange enterprise of novel writing, makes it rational. Many academic critics believe this, so do many readers, so do some writers. But not all

writers have this kind of control of their material, and I wouldn't even want to have it.

There's a difference between control and responsibility. Aesthetically and morally, I take full responsibility for what I write. If I didn't, I wouldn't feel free to let the material control itself to the extent I do. I'd have to manage it consciously and continuously, making everything happen as I planned it to happen. But I never wanted that kind of control. By "going where I have to go," being willing to guess that there is such a place without knowing clearly how I am to get there, trusting to my story to take me there, I know I've gone farther than I could ever have gone if I'd fully known my goal and the way to it before I set out. I left room for luck and chance to come and aid me, room for my narrow plans and ideas to grow and include what I didn't know when I set out.

What told me to do this—to leave room? I have no idea. Luck, chance. A kind of passive courage. A willingness to follow.

Follow what?

A dragon, maybe. A dragon flying on the wind.

It would be lovely if writing a story was like getting into a little boat that drifted off and took me to the promised land, or climbing on a dragon's back and flying off to Selidor. But it's only as a reader that I can do that. As a writer, to take full responsibility without claiming total control requires a lot of work, a lot of groping and testing, flexibility, caution, watchfulness. I have no chart to follow, so I have to be constantly alert. The boat needs steering. There have to be long conversations with the dragon I ride. But however watchful and aware I am, I know I can never be fully aware of the currents that carry the boat, of where the winds beneath the dragon's wings are blowing.

A writer lives and works in the world she was born into, and no matter how firm her own purpose, or how seemingly far from the present day her subject, she and her work are subject to the changing winds and currents of that world.

I was a child during the Great Depression, and eleven years old when America entered the Second World War. I wrote this book soon after the Sixties—a time of high tides and high winds, of great hope and wild folly, when for a while it seemed a more generous vision might replace the sour dream of profiteering and consumerism that has been the bane of my country.

As I look back at the book now, I see how it reflects that time. Along with the active movement to free America from racist injustice and from militarism, there

was a real vision of getting free from compulsive materialism, the confusion of goods with good. Yet already we were watching much of that vision blur off into wishful thinking or become drug-dependent.

Being an irreligious puritan and a rational mystic, I think it's irresponsible to let a belief think for you or a chemical dream for you.

So the book's dark themes of loss and betrayal took shape. So Ged and Arren had to come to Hort Town, and drug addiction and slavery are seen for the first time in the Archipelago. Evil, in this book, has an immediate, ugly, human shape, because I saw evil not as some horde of foreign demons with bad teeth and superweapons but as an insidious and ever-present enemy in my own daily life in my own country: the ruinous irresponsibility of greed.

We are frequently told that greed for endless increase of material goods is natural and universal—as is greed for endless life. We are all supposed to agree that you can't be too rich or live too long.

The desire to live is certainly natural and universal, since it's the basic directive of living creatures: once born, our job and our desire is to try to stay alive.

But is that the same as a desire to stay alive forever, to be immortal? Or is it just that we can't imagine not being, so we invent an endless existence called immortality?

Knowing that everything on earth has an end, we know the afterlife can't be on earth, so it has to be somewhere else—a totally other place where the living can't come and where nothing can ever change. To me, the imagery of the various afterlives and underworlds, the heavens and hells, appears marvelous and powerful, but I can't believe in any of them except as I "believe" in any imaginative creation as a hint, an indication, a sign of something more than can be said or shown. The idea of individual immortality, an endless ego-existence, is more dreadful to me than the idea of letting go the self in death to rejoin shared, eternal being. I see life as a shared gift, received from others and passed on to others, and living and dying as one process, in which lies both our suffering and our reward. Without mortality to purchase it, how can we have the consciousness of eternity? I think the price is worth paying.

So in this book Ged goes down into the dreary realm of the dead, knowing that he will not come back from it, and willing to pay that price.

But even wizards don't know everything. He's wrong. He does come back, saved by his young companion's innocence and strength. Both of them are transformed by the terrible passage. The boy Arren returns as the man Lebannen,

and Ged has lost, not his life, but his power to do magic. The Archmage is no mage now.

What may be implied about Ged's future in that loss, that change, is just hinted at by the Doorkeeper when he says, "He has done with doing. He goes home."

TEHANU

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Only in silence the word,
only in dark the light,
only in dying life:
bright the hawk's flight
on the empty sky.
—*The Creation of Éa*

Chapter 1

A Bad Thing

After Farmer Flint of the Middle Valley died, his widow stayed on at the farmhouse. Her son had gone to sea and her daughter had married a merchant of Valmouth, so she lived alone at Oak Farm. People said she had been some kind of great person in the foreign land she came from, and indeed the mage Ogion used to stop by Oak Farm to see her; but that didn't count for much, since Ogion visited all sorts of nobodies.

She had a foreign name, but Flint had called her Goha, which is what they call a little white web-spinning spider on Gont. That name fit well enough, she being white-skinned and small and a good spinner of goat's-wool and sheep-fleece. So now she was Flint's widow, Goha, mistress of a flock of sheep and the land to pasture them, four fields, an orchard of pears, two tenants' cottages, the old stone farmhouse under the oaks, and the family graveyard over the hill where Flint lay, earth in his earth.

"I've generally lived near tombstones," she said to her daughter.

"Oh, Mother, come live in town with us!" said Apple, but the widow would not leave her solitude.

"Maybe later, when there are babies and you'll need a hand," she said, looking with pleasure at her grey-eyed daughter. "But not now. You don't need me. And I like it here."

When Apple had gone back to her young husband, the widow closed the door and stood on the stone-flagged floor of the kitchen of the farmhouse. It was dusk, but she did not light the lamp, thinking of her own husband lighting the lamp: the hands, the spark, the intent, dark face in the catching glow. The house was silent.

I used to live in a silent house, alone, she thought. I will do so again. She lighted the lamp.

In a late afternoon of the first hot weather, the widow's old friend Lark came out

from the village, hurrying along the dusty lane. "Goha," she said, seeing her weeding in the bean patch, "Goha, it's a bad thing. It's a very bad thing. Can you come?"

"Yes," the widow said. "What would the bad thing be?"

Lark caught her breath. She was a heavy, plain, middle-aged woman, whose name did not fit her body anymore. But once she had been a slight and pretty girl, and she had befriended Goha, paying no attention to the villagers who gossiped about that white-faced Kargish witch Flint had brought home; and friends they had been ever since.

"A burned child," she said.

"Whose?"

"Tramps'."

Goha went to shut the farmhouse door, and they set off along the lane, Lark talking as they went. She was short of breath and sweating. Tiny seeds of the heavy grasses that lined the lane stuck to her cheeks and forehead, and she brushed at them as she talked. "They've been camped in the river meadows all the month. A man, passed himself off as a tinker, but he's a thief, and a woman with him. And another man, younger, hanging around with them most of the time. Not working, any of 'em. Filching and begging and living off the woman. Boys from downriver were bringing them farmstuff to get at her. You know how it is now, that kind of thing. And gangs on the roads and coming by farms. If I were you, I'd lock my door, these days. So this one, this younger fellow, comes into the village, and I was out in front of our house, and he says, 'The child's not well.' I'd barely seen a child with them, a little ferret of a thing, slipped out of sight so quick I wasn't sure it was there at all. So I said, 'Not well? A fever?' And the fellow says, 'She hurt herself, lighting the fire,' and then before I'd got myself ready to go with him he'd made off. Gone. And when I went out there by the river, the other pair was gone too. Cleared out. Nobody. All their traps and trash gone too. There was just their campfire, still smoldering, and just by it—partly in it—on the ground—"

Lark stopped talking for several steps. She looked straight ahead, not at Goha.

"They hadn't even put a blanket over her," she said.

She strode on.

"She'd been pushed into the fire while it was burning," she said. She swallowed, and brushed at the sticking seeds on her hot face. "I'd say maybe she fell, but if she'd been awake she'd have tried to save herself. They beat her and thought they'd killed her, I guess, and wanted to hide what they'd done to her, so they—"

She stopped again, went on again.

"Maybe it wasn't him. Maybe he pulled her out. He came to get help for her, after all. It must have been the father. I don't know. It doesn't matter. Who's to know? Who's to care? Who's to care for the child? Why do we do what we do?"

Goha asked in a low voice, "Will she live?"

"She might," Lark said. "She might well live."

After a while, as they neared the village, she said, "I don't know why I had to come to you. Ivy's there. There's nothing to be done."

"I could go to Valmouth, for Beech."

"Nothing he could do. It's beyond . . . beyond help. I got her warm. Ivy's given her a potion and a sleeping charm. I carried her home. She must be six or seven but she didn't weigh what a two-year-old would. She never really waked. But she makes a sort of gasping. . . . I know there isn't anything you can do. But I wanted you."

"I want to come," Goha said. But before they entered Lark's house, she shut her eyes and held her breath a moment in dread.

Lark's children had been sent outdoors, and the house was silent. The child lay unconscious on Lark's bed. The village witch, Ivy, had smeared an ointment of witch hazel and heal-all on the lesser burns, but had not touched the right side of the face and head and the right hand, which had been charred to the bone. She had drawn the rune Pirr above the bed, and left it at that.

"Can you do anything?" Lark asked in a whisper.

Goha stood looking down at the burned child. Her hands were still. She shook her head.

"You learned healing, up on the mountain, didn't you?" Pain and shame and rage spoke through Lark, begging for relief.

"Even Ogion couldn't heal this," the widow said.

Lark turned away, biting her lip, and wept. Goha held her, stroking her grey hair. They held each other.

The witch Ivy came in from the kitchen, scowling at the sight of Goha. Though the widow cast no charms and worked no spells, it was said that when she first came to Gont she had lived at Re Albi as a ward of the mage, and that she knew the Archmage of Roke, and no doubt had foreign and uncanny powers. Jealous of her prerogative, the witch went to the bed and busied herself beside it, making a mound of something in a dish and setting it afire so that it smoked and reeked while she muttered a curing charm over and over. The rank herbal smoke made the

burned child cough and half rouse, flinching and shuddering. She began to make a gasping noise, quick, short, scraping breaths. Her one eye seemed to look up at Goha.

Goha stepped forward and took the child's left hand in hers. She spoke in her own language. "I served them and I left them," she said. "I will not let them have you."

The child stared at her or at nothing, trying to breathe, and trying again to breathe, and trying again to breathe.

Chapter 2

Going to the Falcon's Nest

It was more than a year later, in the hot and spacious days after the Long Dance, that a messenger came down the road from the north to Middle Valley asking for the widow Goha. People in the village put him on the path, and he came to Oak Farm late in the afternoon. He was a sharp-faced, quick-eyed man. He looked at Goha and at the sheep in the fold beyond her and said, "Fine lambs. The Mage of Re Albi sends for you."

"He sent you?" Goha inquired, disbelieving and amused. Ogion, when he wanted her, had quicker and finer messengers: an eagle calling, or only his own voice saying her name quietly—*Will you come?*

The man nodded. "He's sick," he said. "Will you be selling off any of the ewe lambs?"

"I might. You can talk to the shepherd if you like. Over by the fence there. Do you want supper? You can stay the night here if you want, but I'll be on my way."

"Tonight?"

This time there was no amusement in her look of mild scorn. "I won't be waiting about," she said. She spoke for a minute with the old shepherd, Clearbrook, and then turned away, going up to the house built into the hillside by the oak grove. The messenger followed her.

In the stone-floored kitchen, a child whom he looked at once and quickly looked away from served him milk, bread, cheese, and green onions, and then went off, never saying a word. She reappeared beside the woman, both shod for travel and carrying light leather packs. The messenger followed them out, and the widow locked the farmhouse door. They all set off together, he on his business, for the message from Ogion had been a mere favor added to the serious matter of buying a breeding ram for the Lord of Re Albi; and the woman and the burned child bade him farewell where the lane turned off to the village. They went on up the road he

had come down, northward and then west into the foothills of Gont Mountain.

They walked until the long summer twilight began to darken. They left the narrow road then and made camp in a dell down by a stream that ran quick and quiet, reflecting the pale evening sky between thickets of scrub willow. Goha made a bed of dry grass and willow leaves, hidden among the thickets like a hare's form, and rolled the child up in a blanket on it. "Now," she said, "you're a cocoon. In the morning you'll be a butterfly and hatch out." She lighted no fire, but lay in her cloak beside the child and watched the stars shine one by one and listened to what the stream said quietly, until she slept.

When they woke in the cold before the dawn, she made a small fire and heated a pan of water to make oatmeal gruel for the child and herself. The little ruined butterfly came shivering from her cocoon, and Goha cooled the pan in the dewy grass so that the child could hold it and drink from it. The east was brightening above the high, dark shoulder of the mountain when they set off again.

They walked all day at the pace of a child who tired easily. The woman's heart yearned to make haste, but she walked slowly. She was not able to carry the child any long distance, and so to make the way easier for her she told her stories.

"We're going to see a man, an old man, called Ogion," she told her as they trudged along the narrow road that wound upward through the forests. "He's a wise man, and a wizard. Do you know what a wizard is, Therru?"

If the child had had a name, she did not know it or would not say it. Goha called her Therru.

She shook her head.

"Well, neither do I," said the woman. "But I know what they can do. When I was young—older than you, but young—Ogion was my father, the way I'm your mother now. He looked after me and tried to teach me what I needed to know. He stayed with me when he'd rather have been wandering by himself. He liked to walk, all along these roads like we're doing now, and in the forests, in the wild places. He went everywhere on the mountain, looking at things, listening. He always listened, so they called him the Silent. But he used to talk to me. He told me stories. Not only the great stories everybody learns, the heroes and the kings and the things that happened long ago and far away, but stories only he knew." She walked on a way before she went on. "I'll tell you one of those stories now.

"One of the things wizards can do is turn into something else—take another form. Shape-changing, they call it. An ordinary sorcerer can make himself look like somebody else, or like an animal, just so you don't know for a minute what you're

seeing—as if he'd put on a mask. But the wizards and mages can do more than that. They can be the mask, they can truly change into another being. So a wizard, if he wanted to cross the sea and had no boat, might turn himself into a gull and fly across. But he has to be careful. If he stays a bird, he begins to think what a bird thinks and forget what a man thinks, and he might fly off and be a gull and never a man again. So they say there was a great wizard once who liked to turn himself into a bear, and did it too often, and became a bear, and killed his own little son; and they had to hunt him down and kill him. But Ogion used to joke about it, too. Once when the mice got into his pantry and ruined the cheese, he caught one with a tiny mousetrap spell, and he held the mouse up like this and looked it in the eye and said, 'I told you not to play mouse!' And for a minute I thought he meant it. . . .

"Well, this story is about something like shape-changing, but Ogion said it was beyond all shape-changing he knew, because it was about being two things, two beings, at once, and in the same form, and he said that this is beyond the power of wizards. But he met with it in a little village around on the northwest coast of Gont, a place called Kemay. There was a woman there, an old fisherwoman, not a witch, not learned; but she made songs. That's how Ogion came to hear of her. He was wandering there, the way he did, going along the coast, listening; and he heard somebody singing, mending a net or caulking a boat and singing as they worked:

Farther west than west
beyond the land
my people are dancing
on the other wind.

"It was the tune and the words both that Ogion heard, and he had never heard them before, so he asked where the song came from. And from one answer to another, he went along to where somebody said, 'Oh, that's one of the songs of the Woman of Kemay.' So he went on along to Kemay, the little fishing port where the woman lived, and he found her house down by the harbor. And he knocked on the door with his mage's staff. And she came and opened the door.

"Now you know, you remember when we talked about names, how children have child-names, and everybody has a use-name, and maybe a nickname too. Different people may call you differently. You're my Therru, but maybe you'll have a Hardic use-name when you get older. But also, when you come into your

womanhood, you will, if all be rightly done, be given your true name. It will be given you by one of true power, a wizard or a mage, because that is their power, their art—naming. And that's the name you'll maybe never tell another person, because your own self is in your true name. It is your strength, your power; but to another it is risk and burden, only to be given in utmost need and trust. But a great mage, knowing all names, may know it without your telling him.

"So Ogion, who is a great mage, stood at the door of the little house there by the sea-wall, and the old woman opened the door. Then Ogion stepped back, and he held up his oak staff, and put up his hand, too, like this, as if trying to protect himself from the heat of a fire, and in his amazement and fear he said her true name aloud—'Dragon!'

"In that first moment, he told me, it was no woman he saw at all in the doorway, but a blaze and glory of fire, and a glitter of gold scales and talons, and the great eyes of a dragon. They say you must not look into a dragon's eyes.

"Then that was gone, and he saw no dragon, but an old woman standing there in the doorway, a bit stooped, a tall old fisherwoman with big hands. She looked at him as he did at her. And she said, 'Come in, Lord Ogion.'

"So he went in. She served him fish soup, and they ate, and then they talked by her fire. He thought that she must be a shape-changer, but he didn't know, you see, whether she was a woman who could change herself into a dragon, or a dragon who could change itself into a woman. So he asked her at last, 'Are you woman or dragon?' And she didn't say, but she said, 'I'll sing you a story I know.'"

Therru had a little stone in her shoe. They stopped to get that out, and went on, very slowly, for the road was climbing steeply between cut banks of stone overhung by thickets where the cicadas sang in the summer heat.

"So this is the story she sang to him, to Ogion.

"When Segoy raised the islands of the world from the sea in the beginning of time, the dragons were the first born of the land and the wind blowing over the land. So the Song of the Creation tells. But her song told also that then, in the beginning, dragon and human were all one. They were all one people, one race, winged, and speaking the True Language.

"They were beautiful, and strong, and wise, and free.

"But in time nothing can be without becoming. So among the dragon-people some became more and more in love with flight and wildness, and would have less and less to do with the works of making, or with study and learning, or with houses and cities. They wanted only to fly farther and farther, hunting and eating their kill,

ignorant and uncaring, seeking more freedom and more.

"Others of the dragon-people came to care little for flight, but gathered up treasure, wealth, things made, things learned. They built houses, strongholds to keep their treasures in, so they could pass all they gained to their children, ever seeking more increase and more. And they came to fear the wild ones, who might come flying and destroy all their dear hoard, burn it up in a blast of flame out of mere carelessness and ferocity.

"The wild ones feared nothing. They learned nothing. Because they were ignorant and fearless, they could not save themselves when the flightless ones trapped them as animals and killed them. But other wild ones would come flying and set the beautiful houses afire, and destroy, and kill. Those that were strongest, wild or wise, were those who killed each other first.

"Those who were most afraid, they hid from the fighting, and when there was no more hiding they ran from it. They used their skills of making and made boats and sailed east, away from the western isles where the great winged ones made war among the ruined towers.

"So those who had been both dragon and human changed, becoming two peoples—the dragons, always fewer and wilder, scattered by their endless, mindless greed and anger, in the far islands of the Western Reach; and the human folk, always more numerous in their rich towns and cities, filling up the Inner Isles and all the south and east. But among them there were some who saved the learning of the dragons—the True Language of the Making—and these are now the wizards.

"But also, the song said, there are those among us who know they once were dragons, and among the dragons there are some who know their kinship with us. And these say that when the one people were becoming two, some of them, still both human and dragon, still winged, went not east but west, on over the Open Sea, till they came to the other side of the world. There they live in peace, great winged beings both wild and wise, with human mind and dragon heart. And so she sang,

Farther west than west
beyond the land
my people are dancing
on the other wind.

"So that was the story told in the song of the Woman of Kemay, and it ended with those words.

"Then Ogion said to her, 'When I first saw you I saw your true being. This woman who sits across the hearth from me is no more than the dress she wears.'

"But she shook her head and laughed, and all she would say was, 'If only it were that simple!'

"So then after a while Ogion came back to Re Albi. And when he told me the story, he said to me, 'Ever since that day, I have wondered if anyone, man or dragon, has been farther west than west; and who we are, and where our wholeness lies.' . . . Are you getting hungry, Therru? There's a good sitting place, it looks like, up there where the road turns. Maybe from there we'll be able to see Gont Port, away down at the foot of the mountain. It's a big city, even bigger than Valmouth. We'll sit down when we get to the turn, and rest a bit."

From the high corner of the road they could indeed look down the vast slopes of forest and rocky meadow to the town on its bay, and see the crags that guarded the entrance to the bay, and the boats on the dark water like wood chips or water beetles. Far ahead on their road and still somewhat above it, a cliff jutted out from the mountainside: the Overfell, on which was the village of Re Albi, the Falcon's Nest.

Therru made no complaints, but when presently Goha said, "Well, shall we go on?" the child, sitting there between the road and the gulfs of sky and sea, shook her head. The sun was warm, and they had walked a long way since their breakfast in the dell.

Goha brought out their water bottle, and they drank again; then she brought out a bag of raisins and walnuts and gave it to the child.

"We're in sight of where we're going," she said, "and I'd like to be there before dark, if we can. I'm anxious to see Ogion. You'll be very tired, but we won't walk fast. And we'll be there safe and warm tonight. Keep the bag, tuck it in your belt. Raisins make your legs strong. Would you like a staff—like a wizard—to help you walk?"

Therru munched and nodded. Goha took out her knife and cut a strong shoot of hazel for the child, and then seeing an alder fallen above the road, broke off a branch of it and trimmed it to make herself a stout, light stick.

They set off again, and the child trudged along, beguiled by raisins. Goha sang to amuse them both, love songs and shepherd's songs and ballads she had learned in the Middle Valley; but all at once her voice hushed in the middle of a tune. She

stopped, putting out her hand in a warning gesture.

The four men ahead of them on the road had seen her. There was no use trying to hide in the woods till they went on or went by.

"Travelers," she said quietly to Therru, and walked on. She took a good grip on her alder stick.

What Lark had said about gangs and thieves was not just the complaint each generation makes that things aren't what they used to be and the world's going to the dogs. In the last several years there had been a loss of peace and trust in the towns and countrysides of Gont. Young men behaved like strangers among their own people, abusing hospitality, stealing, selling what they stole. Beggary was common where it had been rare, and the unsatisfied beggar threatened violence. Women did not like to go alone in the streets and roads, nor did they like that loss of freedom. Some of the young women ran off to join the gangs of thieves and poachers. Often they came home within the year, sullen, bruised, and pregnant. And among village sorcerers and witches there was rumor of matters of their profession going amiss: charms that had always cured did not cure; spells of finding found nothing, or the wrong thing; love potions drove men into frenzies not of desire but of murderous jealousy. And worse than this, they said, people who knew nothing of the art of magic, the laws and limits of it and the dangers of breaking them, were calling themselves people of power, promising wonders of wealth and health to their followers, promising even immortality.

Ivy, the witch of Goha's village, had spoken darkly of this weakening of magic, and so had Beech, the sorcerer of Valmouth. He was a shrewd and modest man, who had come to help Ivy do what little could be done to lessen the pain and scarring of Therru's burns. He had said to Goha, "I think a time in which such things as this occur must be a time of ruining, the end of an age. How many hundred years since there was a king in Havnor? It can't go on so. We must turn to the center again or be lost, island against island, man against man, father against child. . . ." He had glanced at her, somewhat timidly, yet with his clear, shrewd look. "The Ring of Erreth-Akbe is restored to the Tower in Havnor," he said. "I know who brought it there. . . . That was the sign, surely, that was the sign of the new age to come! But we haven't acted on it. We have no king. We have no center. We must find our heart, our strength. Maybe the Archmage will act at last." And he added, with confidence, "After all, he is from Gont."

But no word of any deed of the Archmage, or any heir to the Throne in Havnor, had come; and things went badly on.

So it was with fear and a grim anger that Goha saw the four men on the road before her step two to each side, so that she and the child would have to pass between them.

As they went walking steadily forward, Therru kept very close beside her, holding her head bent down, but she did not take her hand.

One of the men, a big-chested fellow with coarse black hairs on his upper lip drooping over his mouth, began to speak, grinning a little. “Hey, there,” he said, but Goha spoke at the same time and louder. “Out of my way!” she said, raising her alder stick as if it were a wizard’s staff—“I have business with Ogion!” She strode between the men and straight on, Therru trotting beside her. The men, mistaking effrontery for witchery, stood still. Ogion’s name perhaps still held power. Or perhaps there was a power in Goha, or in the child. For when the two had gone by, one of the men said, “Did you see that?” and spat and made the sign to avert evil.

“Witch and her monster brat,” another said. “Let ’em go!”

Another, a man in a leather cap and jerkin, stood staring for a moment while the others slouched on their way. His face looked sick and stricken, yet he seemed to be turning to follow the woman and child, when the hairy-lipped man called to him, “Come on, Handy!” and he obeyed.

Out of sight around the turn of the road, Goha had picked up Therru and hurried on with her until she had to set her down and stand gasping. The child asked no questions and made no delays. As soon as Goha could go on again, the child walked as fast as she could beside her, holding her hand.

“You’re red,” she said. “Like fire.”

She spoke seldom, and not clearly, her voice being very hoarse; but Goha could understand her.

“I’m angry,” Goha said with a kind of laugh. “When I’m angry I turn red. Like you people, you red people, you barbarians of the western lands . . . Look, there’s a town there ahead, that’ll be Oak Springs. It’s the only village on this road. We’ll stop there and rest a little. Maybe we can get some milk. And then, if we can go on, if you think you can walk on up to the Falcon’s Nest, we’ll be there by nightfall, I hope.”

The child nodded. She opened her bag of raisins and walnuts and ate a few. They trudged on.

The sun had long set when they came through the village and to Ogion’s house on the cliff-top. The first stars glimmered above a dark mass of clouds in the west over the high horizon of the sea. The sea wind blew, bowing short grasses. A goat

bleated in the pastures behind the low, small house. The one window shone dim yellow.

Goha stood her stick and Therru's against the wall by the door, and held the child's hand, and knocked once.

There was no answer.

She pushed the door open. The fire on the hearth was out, cinders and grey ashes, but an oil lamp on the table made a tiny seed of light, and from his mattress on the floor in the far corner of the room Ogion said, "Come in, Tenar."

Chapter 3

Ogion

She bedded down the child on the cot in the western alcove. She built up the fire. She went and sat down beside Ogion's pallet, cross-legged on the floor.

"No one looking after you!"

"I sent 'em off," he whispered.

His face was as dark and hard as ever, but his hair was thin and white, and the dim lamp made no spark of light in his eyes.

"You could have died alone," she said, fierce.

"Help me do that," the old man said.

"Not yet," she pleaded, stooping, laying her forehead on his hand.

"Not tonight," he agreed. "Tomorrow."

He lifted his hand to stroke her hair once, having that much strength.

She sat up again. The fire had caught. Its light played on the walls and low ceiling and sent shadows to thicken in the corners of the long room.

"If Ged would come," the old man murmured.

"Have you sent to him?"

"Lost," Ogion said. "He's lost. A cloud. A mist over the lands. He went into the west. Carrying the branch of the rowan tree. Into the dark mist. I've lost my hawk."

"No, no, no," she whispered. "He'll come back."

They were silent. The fire's warmth began to penetrate them both, letting Ogion relax and drift in and out of sleep, letting Tenar find rest pleasant after the long day afoot. She rubbed her feet and her aching shoulders. She had carried Therru part of the last long climb, for the child had begun to gasp with weariness as she tried to keep up.

Tenar got up, heated water, and washed the dust of the road from her. She heated milk, and ate bread she found in Ogion's larder, and came back to sit by him. While he slept, she sat thinking, watching his face and the firelight and the

shadows.

She thought how a girl had sat silent, thinking, in the night, a long time ago and far away, a girl in a windowless room, brought up to know herself only as the one who had been eaten, priestess and servant of the powers of the darkness of the earth. And there had been a woman who would sit up in the peaceful silence of a farmhouse when husband and children slept, to think, to be alone an hour. And there was the widow who had carried a burned child here, who sat by the side of the dying, who waited for a man to return. Like all women, any woman, doing what women do. But it was not by the names of the servant or the wife or the widow that Ogion had called her. Nor had Ged, in the darkness of the Tombs. Nor—longer ago, farther away than all—had her mother, the mother she remembered only as the warmth and lion-color of firelight, the mother who had given her her name.

"I am Tenar," she whispered. The fire, catching a dry branch of pine, leaped up in a bright yellow tongue of flame.

Ogion's breathing became troubled and he struggled for air. She helped him as she could till he found some ease. They both slept for a while, she drowsing by his dazed and drifting silence, broken by strange words. Once in the deep night he said aloud, as if meeting a friend in the road, "Are you here, then? Have you seen him?" And again, when Tenar roused herself to build up the fire, he began to speak, but this time it seemed he spoke to someone in his memory of years long gone, for he said clearly as a child might, "I tried to help her, but the roof of the house fell down. It fell on them. It was the earthquake." Tenar listened. She too had seen earthquake. "I tried to help!" said the boy in the old man's voice, in pain. Then the gasping struggle to breathe began again.

At first light Tenar was wakened by a sound she thought at first was the sea. It was a great rushing of wings. A flock of birds was flying over, low, so many that their wings stormed and the window was darkened by their quick shadows. It seemed they circled the house once and then were gone. They made no call or cry, and she did not know what birds they were.

People came that morning from the village of Re Albi, which Ogion's house stood apart from to the north. A goat-girl came, and a woman for the milk of Ogion's goats, and others to ask what they might do for him. Moss, the village witch, fingered the alder stick and the hazel switch by the door and peered in hopefully, but not even she ventured to come in, and Ogion growled from his pallet, "Send 'em away! Send 'em all away!"

He seemed stronger and more comfortable. When little Therru woke, he spoke

to her in the dry, kind, quiet way Tenar remembered. The child went out to play in the sun, and he said to Tenar, "What is the name you call her?"

He knew the True Language of the Making, but he had never learned any Kargish at all.

"*Therru* means burning, the flaming of fire," she said.

"Ah, ah," he said, and his eyes gleamed, and he frowned. He seemed to grope for words for a moment. "That one," he said, "that one—they will fear her."

"They fear her now," Tenar said bitterly.

The mage shook his head.

"Teach her, Tenar," he whispered. "Teach her all!—Not Roke. They are afraid—Why did I let you go? Why did you go? To bring her here—too late?"

"Be still, be still," she told him tenderly, for he struggled with words and breath and could find neither. He shook his head, and gasped, "Teach her!" and lay still.

He would not eat, and only drank a little water. In the middle of the day he slept. Waking in the late afternoon, he said, "Now, daughter," and sat up.

Tenar took his hand, smiling at him.

"Help me get up."

"No, no."

"Yes," he said. "Outside. I can't die indoors."

"Where would you go?"

"Anywhere. But if I could, the forest path," he said. "The beech above the meadow."

When she saw he was able to get up and determined to get outdoors, she helped him.

Together they got to the door, where he stopped and looked around the one room of his house. In the dark corner to the right of the doorway his tall staff leaned against the wall, shining a little. Tenar reached out to give it to him, but he shook his head. "No," he said, "not that." He looked around again as if for something missing, forgotten. "Come on," he said at last.

When the bright wind from the west blew on his face and he looked out at the high horizon, he said, "That's good."

"Let me get some people from the village to make a litter and carry you," she said. "They're all waiting to do something for you."

"I want to walk," the old man said.

Therru came around the house and watched solemnly as Ogion and Tenar went, step by step, and stopping every five or six steps for Ogion to gasp, across

the tangled meadow toward the woods that climbed steep up the mountainside from the inner side of the cliff-top. The sun was hot and the wind cold. It took them a very long time to cross that meadow. Ogion's face was grey and his legs shook like the grass in the wind when they got at last to the foot of a big, young beech tree just inside the forest, a few yards up the beginning of the mountain path. There he sank down between the roots of the tree, his back against its trunk. For a long time he could not move or speak, and his heart, pounding and faltering, shook his body. He nodded finally and whispered, "All right."

Therru had followed them at a distance. Tenar went to her and held her and talked to her a little. She came back to Ogion. "She's bringing a rug," she said.

"Not cold."

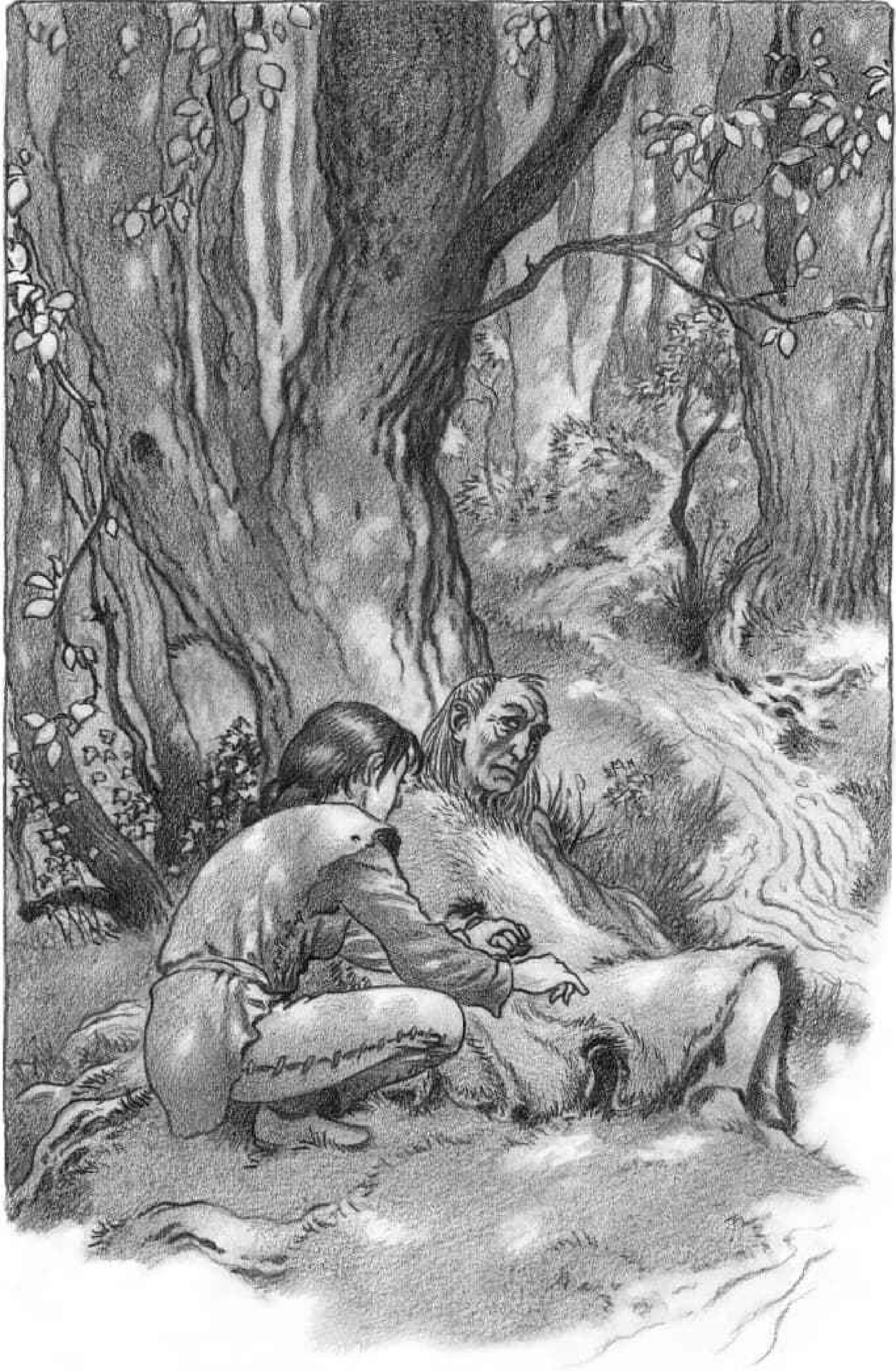
"*I'm* cold."

There was the flicker of a smile on her face.

The child came lugging a goat's-wool blanket. She whispered to Tenar and ran off again.

"Heather will let her help milk the goats, and look after her," Tenar said to Ogion. "So I can stay here with you."

"Never one thing, for you," he said in the hoarse whistling whisper that was all the voice he had left.



“No. Always at least two things, and usually more,” she said. “But I am here.”

He nodded.

For a long time he did not speak, but sat back against the tree trunk, his eyes closed. Watching his face, Tenar saw it change as slowly as the light changed in the west.

He opened his eyes and gazed through a gap in the thickets at the western sky. He seemed to watch something, some act or deed, in that far, clear, golden space of light. He whispered once, hesitant, as if unsure, “The dragon—”

The sun was down, the wind fallen.

Ogion looked at Tenar.

“Over,” he whispered with exultation. “All changed!—Changed, Tenar! Wait—wait here, for—” A shaking took his body, tossing him like the branch of a tree in a great wind. He gasped. His eyes closed and opened, gazing beyond her. He laid his hand on hers; she bent down to him; he spoke his name to her, so that after his death he might be truly known.

He gripped her hand and shut his eyes and began once more the struggle to breathe, until there was no more breath. He lay then like one of the roots of the tree, while the stars came out and shone through the leaves and branches of the forest.

Tenar sat with the dead man in the dusk and dark. A lantern gleamed like a firefly across the meadow. She had laid the woolen blanket across them both, but her hand that held his hand had grown cold, as if it held a stone. She touched her forehead to his hand once more. She stood up, stiff and dizzy, her body feeling strange to her, and went to meet and guide whoever was coming with the light.

That night his neighbors sat with Ogion, and he did not send them away.

The mansion house of the Lord of Re Albi stood on an outcrop of rocks on the mountainside above the Overfell. Early in the morning, long before the sun had cleared the mountain, the wizard in the service of that lord came down through the village; and very soon after, another wizard came toiling up the steep road from Gont Port, having set out in darkness. Word had come to them that Ogion was dying, or their power was such that they knew of the passing of a great mage.

The village of Re Albi had no sorcerer, only its mage, and a witchwoman to perform the lowly jobs of finding and mending and bonesetting, which people would not bother the mage with. Aunty Moss was a dour creature, unmarried, like most witches, and unwashed, with greying hair tied in curious charm-knots, and

eyes red-rimmed from herb-smoke. It was she who had come across the meadow with the lantern, and with Tenar and the others she had watched the night by Ogion's body. She had set a wax candle in a glass shade, there in the forest, and had burned sweet oils in a dish of clay; she had said the words that should be said, and done what should be done. When it came to touching the body to prepare it for burial, she had looked once at Tenar as if for permission, and then had gone on with her offices. Village witches usually saw to the homing, as they called it, of the dead, and often to the burial.

When the wizard came down from the mansion house, a tall young man with a silvery staff of pinewood, and the other one came up from Gont Port, a stout middle-aged man with a short yew staff, Aunty Moss did not look at them with her bloodshot eyes, but ducked and bowed and drew back, gathering up her poor charms and witcheries.

When she had laid out the corpse as it should lie to be buried, on the left side with the knees bent, she had put in the upturned left hand a tiny charm-bundle, something wrapped in soft goatskin and tied with colored cord. The wizard of Re Albi flicked it away with the tip of his staff.

"Is the grave dug?" asked the wizard of Gont Port.

"Yes," said the wizard of Re Albi. "It is dug in the graveyard of my lord's house," and he pointed toward the mansion house up on the mountain.

"I see," said Gont Port. "I had thought our mage would be buried in all honor in the city he saved from earthquake."

"My lord desires the honor," said Re Albi.

"But it would seem—" Gont Port began, and stopped, not liking to argue, but not ready to give in to the young man's easy claim. He looked down at the dead man. "He must be buried nameless," he said with regret and bitterness. "I walked all night, but came too late. A great loss made greater!"

The young wizard said nothing.

"His name was Aihal," Tenar said. "His wish was to lie here, where he lies now."

Both men looked at her. The young man, seeing a middle-aged village woman, simply turned away. The man from Gont Port stared a moment and said, "Who are you?"

"I'm called Flint's widow, Goha," she said. "Who I am is your business to know, I think. But not mine to say."

At this, the wizard of Re Albi found her worthy of a brief stare. "Take care,

woman, how you speak to men of power!"

"Wait, wait," said Gont Port, with a patting gesture, trying to calm Re Albi's indignation, and still gazing at Tenar. "You were—You were his ward, once?"

"And friend," Tenar said. Then she turned away her head and stood silent. She had heard the anger in her voice as she said that word, "friend." She looked down at her friend, a corpse ready for the ground, lost and still. They stood over him, alive and full of power, offering no friendship, only contempt, rivalry, anger.

"I'm sorry," she said. "It was a long night. I was with him when he died."

"It is not—" the young wizard began, but unexpectedly old Aunty Moss interrupted him, saying loudly, "She was. Yes, she was. Nobody else but her. He sent for her. He sent young Townsend the sheep-dealer to tell her come, clear down round the mountain, and he waited his dying till she did come and was with him, and then he died, and he died where he would be buried, here."

"And—" said the older man, "and he told you—?"

"His name." Tenar looked at them, and do what she would, the incredulity on the older man's face, the contempt on the other's, brought out an answering disrespect in her. "I said that name," she said. "Must I repeat it to you?"

To her consternation she saw from their expressions that in fact they had not heard the name, Ogion's true name; they had not paid attention to her.

"Oh!" she said. "This is a bad time—a time when even such a name can go unheard, can fall like a stone! Is listening not power? Listen, then: his name was Aihal. His name in death is Aihal. In the songs he will be known as Aihal of Gont. If there are songs to be made anymore. He was a silent man. Now he's very silent. Maybe there will be no songs, only silence. I don't know. I'm very tired. I've lost my father and dear friend." Her voice failed; her throat closed on a sob. She turned to go. She saw on the forest path the little charm-bundle Aunty Moss had made. She picked it up, knelt down by the corpse, kissed the open palm of the left hand, and laid the bundle on it. There on her knees she looked up once more at the two men. She spoke quietly.

"Will you see to it," she said, "that his grave is dug here, where he desired it?"

First the older man, then the younger, nodded.

She got up, smoothing down her skirt, and started back across the meadow in the morning light.

Chapter 4

Kalessin

"Wait," Ogion, who was Aihal now, had said to her, just before the wind of death had shaken him and torn him loose from living. "Over—all changed," he had whispered, and then, "Tenar, wait—" But he had not said what she should wait for. The change he had seen or known, perhaps; but what change? Was it his own death he meant, his own life that was over? He had spoken with joy, exulting. He had charged her to wait.

"What else have I to do?" she said to herself, sweeping the floor of his house. "What else have I ever done?" And, speaking to her memory of him, "Shall I wait here, in your house?"

"Yes," said Aihal the Silent, silently, smiling.

So she swept out the house and cleaned the hearth and aired the mattresses. She threw out some chipped crockery and a leaky pan, but she handled them gently. She even put her cheek against a cracked plate as she took it out to the midden, for it was evidence of the old mage's illness this past year. Austere he had been, living as plain as a poor farmer, but when his eyes were clear and his strength in him, he would never have used a broken plate or let a pan go unmended. These signs of his weakness grieved her, making her wish she had been with him to look after him. "I would have liked that," she said to her memory of him, but he said nothing. He never would have anybody to look after him but himself. Would he have said to her, "You have better things to do?" She did not know. He was silent. But that she did right to stay here in his house, now, she was certain.

Shandy and her old husband, Clearbrook, who had been at the farm in Middle Valley longer than she herself had, would look after the flocks and the orchard; the other couple on the farm, Tiff and Sis, would get the field crops in. The rest would have to take care of itself for a while. Her raspberry canes would be picked by the neighborhood children. That was too bad; she loved raspberries. Up here on the

Overfell, with the sea wind always blowing, it was too cold to grow raspberries. But Ogion's little old peach tree in the sheltered nook of the house wall facing south bore eighteen peaches, and Therru watched them like a mousing cat till the day she came in and said in her hoarse, unclear voice, "Two of the peaches are all red and yellow."

"Ah," said Tenar. They went together to the peach tree and picked the two first ripe peaches and ate them there, unpeeled. The juice ran down their chins. They licked their fingers.

"Can I plant it?" said Therru, looking at the wrinkled stone of her peach.

"Yes. This is a good place, near the old tree. But not too close. So they both have room for their roots and branches."

The child chose a place and dug the tiny grave. She laid the stone in it and covered it over. Tenar watched her. In the few days they had been living here, Therru had changed, she thought. She was still unresponsive, without anger, without joy; but since they had been here her awful vigilance, her immobility, had almost imperceptibly relaxed. She had desired the peaches. She had thought of planting the stone, of increasing the number of peaches in the world. At Oak Farm she was unafraid of two people only, Tenar and Lark; but here she had taken quite easily to Heather, the goatherd of Re Albi, a bawling-voiced, gentle lackwit of twenty, who treated the child very much as another goat, a lame kid. That was all right. And Aunty Moss was all right too, no matter what she smelled like.

When Tenar had first lived in Re Albi, twenty-five years ago, Moss had not been an old witch but a young one. She had ducked and bowed and grinned at "the young lady," "the White Lady," Ogion's ward and student, never speaking to her but with the utmost respect. Tenar had felt that respect to be false, a mask for an envy and dislike and distrust that were all too familiar to her from women over whom she had been placed in a position of superiority, women who saw themselves as common and her as uncommon, as privileged. Priestess of the Tombs of Atuan or foreign ward of the Mage of Gont, she was set apart, set above. Men had given her power, men had shared their power with her. Women looked at her from outside, sometimes rivalrous, often with a trace of ridicule.

She had felt herself the one left outside, shut out. She had fled from the Powers of the desert tombs, and then she had left the powers of learning and skill offered her by her guardian, Ogion. She had turned her back on all that, gone to the other side, the other room, where the women lived, to be one of them. A wife, a farmer's wife, a mother, a householder, undertaking the power that a woman was born to,

the authority allotted her by the arrangements of mankind.

And there in the Middle Valley, Flint's wife, Goha, had been welcome, all in all, among the women; a foreigner to be sure, white-skinned and talking a bit strange, but a notable housekeeper, an excellent spinner, with well-behaved, well-grown children and a prospering farm: respectable. And among men she was Flint's woman, doing what a woman should do: bed, breed, bake, cook, clean, spin, sew, serve. A good woman. They approved of her. Flint did well for himself after all, they said. I wonder what a white woman's like, white all over? their eyes said, looking at her, until she got older and they no longer saw her.

Here, now, it was all changed, there was none of all that. Since she and Moss had kept the vigil for Ogion together, the witch had made it plain that she would be her friend, follower, servant, whatever Tenar wanted her to be. Tenar was not at all sure what she wanted Aunty Moss to be, finding her unpredictable, unreliable, incomprehensible, passionate, ignorant, sly, and dirty. But Moss got on with the burned child. Perhaps it was Moss who was working this change, this slight easing, in Therru. With her, Therru behaved as with everyone—blank, unanswering, docile in the way an inanimate thing, a stone, is docile. But the old woman had kept at her, offering her little sweets and treasures, bribing, coaxing, wheedling. "Come with Aunty Moss now, dearie! Come along and Aunty Moss'll show you the prettiest sight you ever saw. . . ."

Moss's nose leaned out over her toothless jaws and thin lips; there was a wart on her cheek the size of a cherry pit; her hair was a grey-black tangle of charm-knots and wisps; and she had a smell as strong and broad and deep and complicated as the smell of a fox's den. "Come into the forest with me, dearie!" said the old witches in the tales told to the children of Gont. "Come with me and I'll show you such a pretty sight!" And then the witch shut the child in her oven and baked it brown and ate it, or dropped it into her well, where it hopped and croaked dismally forever, or put it to sleep for a hundred years inside a great stone, till the King's Son should come, the Mage Prince, to shatter the stone with a word, wake the maiden with a kiss, and slay the wicked witch. . . .

"Come with me, dearie!" And she took the child into the fields and showed her a lark's nest in the green hay, or into the marshes to gather white hallows, wild mint, and blueberries. She did not have to shut the child in an oven, or change her into a monster, or seal her in stone. That had all been done already.

She was kind to Therru, but it was a wheedling kindness, and when they were together it seemed that she talked to the child a great deal. Tenar did not know

what Moss was telling or teaching her, whether she should let the witch fill the child's head with stuff. *Weak as woman's magic, wicked as woman's magic*, she had heard said a hundred times. And indeed she had seen that the witchery of such women as Moss or Ivy was often weak in sense and sometimes wicked in intent or through ignorance. Village witches, though they might know many spells and charms and some of the great songs, were never trained in the High Arts or the principles of magery. No woman was so trained. Wizardry was a man's work, a man's skill; magic was made by men. There had never been a woman mage. Though some few had called themselves wizard or sorceress, their power had been untrained, strength without art or knowledge, half frivolous, half dangerous.

The ordinary village witch, like Moss, lived on a few words of the True Speech handed down as great treasures from older witches or bought at high cost from sorcerers, and a supply of common spells of finding and mending, much meaningless ritual and mystery-making and jibberish, a solid experiential training in midwifery, bonesetting, and curing animal and human ailments, a good knowledge of herbs mixed with a mess of superstitions—all this built up on whatever native gift she might have of healing, chanting, changing, or spell-casting. Such a mixture might be a good one or a bad one. Some witches were fierce, bitter women, ready to do harm and knowing no reason not to do harm. Most were midwives and healers with a few love potions, fertility charms, and potency spells on the side, and a good deal of quiet cynicism about them. A few, having wisdom though no learning, used their gift purely for good, though they could not tell, as any prentice wizard could, the reason for what they did, and prate of the Balance and the Way of Power to justify their action or abstention. "I follow my heart," one of these women had said to Tenar when she was Ogion's ward and pupil. "Lord Ogion is a great mage. He does you great honor, teaching you. But look and see, child, if all he's taught you isn't finally to follow your heart."

Tenar had thought even then that the wise woman was right, and yet not altogether right; there was something left out of that. And she still thought so.

Watching Moss with Therru now, she thought Moss was following her heart, but it was a dark, wild, queer heart, like a crow, going its own ways on its own errands. And she thought that Moss might be drawn to Therru not only by kindness but by Therru's hurt, by the harm that had been done her: by violence, by fire.

Nothing Therru did or said, however, showed that she was learning anything from Aunty Moss except where the lark nested and the blueberries grew and how

to make cat's cradles one-handed. Therru's right hand had been so eaten by fire that it had healed into a kind of club, the thumb usable only as a pincer, like a crab's claw. But Aunty Moss had an amazing set of cat's cradles for four fingers and a thumb, and rhymes to go with the figures—

Churn churn cherry all!
Burn burn bury all!
Come, dragon, come!

—and the string would form four triangles that flicked into a square. . . . Therru never sang aloud, but Tenar heard her whispering the chant under her breath as she made the figures, alone, sitting on the doorstep of the mage's house.

And, Tenar thought, what bond linked her, herself, to the child, beyond pity, beyond mere duty to the helpless? Lark would have kept her if Tenar had not taken her. But Tenar had taken her without ever asking herself why. Had she been following her heart? Ogion had asked nothing about the child, but he had said, "They will fear her." And Tenar had replied, "They do," and truly. Maybe she herself feared the child, as she feared cruelty, and rape, and fire. Was fear the bond that held her?

"Goha," Therru said, sitting on her heels under the peach tree, looking at the place in the hard summer dirt where she had planted the peach stone, "what are dragons?"

"Great creatures," Tenar said, "like lizards, but longer than a ship—bigger than a house. With wings, like birds. They breathe out fire."

"Do they come here?"

"No," Tenar said.

Therru asked no more.

"Has Aunty Moss been telling you about dragons?"

Therru shook her head. "You did," she said.

"Ah," said Tenar. And presently, "The peach you planted will need water to grow. Once a day, till the rains come."

Therru got up and trotted off around the corner of the house to the well. Her legs and feet were perfect, unhurt. Tenar liked to see her walk or run, the dark, dusty, pretty little feet on the earth. She came back with Ogion's watering-jug, struggling along with it, and tipped out a small flood over the new planting.

“So you remember the story about when people and dragons were all the same. . . . It told how the humans came here, eastward, but the dragons all stayed in the far western isles. A long, long way away.”

Therru nodded. She did not seem to be paying attention, but when Tenar, saying “the western isles,” pointed out to the sea, Therru turned her face to the high, bright horizon glimpsed between staked bean-plants and the milking shed.

A goat appeared on the roof of the milking shed and arranged itself in profile to them, its head nobly poised; apparently it considered itself to be a mountain goat.

“Sippy’s got loose again,” said Tenar.

“Hesssss! Hesssss!” went Therru, imitating Heather’s goat call; and Heather herself appeared by the bean-patch fence, saying “Hesssss!” up at the goat, which ignored her, gazing thoughtfully down at the beans.

Tenar left the three of them to play the catching-Sippy game. She wandered on past the bean patch toward the edge of the cliff and along it. Ogion’s house stood apart from the village and closer than any other house to the edge of the Overfell, here a steep, grassy slope broken by ledges and outcrops of rock, where goats could be pastured. As you went on north the drop grew ever steeper, till it began to fall sheer; and on the path the rock of the great ledge showed through the soil, till a mile or so north of the village the Overfell had narrowed to a shelf of reddish sandstone hanging above the sea that undercut its base two thousand feet below.

Nothing grew at that far end of the Overfell but lichens and rockworts and here and there a blue daisy, wind-stunted, like a button dropped on the rough, crumbling stone. Inland of the cliff’s edge to the north and east, above a narrow strip of marshland the dark, tremendous side of Gont Mountain rose up, forested almost to the peak. The cliff stood so high above the bay that one must look down to see its outer shores and the vague lowlands of Essary. Beyond them, in all the south and west, there was nothing but the sky above the sea.

Tenar had liked to go there in the years she had lived in Re Albi. Ogion had loved the forests, but she, who had lived in a desert where the only trees for a hundred miles were a gnarled orchard of peach and apple, hand watered in the endless summers, where nothing grew green and moist and easy, where there was nothing but a mountain and a great plain and the sky—she liked the cliff’s edge better than the enclosing woods. She liked having nothing at all over her head.

The lichens, the grey rockwort, the stemless daisies, she liked them, too; they were familiar. She sat down on the shelving rock a few feet from the edge and looked out to sea as she had used to do. The sun was hot but the ceaseless wind

cooled the sweat on her face and arms. She leaned back on her hands and thought of nothing, sun and wind and sky and sea filling her, making her transparent to sun, wind, sky, sea. But her left hand reminded her of its existence, and she looked round to see what was scratching the heel of her hand. It was a tiny thistle, crouched in a crack in the sandstone, barely lifting its colorless spikes into the light and wind. It nodded stiffly as the wind blew, resisting the wind, rooted in rock. She gazed at it for a long time.

When she looked out to sea again she saw, blue in the blue haze where sea met sky, the line of an island: Oranéa, easternmost of the Inner Isles.

She gazed at that faint dream-shape, dreaming, until a bird flying from the west over the sea drew her gaze. It was not a gull, for it flew steadily, and too high to be a pelican. Was it a wild goose, or an albatross, the great, rare voyager of the open sea, come among the islands? She watched the slow beat of the wings, far out and high in the dazzling air. Then she got to her feet, retreating a little from the cliff's edge, and stood motionless, her heart going hard and her breath caught in her throat, watching the sinuous, iron-dark body borne by long, webbed wings as red as fire, the outreaching claws, the coils of smoke fading behind it in the air.

Straight to Gont it flew, straight to the Overfell, straight to her. She saw the glitter of rust-black scales and the gleam of the long eye. She saw the red tongue that was a tongue of flame. The stink of burning filled the wind, as with a hissing roar the dragon, turning to land on the shelf of rock, breathed out a sigh of fire.

Its feet clashed on the rock. The thorny tail, writhing, rattled, and the wings, scarlet where the sun shone through them, stormed and rustled as they folded down to the mailed flanks. The head turned slowly. The dragon looked at the woman who stood there within reach of its scythe-blade talons. The woman looked at the dragon. She felt the heat of its body.

She had been told that men must not look into a dragon's eyes, but that was nothing to her. It gazed straight at her from yellow eyes under armored carapaces wide-set above the narrow nose and flaring, fuming nostrils. And her small, soft face and dark eyes gazed straight at it.

Neither of them spoke.

The dragon turned its head aside a little so that she was not destroyed when it did speak, or perhaps it laughed—a great "Hah!" of orange flame.

Then it lowered its body into a crouch and spoke, but not to her.

"Ahivaraihe, Ged," it said, mildly enough, smokily, with a flicker of the burning tongue; and it lowered its head.

Tenar saw for the first time, then, the man astride its back. In the notch between two of the high sword-thorns that rose in a row down its spine he sat, just behind the neck and above the shoulders where the wings had root. His hands were clenched on the rust-dark mail of the dragon's neck, and his head leaned against the base of the sword-thorn, as if he were asleep.

"Ahi eheraihe, Ged!" said the dragon, a little louder, its long mouth seeming always to smile, showing the teeth as long as Tenar's forearm, yellowish, with white, sharp tips.

The man did not stir.

The dragon turned its long head and looked again at Tenar.

"Sobriost," it said, in a whisper of steel sliding over steel.

That word of the Language of the Making she knew. Ogion had taught her all she would learn of that tongue. Go up, the dragon said: mount! And she saw the steps to mount. The taloned foot, the crooked elbow, the shoulder-joint, the first musculature of the wing: four steps.

She too said, "Hah!" but not in a laugh, only trying to get her breath, which kept sticking in her throat; and she lowered her head a moment to stop her dizzy faintness. Then she went forward, past the talons and the long lipless mouth and the long yellow eye, and mounted the shoulder of the dragon. She took the man's arm. He did not move, but surely he was not dead, for the dragon had brought him here and spoken to him. "Come on," she said, and then seeing his face as she loosened the clenched grip of his left hand, "Come on, Ged. Come on. . . ."

He raised his head a little. His eyes were open, but unseeing. She had to climb around him, scratching her legs on the hot, mailed hide of the dragon, and unclench his right hand from a horny knob at the base of the sword-thorn. She got him to take hold of her arms, and so could carry-drag him down those four strange stairs to earth.

He roused enough to try to hold on to her, but there was no strength in him. He sprawled off the dragon onto the rock like a sack unloaded, and lay there.

The dragon turned its immense head and in a completely animal gesture nosed and sniffed at the man's body.

It lifted its head, and its wings too half lifted with a vast, metallic sound. It shifted its feet away from Ged, closer to the edge of the cliff. Turning back the head on the thorned neck, it stared once more directly at Tenar, and its voice like the dry roar of a kiln-fire spoke: *"Thesse Kalessin."*

The sea wind whistled in the dragon's half-open wings.

"Thesse Tenar," the woman said in a clear, shaking voice.

The dragon looked away, westward, over the sea. It twitched its long body with a clink and clash of iron scales, then abruptly opened its wings, crouched, and leapt straight out from the cliff onto the wind. The dragging tail scored the sandstone as it passed. The red wings beat down, lifted, and beat down, and already Kalessin was far from land, flying straight, flying west.

Tenar watched it till it was no larger than a wild goose or a gull. The air was cold. When the dragon had been there it had been hot, furnace-hot, with the dragon's inward fire. Tenar shivered. She sat down on the rock beside Ged and began to cry. She hid her face in her arms and wept aloud. "What can I do?" she cried. "What can I do now?"

Presently she wiped her eyes and nose on her sleeve, put back her hair with both hands, and turned to the man who lay beside her. He lay so still, so easy on the bare rock, as if he might lie there forever.

Tenar sighed. There was nothing she could do, but there was always the next thing to be done.

She could not carry him. She would have to get help. That meant leaving him alone. It seemed to her that he was too near the cliff's edge. If he tried to get up he might fall, weak and dizzy as he would be. How could she move him? He did not rouse at all when she spoke and touched him. She took him under the shoulders and tried to pull him, and to her surprise succeeded; dead weight as he was, the weight was not much. Resolute, she dragged him ten or fifteen feet inland, off the bare rock shelf onto a bit of dirt, where dry bunchgrass gave some illusion of shelter. There she had to leave him. She could not run, for her legs shook and her breath still came in sobs. She walked as fast as she could to Ogion's house, calling out as she approached it to Heather, Moss, and Therru.

The child appeared around the milking shed and stood, as her way was, obedient to Tenar's call but not coming forward to greet or be greeted.

"Therru, run into town and ask anyone to come—anybody strong—there's a man hurt on the cliff."

Therru stood there. She had never gone alone into the village. She was frozen between obedience and fear. Tenar saw that and said, "Is Aunty Moss here? Is Heather? The three of us can carry him. Only, quick, quick, Therru!" She felt that if she let Ged lie unprotected there he would surely die. He would be gone when she came back—dead, fallen, taken by dragons. Anything could happen. She must hurry before it happened. Flint had died of a stroke in his fields and she had not

been with him. He had died alone. The shepherd had found him lying by the gate. Ogion had died and she could not keep him from dying, she could not give him breath. Ged had come home to die and it was the end of everything, there was nothing left, nothing to be done, but she must do it. "Quick, Therru! Bring anyone!"

She started shakily toward the village herself, but saw old Moss hurrying across the pasture, stumping along with her thick hawthorn stick. "Did you call me, dearie?"

Moss's presence was an immediate relief. She began to get her breath and be able to think. Moss wasted no time in questions, but hearing there was a man hurt who must be moved, got the heavy canvas mattress-cover that Tenar had been airing, and lugged it out to the end of the Overfell. She and Tenar rolled Ged onto it and were dragging this conveyance laboriously homeward when Heather came trotting along, followed by Therru and Sippy. Heather was young and strong, and with her help they could lift the canvas like a litter and carry the man to the house.

Tenar and Therru slept in the alcove in the west wall of the long single room. There was only Ogion's bed at the far end, covered now with a heavy linen sheet. There they laid the man. Tenar put Ogion's blanket over him, while Moss muttered charms around the bed, and Heather and Therru stood and stared.

"Let him be now," said Tenar, leading them all to the front part of the house.

"Who is he?" Heather asked.

"What was he doing on the Overfell?" Moss asked.

"You know him, Moss. He was Ogion's—Aihal's prentice, once."

The witch shook her head. "That was the lad from Ten Alders, dearie," she said. "The one that's Archmage in Roke, now."

Tenar nodded.

"No, dearie," said Moss. "This looks like him. But isn't him. This man's no mage. Not even a sorcerer."

Heather looked from one to the other, entertained. She did not understand most things people said, but she liked to hear them say them.

"But I know him, Moss. It's Sparrowhawk." Saying the name, Ged's use-name, released a tenderness in her, so that for the first time she thought and felt that this was he indeed, and that all the years since she had first seen him were their bond. She saw a light like a star in darkness, underground, long ago, and his face in the light. "I know him, Moss." She smiled, and then smiled more broadly. "He's the first man I ever saw," she said.

Moss mumbled and shifted. She did not like to contradict "Mistress Goha," but she was perfectly unconvinced. "There's tricks, disguises, transformations, changes," she said. "Better be careful, dearie. How did he get where you found him, away out there? Did any see him come through the village?"

"None of you—saw—?"

They stared at her. She tried to say "the dragon" and could not. Her lips and tongue would not form the word. But a word formed itself with them, making itself with her mouth and breath. "Kalessin," she said.

Therru was staring at her. A wave of warmth, heat, seemed to flow from the child, as if she were in fever. She said nothing, but moved her lips as if repeating the name, and that fever heat burned around her.

"Tricks!" Moss said. "Now that our mage is gone there'll be all kinds of tricksters coming round."

"I came from Atuan to Havnor, from Havnor to Gont, with Sparrowhawk, in an open boat," Tenar said dryly. "You saw him when he brought me here, Moss. He wasn't archmage then. But he was the same, the same man. Are there other scars like those?"

Confronted, the older woman became still, collecting herself. She glanced at Therru. "No," she said. "But—"

"Do you think I wouldn't know him?"

Moss twisted her mouth, frowned, rubbed one thumb with the other, looking at her hands. "There's evil things in the world, mistress," she said. "A thing that takes a man's form and body, but his soul's gone—eaten—"

"The gebbeth?"

Moss cringed at the word spoken openly. She nodded. "They do say, once the mage Sparrowhawk came here, long ago, before you came with him. And a thing of darkness came with him—following him. Maybe it still does. Maybe—"

"The dragon who brought him here," Tenar said, "called him by his true name. And I know that name." Wrath at the witch's obstinate suspicion rang in her voice.

Moss stood mute. Her silence was better argument than her words.

"Maybe the shadow on him is his death," Tenar said. "Maybe he's dying. I don't know. If Ogion—"

At the thought of Ogion she was in tears again, thinking how Ged had come too late. She swallowed the tears and went to the woodbox for kindling for the fire. She gave Therru the kettle to fill, touching her face as she spoke to her. The seamed and slabby scars were hot to touch, but the child was not feverish. Tenar knelt to

make the fire. Somebody in this fine household—a witch, a widow, a cripple, and a half-wit—had to do what must be done, and not frighten the child with weeping. But the dragon was gone, and was there nothing to come anymore but death?

Chapter 5

Bettering

He lay like the dead but was not dead. Where had he been? What had he come through? That night, in firelight, Tenar took the stained, worn, sweat-stiffened clothes off him. She washed him and let him lie naked between the linen sheet and the blanket of soft, heavy goat's-wool. Though a short, slight-built man, he had been compact, vigorous; now he was thin as if worn down to the bone, worn away, fragile. Even the scars that ridged his shoulder and the left side of his face from temple to jaw seemed lessened, silvery. And his hair was grey.

I'm sick of mourning, Tenar thought. Sick of mourning, sick of grief. I will not grieve for him! Didn't he come to me riding the dragon?

Once I meant to kill him, she thought. Now I'll make him live, if I can. She looked at him then with a challenge in her eye, and no pity.

"Which of us saved the other from the Labyrinth, Ged?"

Unhearing, unmoving, he slept. She was very tired. She bathed in the water she had heated to wash him with, and crept into bed beside the little, warm, silky silence that was Therru asleep. She slept, and her sleep opened out into a vast windy space hazy with rose and gold. She flew. Her voice called, "Kalessin!" A voice answered, calling from the gulfs of light.

When she woke, the birds were chirping in the fields and on the roof. Sitting up she saw the light of morning through the gnarled glass of the low window looking west. There was something in her, some seed or glimmer, too small to look at or think about, new. Therru was still asleep. Tenar sat by her looking out the small window at cloud and sunlight, thinking of her daughter Apple, trying to remember Apple as a baby. Only the faintest glimpse, vanishing as she turned to it—the small, fat body shaking with a laugh, the wispy, flying hair . . . And the second baby, Spark he got called as a joke, because he'd been struck off Flint. She did not know

his true name. He had been as sickly a child as Apple had been a sound one. Born early and very small, he had nearly died of the croup at two months, and for two years after that it had been like rearing a fledgling sparrow, you never knew if he would be alive in the morning. But he held on, the little spark wouldn't go out. And growing, he became a wiry boy, endlessly active, driven; no use on the farm; no patience with animals, plants, people; using words for his needs only, never for pleasure and the give and take of love and knowledge.

Ogion had come by on his wanderings when Apple was thirteen and Spark eleven. Ogion had named Apple then, in the springs of the Kaheda at the valley's head; beautiful she had walked in the green water, the woman-child, and he had given her her true name, Hayohe. He had stayed on at Oak Farm a day or two, and had asked the boy if he wanted to go wandering a little with him in the forests. Spark merely shook his head. "What would you do if you could?" the mage had asked him, and the boy said what he had never been able to say to father or mother: "Go to sea." So after Beech gave him his true name, three years later, he shipped as a sailor aboard a merchantman trading from Valmouth to Oranéa and North Havnor. From time to time he would come to the farm, but not often and never for long, though at his father's death it would be his property. He was white-skinned like Tenar, but grew tall like Flint, with a narrow face. He had not told his parents his true name. There might never be anyone he told it to. Tenar had not seen him for three years now. He might or might not know of his father's death. He might be dead himself, drowned, but she thought not. He would carry that spark his life over the waters, through the storms.

That was what it was like in her now, a spark; like the bodily certainty of a conception; a change, a new thing. What it was she would not ask. You did not ask. You did not ask a true name. It was given you, or not.

She got up and dressed. Early as it was, it was warm, and she built no fire. She sat in the doorway to drink a cup of milk and watch the shadow of Gont Mountain draw inward from the sea. There was as little wind as there could be on this air-swept shelf of rock, and the breeze had a midsummer feel, soft and rich, smelling of the meadows. There was a sweetness in the air, a change.

"All changed!" the old man had whispered, dying, joyful. Laying his hand on hers, giving her the gift, his name, giving it away.

"Aihal!" she whispered. For answer a couple of goats bleated, out behind the milking shed, waiting for Heather to come. "Be-eh," one said, and the other, deeper, metallic, "Bla-ah! Bla-ah!" Trust a goat, Flint used to say, to spoil anything.

Flint, a shepherd, had disliked goats. But Sparrowhawk had been a goatherd, here across the mountain, as a boy.

She went inside. She found Therru standing gazing at the sleeping man. She put her arm around the child, and though Therru usually shrank from or was passive to touch or caress, this time she accepted it and perhaps even leaned a little to Tenar.

Ged lay in the same exhausted, overwhelmed sleep. His face was turned to expose the four white scars that marked it.

"Was he burned?" Therru whispered.

Tenar did not answer at once. She did not know what those scars were. She had asked him long ago, in the Painted Room of the Labyrinth of Atuan, jeering: "A dragon?" And he had answered seriously, "Not a dragon. One of the kinship of the Nameless Ones; but I learned his name. . . ." And that was all she knew. But she knew what "burned" meant to the child.

"Yes," she said.

Therru continued to gaze at him. She had cocked her head to bring her one seeing eye to bear, which made her look like a little bird, a sparrow or a finch.

"Come along, finchling, birdlet, sleep's what he needs, you need a peach. Is there a peach ripe this morning?"

Therru trotted out to see, and Tenar followed her.

Eating her peach, the child studied the place where she had planted the peach pit yesterday. She was evidently disappointed that no tree had grown there, but she said nothing.

"Water it," said Tenar.

Aunty Moss arrived in the midmorning. One of her skills as a witch-handywoman was basketmaking, using the rushes of Overfell Marsh, and Tenar had asked her to teach her the art. As a child in Atuan, Tenar had learned how to learn. As a stranger in Gont, she had found that people liked to teach. She had learned to be taught and so to be accepted, her foreignness forgiven.

Ogion had taught her his knowledge, and then Flint had taught her his. It was her habit of life, to learn. There seemed always to be a great deal to be learned, more than she would have believed when she was a prentice-priestess or the pupil of a mage.

The rushes had been soaking, and this morning they were to split them, an exacting but not a complicated business, leaving plenty of attention to spare.

"Aunty," said Tenar as they sat on the doorstep with the bowl of soaking rushes

between them and a mat before them to lay the split ones on, "how do you tell if a man's a wizard or not?"

Moss's reply was circuitous, beginning with the usual gnomics and obscurities. "Deep knows deep," she said, deeply, and "What's born will speak," and she told a story about the ant that picked up a tiny end of hair from the floor of a palace and ran off to the ants' nest with it, and in the night the nest glowed underground like a star, for the hair was from the head of the great mage Brost. But only the wise could see the glowing anthill. To common eyes it was all dark.

"One needs training, then," said Tenar.

Maybe, maybe not, was the gist of Moss's dark reply. "Some are born with that gift," she said. "Even when they don't know it, it will be there. Like the hair of the mage in the hole in the ground, it will shine."

"Yes," said Tenar. "I've seen that." She split and resplit a reed cleanly and laid the splints on the mat. "How do you know, then, when a man is not a wizard?"

"It's not there," Moss said, "it's not there, dearie. The power. See now. If I've got eyes in my head I can see that you have eyes, can't I? And if you're blind I'll see that. And if you've only got one eye, like the little one, or if you've got three, I'll see 'em, won't I? But if I don't have an eye to see with, I won't know if you do till you tell me. But I do. I see, I know. The third eye!" She touched her forehead and gave a loud, dry chuckle, like a hen triumphant over an egg. She was pleased with having found the words to say what she wanted to say. A good deal of her obscurity and cant, Tenar had begun to realize, was mere ineptness with words and ideas. Nobody had ever taught her to think consecutively. Nobody had ever listened to what she said. All that was expected, all that was wanted of her was muddle, mystery, mumbling. She was a witchwoman. She had nothing to do with clear meaning.

"I understand," Tenar said. "Then—maybe this is a question you don't want to answer—then when you look at a person with your third eye, with your power, you see their power—or don't see it?"

"It's more a knowing," Moss said. "Seeing is just a way of saying it. 'Tisn't like I see you, I see this rush, I see the mountain there. It's a knowing. I know what's in you and not in that poor hollow-headed Heather. I know what's in the dear child and not in him in yonder. I know—" She could not get any farther with it. She mumbled and spat. "Any witch worth a hairpin knows another witch!" she said finally, plainly, impatiently.

"You recognize each other."

Moss nodded. "Aye, that's it. That's the word. Recognize."

"And a wizard would recognize your power, would know you for a sorceress—"

But Moss was grinning at her, a black cave of a grin in a cobweb of wrinkles.

"Dearie," she said, "a man, you mean, a wizardly man? What's a man of power to do with us?"

"But Ogion—"

"Lord Ogion was kind," Moss said, without irony.

They split rushes for a while in silence.

"Don't cut your thumb on 'em, dearie," Moss said.

"Ogion taught me. As if I weren't a girl. As if I'd been his prentice, like Sparrowhawk. He taught me the Language of the Making, Moss. What I asked him, he told me."

"There wasn't no other like him."

"It was I who wouldn't be taught. I left him. What did I want with his books? What good were they to me? I wanted to live, I wanted a man, I wanted my children, I wanted my life."

She split reeds neatly, quickly, with her nail.

"And I got it," she said.

"Take with the right hand, throw away with the left," the witch said. "Well, dearie mistress, who's to say? Who's to say? Wanting a man got me into awful troubles more than once. But wanting to get married, never! No, no. None of that for me."

"Why not?" Tenar demanded.

Taken aback, Moss said simply, "Why, what man'd marry a witch?" And then, with a sidelong chewing motion of her jaw, like a sheep shifting its cud, "And what witch'd marry a man?"

They split rushes.

"What's wrong with men?" Tenar inquired cautiously.

As cautiously, lowering her voice, Moss replied, "I don't know, my dearie. I've thought on it. Often I've thought on it. The best I can say it is like this. A man's in his skin, see, like a nut in its shell." She held up her long, bent, wet fingers as if holding a walnut. "It's hard and strong, that shell, and it's all full of him. Full of grand man-meat, man-self. And that's all. That's all there is. It's all him and nothing else, inside."

Tenar pondered awhile and finally asked, "But if he's a wizard—"

"Then it's all his power, inside. His power's himself, see. That's how it is with

him. And that's all. When his power goes, he's gone. Empty." She cracked the unseen walnut and tossed the shells away. "Nothing."

"And a woman, then?"

"Oh, well, dearie, a woman's a different thing entirely. Who knows where a woman begins and ends? Listen, mistress, I have roots, I have roots deeper than this island. Deeper than the sea, older than the raising of the lands. I go back into the dark." Moss's eyes shone with a weird brightness in their red rims and her voice sang like an instrument. "I go back into the dark! Before the moon I was. No one knows, no one knows, no one can say what I am, what a woman is, a woman of power, a woman's power, deeper than the roots of trees, deeper than the roots of islands, older than the Making, older than the moon. Who dares ask questions of the dark? Who'll ask the dark its name?"

The old woman was rocking, chanting, lost in her incantation; but Tenar sat upright, and split a reed down the center with her thumbnail.

"I will," she said.

She split another reed.

"I lived long enough in the dark," she said.

She looked in from time to time to see that Sparrowhawk was still sleeping. She did so now. When she sat down again with Moss, wanting not to return to what they had been saying, for the older woman looked dour and sullen, she said, "This morning when I woke up I felt, oh, as if a new wind were blowing. A change. Maybe just the weather. Did you feel that?"

But Moss would not say yes or no. "Many a wind blows here on the Overfell, some good, some ill. Some bears clouds and some fair weather, and some brings news to those who can hear it, but those who won't listen can't hear. Who am I to know, an old woman without mage-learning, without book-learning? All my learning's in the earth, in the dark earth. Under their feet, the proud ones. Under their feet, the proud lords and mages. Why should they look down, the learned ones? What does an old witch-woman know?"

She would be a formidable enemy, Tenar thought, and was a difficult friend.

"Aunty," she said, taking up a reed, "I grew up among women. Only women. In the Kargish lands, far east, in Atuan. I was taken from my family as a little child to be brought up a priestess in a place in the desert. I don't know what name it has, all we called it in our language was just that, the place. The only place I knew. There were a few soldiers guarding it, but they couldn't come inside the walls. And we

couldn't go outside the walls. Only in a group, all women and girls, with eunuchs guarding us, keeping the men out of sight."

"What's those you said?"

"Eunuchs?" Tenar had used the Kargish word without thinking. "Gelded men," she said.

The witch stared, and said, *"Tsekh!"* and made the sign to avert evil. She sucked her lips. She had been startled out of her resentment.

"One of them was the nearest to a mother I had there. . . . But do you see, Aunty, I never saw a man till I was a woman grown. Only girls and women. And yet I didn't know what women are, because women were all I did know. Like men who live among men, sailors, and soldiers, and mages on Roke—do they know what men are? How can they, if they never speak to a woman?"

"Do they take 'em and do 'em like rams and he-goats," said Moss, "like that, with a gelding knife?"

Horror, the macabre, and a gleam of vengeance had won out over both anger and reason. Moss didn't want to pursue any topic but that of eunuchs.

Tenar could not tell her much. She realized that she had never thought about the matter. When she was a girl in Atuan, there had been gelded men; and one of them had loved her tenderly, and she him; and she had killed him to escape from him. Then she had come to the Archipelago, where there were no eunuchs, and had forgotten them, sunk them in darkness with Manan's body.

"I suppose," she said, trying to satisfy Moss's craving for details, "that they took young boys, and—" But she stopped. Her hands stopped working.

"Like Therru," she said after a long pause. "What's a child for? What's it there for? To be used. To be raped, to be gelded—Listen, Moss. When I lived in the dark places, that was what they did there. And when I came here, I thought I'd come out into the light. I learned the true words. And I had my man, I bore my children, I lived well. In the broad daylight. And in the broad daylight, they did that—to the child. In the meadows by the river. The river that rises from the spring where Ogion named my daughter. In the sunlight. I am trying to find out where I can live, Moss. Do you know what I mean? What I'm trying to say?"

"Well, well," the older woman said; and after a while, "Dearie, there's misery enough without going looking for it." And seeing Tenar's hands shake as she tried to split a stubborn reed, she said, again, "Don't cut your thumb on 'em, dearie."

It was not till the next day that Ged roused at all. Moss, who was very skillful though appallingly unclean as a nurse, had succeeded in spooning some meat-broth into him. "Starving," she said, "and dried up with thirst. Wherever he was, they didn't do much eating and drinking." And after appraising him again, "He'll be too far gone already, I think. They get weak, see, and can't even drink, though it's all they need. I've known a great strong man to die like that. All in a few days, shriveled to a shadow, like."

But through relentless patience she got a few spoonfuls of her brew of meat and herbs into him. "Now we'll see," she said. "Too late, I guess. He's slipping away." She spoke without regret, perhaps with relish. The man was nothing to her; a death was an event. Maybe she could bury this mage. They had not let her bury the old one.

Tenar was salving his hands, the next day, when he woke. He must have ridden long on Kalessin's back, for his fierce grip on the iron scales had scoured the skin off his palms, and the inner side of the fingers was cut and recut. Sleeping, he kept his hands clenched as if they would not let go the absent dragon. She had to force his fingers open gently to wash and salve the sores. As she did that, he cried out and started, reaching out, as if he felt himself falling. His eyes opened. She spoke quietly. He looked at her.

"Tenar," he said without smiling, in pure recognition beyond emotion. And it gave her pure pleasure, like a sweet flavor or a flower, that there was still one man living who knew her name, and that it was this man.

She leaned forward and kissed his cheek. "Lie still," she said. "Let me finish this." He obeyed, drifting back into sleep soon, this time with his hands open and relaxed.

Later, falling asleep beside Therru in the night, she thought, But I never kissed him before. And the thought shook her. At first she disbelieved it. Surely, in all the years—Not in the Tombs, but after, traveling together in the mountains—In *Lookfar*, when they sailed together to Havnor—When he brought her here to Gont—?

No. Nor had Ogion ever kissed her, or she him. He had called her Daughter, and had loved her, but had not touched her; and she, brought up as a solitary, untouched priestess, a holy thing, had not sought touch, or had not known she sought it. She would lean her forehead or her cheek for a moment on Ogion's open hand, and he might stroke her hair, once, very lightly.

And Ged never even that.

Did I never *think* of it? she asked herself in a kind of incredulous awe.

She did not know. As she tried to think of it, a horror, a sense of transgression, came on her very strongly, and then died away, meaningless. Her lips knew the slightly rough, dry, cool skin of his cheek near the mouth on the right side, and only that knowledge had importance, was of weight.

She slept. She dreamed that a voice called her, "Tenar! Tenar!" and that she replied, crying like a seabird, flying in the light above the sea; but she did not know what name she called.

Sparrowhawk disappointed Aunty Moss. He stayed alive. After a day or two she gave him up for saved. She came and fed him her broth of goat's-meat and roots and herbs, propping him against her, surrounding him with the powerful smell of her body, spooning life into him, and grumbling. Although he had recognized her and called her by her use-name, and she could not deny that he seemed to be the man called Sparrowhawk, she wanted to deny it. She did not like him. He was all wrong, she said. Tenar respected the witch's sagacity enough that this troubled her, but she could not find any such suspicion in herself, only the pleasure of his being there and of his slow return to life. "When he's himself again, you'll see," she said to Moss.

"Himself!" Moss said, and she made that gesture with her fingers of breaking and dropping a nutshell.

He asked, pretty soon, about Ogion. Tenar had dreaded that question. She had told herself and nearly convinced herself that he would not ask, that he would know as mages knew, as even the wizards of Gont Port and Re Albi had known when Ogion died. But on the fourth morning he was lying awake when she came to him, and looking up at her, he said, "This is Ogion's house."

"Aihal's house," she said, as easily as she could; it still was not easy for her to speak the mage's true name. She did not know if Ged had known that name. Surely he had. Ogion would have told him, or had not needed to tell him.

For a while he did not react, and when he spoke it was without expression. "Then he is dead."

"Ten days ago."

He lay looking before him as if pondering, trying to think something out.

"When did I come here?"

She had to lean close to understand him. "Four days ago, in the evening of the day."

“There was no one else in the mountains,” he said. Then his body winced and shuddered as if in pain or the intolerable memory of pain. He shut his eyes, frowning, and took a deep breath.

As his strength returned little by little, that frown, the held breath and clenched hands, became familiar to Tenar. Strength returned to him but not ease, not health.

He sat on the doorstep of the house in the sunlight of the summer afternoon. It was the longest journey he had yet taken from the bed. He sat on the threshold, looking out into the day, and Tenar, coming around the house from the bean patch, looked at him. He still had an ashy, shadowy look to him. It was not the grey hair only, but some quality of skin and bone, and there was nothing much to him but that. There was no light in his eyes. Yet this shadow, this ashen man, was the same whose face she had seen first in the radiance of his own power, the strong face with hawk nose and fine mouth, a handsome man. He had always been a proud, handsome man.

She came on toward him.

“The sunlight’s what you need,” she said to him, and he nodded, but his hands were clenched as he sat in the flood of summer warmth.

He was so silent with her that she thought maybe it was her presence that troubled him. Maybe he could not be at ease with her as he had used to be. He was archmage now, after all—she kept forgetting that. And it was twenty-five years since they had walked in the mountains of Atuan and sailed together in *Lookfar* across the eastern sea.

“Where is *Lookfar*?” she asked, suddenly, surprised by the thought of it, and then thought, But how stupid of me! All those years ago, and he’s archmage, he wouldn’t have that little boat now.

“In Selidor,” he answered, his face set in its steady and incomprehensible misery.

As long ago as forever, as far away as Selidor . . .

“The farthest island,” she said; it was half a question.

“The farthest west,” he said.

They were sitting at table, having finished the evening meal. Therru had gone outside to play.

“It was from Selidor that you came, then, on Kalessin?”

When she spoke the dragon’s name again it spoke itself, shaping her mouth to its shape and sound, making her breath soft fire.

At the name, he looked up at her, one intense glance, which made her realize that he did not usually meet her eyes at all. He nodded. Then, with a laborious honesty, he corrected his assent: "From Selidor to Roke. And then from Roke to Gont."

A thousand miles? Ten thousand miles? She had no idea. She had seen the great maps in the treasuries of Havnor, but no one had taught her numbers, distances. *As far away as Selidor . . .* And could the flight of a dragon be counted in miles?

"Ged," she said, using his true name since they were alone, "I know you've been in great pain and peril. And if you don't want, maybe you can't, maybe you shouldn't tell me—but if I knew, if I knew something of it, I'd be more help to you, maybe. I'd like to be. And they'll be coming soon from Roke for you, sending a ship for the Archmage, what do I know, sending a dragon for you! And you'll be gone again. And we'll never have talked." As she spoke she clenched her own hands at the falseness of her tone and words. To joke about the dragon—to whine like an accusing wife!

He was looking down at the table, sullen, enduring, like a farmer after a hard day in the fields faced with some domestic squall.

"Nobody will come from Roke, I think," he said, and it cost him effort enough that it was a while before he went on. "Give me time."

She thought it was all he was going to say, and replied, "Yes, of course. I'm sorry," and was rising to clear the table when he said, still looking down, not clearly, "I have that, now."

Then he too got up, and brought his dish to the sink, and finished clearing the table. He washed the dishes while Tenar put the food away. And that interested her. She had been comparing him to Flint; but Flint had never washed a dish in his life. Women's work. But Ged and Ogion had lived here, bachelors, without women; everywhere Ged had lived, it was without women; so he did the "women's work" and thought nothing about it. It would be a pity, she thought, if he did think about it, if he started fearing that his dignity hung by a dishcloth.

Nobody came for him from Roke. When they spoke of it, there had scarcely been time for any ship but one with the magewind in her sails all the way; but the days went on, and still there was no message or sign to him. It seemed strange to her that they would let their archmage go untroubled so long. He must have forbidden them to send to him; or perhaps he had hidden himself here with his wizardry, so that they did not know where he was, and so that he could not be recognized. For the villagers paid curiously little attention to him still.

That no one had come down from the mansion of the Lord of Re Albi was less surprising. The lords of that house had never been on good terms with Ogion. Women of the house had been, so the village tales went, adepts of dark arts. One had married a northern lord, they said, who buried her alive under a stone; another had meddled with the unborn child in her womb, trying to make it a creature of power, and indeed it had spoken words as it was born, but it had no bones. "Like a little bag of skin," the midwife whispered in the village, "a little bag with eyes and a voice, and it never sucked, but it spoke in some strange tongue, and died. . . ." Whatever the truth of such tales, the Lords of Re Albi had always held aloof. Companion of the mage Sparrowhawk, ward of the mage Ogion, bringer of the Ring of Erreth-Akbe to Havnor, Tenar might have been asked to stay, it would seem, at the mansion house when she first came to Re Albi; but she had not. She had lived instead, to her own delight, alone in a tiny cottage that belonged to the village weaver, Fan, and she saw the people of the great house seldom and at a distance. There was now no lady of the house at all, Moss told her, only the old lord, very old, and his grandson, and the young wizard, called Aspen, whom they had hired from the School on Roke.

Since Ogion was buried, with Aunty Moss's talisman in his hand, under the beech tree by the mountain path, Tenar had not seen Aspen. Strange as it seemed, he did not know the Archmage of Earthsea was in his own village, or, if he knew it, for some reason kept away. And the wizard of Gont Port, who had also come to bury Ogion, had never come back either. Even if he did not know that Ged was here, surely he knew who she was, the White Lady, who had worn the Ring of Erreth-Akbe on her wrist, who had made whole the Rune of Peace—And how many years ago was that, old woman! she said to herself. Is your nose out of joint?

All the same, it was she who had told them Ogion's true name. It seemed some courtesy was owing.

But wizards, as such, had nothing to do with courtesy. They were men of power. It was only power that they dealt with. And what power had she now? What had she ever had? As a girl, a priestess, she had been a vessel: the power of the dark places had run through her, used her, left her empty, untouched. As a young woman she had been taught a powerful knowledge by a powerful man and had laid it aside, turned away from it, not touched it. As a woman she had chosen and had the powers of a woman, in their time, and the time was past; her wiving and mothering was done. There was nothing in her, no power, for anybody to recognize.

But a dragon had spoken to her. "I am Kalessin," it had said, and she had answered, "I am Tenar."

"What is a dragonlord?" she had asked Ged, in the dark place, the Labyrinth, trying to deny his power, trying to make him admit hers; and he had answered with the plain honesty that forever disarmed her, "A man dragons will talk to."

So she was a woman dragons would talk to. Was that the new thing, the folded knowledge, the light seed, that she felt in herself, waking beneath the small window that looked west?

A few days after that brief conversation at table, she was weeding Ogion's garden patch, rescuing the onions he had set out in spring from the weeds of summer. Ged let himself in the gate in the high fence that kept the goats out, and set to weeding at the other end of the row. He worked awhile and then sat back, looking down at his hands.

"Let them have time to heal," Tenar said mildly.

He nodded.

The tall staked bean-plants in the next row were flowering. Their scent was very sweet. He sat with his thin arms on his knees, staring into the sunlit tangle of vines and flowers and hanging beanpods. She spoke as she worked: "When Aihal died, he said, 'All changed. . . .' And since his death, I've mourned him, I've grieved, but something lifts up my grief. Something is coming to be born—has been set free. I know in my sleep and my first waking, something is changed."

"Yes," he said. "An evil ended. And . . ."

After a long silence he began again. He did not look at her, but his voice sounded for the first time like the voice she remembered, easy, quiet, with the dry Gontish accent.

"Do you remember, Tenar, when we came first to Havnor?"

Would I forget? her heart said, but she was silent for fear of driving him back into silence.

"We brought *Lookfar* in and came up onto the quai—the steps are marble. And the people, all the people—and you held up your arm to show them the Ring. . . ."

"—And held your hand; I was terrified beyond terror: the faces, the voices, the colors, the towers and the flags and banners, the gold and silver and music, and all I knew was you—in the whole world all I knew was you, there by me as we walked. . . ."

"The stewards of the King's House brought us to the foot of the Tower of Erreth-Akbe, through the streets full of people. And we went up the high steps, the

two of us alone. Do you remember?"

She nodded. She laid her hands on the earth she had been weeding, feeling its grainy coolness.

"I opened the door. It was heavy, it stuck at first. And we went in. Do you remember?"

It was as if he asked for reassurance—Did it happen? Do I remember?

"It was a great, high hall," she said. "It made me think of my Hall, where I was eaten, but only because it was so high. The light came down from windows away up in the tower. Shafts of sunlight crossing like swords."

"And the throne," he said.

"The throne, yes, all gold and crimson. But empty. Like the throne in the Hall in Atuan."

"Not now," he said. He looked across the green shoots of onion at her. His face was strained, wistful, as if he named a joy he could not grasp. "There is a king in Havnor," he said, "at the center of the world. What was foretold has been fulfilled. The Rune is healed, and the world is whole. The days of peace have come. He—"

He stopped and looked down, clenching his hands.

"He carried me from death to life. Arren of Enlad. Lebannen of the songs to be sung. He has taken his true name, Lebannen, King of Earthsea."

"Is that it, then," she asked, kneeling, watching him—"the joy, the coming into light?"

He did not answer.

A king in Havnor, she thought, and said aloud, "A king in Havnor!"

The vision of the beautiful city was in her, the wide streets, the towers of marble, the tiled and bronze roofs, the white-sailed ships in harbor, the marvelous throne room where sunlight fell like swords, the wealth and dignity and harmony, the order that was kept there. From that bright center, she saw order going outward like the perfect rings on water, like the straightness of a paved street or a ship sailing before the wind: a going the way it should go, a bringing to peace.

"You did well, dear friend," she said.

He made a little gesture as if to stop her words, and then turned away, pressing his hand to his mouth. She could not bear to see his tears. She bent to her work. She pulled a weed, and another, and the tough root broke. She dug with her hands, trying to find the root of the weed in the harsh soil, in the dark of the earth.

"Goha," said Therru's weak, cracked voice at the gate, and Tenar looked round. The child's half-face looked straight at her from the seeing eye and the blinded eye.

Tenar thought, Shall I tell her that there is a king in Havnor?

She got up and went to the gate to spare Therru from trying to make herself heard. When she lay in the fire unconscious, Beech said, the child had breathed in fire. "Her voice is burned away," he explained.

"I was watching Sippy," Therru whispered, "but she got out of the broom-pasture. I can't find her."

It was as long a speech as she had ever made. She was trembling from running and from trying not to cry. We can't all be weeping at once, Tenar said to herself—this is stupid, we can't have this!—"Sparrowhawk!" she said, turning, "there's a goat got out."

He stood up at once and came to the gate.

"Try the springhouse," he said.

He looked at Therru as if he did not see her hideous scars, as if he scarcely saw her at all: a child who had lost a goat, who needed to find a goat. It was the goat he saw. "Or she's off to join the village flock," he said.

Therru was already running to the springhouse.

"Is she your daughter?" he asked Tenar. He had never before said a word about the child, and all Tenar could think for a moment was how very strange men were.

"No, nor my granddaughter. But my child," she said. What was it that made her jeer at him, jibe at him, again?

He let himself out the gate, just as Sippy dashed toward them, a brown-and-white flash, followed far behind by Therru.

"Hi!" Ged shouted suddenly, and with a leap he blocked the goat's way, heading her directly to the open gate and Tenar's arms. She managed to grab Sippy's loose leather collar. The goat at once stood still, mild as any lamb, looking at Tenar with one yellow eye and at the onion-rows with the other.

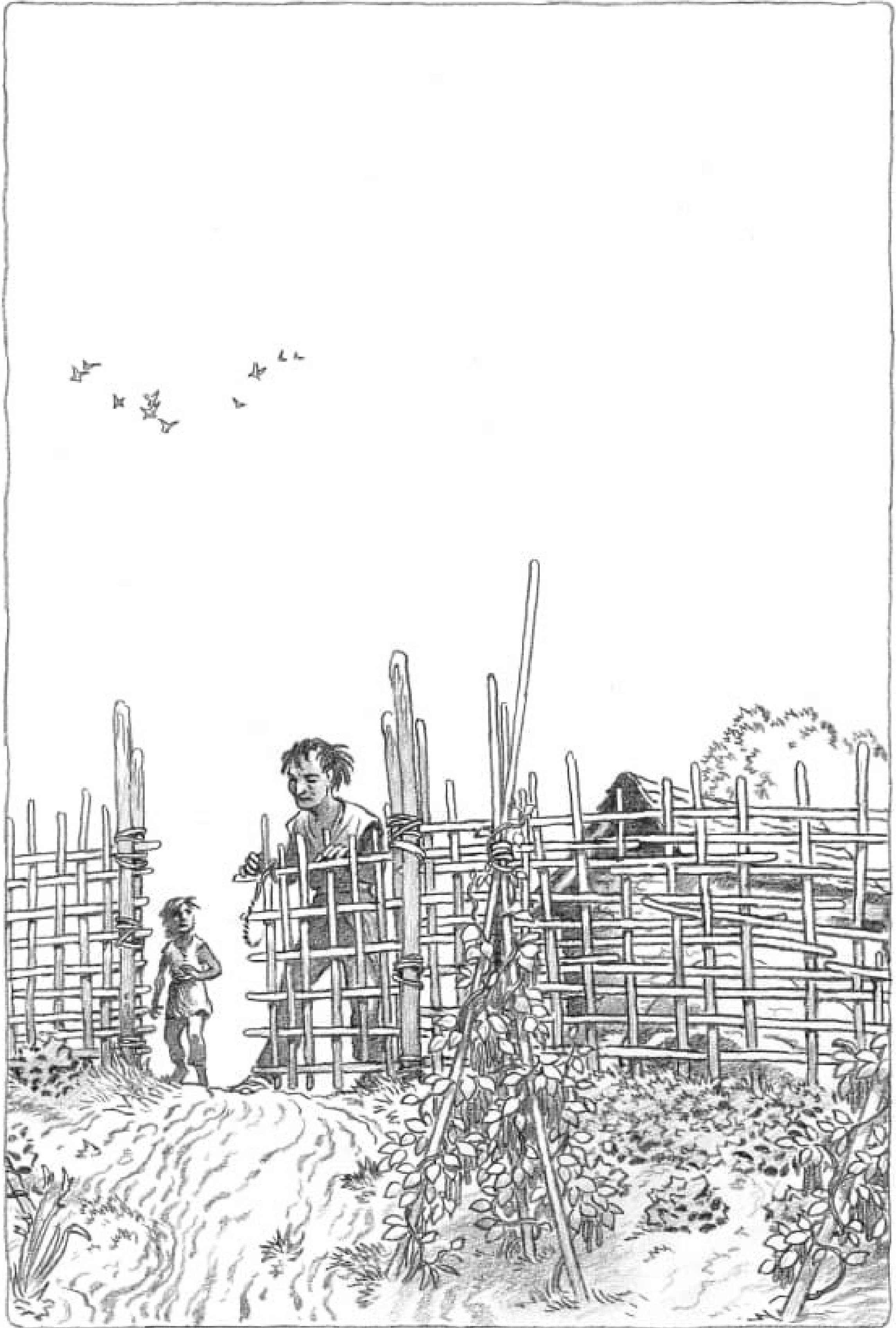
"Out," said Tenar, leading her out of goat heaven and over to the stonier pasture where she was supposed to be.

Ged had sat down on the ground, as out of breath as Therru, or more so, for he gasped, and was evidently dizzy; but at least he was not in tears. Trust a goat to spoil anything.

"Heather shouldn't have told you to watch Sippy," Tenar said to Therru. "Nobody can watch Sippy. If she gets out again, tell Heather, and don't worry. All right?"

Therru nodded. She was looking at Ged. She seldom looked at people, and very seldom at men, for longer than a glance; but she was gazing at him steadily, her

head cocked like a sparrow. Was a hero being born?



Chapter 6

Worsening

It was well over a month since the solstice, but the evenings were still long up on the west-facing Overfell. Therru had come in late from an all-day herbal expedition with Aunty Moss, too tired to eat. Tenar put her to bed and sat with her, singing to her. When the child was overtired she could not sleep, but would crouch in the bed like a paralyzed animal, staring at hallucinations till she was in a nightmare state, neither sleeping nor waking, and unreachable. Tenar had found she could prevent this by holding her and singing her to sleep. When she ran out of the songs she had learned as a farmer's wife in Middle Valley, she sang interminable Kargish chants she had learned as a child priestess at the Tombs of Atuan, lulling Therru with the drone and sweet whine of offerings to the Nameless Powers and the Empty Throne that was now filled with the dust and ruin of earthquake. She felt no power in those songs but that of song itself; and she liked to sing in her own language, though she did not know the songs a mother would sing to a child in Atuan, the songs her mother had sung to her.

Therru was fast asleep at last. Tenar slipped her from her lap to the bed and waited a moment to be sure she slept on. Then, after a glance round to be sure she was alone, with an almost guilty quickness, yet with the ceremony of enjoyment, of great pleasure, she laid her narrow, light-skinned hand along the side of the child's face where eye and cheek had been eaten away by fire, leaving slabbed, bald scar. Under her touch all that was gone. The flesh was whole, a child's round, soft, sleeping face. It was as if her touch restored the truth.

Lightly, reluctantly, she lifted her palm, and saw the irremediable loss, the healing that would never be whole.

She bent down and kissed the scar, got up quietly, and went out of the house.

The sun was setting in a vast, pearly haze. No one was about. Sparrowhawk was probably off in the forest. He had begun to visit Ogion's grave, spending hours in

that quiet place under the beech tree, and as he got more strength he took to wandering on up the forest paths that Ogion had loved. Food evidently had no savor to him; Tenar had to ask him to eat. Companionship he shunned, seeking only to be alone. Therru would have followed him anywhere, and being as silent as he was she did not trouble him, but he was restless, and presently would send the child home and go on by himself, farther, to what ends Tenar did not know. He would come in late, cast himself down to sleep, and often be gone again before she and the child woke. She would leave him bread and meat to take with him.

She saw him now coming along the meadow path that had been so long and hard when she had helped Ogion walk it for the last time. He came through the luminous air, the wind-bowed grasses, walking steadily, locked in his obstinate misery, hard as stone.

"Will you be about the house?" she asked him, across some distance. "Therru's asleep. I want to walk a little."

"Yes. Go on," he said, and she went on, pondering the indifference of a man toward the exigencies that ruled a woman: that someone must be not far from a sleeping child, that one's freedom meant another's unfreedom, unless some ever-changing, moving balance were reached, like the balance of a body moving forward, as she did now, on two legs, first one then the other, in the practice of that remarkable art, walking. . . . Then the deepening colors of the sky and the soft insistence of the wind replaced her thoughts. She went on walking, without metaphors, until she came to the sandstone cliffs. There she stopped and watched the sun be lost in the serene, rosy haze.

She knelt and found with her eyes and then with her fingertips a long, shallow, blurred groove in the rock, scored right out to the edge of the cliff: the track of Kalessin's tail. She followed it again and again with her fingers, gazing out into the gulfs of twilight, dreaming. She spoke once. The name was not fire in her mouth this time, but hissed and dragged softly out of her lips, "Kalessin. . . ."

She looked up to the east. The summits of Gont Mountain above the forests were red, catching the light that was gone here below. The color dimmed as she watched. She looked away and when she looked back the summit was grey, obscure, the forested slopes dark.

She waited for the evening star. When it shone above the haze, she walked slowly home.

Home, not home. Why was she here in Ogion's house not in her own farmhouse, looking after Ogion's goats and onions not her own orchards and

flocks? "Wait," he had said, and she had waited; and the dragon had come; and Ged was well now—was well enough. She had done her part. She had kept the house. She was no longer needed. It was time she left.

Yet she could not think of leaving this high ledge, this hawk's nest, and going down into the lowlands again, the easy farmlands, the windless inlands, she could not think of that without her heart sinking and darkening. What of the dream she had here, under the small window looking west? What of the dragon who had come to her here?

The door of the house stood open as usual for light and air. Sparrowhawk was sitting without lamp or firelight on a low seat by the swept hearth. He often sat there. She thought it had been his place when he was a boy here, in his brief apprenticeship with Ogion. It had been her place, winter days, when she had been Ogion's pupil.

He looked at her entering, but his eyes had not been on the doorway but beside it to the right, the dark corner behind the door. Ogion's staff stood there, an oaken stick, heavy, worn smooth at the grip, the height of the man himself. Beside it Therru had set the hazel switch and the alder stick Tenar had cut for them when they were walking to Re Albi.

Tenar thought—His staff, his wizard's staff, yew wood, Ogion gave it to him—Where is it?—And at the same time, Why have I not thought of that till now?

It was dark in the house, and seemed stuffy. She was oppressed. She had wished he would stay to talk with her, but now that he sat there she had nothing to say to him, nor he to her.

"I've been thinking," she said at last, setting straight the four dishes on the oaken sideboard, "that it's time I was getting back to my farm."

He said nothing. Possibly he nodded, but her back was turned.

She was tired all at once, wanting to go to bed; but he sat there in the front part of the house, and it was not yet entirely dark; she could not undress in front of him. Shame made her angry. She was about to ask him to go out for a while when he spoke, clearing his throat, hesitant.

"The books. Ogion's books. The Runes and the two Lore-books. Would you be taking them with you?"

"With me?"

"You were his last student."

She came over to the hearth and sat down across from him on Ogion's three-legged chair.

“I learned to write the runes of Hardic, but I’ve forgotten most of that, no doubt. He taught me some of the language the dragons speak. Some of that I remember. But nothing else. I didn’t become an adept, a wizard. I got married, you know. Would Ogion have left his books of wisdom to a farmer’s wife?”

After a pause he said without expression, “Did he not leave them to someone, then?”

“To you, surely.”

Sparrowhawk said nothing.

“You were his last prentice, and his pride, and friend. He never said it, but of course they go to you.”

“What am I to do with them?”

She stared at him through the dusk. The western window gleamed faint across the room. The dour, relentless, unexplaining rage in his voice roused her own anger.

“You the Archmage ask me? Why do you make a worse fool of me than I am, Ged?”

He got up then. His voice shook. “But don’t you—can’t you see—all that is over—is gone!”

She sat staring, trying to see his face.

“I have no power, nothing. I gave it—spent it—all I had. To close—So that—So it’s done, done with.”

She tried to deny what he said, but could not.

“Like pouring out a little water,” he said, “a cup of water onto the sand. In the Dry Land. I had to do that. But now I have nothing to drink. And what difference, what difference did it make, does it make, one cup of water in all the desert? Is the desert gone?—Ah! Listen!—It used to whisper that to me from behind the door there: Listen, listen! And I went into the Dry Land when I was young. And I met it there, I became it, I married my death. It gave me life. Water, the water of life. I was a fountain, a spring, flowing, giving. But the springs don’t run, there. All I had in the end was one cup of water, and I had to pour it out on the sand, in the bed of the dry river, on the rocks in the dark. So it’s gone. It’s over. Done.”

She knew enough, from Ogion and from Ged himself, to know what land he spoke of, and that though he spoke in images they were not masks of the truth but the truth itself as he had known it. She knew also that she must deny what he said, no matter if it was true. “You don’t give yourself time, Ged,” she said. “Coming back from death must be a long journey—even on the dragon’s back. It will take

time. Time and quiet, silence, stillness. You have been hurt. You will be healed."

For a long while he was silent, standing there. She thought she had said the right thing, and given him some comfort. But he spoke at last.

"Like the child?"

It was like a knife so sharp she did not feel it come into her body.

"I don't know," he said in the same soft, dry voice, "why you took her, knowing that she cannot be healed. Knowing what her life must be. I suppose it's a part of this time we have lived—a dark time, an age of ruin, an ending time. You took her, I suppose, as I went to meet my enemy, because it was all you could do. And so we must live on into the new age with the spoils of our victory over evil. You with your burned child, and I with nothing at all."

Despair speaks evenly, in a quiet voice.

Tenar turned to look at the mage's staff in the dark place to the right of the door, but there was no light in it. It was all dark, inside and out. Through the open doorway a couple of stars were visible, high and faint. She looked at them. She wanted to know what stars they were. She got up and went groping past the table to the door. The haze had risen and not many stars were visible. One of those she had seen from indoors was the white summer star that they called, in Atuan, in her own language, Tehanu. She did not know the other one. She did not know what they called Tehanu here, in Hardic, or what its true name was, what the dragons called it. She knew only what her mother would have called it, Tehanu, Tehanu. Tenar, Tenar . . .

"Ged," she said from the doorway, not turning, "who brought you up, when you were a child?"

He came to stand near her, also looking out at the misty horizon of the sea, the stars, the dark bulk of the mountain above them.

"Nobody much," he said. "My mother died when I was a baby. There were some older brothers. I don't remember them. There was my father the smith. And my mother's sister. She was the witch of Ten Alders."

"Aunty Moss," Tenar said.

"Younger. She had some power."

"What was her name?"

He was silent.

"I cannot remember," he said slowly.

After a while he said, "She taught me the names. Falcon, pilgrim falcon, eagle, osprey, goshawk, sparrowhawk . . ."

“What do you call that star? The white one, up high.”

“The Heart of the Swan,” he said, looking up at it. “In Ten Alders they called it the Arrow.”

But he did not say its name in the Language of the Making, nor the true names the witch had taught him of hawk, falcon, sparrowhawk.

“What I said—in there—was wrong,” he said softly. “I shouldn’t speak at all. Forgive me.”

“If you won’t speak, what can I do but leave you?” She turned to him. “Why do you think only of yourself? Always of yourself? Go outside awhile,” she told him, wrathful. “I want to go to bed.”

Bewildered, muttering some apology, he went out; and she, going to the alcove, slipped out of her clothes and into the bed, and hid her face in the sweet warmth of Therru’s silky nape.

“Knowing what her life must be . . .”

Her anger with him, her stupid denial of the truth of what he told her, rose from disappointment. Though Lark had said ten times over that nothing could be done, yet she had hoped that Tenar could heal the burns; and for all her saying that even Ogion could not have done it, Tenar had hoped that Ged could heal Therru—could lay his hand on the scar and it would be whole and well, the blind eye bright, the clawed hand soft, the ruined life intact.

“Knowing what her life must be . . .”

The averted faces, the signs against evil, the horror and curiosity, the sickly pity and the prying threat, for harm draws harm to it . . . And never a man’s arms. Never anyone to hold her. Never anyone but Tenar. Oh, he was right, the child should have died, should be dead. They should have let her go into that dry land, she and Lark and Ivy, meddling old women, softhearted and cruel. He was right, he was always right. But then, the men who had used her for their needs and games, the woman who had suffered her to be used—they had been quite right to beat her unconscious and push her into the fire to burn to death. Only they had not been thorough. They had lost their nerve, they had left some life in her. That had been wrong. And everything she, Tenar, had done was wrong. She had been given to the dark powers as a child: she had been eaten by them, she had been suffered to be eaten. Did she think that by crossing the sea, by learning other languages, by being a man’s wife, a mother of children, that by merely living her life, she could ever be anything but what she was—their servant, their food, theirs to use for their needs and games? Destroyed, she had drawn the destroyed to her, part of her own ruin,

the body of her own evil.

The child's hair was fine, warm, sweet-smelling. She lay curled up in the warmth of Tenar's arms, dreaming. What wrong could she be? Wronged, wronged beyond all repair, but not wrong. Not lost, not lost, not lost. Tenar held her and lay still and set her mind on the light of her dreaming, the gulfs of bright air, the name of the dragon, the name of the star, Heart of the Swan, the Arrow, Tehanu.

She was combing the black goat for the fine underwool that she would spin and take to a weaver to make into cloth, the silky "fleecefell" of Gont Island. The old black goat had been combed a thousand times, and liked it, leaning into the dig and pull of the wire comb-teeth. The grey-black combings grew into a soft, dirty cloud, which Tenar at last stuffed into a net bag; she worked some burrs out of the fringes of the goat's ears by way of thanks, and slapped her barrel flank companionably. "Bah!" the goat said, and trotted off. Tenar let herself out of the fenced pasture and came around in front of the house, glancing over the meadow to make sure Therru was still playing there.

Moss had shown the child how to weave grass baskets, and clumsy as her crippled hand was, she had begun to get the trick of it. She sat there in the meadow grass with her work on her lap, but she was not working. She was watching Sparrowhawk.

He stood a good way off, nearer the cliff's edge. His back was turned, and he did not know anyone was watching him, for he was watching a bird, a young kestrel; and she in turn was watching some small prey she had glimpsed in the grass. She hung beating her wings, wanting to flush the vole or mouse, to panic it into a rush to its nest. The man stood, as intent, as hungry, gazing at the bird. Slowly he lifted his right hand, holding the forearm level, and he seemed to speak, though the wind bore his words away. The kestrel veered, crying her high, harsh, keening cry, and shot up and off toward the forests.

The man lowered his arm and stood still, watching the bird. The child and the woman were still. Only the bird flew, went free.

"He came to me once as a falcon, a pilgrim falcon," Ogion had said, by the fire, on a winter day. He had been telling her of the spells of Changing, of transformations, of the mage Bordger who had become a bear. "He flew to me, to my wrist, out of the north and west. I brought him in by the fire here. He could not speak. Because I knew him, I was able to help him; he could put off the falcon, and be a man again.

But there was always some hawk in him. They called him Sparrowhawk in his village because the wild hawks would come to him, at his word. Who are we? What is it to be a man? Before he had his name, before he had knowledge, before he had power, the hawk was in him, and the man, and the mage, and more—he was what we cannot name. And so are we all."

The girl sitting at the hearth, gazing at the fire, listening, saw the hawk; saw the man; saw the birds come to him, come at his word, at his naming them, come beating their wings to hold his arm with their fierce talons; saw herself the hawk, the wild bird.

Chapter 7

Mice

Townsend, the sheep-buyer who had brought Ogion's message to the farm in Middle Valley, came out one afternoon to the mage's house.

"Will you be selling the goats, now Lord Ogion's gone?"

"I might," Tenar said neutrally. She had in fact been wondering how, if she stayed in Re Albi, she would get on. Like any wizard, Ogion had been supported by the people his skills and powers served—in his case, anyone on Gont. He had only to ask and what he needed would be given gratefully, a good bargain for the goodwill of a mage; but he never had to ask. Rather he had to give away the excess of food and raiment and tools and livestock and all necessities and ornaments that were offered or simply left on his doorstep. "What shall I do with them?" he would demand, perplexed, standing with his arms full of indignant, squawking chickens, or yards of tapestry, or pots of pickled beets.

But Tenar had left her living in the Middle Valley. She had not thought when she left so suddenly of how long she might stay. She had not brought with her the seven pieces of ivory, Flint's hoard; nor would that money have been of use in the village except to buy land or livestock, or deal with some trader up from Gont Port peddling pellawi furs or silks of Lorbanery to the rich farmers and little lords of Gont. Flint's farm gave her all she and Therru needed to eat and wear; but Ogion's six goats and his beans and onions had been for his pleasure rather than his need. She had been living off his larder, the gifts of villagers who gave to her for his sake, and the generosity of Aunty Moss. Just yesterday the witch had said, "Dearie, my ringneck hen's brood's hatched out, and I'll bring you two-three chickies when they begin to scratch. The mage wouldn't keep 'em, too noisy and silly, he said, but what's a house without chickies at the door?"

Indeed, her hens wandered in and out of Moss's door freely, and slept on her bed, and enriched the smells of the dark, smoky, reeking room beyond belief.

"There's a brown-and-white yearling nanny will make a fine milch goat," Tenar said to the sharp-faced man.

"I was thinking of the whole lot," he said. "Maybe. Only five or six of 'em, right?"

"Six. They're in the pasture up there if you want to have a look."

"I'll do that." But he didn't move. No eagerness, of course, was to be evinced on either side.

"Seen the great ship come in?" he asked.

Ogion's house looked west and north, and from it one could see only the rocky headlands at the mouth of the bay, the Armed Cliffs; but from the village itself at several places one could look down the steep back-and-forth road to Gont Port and see the docks and the whole harbor. Shipwatching was a regular pursuit in Re Albi. There were generally a couple of old men on the bench behind the smithy, which gave the best view, and though they might never in their lives have gone down the fifteen zigzag miles of that road to Gont Port, they watched the comings and goings of ships as a spectacle, strange yet familiar, provided for their entertainment.

"From Havnor, smith's boy said. He was down in Port bargaining for ingots. Come up yesterevening late. The great ship's from Havnor Great Port, he said."

He was probably talking to keep her mind off the price of goats, and the slyness of his look was probably simply the way his eyes were made. But Havnor Great Port traded little with Gont, a poor and remote island notable only for wizards, pirates, and goats; and something in the words, "the great ship," troubled or alarmed her, she did not know why.

"He said they say there's a king in Havnor now," the sheep-buyer went on, with a sidelong glance.

"That might be a good thing," said Tenar.

Townsend nodded. "Might keep the foreign riffraff out."

Tenar nodded her foreign head pleasantly.

"But there's those down in Port won't be pleased, maybe." He meant the pirate sea-captains of Gont, whose control of the northeastern seas had been increasing of late years to the point where many of the old trade-schedules with the central islands of the Archipelago had been disrupted or abandoned; this impoverished everyone on Gont except the pirates, but that did not prevent the pirates from being heroes in the eyes of most Gontishmen. For all she knew, Tenar's son was a sailor on a pirate ship. And safer, maybe, as such than on a steady merchantman. *Better shark than herring*, as they said.

"There's some who're never pleased no matter what," Tenar said, automatically following the rules of conversation, but impatient enough with them that she added, rising, "I'll show you the goats. You can have a look. I don't know if we'll sell all or any." And she took the man to the broom-pasture gate and left him. She did not like him. It wasn't his fault that he had brought her bad news once and maybe twice, but his eyes slid, and she did not like his company. She wouldn't sell him Ogion's goats. Not even Sippy.

After he had left, bargainless, she found herself uneasy. She had said to him, "I don't know if we'll sell," and that had been foolish, to say *we* instead of *I*, when he hadn't asked to speak to Sparrowhawk, hadn't even alluded to him, as a man bargaining with a woman was more than likely to do, especially when she was refusing his offer.

She did not know what they made of Sparrowhawk, of his presence and nonpresence, in the village. Ogion, aloof and silent and in some ways feared, had been their own mage and their fellow-villager. Sparrowhawk they might be proud of as a name, the Archmage who had lived awhile in Re Albi and done wonderful things, fooling a dragon in the Ninety Isles, bringing the Ring of Erreth-Akbe back from somewhere or other; but they did not know him. Nor did he know them. He had not gone into the village since he came, only to the forest, the wilderness. She had not thought about it before, but he avoided the village as surely as Therru did.

They must have talked about him. It was a village, and people talked. But gossip about the doings of wizards and mages would not go far. The matter was too uncanny, the lives of men of power were too strange, too different from their own. "Let be," she had heard villagers in the Middle Valley say when somebody got to speculating too freely about a visiting weatherworker or their own wizard, Beech —"Let be. He goes his way, not ours."

As for herself, that she should have stayed on to nurse and serve such a man of power would not seem a questionable matter to them; again it was a case of "Let be." She had not been very much in the village herself; they were neither friendly nor unfriendly to her. She had lived there once in Weaver Fan's cottage, she was the old mage's ward, he had sent Townsend down round the mountain for her; all that was very well. But then she had come with the child, terrible to look at, who'd walk about in daylight with it by choice? And what kind of woman would be a wizard's pupil, a wizard's nurse? Witchery there, sure enough, and foreign too. But all the same, she was wife to a rich farmer way down there in the Middle Valley;

though he was dead and she a widow. Well, who could understand the ways of the witchfolk? Let be, better let be . . .

She met the Archmage of Earthsea as he came past the garden fence. She said, "They say there's a ship in from the City of Havnor."

He stopped. He made a movement, quickly controlled, but it had been the beginning of a turn to run, to break and run like a mouse from a hawk.

"Ged!" she said. "What is it?"

"I can't," he said. "I can't face them."

"Who?"

"Men from him. From the King."

His face had gone greyish, as when he was first here, and he looked around for a place to hide.

His terror was so urgent and undefended that she thought only how to spare him. "You needn't see them. If anybody comes I'll send them away. Come back to the house now. You haven't eaten all day."

"There was a man there," he said.

"Townsend, pricing goats. I sent *him* away. Come on!"

He came with her, and when they were in the house she shut the door.

"They couldn't harm you, surely, Ged. Why would they want to?"

He sat down at the table and shook his head dully. "No, no."

"Do they know you're here?"

"I don't know."

"What is it you're afraid of?" she asked, not impatiently, but with some rational authority.

He put his hands across his face, rubbing his temples and forehead, looking down. "I was—" he said. "I'm not—"

It was all he could say.

She stopped him, saying, "All right, it's all right." She dared not touch him lest she worsen his humiliation by any semblance of pity. She was angry at him, and for him. "It's none of their business," she said, "where you are, or who you are, or what you choose to do or not to do! If they come prying they can leave curious." That was Lark's saying. She had a pang of longing for the company of an ordinary, sensible woman. "Anyhow, the ship may have nothing at all to do with you. They may be chasing pirates home. It'll be a good thing, too, when the King gets around to doing that. . . . I found some wine in the back of the cupboard, a couple of bottles, I wonder how long Ogion had it squirreled away there. I think we'd both

do well with a glass of wine. And some bread and cheese. The little one's had her dinner and gone off with Heather to catch frogs. There may be frogs' legs for supper. But bread and cheese for now. And wine. I wonder where it's from, who brought it to Ogion, how old it is?" So she talked along, woman's babble, saving him from having to make any answer or misread any silence, until he had got over the crisis of shame, and eaten a little, and drunk a glass of the old, soft, red wine.

"It's best I go, Tenar," he said. "Till I learn to be what I am now."

"Go where?"

"Up on the mountain."

"Wandering—like Ogion?" She looked at him. She remembered walking with him on the roads of Atuan, deriding him: "Do wizards often beg?" And he had answered, "Yes, but they try to give something in exchange."

She asked cautiously, "Could you get on for a while as a weatherworker, or a finder?" She filled his glass full.

He shook his head. He drank wine, and looked away. "No," he said. "None of that. Nothing of that."

She did not believe him. She wanted to rebel, to deny, to say to him, How can it be, how can you say that—as if you'd forgotten all you know, all you learned from Ogion, and at Roke, and in your traveling! You can't have forgotten the words, the names, the acts of your art. You learned, you earned your power!—She kept herself from saying that, but she murmured, "I don't understand. How can it all . . ."

"A cup of water," he said, tipping his glass a little as if to pour it out. And after a while, "What I don't understand is why he brought me back. The kindness of the young is cruelty. . . . So I'm here, I have to get on with it, till I can go back."

She did not know clearly what he meant, but she heard a note of blame or complaint that, in him, shocked and angered her. She spoke stiffly: "It was Kalessin that brought you here."

It was dark in the house with the door closed and only the small western window letting in the late-afternoon light. She could not make out his expression; but presently he raised his glass to her with a shadowy smile, and drank.

"This wine," he said. "Some great merchant or pirate must have brought it to Ogion. I never drank its equal. Even in Havnor." He turned the squat glass in his hands, looking down at it. "I'll call myself something," he said, "and go across the mountain, to Armouth and the East Forest country, where I came from. They'll be making hay. There's always work at haying and harvest."

She did not know how to answer. Fragile and ill-looking, he would be given

such work only out of charity or brutality; and if he got it he would not be able to do it.

"The roads aren't like they used to be," she said. "These last years, there's thieves and gangs everywhere. Foreign riffraff, as my friend Townsend says. But it's not safe anymore to go alone."

Looking at him in the dusky light to see how he took this, she wondered sharply for a moment what it must be like never to have feared a human being—what it would be like to have to learn to be afraid.

"Ogion still went—" he began, and then set his mouth; he had recalled that Ogion had been a mage.

"Down in the south part of the island," Tenar said, "there's a lot of herding. Sheep, goats, cattle. They drive them up into the hills before the Long Dance, and pasture them there until the rains. They're always needing herders." She drank a mouthful of the wine. It was like the dragon's name in her mouth. "But why can't you just stay here?"

"Not in Ogion's house. The first place they'll come."

"Well, what if they do come? What will they want of you?"

"To be what I was."

The desolation of his voice chilled her.

She was silent, trying to remember what it was like to have been powerful, to be the Eaten One, the One Priestess of the Tombs of Atuan, and then to lose that, throw it away, become only Tenar, only herself. She thought about how it was to have been a woman in the prime of life, with children and a man, and then to lose all that, becoming old and a widow, powerless. But even so she did not feel she understood his shame, his agony of humiliation. Perhaps only a man could feel so. A woman got used to shame.

Or maybe Aunty Moss was right, and when the meat was out the shell was empty.

Witch-thoughts, she thought. And to turn his mind and her own, and because the soft, fiery wine made her wits and tongue quick, she said, "Do you know, I've thought—about Ogion teaching me, and I wouldn't go on, but went and found myself my farmer and married him—I thought, when I did that, I thought on my wedding day, Ged will be angry when he hears of this!" She laughed as she spoke.

"I was," he said.

She waited.

He said, "I was disappointed."

“Angry,” she said.

“Angry,” he said.

He poured her glass full.

“I had the power to know power, then,” he said. “And you—you shone, in that terrible place, the Labyrinth, that darkness. . . .”

“Well, then, tell me: what should I have done with my power, and the knowledge Ogion tried to teach me?”

“Use it.”

“How?”

“As the Art Magic is used.”

“By whom?”

“Wizards,” he said, a little painfully.

“Magic means the skills, the arts of wizards, of mages?”

“What else would it mean?”

“Is that all it could ever mean?”

He pondered, glancing up at her once or twice.

“When Ogion taught me,” she said, “here—at the hearth there—the words of the Old Speech, they were as easy and as hard in my mouth as in his. That was like learning the language I spoke before I was born. But the rest—the lore, the runes of power, the spells, the rules, the raising of the forces—that was all dead to me. Somebody else’s language. I used to think, I could be dressed up as a warrior, with a lance and a sword and a plume and all, but it wouldn’t fit, would it? What would I do with the sword? Would it make me a hero? I’d be myself in clothes that didn’t fit, is all, hardly able to walk.”

She sipped her wine.

“So I took it all off,” she said, “and put on my own clothes.”

“What did Ogion say when you left him?”

“What did Ogion usually say?”

That roused the shadowy smile again. He said nothing.

She nodded.

After a while, she went on more softly, “He took me because you brought me to him. He wanted no prentice after you, and he never would have taken a girl but from you, at your asking. But he loved me. He did me honor. And I loved and honored him. But he couldn’t give me what I wanted, and I couldn’t take what he had to give me. He knew that. But, Ged, it was a different matter when he saw Therru. The day before he died. You say, and Moss says, that power knows

power. I don't know what he saw in her, but he said, 'Teach her!' And he said . . ."

Ged waited.

"He said, 'They will fear her.' And he said, 'Teach her *all*! Not Roke.' I don't know what he meant. How can I know? If I had stayed here with him I might know, I might be able to teach her. But I thought, Ged will come, he'll know. He'll know what to teach her, what she needs to know, my wronged one."

"I do not know," he said, speaking very low. "I saw—In the child I see only—the wrong done. The evil."

He drank off his wine.

"I have nothing to give her," he said.

There was a little scraping knock at the door. He started up instantly with that same helpless turn of the body, looking for a place to hide.

Tenar went to the door, opened it a crack, and smelled Moss before she saw her.

"Men in the village," the old woman whispered dramatically. "All kind of fine folk come up from the Port, from the great ship that's in from Havnor City, they say. Come after the Archmage, they say."

"He doesn't want to see them," Tenar said weakly. She had no idea what to do.

"I dare say not," said the witch. And after an expectant pause, "Where is he, then?"

"Here," said Sparrowhawk, coming to the door and opening it wider. Moss eyed him and said nothing.

"Do they know where I am?"

"Not from me," Moss said.

"If they come here," said Tenar, "all you have to do is send them away—after all, you are the Archmage—"

Neither he nor Moss was paying attention to her.

"They won't come to *my* house," Moss said. "Come on, if you like."

He followed her, with a glance but no word to Tenar.

"But what am I to tell them?" she demanded.

"Nothing, dearie," said the witch.

Heather and Therru came back from the marshes with seven dead frogs in a net bag, and Tenar busied herself cutting off and skinning the legs for the hunters' supper. She was just finishing when she heard voices outside, and looking up at the open door saw people standing at it—men in hats, a twist of gold, a glitter—"Mistress Goha?" said a civil voice.

"Come in!" she said.

They came in: five men, seeming twice as many in the low-ceilinged room, and tall, and grand. They looked about them, and she saw what they saw.

They saw a woman standing at a table, holding a long, sharp knife. On the table was a chopping board and on that, to one side, a little heap of naked greenish-white legs; to the other, a heap of fat, bloody, dead frogs. In the shadow behind the door something lurked—a child, but a child deformed, mismade, half-faced, claw-handed. On a bed in an alcove beneath the single window sat a big, bony young woman, staring at them with her mouth wide open. Her hands were bloody and muddy and her dank skirt smelled of marsh-water. When she saw them look at her, she tried to hide her face with her skirt, baring her legs to the thigh.

They looked away from her, and from the child, and there was no one else to look at but the woman with the dead frogs.

"Mistress Goha," one of them repeated.

"So I'm called," she said.

"We come from Havnor, from the King," said the civil voice. She could not see his face clearly against the light. "We seek the Archmage, Sparrowhawk of Gont. King Lebannen is to be crowned at the turn of autumn, and he seeks to have the Archmage, his lord and friend, with him to make ready for the coronation, and to crown him, if he will."

The man spoke steadily and formally, as to a lady in a palace. He wore sober breeches of leather and a linen shirt dusty from the climb up from Gont Port, but it was fine cloth, with embroidery of gold thread at the throat.

"He's not here," Tenar said.

A couple of little boys from the village peered in at the door and drew back, peered again, fled shouting.

"Maybe you can tell us where he is, Mistress Goha," said the man.

"I cannot."

She looked at them all. The fear of them she had felt at first—caught from Sparrowhawk's panic, perhaps, or mere foolish fluster at seeing strangers—was subsiding. Here she stood in Ogion's house; and she knew well enough why Ogion had never been afraid of great people.

"You must be tired after that long road," she said. "Will you sit down? There's wine. Here, I must wash the glasses."

She carried the chopping board over to the sideboard, put the frogs' legs in the larder, scraped the rest into the swill-pail that Heather would carry to Weaver

Fan's pigs, washed her hands and arms and the knife at the basin, poured fresh water, and rinsed out the two glasses she and Sparrowhawk had drunk from. There was one other glass in the cabinet, and two clay cups without handles. She set these on the table, and poured wine for the visitors; there was just enough left in the bottle to go round. They had exchanged glances, and had not sat down. The shortage of chairs excused that. The rules of hospitality, however, bound them to accept what she offered. Each man took glass or cup from her with a polite murmur. Saluting her, they drank.

"My word!" said one of them.

"Andrades—the Late Harvest," said another, with round eyes.

A third shook his head. "Andrades—the Dragon Year," he said solemnly.

The fourth nodded and sipped again, reverent.

The fifth, who was the first to have spoken, lifted his clay cup to Tenar again and said, "You honor us with a king's wine, mistress."

"It was Ogion's," she said. "This was Ogion's house. This is Aihal's house. You knew that, my lords?"

"We did, mistress. The King sent us to this house, believing that the Archmage would come here; and, when word of the death of its master came to Roke and Havnor, yet more certain of it. But it was a dragon that bore the Archmage from Roke. And no word or sending has come from him since then to Roke or to the King. And it is much in the King's heart, and much in the interest of us all, to know the Archmage is here, and is well. Did he come here, mistress?"

"I cannot say," she said, but it was a poor equivocation, repeated, and she could see that the men thought so. She drew herself up, standing behind the table. "I mean that I will not say. I think if the Archmage wishes to come, he will come. If he wishes not to be found, you will not find him. Surely you will not seek him out against his will."

The oldest of the men, and the tallest, said, "The King's will is ours."

The first speaker said more conciliatingly, "We are only messengers. What is between the King and the Archmage of the Isles is between them. We seek only to bring the message, and the reply."

"If I can, I will see that your message reaches him."

"And the reply?" the oldest man demanded.

She said nothing, and the first speaker said, "We'll be here some few days at the house of the Lord of Re Albi, who, hearing of our ship's arrival, offered us his hospitality."

She felt a sense of a trap laid or a noose tightening, though she did not know why. Sparrowhawk's vulnerability, his sense of his own weakness, had infected her. Distraught, she used the defense of her appearance, her seeming to be a mere goodwife, a middle-aged housekeeper—but was it seeming? It was also truth, and these matters were more subtle even than the guises and shape-changes of wizards—She ducked her head and said, "That will be more befitting your lordships' comfort. You see we live very plain here, as the old mage did."

"And drink Andrades wine," said the one who had identified the vintage, a bright-eyed, handsome man with a winning smile. She, playing her part, kept her head down. But as they took their leave and filed out, she knew that, seem what she might and be what she might, if they did not know now that she was Tenar of the Ring they would know it soon enough; and so would know that she herself knew the Archmage and was indeed their way to him, if they were determined to seek him out.

When they were gone, she heaved a great sigh. Heather did so too, and then finally shut her mouth, which had hung open all the time they were there.

"I never," she said, in a tone of deep, replete satisfaction, and went to see where the goats had got to.

Therru came out from the dark place behind the door, where she had barricaded herself from the strangers with Ogion's staff and Tenar's alder stick and her own hazel switch. She moved in the tight, sidling way she had mostly abandoned since they had been here, not looking up, the ruined half of her face bent down toward the shoulder.

Tenar went to her and knelt to hold her in her arms. "Therru," she said, "they won't hurt you. They mean no harm."

The child would not look at her. She let Tenar hold her like a block of wood.

"If you say so, I won't let them in the house again."

After a while the child moved a little and asked in her hoarse, thick voice, "What will they do to Sparrowhawk?"

"Nothing," Tenar said. "No harm! They come—they mean to do him honor."

But she had begun to see what their attempt to do him honor would do to him—denying his loss, denying him his grief for what he had lost, forcing him to act the part of what he was no longer.

When she let the child go, Therru went to the closet and fetched out Ogion's broom. She laboriously swept the floor where the men from Havnor had stood, sweeping away their footprints, sweeping the dust of their feet out the door, off the

doorstep.

Watching her, Tenar made up her mind.

She went to the shelf where Ogion's three great books stood, and rummaged there. She found several goose quills and a half-dried-up bottle of ink, but not a scrap of paper or parchment. She set her jaw, hating to do damage to anything so sacred as a book, and scored and tore out a thin strip of paper from the blank endsheet of the Book of Runes. She sat at the table and dipped the pen and wrote. Neither the ink nor the words came easy. She had scarcely written anything since she had sat at this same table a quarter of a century ago, with Ogion looking over her shoulder, teaching her the runes of Hardic and the Great Runes of Power. She wrote:

> *go oak farm in midl valy to clerbrook*
> *say goha sent to look to garden & sheep*

It took her nearly as long to read it over as it had to write it. By now Therru had finished her sweeping and was watching her, intent. She added one word:

> *to-night*

"Where's Heather?" she asked the child, as she folded the paper on itself once and twice. "I want her to take this to Aunty Moss's house."

She longed to go herself, to see Sparrowhawk, but dared not be seen going, lest they were watching her to lead them to him.

"I'll go," Therru whispered.

Tenar looked at her sharply.

"You'll have to go alone, Therru. Past the village."

The child nodded.

"Give it only to him!"

She nodded again.

Tenar tucked the paper into the child's pocket, held her, kissed her, let her go. Therru went, not crouching and sidling now but running freely, flying, Tenar thought, seeing her vanish in the evening light beyond the dark door-frame, flying like a bird, a dragon, a child, free.

CHAPTER 8

HAWKS

Therru was back soon with Sparrowhawk's reply: "He said he'll leave tonight."

Tenar heard this with satisfaction, relieved that he had accepted her plan, that he would get clear away from these messengers and messages he dreaded. It was not till she had fed Heather and Therru their frog-leg feast, and put Therru to bed and sung to her, and was sitting up alone without lamp or firelight, that her heart began to sink. He was gone. He was not strong, he was bewildered and uncertain, he needed friends; and she had sent him away from those who were and those who wished to be his friends. He was gone, and she must stay, to keep the hounds from his trail, to learn at least whether they stayed in Gont or sailed back to Havnor.

His panic and her obedience to it began to seem so unreasonable to her that she thought it equally unreasonable, improbable, that he would in fact go. He would use his wits and simply hide in Moss's house, which was the last place in all Earthsea that a king would look for an archmage. It would be much better if he stayed there till the King's men left. Then he could come back here to Ogion's house, where he belonged. And it would go on as before, she looking after him until he had his strength back, and he giving her his dear companionship.

A shadow against the stars in the doorway: "Hsssst! Awake?" Aunty Moss came in. "Well, he's off," she said, conspiratorial, jubilant. "Went the old forest road. Says he'll cut down to the Middle Valley way, along past Oak Springs, tomorrow."

"Good," said Tenar.

Bolder than usual, Moss sat down uninvited. "I gave him a loaf and a bit of cheese for the way."

"Thank you, Moss. That was kind."

"Mistress Goha." Moss's voice in the darkness took on the singsong resonance of her chanting and spell-casting. "There's a thing I was wanting to say to you, dearie, without going beyond what I can know, for I know you've lived among

great folks and been one of 'em yourself, and that seals my mouth when I think of it. And yet there's things I know that you've had no way of knowing, for all the learning of the runes, and the Old Speech, and all you've learned from the wise, and in the foreign lands."

"That's so, Moss."

"Aye, well, then. So when we talked about how witch knows witch, and power knows power, and I said—of him who's gone now—that he was no mage now, whatever he had been, and still you would deny it—But I was right, wasn't I?"

"Yes."

"Aye. I was."

"He said so himself."

"O' course he did. He don't lie nor say this is that and that's this till you don't know which end's up, I'll say that for him. He's not one tries to drive the cart without the ox, either. But I'll say flat out I'm glad he's gone, for it wouldn't do, it wouldn't do any longer, being a different matter with him now, and all."

Tenar had no idea what she was talking about, except for her image of trying to drive the cart without the ox. "I don't know why he's so afraid," she said. "Well, I know in part, but I don't understand it, why he feels such shame. But I know he thinks that he should have died. And I know that all I understand about living is having your work to do, and being able to do it. That's the pleasure, and the glory, and all. And if you can't do the work, or it's taken from you, then what's any good? You have to have something. . . ."

Moss listened and nodded as at words of wisdom, but after a slight pause she said, "It's a queer thing for an old man to be a boy of fifteen, no doubt!"

Tenar almost said, "What are you talking about, Moss?"—but something prevented her. She realized that she had been listening for Ged to come into the house from his roaming on the mountainside, that she was listening for the sound of his voice, that her body denied his absence. She glanced suddenly over at the witch, a shapeless lump of black perched on Ogion's chair by the empty hearth.

"Ah!" she said, a great many thoughts suddenly coming into her mind all at once.

"That's why," she said. "*That's* why I never—"

After a quite long silence, she said, "Do they—do wizards—is it a spell?"

"Surely, surely, dearie," said Moss. "They witch 'emselves. Some'll tell you they make a trade-off, like a marriage turned backward, with vows and all, and so get their power then. But to me that's got a wrong sound to it, like a dealing with the

Old Powers more than what a true witch deals with. And the old mage, he told me they did no such thing. Though I've known some woman witches do it, and come to no great harm by it."

"The ones who brought me up did that, promising virginity."

"Oh, aye, no men, you told me, and them yurnix. Terrible!"

"But why, but why—why did I never *think*—"

The witch laughed aloud. "Because that's the power of 'em, dearie. You don't think! You can't! And nor do they, once they've set their spell. How could they? Given their power? It wouldn't do, would it, it wouldn't do. You don't get without you give as much. That's true for all, surely. So they know that, the witch men, the men of power, they know that better than any. But then, you know, it's an uneasy thing for a man not to be a man, no matter if he can call the sun down from the sky. And so they put it right out of mind, with their spells of binding. And truly so. Even in these bad times we've been having, with the spells going wrong and all, I haven't yet heard of a wizard breaking those spells, seeking to use his power for his body's lust. Even the worst would fear to. O' course, there's those will work illusions, but they only fool 'emselves. And there's witch men of little account, witch-tinkers and the like, some of them'll try their own spells of beguilement on country women, but for all I can see, those spells don't amount to much. What it is, is the one power's as great as the other, and each goes its own way. That's how I see it."

Tenar sat thinking, absorbed. At last she said, "They set themselves apart."

"Aye. A wizard has to do that."

"But you don't."

"Me? I'm only an old witch woman, dearie."

"How old?"

After a minute Moss's voice in the darkness said, with a hint of laughter in it, "Old enough to keep out of trouble."

"But you said . . . You haven't been celibate."

"What's that, dearie?"

"Like the wizards."

"Oh, no. No, no! Never was anything to look at, but there was a way I could look at them . . . not witching, you know, dearie, you know what I mean . . . there's a way to look, and he'd come round, sure as a crow will caw, in a day or two or three he'd come around my place—'I need a cure for my dog's mange,' 'I need a tea for my sick granny,'—but I knew what it was they needed, and if I liked 'em well

enough maybe they got it. And for love, for love—I'm not one o' them, you know, though maybe some witches are, but they dishonor the art, I say. I do my art for pay but I take my pleasure for love, that's what I say. Not that it's all pleasure, all that. I was crazy for a man here for a long time, years, a good-looking man he was, but a hard, cold heart. He's long dead. Father to that Townsend who's come back here to live, you know him. Oh, I was so heartset on that man I did use my art, I spent many a charm on him, but 'twas all wasted. All for nothing. No blood in a turnip . . . And I came up here to Re Albi in the first place when I was a girl because I was in trouble with a man in Gont Port. But I can't talk of that, for they were rich, great folks. 'Twas they had the power, not I! They didn't want their son tangled with a common girl like me, foul slut they called me, and they'd have had me put out of the way, like killing a cat, if I hadn't run off up here. But oh, I did like that lad, with his round, smooth arms and legs and his big, dark eyes, I can see him plain as plain after all these years. . . ."

They sat a long while silent in the darkness.

"When you had a man, Moss, did you have to give up your power?"

"Not a bit of it," the witch said, complacent.

"But you said you don't get unless you give. Is it different, then, for men and for women?"

"What isn't, dearie?"

"I don't know," Tenar said. "It seems to me we make up most of the differences, and then complain about 'em. I don't see why the Art Magic, why power, should be different for a man witch and a woman witch. Unless the power itself is different. Or the art."

"A man gives out, dearie. A woman takes in."

Tenar sat silent but unsatisfied.

"Ours is only a little power, seems like, next to theirs," Moss said. "But it goes down deep. It's all roots. It's like an old blackberry thicket. And a wizard's power's like a fir tree, maybe, great and tall and grand, but it'll blow right down in a storm. Nothing kills a blackberry bramble." She gave her hen-chuckle, pleased with her comparison. "Well, then!" she said briskly. "So as I said, it's maybe just as well he's on his way and out o' the way, lest people in the town begin to talk."

"To talk?"

"You're a respectable woman, dearie, and her reputation is a woman's wealth."

"Her wealth," Tenar repeated in the same blank way; then she said it again: "Her wealth. Her treasure. Her hoard. Her value . . ." She stood up, unable to sit still, stretching her back and arms. "Like the dragons who found caves, who built fortresses for their treasure, for their hoard, to be safe, to sleep on their treasure, to be their treasure. Take in, take in, and never give out!"

"You'll know the value of a good reputation," Moss said dryly, "when you've lost it. 'Tisn't everything. But it's hard to fill the place of."

"Would you give up being a witch to be respectable, Moss?"

"I don't know," Moss said after a while, thoughtfully. "I don't know as I'd know how. I have the one gift, maybe, but not the other."

Tenar went to her and took her hands. Surprised at the gesture, Moss got up, drawing away a little; but Tenar drew her forward and kissed her cheek.

The older woman put up one hand and timidly touched Tenar's hair, one caress, as Ogion had used to do. Then she pulled away and muttered about having to go home, and started to leave, and asked at the door, "Or would you rather I stayed, with them foreigners about?"

"Go on," Tenar said. "I'm used to foreigners."

That night as she lay going to sleep she entered again into the vast gulfs of wind

and light, but the light was smoky, red and orange-red and amber, as if the air itself were fire. In this element she was and was not; flying on the wind and being the wind, the blowing of the wind, the force that went free; and no voice called to her.

In the morning she sat on the doorstep brushing out her hair. She was not fair to blondness, like many Kargish people; her skin was pale, but her hair dark. It was still dark, hardly a thread of grey in it. She had washed it, using some of the water that was heating to wash clothes in, for she had decided the laundry would be her day's work, Ged being gone, and her respectability secure. She dried her hair in the sun, brushing it. In the hot, windy morning, sparks followed the brush and crackled from the flying ends of her hair.

Therru came to stand behind her, watching. Tenar turned and saw her so intent she was almost trembling.

"What is it, birdlet?"

"The fire flying out," the child said, with fear or exultation. "All over the sky!"

"It's just the sparks from my hair," Tenar said, a little taken aback. Therru was smiling, and she did not know if she had ever seen the child smile before. Therru reached out both her hands, the whole one and the burned, as if to touch and follow the flight of something around Tenar's loose, floating hair. "The fires, all flying out," she repeated, and she laughed.

At that moment Tenar first asked herself how Therru saw her—saw the world—and knew she did not know: that she could not know what one saw with an eye that had been burned away. And Ogion's words, *They will fear her*, returned to her; but she felt no fear of the child. Instead, she brushed her hair again, vigorously, so the sparks would fly, and once again she heard the little husky laugh of delight.

She washed the sheets, the dishcloths, her shifts and spare dress, and Therru's dresses, and laid them out (after making sure the goats were in the fenced pasture) in the meadow to dry on the dry grass, weighting down the things with stones, for the wind was gusty, with a late-summer wildness in it.

Therru had been growing. She was still very small and thin for her age, which must be about eight, but in the last couple of months, with her injuries healed at last and free of pain, she had begun to run about more and to eat more. She was fast outgrowing her clothes, hand-me-downs from Lark's youngest, a girl of five.

Tenar thought she might walk into the village and visit with Weaver Fan and see

if he might have an end or two of cloth to give in exchange for the swill she had been sending for his pigs. She would like to sew something for Therru. And she would like to visit with old Fan, too. Ogion's death and Ged's illness had kept her from the village and the people she had known there. They had pulled her away, as ever, from what she knew, what she knew how to do, the world she had chosen to live in—a world not of kings and queens, great powers and dominions, high arts and journeys and adventures (she thought as she made sure Therru was with Heather, and set off into town), but of common people doing common things, such as marrying, and bringing up children, and farming, and sewing, and doing the wash. She thought this with a kind of vengefulness, as if she were thinking it at Ged, now no doubt halfway to Middle Valley. She imagined him on the road, near the dell where she and Therru had slept. She imagined the slight, ashen-haired man going along alone and silently, with half a loaf of the witch's bread in his pocket, and a load of misery in his heart.

It's time you found out, maybe, she thought to him. Time you learned that you didn't learn everything on Roke! As she harangued him thus in her mind, another image came into it: she saw near Ged one of the men who had stood waiting for her and Therru on that road. Involuntarily she said, "Ged, be careful!"—fearing for him, for he did not carry even a stick. It was not the big fellow with hairy lips that she saw, but another of them, a youngish man with a leather cap, the one who had stared hard at Therru.

She looked up to see the little cottage next to Fan's house, where she had lived when she lived here. Between it and her a man was passing. It was the man she had been remembering, imagining, the man with a leather cap. He was going past the cottage, past the weaver's house; he had not seen her. She watched him walk on up the village street without stopping. He was going either to the turning of the hill road or to the mansion house.

Without pausing to think why, Tenar followed him at a distance until she saw which turn he took. He went on up the hill to the domain of the Lord of Re Albi, not down the road that Ged had gone.

She turned back then, and made her visit to old Fan.

Though almost a recluse, like many weavers, Fan had been kind in his shy way to the Kargish girl, and vigilant. How many people, she thought, had protected her respectability! Now nearly blind, Fan had an apprentice who did most of the weaving. He was glad to have a visitor. He sat as if in state in an old carved chair under the object from which his use-name came: a very large painted fan, the

treasure of his family—the gift, so the story went, of a generous sea-pirate to his grandfather for some speedy sail-making in time of need. It was displayed open on the wall. The delicately painted men and women in their gorgeous robes of rose and jade and azure, the towers and bridges and banners of Havnor Great Port, were all familiar to Tenar as soon as she saw the fan again. Visitors to Re Albi were often brought to see it. It was the finest thing, all agreed, in the village.

She admired it, knowing it would please the old man, and because it was indeed very beautiful, and he said, "You've not seen much to equal that, in all your travels, eh?"

"No, no. Nothing like it in Middle Valley at all," said she.

"When you was here, in my cottage, did I ever show you the other side of it?"

"The other side? No," she said, and nothing would do then but he must get the fan down; only she had to climb up and do it, carefully untacking it, since he could not see well enough and could not climb up on the chair. He directed her anxiously. She laid it in his hands, and he peered with his dim eyes at it, half closed it to make sure the ribs played freely, then closed it all the way, turned it over, and handed it to her.

"Open it slow," he said.

She did so. Dragons moved as the folds of the fan moved. Painted faint and fine on the yellowed silk, dragons of pale red, blue, green moved and grouped, as the figures on the other side were grouped, among clouds and mountain peaks.

"Hold it up to the light," said old Fan.

She did so, and saw the two sides, the two paintings, made one by the light flowing through the silk, so that the clouds and peaks were the towers of the city, and the men and women were winged, and the dragons looked with human eyes.

"You see?"

"I see," she murmured.

"I can't, now, but it's in my mind's eye. I don't show many that."

"It is very wonderful."

"I meant to show it to the old mage," Fan said, "but with one thing and another I never did."

Tenar turned the fan once more before the light, then remounted it as it had been, the dragons hidden in darkness, the men and women walking in the light of day.

Fan took her out next to see his pigs, a fine pair, fattening nicely toward autumn sausages. They discussed Heather's shortcomings as a swill-carrier. Tenar told

him that she fancied a scrap of cloth for a child's dress, and he was delighted, pulling out a full width of fine linen sheeting for her, while the young woman who was his apprentice, and who seemed to have taken up his unsociability as well as his craft, clacked away at the broad loom, steady and scowling.

Walking home, Tenar thought of Therru sitting at that loom. It would be a decent living. The bulk of the work was dull, always the same over, but weaving was an honorable trade and in some hands a noble art. And people expected weavers to be a bit shy, often to be unmarried, shut away at their work as they were; yet they were respected. And working indoors at a loom, Therru would not have to show her face. But the claw hand? Could that hand throw the shuttle, warp the loom?

And was she to hide all her life?

But what was she to do? "Knowing what her life must be . . ."

Tenar set herself to think of something else. Of the dress she would make. Lark's daughter's dresses were coarse homespun, plain as mud. She could dye half this width, yellow maybe, or with red madder from the marsh; and then a full apron or overdress of white, with a ruffle to it. Was the child to be hidden at a loom in the dark and never have a ruffle to her skirt? And that would still leave enough for a shift, and a second apron if she cut out carefully.

"Therru!" she called as she approached the house. Heather and Therru had been in the broom-pasture when she left. She called again, wanting to show Therru the material and tell her about the dress. Heather came gawking around from the springhouse, hauling Sippy on a rope.

"Where's Therru?"

"With you," Heather replied so serenely that Tenar looked around for the child before she understood that Heather had no idea where she was and had simply stated what she wished to be true.

"Where did you leave her?"

Heather had no idea. She had never let Tenar down before; she had seemed to understand that Therru had to be kept more or less in sight, like a goat. But maybe it was Therru all along who had understood that, and had kept herself in sight? So Tenar thought, as having no comprehensible guidance from Heather, she began to look and call for the child, receiving no response.

She kept away from the cliff's edge as long as she could. Their first day there, she had explained to Therru that she must never go alone down the steep fields below the house or along the sheer edge north of it, because one-eyed vision

cannot judge distance or depth with certainty. The child had obeyed. She always obeyed. But children forget. But she would not forget. But she might get close to the edge without knowing it. But surely she had gone to Moss's house. That was it —having been there alone, last night, she would go again. That was it, of course.

She was not there. Moss had not seen her.

"I'll find her, I'll find her, dearie," she assured Tenar; but instead of going up the forest path to look for her as Tenar had hoped she would, Moss began to knot up her hair in preparation for casting a spell of finding.

Tenar ran back to Ogion's house, calling again and again. And this time she looked down the steep fields below the house, hoping to see the little figure crouched playing among the boulders. But all she saw was the sea, wrinkled and dark, at the end of those falling fields, and she grew dizzy and sick-hearted.

She went to Ogion's grave and a short way past it up the forest path, calling. As she came back through the meadow, the kestrel was hunting in the same spot where Ged had watched it hunt. This time it stooped, and struck, and rose with some little creature in its talons. It flew fast to the forest. She's feeding her young, Tenar thought. All kinds of thoughts went through her mind very vivid and precise, as she passed the laundry laid out on the grass, dry now, she must take it up before evening. She must search around the house, the springhouse, the milking shed, more carefully. This was her fault. She had caused it to happen by thinking of making Therru into a weaver, shutting her away in the dark to work, to be respectable. When Ogion had said "Teach her, teach her all, Tenar!" When she knew that a wrong that cannot be repaired must be transcended. When she knew that the child had been given her and she had failed in her charge, failed her trust, lost her, lost the one great gift.

She went into the house, having searched every corner of the other buildings, and looked again in the alcove and round the other bed. She poured herself water, for her mouth was dry as sand.

Behind the door the three sticks of wood, Ogion's staff and the walking sticks, moved in the shadows, and one of them said, "Here."

The child was crouched in that dark corner, drawn into her own body so that she seemed no bigger than a little dog, head bent down to the shoulder, arms and legs pulled tight in, the one eye shut.

"Little bird, little sparrow, little flame, what is wrong? What happened? What have they done to you now?"

Tenar held the small body, closed and stiff as stone, rocking it in her arms.

"How could you frighten me so? How could you hide from me? Oh, I was so angry!"

She wept, and her tears fell on the child's face.

"Oh Therru, Therru, Therru, don't hide away from me!"

A shudder went through the knotted limbs, and slowly they loosened. Therru moved, and all at once clung to Tenar, pushing her face into the hollow between Tenar's breast and shoulder, clinging tighter, till she was clutching desperately. She did not weep. She never wept; her tears had been burned out of her, maybe; she had none. But she made a long, moaning, sobbing sound.

Tenar held her, rocking her, rocking her. Very, very slowly the desperate grip relaxed. The head lay pillowed on Tenar's breast.

"Tell me," the woman murmured, and the child answered in her faint, hoarse whisper, "He came here."

Tenar's first thought was of Ged, and her mind, still moving with the quickness of fear, caught that, saw who "he" was to her, and gave it a wry grin in passing, but passed on, hunting. "Who came here?"

No answer but a kind of internal shuddering.

"A man," Tenar said quietly, "a man in a leather cap."

Therru nodded once.

"We saw him on the road, coming here."

No response.

"The four men—the ones I was angry at, do you remember? He was one of them."

But she recalled how Therru had held her head down, hiding the burned side, not looking up, as she had always done among strangers.

"Do you know him, Therru?"

"Yes."

"From—from when you lived in the camp by the river?"

One nod.

Tenar's arms tightened around her.

"He came here?" she said, and all the fear she had felt turned as she spoke into anger, a rage that burned in her the length of her body like a rod of fire. She gave a kind of laugh—"Hah!"—and remembered in that moment Kalessin, how Kalessin had laughed.

But it was not so simple for a human and a woman. The fire must be contained. And the child must be comforted.

"Did he see you?"

"I hid."

Presently Tenar said, stroking Therru's hair, "He will never touch you, Therru. Understand me and believe me: he will never touch you again. He'll never see you again unless I'm with you, and then he must deal with me. Do you understand, my dear, my precious, my beautiful? You need not fear him. You must not fear him. He wants you to fear him. He feeds on your fear. We will starve him, Therru. We'll starve him till he eats himself. Till he chokes gnawing on the bones of his own hands. . . . Ah, ah, ah, don't listen to me now, I'm only angry, only angry. . . . Am I red? Am I red like a Gontishwoman, now? Like a dragon, am I red?" She tried to joke; and Therru, lifting her head, looked up into her face from her own crumpled, tremulous, fire-eaten face and said, "Yes. You are a red dragon."

The idea of the man's coming to the house, being in the house, coming around to look at his handiwork, maybe thinking of improving on it, that idea whenever it recurred to Tenar came less as a thought than as a queasy fit, a need to vomit. But the nausea burned itself out against the anger.

They got up and washed, and Tenar decided that what she felt most of all just now was hunger. "I am hollow," she said to Therru, and set them out a substantial meal of bread and cheese, cold beans in oil and herbs, a sliced onion, and dry sausage. Therru ate a good deal, and Tenar ate a great deal.

As they cleared up, she said, "For the present, Therru, I won't leave you at all, and you won't leave me. Right? And we should both go now to Aunty Moss's house. She was making a spell to find you, and she needn't bother to go on with it, but she might not know that."

Therru stopped moving. She glanced once at the open doorway, and shrank away from it.

"We need to bring in the laundry, too. On our way back. And when we're back, I'll show you the cloth I got today. For a dress. For a new dress, for you. A red dress."

The child stood, drawing in to herself.

"If we hide, Therru, we feed him. We will eat. And we will starve him. Come with me."

The difficulty, the barrier of that doorway to the outside was tremendous to Therru. She shrank from it, she hid her face, she trembled, stumbled, it was cruel to force her to cross it, cruel to drive her out of hiding, but Tenar was without pity.

“Come!” she said, and the child came.

They walked hand-in-hand across the fields to Moss’s house. Once or twice Therru managed to look up.

Moss was not surprised to see them, but she had a queer, wary look about her. She told Therru to run inside her house to see the ringneck hen’s new chicks and choose which two might be hers; and Therru disappeared at once into that refuge.

“She was in the house all along,” Tenar said. “Hiding.”

“Well she might,” said Moss.

“Why?” Tenar asked harshly. She was not in the hiding vein.

“There’s—there’s beings about,” the witch said, not portentously but uneasily.

“There’s scoundrels about!” said Tenar, and Moss looked at her and drew back a little.

“Eh, now,” she said. “Eh, dearie. You have a fire around you, a shining of fire all about your head. I cast the spell to find the child, but it didn’t go right. It went its own way somehow, and I don’t know yet if it’s ended. I’m bewildered. I saw great beings. I sought the little girl but I saw them, flying in the mountains, flying in the clouds. And now you have that about you, like your hair was afire. What’s amiss, what’s wrong?”

“A man in a leather cap,” Tenar said. “A youngish man. Well enough looking. The shoulder seam of his vest’s torn. Have you seen him round?”

Moss nodded. “They took him on for the haying at the mansion house.”

“I told you that she”—Tenar glanced at the house—“was with a woman and two men? He’s one of them.”

“You mean, one of them that—”

“Yes.”

Moss stood like a wood carving of an old woman, rigid, a block. “I don’t know,” she said at last. “I thought I knew enough. But I don’t. What—What would—Would he come to—to see her?”

“If he’s the father, maybe he’s come to claim her.”

“Claim her?”

“She’s his property.”

Tenar spoke evenly. She looked up at the heights of Gont Mountain as she spoke.

“But I think it’s not the father. I think this is the other one. The one that came and told my friend in the village that the child had ‘hurt herself.’”

Moss was still bewildered, still frightened by her own conjurations and visions,

by Tenar's fierceness, by the presence of abominable evil. She shook her head, desolate. "I don't know," she said. "I thought I knew enough. How could he come back?"

"To eat," Tenar said. "To eat. I won't be leaving her alone again. But tomorrow, Moss, I might ask you to keep her here an hour or so, early in the day. Would you do that, while I go up to the manor house?"

"Aye, dearie. Of course. I could put a hiding-spell on her, if you like. But . . . But they're up there, the great men from the King's City. . . ."

"Why, then, they can see how life is among the common folk," said Tenar, and Moss drew back again as if from a rush of sparks blown her way from a fire in the wind.

Chapter 9

Finding Words

They were making hay in the Lord's long meadow, strung out across the slope in the bright shadows of morning. Three of the mowers were women, and of the two men one was a boy, as Tenar could make out from some distance, and the other was stooped and grizzled. She came up along the mown rows and asked one of the women about the man with the leather cap.

"Him from down by Valmouth, ah," said the mower. "Don't know where he's got to." The others came along the row, glad of a break. None of them knew where the man from Middle Valley was or why he wasn't mowing with them. "That kind don't stay," the grizzled man said. "Shiftless. You know him, miss's?"

"Not by choice," said Tenar. "He came lurking about my place—frightened the child. I don't know what he's called, even."

"Calls himself Handy," the boy volunteered. The others looked at her or looked away and said nothing. They were beginning to piece out who she must be, the Kargish woman in the old mage's house. They were tenants of the Lord of Re Albi, suspicious of the villagers, leery of anything to do with Ogion. They whetted their scythes, turned away, strung out again, fell to work. Tenar walked down from the hillside field, past a row of walnut trees, to the road.

On it a man stood waiting. Her heart leapt. She strode on to meet him.

It was Aspen, the wizard of the mansion house. He stood gracefully leaning on his tall pine staff in the shade of a roadside tree. As she came out onto the road he said, "Are you looking for work?"

"No."

"My lord needs field hands. This hot weather's on the turn, the hay must be got in."

To Goha, Flint's widow, what he said was appropriate, and Goha answered him politely, "No doubt your skill can turn the rain from the fields till the hay's in." But

he knew she was the woman to whom Ogion dying had spoken his true name, and, given that knowledge, what he said was so insulting and deliberately false as to serve as a clear warning. She had been about to ask him if he knew where the man Handy was. Instead, she said, "I came to say to the overseer here that a man he took on for the haymaking left my village as a thief and worse, not one he'd choose to have about the place. But it seems the man's moved on."

She gazed calmly at Aspen until he answered, with an effort, "I know nothing about these people."

She had thought him, on the morning of Ogion's death, to be a young man, a tall, handsome youth with a grey cloak and a silvery staff. He did not look as young as she had thought him, or he was young but somehow dried and withered. His stare and his voice were now openly contemptuous, and she answered him in Goha's voice: "To be sure. I beg your pardon." She wanted no trouble with him. She made to go on her way back to the village, but Aspen said, "Wait!"

She waited.

"'A thief and worse,' you say, but slander's cheap, and a woman's tongue worse than any thief. You come up here to make bad blood among the field hands, casting calumny and lies, the dragonseed every witch sows behind her. Did you think I did not know you for a witch? When I saw that foul imp that clings to you, do you think I did not know how it was begotten, and for what purposes? The man did well who tried to destroy that creature, but the job should be completed. You defied me once, across the body of the old wizard, and I forbore to punish you then, for his sake and in the presence of others. But now you've come too far, and I warn you, woman! I will not have you set foot on this domain. And if you cross my will or dare so much as speak to me again, I will have you driven from Re Albi, and off the Overfell, with the dogs at your heels. Have you understood me?"

"No," Tenar said. "I have never understood men like you."

She turned and set off down the road.

Something like a stroking touch went up her spine, and her hair lifted up on her head. She turned sharp round to see the wizard reach out his staff toward her, and the dark lightnings gather round it, and his lips part to speak. She thought in that moment, Because Ged has lost his magery, I thought all men had, but I was wrong! And a civil voice said, "Well, well. What have we here?"

Two of the men from Havnor had come out onto the road from the cherry orchards on the other side of it. They looked from Aspen to Tenar with bland and courtly expressions, as if regretting the necessity of preventing a wizard from laying

a curse on a middle-aged widow, but really, really, it would not do.

"Mistress Goha," said the man with the gold-embroidered shirt, and bowed to her.

The other, the bright-eyed one, saluted her also, smiling. "Mistress Goha," he said, "is one who, like the King, bears her true name openly, I think, and unafraid. Living in Gont, she may prefer that we use her Gontish name. But knowing her deeds, I ask to do her honor; for she wore the Ring that no woman wore since Elfarran." He dropped to one knee as if it were the most natural thing in the world, took Tenar's right hand very lightly and quickly, and touched his forehead to her wrist. He released her and stood up, smiling that kind, collusive smile.

"Ah," said Tenar, flustered and warmed right through, "there's all kinds of power in the world! Thank you."

The wizard stood motionless, staring. He had closed his mouth on the curse and drawn back his staff, but there was still a visible darkness about it and about his eyes.

She did not know whether he had known or had just now learned that she was Tenar of the Ring. It did not matter. He could not hate her more. To be a woman was her fault. Nothing could worsen or amend it, in his eyes; no punishment was enough. He had looked at what had been done to Therru, and approved.

"Sir," she said now to the older man, "anything less than honesty and openness seems dishonor to the King, for whom you speak—and act, as now. I'd like to honor the King, and his messengers. But my own honor lies in silence, until my friend releases me. I—I'm sure, my lords, that he'll send some word to you, in time. Only give him time, I pray you."

"Surely," said the one, and the other, "As much time as he wants. And your trust, my lady, honors us above all."

She went on down the road to Re Albi at last, shaken by the shock and change of things, the wizard's flaying hatred, her own angry contempt, her terror at the sudden knowledge of his will and power to do her harm, the sudden end of that terror in the refuge offered by the envoys of the King—the men who had come in the white-sailed ship from the haven itself, the Tower of the Sword and the Throne, the center of right and order. Her heart lifted up in gratitude. There was indeed a king upon that throne, and in his crown the chiefest jewel would be the Rune of Peace.

She liked the younger man's face, clever and kindly, and the way he had knelt to her as to a queen, and his smile that had a wink hidden in it. She turned to look

back. The two envoys were walking up the road to the mansion house with the wizard Aspen. They seemed to be conversing with him amicably, as if nothing had happened.

That sank her surge of hopeful trust a bit. To be sure, they were courtiers. It wasn't their business to quarrel, or to judge and disapprove. And he was a wizard, and their host's wizard. Still, she thought, they needn't have walked and talked with him quite so comfortably.

The men from Havnor stayed several days with the Lord of Re Albi, perhaps hoping that the Archmage would change his mind and come to them, but they did not seek him, nor press Tenar about where he might be. When they left at last, Tenar told herself that she must make up her mind what to do. There was no real reason for her to stay here, and two strong reasons for leaving: Aspen and Handy, neither of whom could she trust to let her and Therru alone. Yet she found it hard to make up her mind, because it was hard to think of going. In leaving Re Albi now she left Ogion, lost him, as she had not lost him while she kept his house and weeded his onions. And she thought, I will never dream of the sky, down there. Here, where Kalessin had come, she was Tenar, she thought. Down in Middle Valley she would only be Goha again. She delayed. She said to herself, "Am I to fear those scoundrels, to run from them? That's what they want me to do. Are they to make me come and go at their will?" She said to herself, "I'll just finish the cheese-making." She kept Therru always with her. And the days went by.

Moss came with a tale to tell. Tenar had asked her about the wizard Aspen, not telling her the whole story but saying that he had threatened her—which, in fact, might well be all he had meant to do. Moss usually kept clear of the old lord's domain, but she was curious about what went on there, and not unwilling to find the chance to chat with some acquaintances there, a woman from whom she had learned midwifery and others whom she had attended as healer or finder. She got them talking about the doings at the mansion house. They all hated Aspen and so were quite ready to talk about him, but their tales must be heard as half spite and fear. Still, there would be facts among the fancies. Moss herself attested that until Aspen came three years ago, the younger lord, the grandson, had been fit and well, though a shy, sullen man, "scared-like," she said. Then about the time the young lord's mother died, the old lord had sent to Roke for a wizard—"What for? With Lord Ogion not a mile away? And they're all witchfolk themselves in the mansion."

But Aspen had come. He had paid his respects and no more to Ogion, and

always, Moss said, stayed up at the mansion. Since then, less and less had been seen of the grandson, and it was said now that he lay day and night in bed, "like a sick baby, all shriveled up," said one of the women who had been into the house on some errand. But the old lord, "a hundred years old, or near, or more," Moss insisted—she had no fear of numbers and no respect for them—the old lord was flourishing, "full of juice," they said. And one of the men, for they would have only men wait on them in the mansion, had told one of the women that the old lord had hired the wizard to make him live forever, and that the wizard was doing that, feeding him, the man said, off the grandson's life. And the man saw no harm in it, saying, "Who wouldn't want to live forever?"

"Well," Tenar said, taken aback. "That's an ugly story. Don't they talk about all this in the village?"

Moss shrugged. It was a matter of "Let be" again. The doings of the powerful were not to be judged by the powerless. And there was the dim, blind loyalty, the rootedness in place: the old man was their lord, Lord of Re Albi, nobody else's business what he did. . . . Moss evidently felt this herself. "Risky," she said, "bound to go wrong, such a trick," but she did not say it was wicked.

No sign of the man Handy had been seen up at the mansion. Longing to be sure that he had left the Overfell, Tenar asked an acquaintance or two in the village if they had seen such a man, but she got unwilling and equivocal replies. They wanted no part of her affairs. "Let be . . ." Only old Fan treated her as a friend and fellow-villager. And that might be because his eyes were so dim he could not clearly see Therru.

She took the child with her now when she went into the village, or any distance at all from the house.

Therru did not find this bondage wearisome. She stayed close by Tenar as a much younger child would do, working with her or playing. Her play was with cat's cradle, basket-making, and with a couple of bone figures that Tenar had found in a little grass bag on one of Ogion's shelves. There was an animal that might be a dog or a sheep, a figure that might be a woman or a man. To Tenar they had no sense of power or danger about them, and Moss said, "Just toys." To Therru they were a great magic. She moved them about in the patterns of some silent story for hours at a time; she did not speak as she played. Sometimes she built houses for the person and the animal, stone cairns, huts of mud and straw. They were always in her pocket in their grass bag. She was learning to spin; she could hold the distaff in the burned hand and twist the drop-spindle with the other. They had combed the

goats regularly since they had been there, and by now had a good sackful of silky goathair to be spun.

But I should be teaching her, Tenar thought, distressed. "Teach her *all*," Ogion said, and what am I teaching her? Cooking and spinning? Then another part of her mind said in Goha's voice, "And are those not true arts, needful and noble? Is wisdom all words?"

Still she worried over the matter, and one afternoon while Therru was pulling the goathair to clean and loosen it and she was carding it, in the shade of the peach tree, she said, "Therru, maybe it's time you began to learn the true names of things. There is a language in which all things bear their true names, and deed and word are one. By speaking that tongue Segoy raised the islands from the deeps. It is the language dragons speak."

The child listened, silent.

Tenar laid down her carding combs and picked up a small stone from the ground. "In that tongue," she said, "this is *tolk*."

Therru watched what she did and repeated the word, *tolk*, but without voice, only forming it with her lips, which were drawn back a little on the right side by the scarring.

The stone lay on Tenar's palm, a stone.

They were both silent.

"Not yet," Tenar said. "That's not what I have to teach you now." She let the stone fall to the ground, and picked up her combs and a handful of cloudy, grey wool Therru had prepared for carding. "Maybe when you have your true name, maybe that will be the time. Not now. Now, listen. Now is the time for stories, for you to begin to learn the stories. I can tell you stories of the Archipelago and of the Kargad Lands. I told you a story I learned from my friend Aihal the Silent. Now I'll tell you one I learned from my friend Lark when she told it to her children and mine. This is the story of Andaur and Avad. As long ago as forever, as far away as Selidor, there lived a man called Andaur, a woodcutter, who went up in the hills alone. One day, deep in the forest, he cut a great oak tree down. As it fell it cried out to him in a human voice. . . ."

It was a pleasant afternoon for them both.

But that night as she lay by the sleeping child, Tenar could not sleep. She was restless, concerned with one petty anxiety after another—did I fasten the pasture gate, does my hand ache from carding or is it arthritis beginning, and so on. Then she became very uneasy, thinking she heard noises outside the house. Why haven't

I got me a dog? she thought. Stupid, not to have a dog. A woman and child living alone ought to have a dog these days. But this is Ogion's house! Nobody would come here to do evil. But Ogion is dead, dead, buried at the roots of the tree at the forest's edge. And no one will come. Sparrowhawk's gone, run away. Not even Sparrowhawk anymore, a shadow man, no good to anyone, a dead man forced to be alive. And I have no strength, there's no good in me. I say the word of the Making and it dies in my mouth, it is meaningless. A stone. I am a woman, an old woman, weak, stupid. All I do is wrong. All I touch turns to ashes, shadow, stone. I am the creature of darkness, swollen with darkness. Only fire can cleanse me. Only fire can eat me, eat me away like—

She sat up and cried out aloud in her own language, "The curse be turned, and turn!"—and brought her right arm out and down, pointing straight to the closed door. Then, leaping out of bed, she went to the door, flung it open, and said into the cloudy night, "You come too late, Aspen. I was eaten long ago. Go clean your own house!"

There was no answer, no sound, but a faint, sour, vile smell of burning—singed cloth or hair.

She shut the door, set Ogion's staff against it, and looked to see that Therru still slept. She did not sleep herself, that night.

In the morning she took Therru into the village to ask Fan if he would want the yarn they had been spinning. It was an excuse to get away from the house and to be for a little while among people. The old man said he would be glad to weave the yarn, and they talked for a few minutes, under the great painted fan, while the apprentice scowled and clacked away grimly at the loom. As Tenar and Therru left Fan's house, somebody dodged around the corner of the little cottage where she had lived. Something, wasps or bees, were stinging Tenar's neck and head, and there was a patter of rain all round, a thundershower, but there were no clouds—Stones. She saw the pebbles strike the ground. Therru had stopped, startled and puzzled, looking around. A couple of boys ran from behind the cottage, half hiding, half showing themselves, calling out to each other, laughing.

"Come along," Tenar said steadily, and they walked to Ogion's house.

Tenar was shaking, and the shaking got worse as they walked. She tried to conceal it from Therru, who looked troubled but not frightened, not having understood what had happened.

As soon as they entered the house, Tenar knew someone had been there while

they were in the village. It smelled of burned meat and hair. The coverlet of their bed had been disarranged.

When she tried to think what to do, she knew there was a spell on her. It had been laid waiting for her. She could not stop shaking, and her mind was confused, slow, unable to decide. She could not think. She had said the word, the true name of the stone, and it had been flung at her, in her face—in the face of evil, the hideous face—She had dared speak—She could not speak—

She thought, in her own language, I cannot think in Hardic. I must not.

She could think, in Kargish. Not quickly. It was as if she had to ask the girl Arha, who she had been long ago, to come out of the darkness and think for her. To help her. As she had helped her last night, turning the wizard's curse back on him. Arha had not known a great deal of what Tenar and Goha knew, but she had known how to curse, and how to live in the dark, and how to be silent.

It was hard to do that, to be silent. She wanted to cry out. She wanted to talk—to go to Moss and tell her what had happened, why she must go, to say good-bye at least. She tried to say to Heather, "The goats are yours now, Heather," and she managed to say that in Hardic, so that Heather would understand, but Heather did not understand. She stared and laughed. "Oh, they're Lord Ogion's goats!" she said.

"Then—you—" Tenar tried to say "go on keeping them for him," but a deadly sickness came into her and she heard her voice saying shrilly, "fool, halfwit, imbecile, woman!" Heather stared and stopped laughing. Tenar covered her own mouth with her hand. She took Heather and turned her to look at the cheeses ripening in the milking shed, and pointed to them and to Heather, back and forth, until Heather nodded vaguely and laughed again because she was acting so queer.

Tenar nodded to Therru—come!—and went into the house, where the foul smell was stronger, making Therru cower.

Tenar fetched out their packs and their travel shoes. In her pack she put her spare dress and shifts, Therru's two old dresses and the half-made new one and the spare cloth; the spindle whorls she had carved for herself and Therru; and a little food and a clay bottle of water for the way. In Therru's pack went Therru's best baskets, the bone person and the bone animal in their grass bag, some feathers, a little maze-mat Moss had given her, and a bag of nuts and raisins.

She wanted to say, "Go water the peach tree," but dared not. She took the child out and showed her. Therru watered the tiny shoot carefully.

They swept and straightened up the house, working fast, in silence.

Tenar set a jug back on the shelf and saw on the other end of the shelf the three great books, Ogion's books.

Arha saw them and they were nothing to her, big leather boxes full of paper.

But Tenar stared at them and bit her knuckle, frowning with the effort to decide, to know what to do, and to know how to carry them. She could not carry them. But she must. They could not stay here in the desecrated house, the house where hatred had come in. They were his. Ogion's. Ged's. Hers. The knowledge. Teach her all! She emptied their wool and yarn from the sack she had meant to carry it in and put the books in, one atop the other, and tied the neck of the bag with a leather strap with a loop to hold it by. Then she said, "We must go now, Therru." She spoke in Kargish, but the child's name was the same, it was a Kargish word, flame, flaming; and she came, asking no questions, carrying her little hoard in the pack on her back.

They took up their walking sticks, the hazel shoot and the alder branch. They left Ogion's staff beside the door in the dark corner. They left the door of the house wide open to the wind from the sea.

An animal sense guided Tenar away from the fields and away from the hill road she had come by. She took a shortcut down the steep-falling pastures, holding Therru's hand, to the wagon road that zigzagged down to Gont Port. She knew that if she met Aspen she was lost, and thought he might be waiting for her on the way. But not, maybe, on this way.

After a mile or so of the descent she began to be able to think. What she thought first was that she had taken the right road. For the Hardic words were coming back to her, and after a while, the true words, so that she stooped and picked up a stone and held it in her hand, saying in her mind, *tolk*; and she put that stone in her pocket. She looked out into the vast levels of air and cloud and said in her mind, once, *Kalessin*. And her mind cleared, as that air was clear.

They came into a long cutting shadowed by high, grassy banks and outcrops of rock, where she was a little uneasy. As they came out onto the turn they saw the dark-blue bay below them, and coming into it between the Armed Cliffs a beautiful ship under full sail. Tenar had feared the last such ship, but not this one. She wanted to run down the road to meet it.

That she could not do. They went at Therru's pace. It was a better pace than it had been two months ago, and going downhill made it easy, too. But the ship ran to meet them. There was a magewind in her sails; she came across the bay like a

flying swan. She was in port before Tenar and Therru were halfway down the next long turning of the road.

Towns of any size at all were very strange places to Tenar. She had not lived in them. She had seen the greatest city in Earthsea, Havnor, once, for a while; and she had sailed into Gont Port with Ged, years ago, but they had climbed on up the road to the Overfell without pausing in the streets. The only other town she knew was Valmouth, where her daughter lived, a sleepy, sunny little harbor town where a ship trading from the Andrades was a great event, and most of the conversation of the inhabitants concerned dried fish.

She and the child came into the streets of Gont Port when the sun was still well above the western sea. Therru had walked fifteen miles without complaint and without being worn out, though certainly she was very tired. Tenar was tired too, having not slept the night before, and having been much distressed; and also Ogion's books had been a heavy burden. Halfway down the road she had put them into the backpack, and the food and clothing into the woolsack, which was better, but not all that much better. So they came trudging among outlying houses to the landgate of the city, where the road, coming between two carved stone dragons, turned into a street. There a man, the guard of the gate, eyed them. Therru bent her burned face down toward the shoulder and hid her burned hand under the apron of her dress.

"Will you be going to a house in town, mistress?" the guard asked, peering at the child.

Tenar did not know what to say. She did not know there were guards at city gates. She had nothing to pay a tollkeeper or an innkeeper. She did not know a soul in Gont Port—except, she thought now, the wizard, the one who had come up to bury Ogion, what was he called? But she did not know what he was called. She stood there with her mouth open, like Heather.

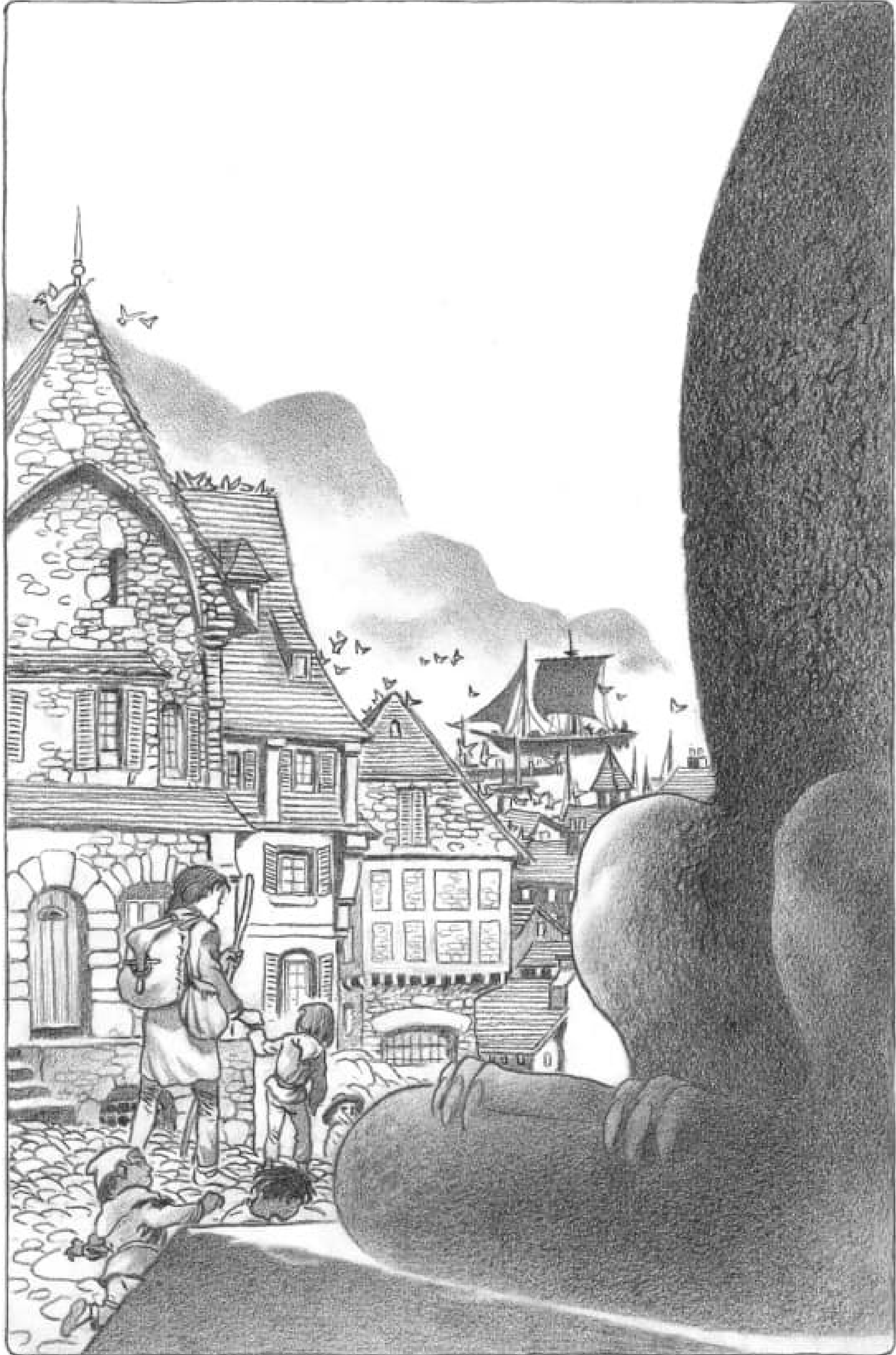
"Go on, go on," the guard said, bored, and turned away.

She wanted to ask him where she would find the road south across the headlands, the coast road to Valmouth; but she dared not waken his interest again, lest he decide she was after all a vagrant or a witch or whatever he and the stone dragons were supposed to keep out of Gont Port. So they went on between the dragons—Therru looked up, a little, to see them—and tramped along on cobblestones, more and more amazed, bewildered, and abashed. It did not seem to Tenar that anybody or anything in the world had been kept out of Gont Port. It

was all here. Tall houses of stone, wagons, drays, carts, cattle, donkeys, marketplaces, shops, crowds, people, people—the farther they went the more people there were. Therru clung to Tenar's hand, sidling, hiding her face with her hair. Tenar clung to Therru's hand.

She did not see how they could stay here, so the only thing to do was get started south and go till nightfall—all too soon now—hoping to camp in the woods. Tenar picked out a broad woman in a broad white apron who was closing the shutters of a shop, and crossed the street, resolved to ask her for the road south out of the city. The woman's firm, red face looked pleasant enough, but as Tenar was getting up her courage to speak to her, Therru clutched her hard as if trying to hide herself against her, and looking up she saw coming down the street toward her the man with the leather cap. He saw her at the same instant. He stopped.

Tenar seized Therru's arm and half dragged, half swung her round. "Come!" she said, and strode straight on past the man. Once she had put him behind her she walked faster, going downhill toward the flare and dark of the sunset water and the docks and quais at the foot of the steep street. Therru ran with her, gasping as she had gasped after she was burned.



Tall masts rocked against the red and yellow sky. The ship, sails furled, lay against the stone pier, beyond an oared galley.

Tenar looked back. The man was following them, close behind. He was not hurrying.

She ran out onto the pier, but after a way Therru stumbled and could not go on, unable to get her breath. Tenar picked her up, and the child held to her, hiding her face in Tenar's shoulder. But Tenar could scarcely move, thus laden. Her legs shook under her. She took a step, and another, and another. She came to the little wooden bridge they had laid from the pier to the ship's deck. She laid her hand on its rail.

A sailor on deck, a bald, wiry fellow, looked her over. "What's wrong, miss's?" he said.

"Is—Is the ship from Havnor?"

"From the King's City, sure."

"Let me aboard!"

"Well, I can't do that," the man said, grinning, but his eyes shifted; he was looking at the man who had come to stand beside Tenar.

"You don't have to run away," Handy said to her. "I don't mean you any harm. I don't want to hurt you. You don't understand. I was the one got help for her, wasn't I? I was really sorry, what happened. I want to help you with her." He put out his hand as if drawn irresistibly to touch Therru. Tenar could not move. She had promised Therru that he would never touch her again. She saw the hand touch the child's bare, flinching arm.

"What do you want with her?" said another voice. Another sailor had taken the place of the bald one: a young man. Tenar thought he was her son.

Handy was quick to speak. "She's got—she took my kid. My niece. It's mine. She witched it, she run off with it, see—"

She could not speak at all. The words were gone from her again, taken from her. The young sailor was not her son. His face was thin and stern, with clear eyes. Looking at him, she found the words: "Let me come aboard. Please!"

The young man held out his hand. She took it, and he brought her across the gangway onto the deck of the ship.

"Wait there," he said to Handy, and to her, "Come with me."

But her legs would not hold her up. She sank down in a heap on the deck of the ship from Havnor, dropping the heavy sack but clinging to the child. "Don't let him take her, oh, don't let them have her, not again, not again, not again!"

Chapter 10

The Dolphin

She would not let go the child, she would not give the child to them. They were all men aboard the ship. Only after a long time did she begin to be able to take into her mind what they said, what had been done, what was happening. When she understood who the young man was, the one she had thought was her son, it seemed as if she had understood it all along, only she had not been able to think it. She had not been able to think anything.

He had come back onto the ship from the docks and now stood talking to a grey-haired man, the ship's master by the look of him, near the gangplank. He glanced over at Tenar, whom they had let stay crouching with Therru in a corner of the deck between the railing and a great windlass. The long day's weariness had won out over Therru's fear; she was fast asleep, close against Tenar, with her little pack for a pillow and her cloak for a blanket.

Tenar got up slowly, and the young man came to her at once. She straightened her skirts and tried to smooth her hair back. "I am Tenar of Atuan," she said. He stood still. She said, "I think you are the King."

He was very young, younger than her son, Spark. He could hardly be twenty yet. But there was a look to him that was not young at all, something in his eyes that made her think: he has been through the fire.

"My name is Lebannen of Enlad, my lady," he said, and he was about to bow or even kneel to her. She caught his hands so that they stood there face-to-face. "Not to me," she said, "nor I to you!"

He laughed in surprise, and held her hands while he stared at her frankly. "How did you know I sought you? Were you coming to me, when that man—?"

"No, no. I was running away—from him—from—from ruffians—I was trying to go home, that's all."

"To Atuan?"

"Oh, no! To my farm. In Middle Valley. On Gont, here." She laughed too, a laugh with tears in it. The tears could be wept now, and would be wept. She let go the King's hands so that she could wipe her eyes.

"Where is it, Middle Valley?" he asked.

"South and east, around the headlands there. Valmouth is the port."

"We'll take you there," he said, with delight in being able to offer it, to do it.

She smiled and wiped her eyes, nodding acceptance.

"A glass of wine. Some food, some rest," he said, "and a bed for your child." The ship's master, listening discreetly, gave orders. The bald sailor she remembered from what seemed a long time ago came forward. He was going to pick up Therru. Tenar stood between him and the child. She could not let him touch her. "I'll carry her," she said, her voice strained high.

"There's the stairs there, miss's. I'll do it," said the sailor, and she knew he was kind, but she could not let him touch Therru.

"Let me," the young man, the King, said, and with a glance at her for permission, he knelt, gathered up the sleeping child, and carried her to the hatchway and carefully down the ladder-stairs. Tenar followed.

He laid her on a bunk in a tiny cabin, awkwardly, tenderly. He tucked the cloak around her. Tenar let him do so.

In a larger cabin that ran across the stern of the ship, with a long window looking out over the twilit bay, he asked her to sit at the oaken table. He took a tray from the sailor boy that brought it, poured out red wine in goblets of heavy glass, offered her fruit and cakes.

She tasted the wine.

"It's very good, but not the Dragon Year," she said.

He looked at her in unguarded surprise, like any boy.

"From Enlad, not the Andrades," he said meekly.

"It's very fine," she assured him, drinking again. She took a cake. It was shortbread, very rich, not sweet. The green and amber grapes were sweet and tart. The vivid tastes of the food and wine were like the ropes that moored the ship, they moored her to the world, to her mind again.

"I was very frightened," she said by way of apology. "I think I'll be myself again soon. Yesterday—no, today, this morning—there was a—a spell—" It was almost impossible to say the word, she stammered at it: "A c-curse—laid on me. It took my speech, and my wits, I think. And we ran from that, but we ran right to the man, the man who—" She looked up despairingly at the young man listening to her. His

grave eyes let her say what must be said. “He was one of the people who crippled the child. He and her parents. They raped her and beat her and burned her; these things happen, my lord. These things happen to children. And he keeps following her, to get at her. And—”

She stopped herself, and drank wine, making herself taste its flavor.

“And so from him I ran to you. To the haven.” She looked about at the low, carved beams of the cabin, the polished table, the silver tray, the thin, quiet face of the young man. His hair was dark and soft, his skin a clear bronze-red; he was dressed well and plainly, with no chain or ring or outward mark of authority. But he looked the way a king should look, she thought.

“I’m sorry I let the man go,” he said. “But he can be found again. Who was it laid the spell on you?”

“A wizard.” She would not say the name. She did not want to think about all that. She wanted them all behind her. No retribution, no pursuit. Leave them to their hatreds, put them behind her, forget.

Lebannen did not press, but he asked, “Will you be safe from these men on your farm?”

“I think so. If I hadn’t been so tired, so confused by the—by the—so confused in my mind, so that I couldn’t think, I wouldn’t have been afraid of Handy. What could he have done? With all the people about, in the street? I shouldn’t have run from him. But all I could feel was her fear. She’s so little, all she can do is fear him. She’ll have to learn not to fear him. I have to teach her that. . . .” She was wandering. Thoughts came into her head in Kargish. Had she been talking in Kargish? He would think she was mad, an old mad woman babbling. She glanced up at him furtively. His dark eyes were not on her; he gazed at the flame of the glass lamp that hung low over the table, a little, still, clear flame. His face was too sad for a young man’s face.

“You came to find him,” she said. “The Archmage. Sparrowhawk.”

“Ged,” he said, looking at her with a faint smile. “You, and he, and I go by our true names.”

“You and I, yes. But he, only to you and me.”

He nodded.

“He’s in danger from envious men, men of ill will, and he has no—no defense, now. You know that?”

She could not bring herself to be plainer, but Lebannen said, “He told me that his power as a mage was gone. Spent in the act that saved me, and all of us. But it

was hard to believe. I wanted not to believe him."

"I too. But it is so. And so he—" Again she hesitated. "He wants to be alone until his hurts are healed," she said at last, cautiously.

Lebannen said, "He and I were in the dark land, the Dry Land, together. We died together. Together we crossed the mountains there. You can come back across the mountains. There is a way. He knew it. But the name of the mountains is Pain. The stones . . . The stones cut, and the cuts are long to heal."

He looked down at his hands. She thought of Ged's hands, scored and gashed, clenched on their wounds. Holding the cuts close, closed.

Her own hand closed on the small stone in her pocket, the word she had picked up on the steep road.

"Why does he hide from me?" the young man cried in grief. Then, quietly, "I hoped indeed to see him. But if he doesn't wish it, that's the end of it, of course." She recognized the courtliness, the civility, the dignity of the messengers from Havnor, and appreciated it; she knew its worth. But she loved him for his grief.

"Surely he'll come to you. Only give him time. He was so badly hurt—everything taken from him—But when he spoke of you, when he said your name, oh, then I saw him for a moment as he was—as he will be again—All pride!"

"Pride?" Lebannen repeated, as if startled.

"Yes. Of course, pride. Who should be proud, if not he?"

"I always thought of him as—He was so patient," Lebannen said, and then laughed at the inadequacy of his description.

"Now he has no patience," she said, "and is hard on himself beyond all reason. There's nothing we can do for him, I think, except let him go his own way and find himself at the end of his tether, as they say on Gont. . . ." All at once she was at the end of her own tether, so weary she felt ill. "I think I must rest now," she said.

He rose at once. "Lady Tenar, you say you fled from one enemy and found another; but I came seeking a friend, and found another." She smiled at his wit and kindness. What a nice boy he is, she thought.

The ship was all astir when she woke: creaking and groaning of timbers, thud of running feet overhead, rattle of canvas, sailors' shouts. Therru was hard to waken and woke dull, perhaps feverish, though she was always so warm that Tenar found it hard to judge her fevers. Remorseful for having dragged the fragile child fifteen miles on foot and for all that had happened yesterday, Tenar tried to cheer her by telling her that they were in a ship, and that there was a real king on the ship, and

that the little room they were in was the King's own room; that the ship was taking them home, to the farm, and Aunty Lark would be waiting for them at home, and maybe Sparrowhawk would be there too. Not even that roused Therru's interest. She was blank, inert, mute.

On her small, thin arm Tenar saw a mark—four fingers, red, like a brand, as from a bruising grip. But Handy had not gripped her, he had only touched her. Tenar had told her, had promised her that he would never touch her again. The promise had been broken. Her word meant nothing. What word meant anything, against deaf violence?

She bent down and kissed the marks on Therru's arm.

"I wish I'd had time to finish your red dress," she said. "The King would probably like to see it. But then, I suppose people don't wear their best clothes on a ship, even kings."

Therru sat on the bunk, her head bent down, and did not answer. Tenar brushed her hair. It was growing out thick at last, a silky black curtain over the burned parts of the scalp. "Are you hungry, birdlet? You didn't have any supper last night. Maybe the King will give us breakfast. He gave me cakes and grapes last night."

No response.

When Tenar said it was time to leave the room, she obeyed. Up on deck she stood with her head bent to her shoulder. She did not look up at the white sails full of the morning wind, nor at the sparkling water, nor back at Gont Mountain rearing its bulk and majesty of forest, cliff, and peak into the sky. She did not look up when Lebannen spoke to her.

"Therru," Tenar said softly, kneeling by her, "when a king speaks to you, you answer."

She was silent.

The expression of Lebannen's face as he looked at her was unreadable. A mask perhaps, a civil mask for revulsion, shock. But his dark eyes were steady. He touched the child's arm very lightly, saying, "It must be strange for you, to wake up in the middle of the sea."

She would eat only a little fruit. When Tenar asked her if she wanted to go back to the cabin, she nodded. Reluctant, Tenar left her curled up in the bunk and went back up on deck.

The ship was passing between the Armed Cliffs, towering grim walls that seemed to lean above the sails. Bowmen on guard in little forts like mud-swallows'

nests high on the cliffs looked down at them on deck, and the sailors yelled cheerfully up at them. "Way for the King!" they shouted, and the reply came down not much louder than the calling of swallows from the heights, "The King!"

Lebannen stood at the high prow with the ship's master and an elderly, lean, narrow-eyed man in the grey cloak of a mage of Roke Island. Ged had worn such a cloak, a clean, fine one, on the day he and she brought the Ring of Erreth-Akbe to the Tower of the Sword; an old one, stained and dirty and travelworn, had been all his blanket on the cold stone of the Tombs of Atuan, and on the dirt of the desert mountains when they had crossed those mountains together. She was thinking of that as the foam flew by the ship's sides and the high cliffs fell away behind.

When the ship was out past the last reefs and had begun to swing eastward, the three men came to her. Lebannen said, "My lady, this is the Master Windkey of Roke Island."

The mage bowed, looking at her with praise in his keen eyes, and curiosity also; a man who liked to know which way the wind blew, she thought.

"Now I needn't hope the fair weather will hold, but can count on it," she said to him.

"I'm only cargo on a day like this," said the mage. "Besides, with a sailor like Master Serrathen handling the ship, who needs a weatherworker?"

We are so polite, she thought, all Ladies and Lords and Masters, all bows and compliments. She glanced at the young king. He was looking at her, smiling but reserved.

She felt as she had felt in Havnor as a girl: a barbarian, uncouth among their smoothnesses. But because she was not a girl now, she was not awed, but only wondered at how men ordered their world into this dance of masks, and how easily a woman might learn to dance it.

It would take them only the day, they told her, to sail to Valmouth. They would make port there by late afternoon, with this fair wind in the sails.

Still very weary from the long distress and strain of the day before, she was content to sit in the seat the bald sailor contrived for her out of a straw mattress and a piece of sailcloth, and watch the waves and the gulls, and see the outline of Gont Mountain, blue and dreamy in the noon light, changing as they skirted its steep shores only a mile or two out from land. She brought Therru up to be in the sunshine, and the child lay beside her, watching and dozing.

A sailor, a very dark man, toothless, came on bare feet with soles like hooves and hideously gnarled toes, and put something down on the canvas near Therru. "For

the little girl," he said hoarsely, and went off at once, though not far off. He looked around hopefully now and then from his work to see if she liked his gift and then pretended he had not looked around. Therru would not touch the little cloth-wrapped packet. Tenar had to open it. It was an exquisite carving of a dolphin, in bone or ivory, the length of her thumb.

"It can live in your grass bag," Tenar said, "with the others, the bone people."

At that Therru came to life enough to fetch out her grass bag and put the dolphin in it. But Tenar had to go thank the humble giver. Therru would not look at him or speak. After a while she asked to go back to the cabin, and Tenar left her there with the bone person, the bone animal, and the dolphin for company.

It's so easy, she thought with rage, it's so easy for Handy to take the sunlight from her, take the ship and the King and her childhood from her, and it's so hard to give them back! A year I've spent trying to give them back to her, and with one touch he takes them and throws them away. And what good does it do him—what's his prize, his power? Is power that—an emptiness?

She joined the King and the mage at the ship's railing. The sun was well to the west now, and the ship drove through a glory of light that made her think of her dream of flying with the dragons.

"Lady Tenar," the King said, "I give you no message for our friend. It seems to me that to do so is to lay a burden on you, and also to encroach upon his freedom; and I don't want to do either. I am to be crowned within the month. If it were he that held the crown, my reign would begin as my heart desires. But whether he's there or not, he brought me to my kingdom. He made me king. I will not forget it."

"I know you will not forget it," she said gently. He was so intense, so serious, armored in the formality of his rank and yet vulnerable in his honesty, the purity of his will. Her heart yearned to him. He thought he had learned pain, but he would learn it again and again, all his life, and forget none of it.

And therefore he would not, like Handy, do the easy thing to do.

"I'll bear a message willingly," she said. "It's no burden. Whether he'd hear it is up to him."

The Master Windkey grinned. "It always was," he said. "Whatever he did was up to him."

"You've known him a long time?"

"Even longer than you, my lady. Taught him," said the mage. "What I could . . . He came to the School on Roke, you know, as a boy, with a letter from Ogion telling us that he had great power. But the first time I had him out in a boat, to learn

how to speak to the wind, you know, he raised up a waterspout. I saw then what we were in for. I thought, Either he'll be drowned before he's sixteen, or he'll be archmage before he's forty. . . . Or I like to think I thought it."

"Is he still archmage?" Tenar asked. The question seemed baldly ignorant, and when it was greeted by a silence, she feared it had been worse than ignorant.

The mage said finally, "There is now no archmage of Roke." His tone was exceedingly cautious and precise.

She dared not ask what he meant.

"I think," said the King, "that the Healer of the Rune of Peace may be part of any council of this realm; don't you think so, sir?"

After another pause and evidently with a little struggle, the mage said, "Certainly."

The King waited, but he said no more.

Lebannen looked out at the bright water and spoke as if he began a tale: "When he and I came to Roke from the farthest west, borne by the dragon . . ." He paused, and the dragon's name spoke itself in Tenar's mind, *Kalessin*, like a struck gong.

"The dragon left me there, but bore him away. The keeper of the door of the House of Roke said then, 'He has done with doing. He goes home.' And before that—on the beach of Selidor—he bade me leave his staff, saying he was no mage now. So the Masters of Roke took counsel to choose a new archmage.

"They took me among them, that I might learn what it might be well for a king to know about the Council of the Wise. And also I was one of them to replace one of their number: Thorion, the Summoner, whose art was turned against him by that great evil which my lord Sparrowhawk found and ended. When we were there, in the Dry Land, between the wall and the mountains, I saw Thorion. My lord spoke to him, telling him the way back to life across the wall. But he did not take it. He did not come back."

The young man's strong, fine hands held hard to the ship's rail. He still gazed at the sea as he spoke. He was silent for a minute and then took up his story.

"So I made out the number, nine, who meet to choose the new archmage.

"They are . . . they are wise men," he said, with a glance at Tenar. "Not only learned in their art, but knowledgeable men. They use their differences, as I had seen before, to make their decision strong. But this time . . ."

"The fact is," said the Master Windkey, seeing Lebannen unwilling to seem to criticize the Masters of Roke, "we were all difference and no decision. We could come to no agreement. Because the Archmage wasn't dead—was alive, you see, and

yet no mage—and yet still a dragonlord, it seemed. . . . And because our Changer was still shaken from the turning of his own art on him, and believed that the Summoner would return from death, and begged us to wait for him. . . . And because the Master Patterner would not speak at all. He is a Karg, my lady, like yourself; did you know that? He came to us from Karego-At." His keen eyes watched her: which way does the wind blow? "So because of all that, we found ourselves at a loss. When the Doorkeeper asked for the names of those from whom we would choose, not a name was spoken. Everybody looked at everybody else. . . ."

"I looked at the ground," Lebannen said.

"So at last we looked to the one who knows the names: the Master Namer. And he was watching the Patterner, who hadn't said a word, but sat there among his trees like a stump. It's in the Grove we meet, you know, among those trees whose roots are deeper than the islands. It was late in the evening by then. Sometimes there's a light among those trees, but not that night. It was dark, no starlight, a cloudy sky above the leaves. And the Patterner stood up and spoke then—but in his own language, not in the Old Speech, nor in Hardic, but in Kargish. Few of us knew it or even knew what tongue it was, and we didn't know what to think. But the Namer told us what the Patterner had said. He said: *A woman on Gont*."

He stopped. He was no longer looking at her. After a bit she said, "Nothing more?"

"Not a word more. When we pressed him, he stared at us and couldn't answer; for he'd been in the vision, you see—he'd been seeing the shape of things, the pattern; and it's little of that can ever be put in words, and less into ideas. He knew no more what to think of what he'd said than the rest of us. But it was all we had."

The Masters of Roke were teachers, after all, and the Windkey was a very good teacher; he couldn't help but make his story clear. Clearer perhaps than he wanted. He glanced once again at Tenar, and away.

"So, you see, it seemed we should come to Gont. But for what? Seeking whom? 'A woman'—not much to go on! Evidently this woman is to guide us, show us the way, somehow, to our archmage. And at once, as you may think, my lady, you were spoken of—for what other woman on Gont had we ever heard of? It is no great island, but yours is a great fame. Then one of us said, 'She would lead us to Ogion.' But we all knew that Ogion had long ago refused to be archmage, and surely would not accept now that he was old and ill. And indeed Ogion was dying as we spoke, I think. Then another said, 'But she'd lead us also to Sparrowhawk!' And then we

were truly in the dark."

"Truly," Lebannen said. "For it began to rain, there among the trees." He smiled. "I had thought I'd never hear rain fall again. It was a great joy to me."

"Nine of us wet," said the Windkey, "and one of us happy."

Tenar laughed. She could not help but like the man. If he was so wary of her, it behooved her to be wary of him; but to Lebannen, and in Lebannen's presence, only candor would do.

"Your 'woman on Gont' can't be me, then, for I will not lead you to Sparrowhawk."

"It was my opinion," the mage said with apparent and perhaps real candor of his own, "that it couldn't be you, my lady. For one thing, he would have said your name, surely, in the vision. Very few are those who bear their true names openly! But I am charged by the Council of Roke to ask you if you know of any woman on this isle who might be the one we seek—sister or mother to a man of power, or even his teacher; for there are witches very wise in their way. Maybe Ogion knew such a woman? They say he knew every soul on this island, for all he lived alone and wandered in the wilderness. I wish he were alive to aid us now!"

She had thought already of the fisherwoman of Ogion's story. But that woman had been old when Ogion knew her, years ago, and must be dead by now. Though dragons, she thought, lived very long lives, it was said.

She said nothing for a while, and then only, "I know no one of that sort."

She could feel the mage's controlled impatience with her. What's she holding out for? What is it she wants? he was thinking, no doubt. And she wondered why it was she could not tell him. His deafness silenced her. She could not even tell him he was deaf.

"So," she said at last, "there is no archmage of Earthsea. But there is a king."

"In whom our hope and trust are well founded," the mage said with a warmth that became him well. Lebannen, watching and listening, smiled.

"In these past years," Tenar said, hesitant, "there have been many troubles, many miseries. My—the little girl—such things have been all too common. And I have heard men and women of power speak of the waning, or the changing, of their power."

"That one whom the Archmage and my lord defeated in the Dry Land, that Cob, caused untold harm and ruin. We shall be repairing our art, healing our wizards and our wizardry, for a long time yet," the mage said, decisively.

"I wonder if there might be more to be done than repairing and healing," she

said, "though that too, of course—But I wonder, could it be that . . . that one such as Cob could have such power because things were already altering . . . and that a change, a great change, has been taking place, has taken place? And that it's because of that change that we have a king again in Earthsea—perhaps a king rather than an archmage?"

The Windkey looked at her as if he saw a very distant storm cloud on the uttermost horizon. He even raised his right hand in the hint, the first sketch, of a windbinding-spell, and then lowered it again. He smiled. "Don't be afraid, my lady," he said. "Roke, and the Art Magic, will endure. Our treasure is well guarded!"

"Tell Kalessin that," she said, suddenly unable to endure the utter unconsciousness of his disrespect. It made him stare, of course. He heard the dragon's name. But it did not make him hear her. How could he, who had never listened to a woman since his mother sang him his last cradle song, hear her?

"Indeed," said Lebannen, "Kalessin came to Roke, which is said to be defended utterly from dragons; and not through any spell of my lord's, for he had no magery then. . . . But I don't think, Master Windkey, that Lady Tenar was afraid for herself."

The mage made an earnest effort to amend his offense. "I'm sorry, my lady," he said, "I spoke as to an ordinary woman."

She almost laughed. She could have shaken him. She said only, indifferently, "My fears are ordinary fears." It was no use; he could not hear her.

But the young king was silent, listening.

A sailor boy up in the dizzy, swaying world of the masts and sails and rigging overhead called out clear and sweet, "Town there round the point!" And in a minute those down on deck saw the little huddle of slate roofs, the spires of blue smoke, a few glass windows catching the westering sun, and the docks and piers of Valmouth on its bay of satiny blue water.

"Shall I take her in or will you talk her in, my lord?" asked the calm ship's master, and the Windkey replied, "Sail her in, master. I don't want to have to deal with all that flotsam!"—waving his hand at the dozens of fishing craft that littered the bay. So the King's ship, like a swan among ducklings, came tacking slowly in, hailed by every boat she passed.

Tenar looked along the docks, but there was no other seagoing vessel.

"I have a sailor son," she said to Lebannen. "I thought his ship might be in."

"What is his ship?"

"He was third mate aboard the *Gull of Eskel*, but that was more than two years ago. He may have changed ships. He's a restless man." She smiled. "When I first saw you, I thought you were my son. You're nothing alike, only in being tall, and thin, and young. And I was confused, frightened. . . . Ordinary fears."

The mage had gone up on the master's station in the prow, and she and Lebannen stood alone.

"There is too much ordinary fear," he said.

It was her only chance to speak to him alone, and the words came out hurried and uncertain—"I wanted to say—but there was no use—but couldn't it be that there's a woman on Gont, I don't know who, I have no idea, but it could be that there is, or will be, or may be, a woman, and that they seek—that they need—her. Is it impossible?"

He listened. He was not deaf. But he frowned, intent, as if trying to understand a foreign language. And he said only, under his breath, "It may be."

A fisherwoman in her tiny dinghy bawled up, "Where from?" and the boy in the rigging called back like a crowing cock, "From the King's City!"

"What is this ship's name?" Tenar asked. "My son will ask what ship I sailed on."

"Dolphin," Lebannen answered, smiling at her. My son, my king, my dear boy, she thought. How I'd like to keep you nearby!

"I must go get my little one," she said.

"How will you get home?"

"Afoot. It's only a few miles up the valley." She pointed past the town, inland, where Middle Valley lay broad and sunlit between two arms of the mountain, like a lap. "The village is on the river, and my farm's a half mile from the village. It's a pretty corner of your kingdom."

"But will you be safe?"

"Oh, yes. I'll spend tonight with my daughter here in Valmouth. And in the village they're all to be depended on. I won't be alone."

Their eyes met for a moment, but neither spoke the name they both thought.

"Will they be coming again, from Roke?" she asked. "Looking for the 'woman on Gont'—or for him?"

"Not for him. That, if they propose again, I will forbid," Lebannen said, not realizing how much he told her in those three words. "But as for their search for a new archmage, or for the woman of the Patterner's vision, yes, that may bring them here. And perhaps to you."

“They’ll be welcome at Oak Farm,” she said. “Though not as welcome as you would be.”

“I will come when I can,” he said, a little sternly; and a little wistfully, “if I can.”

Chapter 11

Home

Most of the people of Valmouth came down to the docks to see the ship from Havnor, when they heard that the King was aboard, the new king, the young king that the new songs were about. They didn't know the new songs yet, but they knew the old ones, and old Relli came with his harp and sang a piece of the *Deed of Morred*, for a king of Earthsea would be the heir of Morred for certain. Presently the King himself came on deck, as young and tall and handsome as could be, and with him a mage of Roke, and a woman and a little girl in old cloaks not much better than beggars, but he treated them as if they were a queen and a princess, so maybe that's what they were. "Maybe it's his mother," said Shinny, trying to see over the heads of the men in front of her, and then her friend Apple clutched her arm and said in a kind of whispered shriek, "It is—it's Mother!"

"Whose mother?" said Shinny, and Apple said, "Mine. And that's Therru." But she did not push forward in the crowd, even when an officer of the ship came ashore to invite old Relli aboard to play for the King. She waited with the others. She saw the King receive the notables of Valmouth, and heard Relli sing for him. She watched him bid his guests farewell, for the ship was going to stand out to sea again, people said, before night fell, and be on her way home to Havnor. The last to come across the gangplank were Therru and Tenar. To each the King gave the formal embrace, laying cheek to cheek, kneeling to embrace Therru. "Ah!" said the crowd on the dock. The sun was setting in a mist of gold, laying a great gold track across the bay, as the two came down the railed gangplank. Tenar lugged a heavy pack and bag; Therru's face was bent down and hidden by her hair. The gangplank was run in, and the sailors leapt to the rigging, and the officers shouted, and the ship *Dolphin* turned on her way. Then Apple made her way through the crowd at last.

"Hello, Mother," she said, and Tenar said, "Hello, Daughter." They kissed,

and Apple picked up Therru and said, "How you've grown! You're twice the girl you were. Come on, come on home with me."

But Apple was a little shy with her mother, that evening, in the pleasant house of her young merchant husband. She gazed at her several times with a thoughtful, almost a wary look. "It never meant a thing to me, you know, Mother," she said at the door of Tenar's bedroom—"all that—the Rune of Peace—and you bringing the Ring to Havnor. It was just like one of the songs. A thousand years ago! But it really was you, wasn't it?"

"It was a girl from Atuan," Tenar said. "A thousand years ago. I think I could sleep for a thousand years, just now."

"Go to bed, then." Apple turned away, then turned back, lamp in hand. "King-kisser," she said.

"Get along with you," said Tenar.

Apple and her husband kept Tenar a couple of days, but after that she was determined to go to the farm. So Apple walked with her and Therru up along the placid, silvery Kaheda. Summer was turning to autumn. The sun was still hot, but the wind was cool. The foliage of trees had a weary, dusty look to it, and the fields were cut or in harvest.

Apple spoke of how much stronger Therru was, and how sturdily she walked now.

"I wish you'd seen her at Re Albi," Tenar said, "before—" and stopped. She had decided not to worry her daughter with all that.

"What did happen?" Apple asked, so clearly resolved to know that Tenar gave in and answered in a low voice, "One of *them*."

Therru was a few yards ahead of them, long-legged in her outgrown dress, hunting blackberries in the hedgerows as she walked.

"Her father?" Apple asked, sickened at the thought.

"Lark said the one that seems to be the father called himself Hake. This one's younger. He's the one that came to Lark to tell her. He's called Handy. He was . . . hanging around at Re Albi. And then by ill luck we ran into him in Gont Port. But the King sent him off. And now I'm here and he's there, and all that's done with."

"But Therru was frightened," Apple said, a bit grimly.

Tenar nodded.

"But why did you go to Gont Port?"

"Oh, well, this man Handy was working for a man . . . a wizard at the Lord's

house in Re Albi, who took a dislike to me. . . ." She tried to think of the wizard's use-name and could not; all she could think of was *Tuaho*, a Kargish word for a kind of tree, she could not remember what tree.

"So?"

"Well, so, it seemed better just to come on home."

"But what did this wizard dislike you for?"

"For being a woman, mostly."

"Bah," said Apple. "Old cheese rind."

"Young cheese rind, in this case."

"Worse yet. Well, nobody around here that I know of has seen the parents, if that's the word for 'em. But if they're still hanging about, I don't like your being alone in the farmhouse."

It is pleasant to be mothered by a daughter, and to behave as a daughter to one's daughter. Tenar said impatiently, "I'll be perfectly all right!"

"You could at least get a dog."

"I've thought of that. Somebody in the village might have a pup. We'll ask Lark when we stop by there."

"Not a puppy, Mother. A dog."

"But a young one—one Therru could play with," she pleaded.

"A nice puppy that will come and kiss the burglars," said Apple, stepping along buxom and grey-eyed, laughing at her mother.

They came to the village about midday. Lark welcomed Tenar and Therru with a festivity of embraces, kisses, questions, and things to eat. Lark's quiet husband and other villagers stopped by to greet Tenar. She felt the happiness of homecoming.

Lark and the two youngest of her seven children, a boy and a girl, accompanied them out to the farm. The children had known Therru since Lark first brought her home, of course, and were used to her, though two months' separation made them shy at first. With them, even with Lark, she remained withdrawn, passive, as in the bad old days.

"She's worn out, confused by all this traveling. She'll get over it. She's come along wonderfully," Tenar said to Lark, but Apple would not let her get out of it so easily. "One of *them* turned up and terrified her and Mother both," said Apple. And little by little, between them, the daughter and the friend got the story out of Tenar that afternoon, as they opened up the cold, stuffy, dusty house, put it to rights, aired the bedding, shook their heads over sprouted onions, laid in a bit of

food in the pantry, and set a large kettle of soup on for supper. What they got came a word at a time. Tenar could not seem to tell them what the wizard had done; a spell, she said vaguely, or maybe it was that he had sent Handy after her. But when she came to talk about the King, the words came tumbling out.

"And then there he was—the King!—like a swordblade—and Handy shrinking and shriveling back from him—And I thought he was Spark! I did, I really did for a moment, I was so—so beside myself—"

"Well," said Apple, "that's all right, because Shinny thought you were his mother. When we were on the docks watching you come sailing in in your glory. She kissed him, you know, Aunty Lark. Kissed the King—just like that. I thought next thing she'd kiss that mage. But she didn't."

"I should think not, what an idea. What mage?" said Lark, with her head in a cupboard. "Where's your flour bin, Goha?"

"Your hand's on it. A Roke mage, come looking for a new archmage."

"Here?"

"Why not?" said Apple. "The last one was from Gont, wasn't he? But they didn't spend much time looking. They sailed straight back to Havnor, once they'd got rid of Mother."

"How you do talk."

"He was looking for a woman, he said," Tenar told them. "'A woman on Gont.' But he didn't seem too happy about it."

"A wizard looking for a woman? Well, that's something new," said Lark. "I'd have thought this'd be weevily by now, but it's perfectly good. I'll bake up a bannock or two, shall I? Where's the oil?"

"I'll need to draw some from the crock in the cool-room. Oh, Shandy! There you are! How are you? How's Clearbrook? How's everything been? Did you sell the ram lambs?"

They sat down nine to supper. In the soft yellow light of the evening in the stone-floored kitchen, at the long farm table, Therru began to lift her head a little, and spoke a few times to the other children; but there was still a cowering in her, and as it grew darker outside she sat so that her seeing eye could watch the window.

Not until Lark and her children had gone home in the twilight, and Apple was singing Therru to sleep, and she was washing up the dishes with Shandy, did Tenar ask about Ged. Somehow she had not wanted to while Lark and Apple were listening; there would have been so many explanations. She had forgotten to

mention his being at Re Albi at all. And she did not want to talk about Re Albi anymore. Her mind seemed to darken when she tried to think of it.

"Did a man come here last month from me—to help out with the work?"

"Oh, I clean forgot!" cried Shandy. "Hawk, you mean—him with the scars on his face?"

"Yes," Tenar said. "Hawk."

"Oh, aye, well, he'll be away up on Hot Springs Mountain, above Lissu, up there with the sheep, with Serry's sheep, I believe. He come here and says how you sent him, and there wasn't a lick o' work for him here, you know, with Clearbrook and me looking after the sheep and I been dairying and old Tiff and Sis helping me out when needed, and I racked my brains, but Clearbrook he says, 'Go ask Serry's man, Farmer Serry's overseer up by Kahedanan, do they need herders in the high pastures,' he said, and that Hawk went off and did that, and got took on, and was off next day. 'Go ask Serry's man,' Clearbrook told him, and that's what he done, and got took right on. So he'll be back down with the flocks come fall, no doubt. Up there on the Long Fells above Lissu, in the high pastures. I think maybe it was goats they wanted him for. Nice-spoken fellow. Sheep or goats, I don't remember which. I hope it's all right with you that we didn't keep him on here, Goha, but it's the truth there wasn't a lick o' work for him what with me and Clearbrook and old Tiff, and Sis got the flax in. And he said he'd been a goatherd over there where he come from, away round the mountain, some place above Armouth he said, though he said he'd never herded sheep. Maybe it'll be goats they've got him with up there."

"Maybe," said Tenar. She was much relieved and much disappointed. She had wanted to know him safe and well, but she had wanted also to find him here.

But it was enough, she told herself, simply to be home—and maybe better that he was not here, that none of all that was here, all the griefs and dreams and wizardries and terrors of Re Albi left behind, for good. She was here, now, and this was home, these stone floors and walls, these small-paned windows, outside which the oaks stood dark in starlight, these quiet, orderly rooms. She lay awake awhile that night. Her daughter slept in the next room, the children's room, with Therru, and Tenar lay in her own bed, her husband's bed, alone.

She slept. She woke, remembering no dream.

After a few days at the farm she scarcely gave a thought to the summer passed on the Overfell. It was long ago and far away. Despite Shandy's insistence on there not

being a lick o' work to be done about the farm, she found plenty that needed doing: all that had been left undone over the summer and all that had to be done in the season of harvest in the fields and dairy. She worked from daybreak till nightfall, and if by chance she had an hour to sit down, she spun, or sewed for Therru. The red dress was finished at last, and a pretty dress it was, with a white apron for fancy wear and an orangey-brown one for everyday. "Now, then, you look beautiful!" said Tenar in her seamstress's pride, when Therru first tried it on.

Therru turned her face away.

"You are beautiful," Tenar said in a different tone. "Listen to me, Therru. Come here. You have scars, ugly scars, because an ugly, evil thing was done to you. People see the scars. But they see you, too, and you aren't the scars. You aren't ugly. You aren't evil. You are Therru, and beautiful. You are Therru who can work, and walk, and run, and dance, beautifully, in a red dress."

The child listened, the soft, unhurt side of her face as expressionless as the rigid, scar-masked side.

She looked down at Tenar's hands, and presently touched them with her small fingers. "It is a beautiful dress," she said in her faint, hoarse voice.

When Tenar was alone, folding up the scraps of red material, tears came stinging into her eyes. She felt rebuked. She had done right to make the dress, and she had spoken the truth to the child. But it was not enough, the right and the truth. There was a gap, a void, a gulf, on beyond the right and the truth. Love, her love for Therru and Therru's for her, made a bridge across that gap, a bridge of spiderweb, but love did not fill or close it. Nothing did that. And the child knew it better than she.

The day of the equinox came, a bright sun of autumn burning through the mist. The first bronze was in the leaves of the oaks. As she scrubbed cream pans in the dairy with the window and door wide open to the sweet air, Tenar thought that her young king was being crowned this day in Havnor. The lords and ladies would walk in their clothes of blue and green and crimson, but he would wear white, she thought. He would climb up the steps to the Tower of the Sword, the steps she and Ged had climbed. The crown of Morred would be placed on his head. He would turn as the trumpets sounded and seat himself on the throne that had been empty so many years, and look at his kingdom with those dark eyes that knew what pain was, what fear was. Rule well, rule long, she thought, poor boy! And she thought, It should have been Ged there putting the crown on his head. He should have gone.

But Ged was herding the rich man's sheep, or maybe goats, up in the high pastures. It was a fair, dry, golden autumn, and they would not be bringing the flocks down till the snow fell up there on the heights.

When she went into the village, Tenar made a point of going by Ivy's cottage at the end of Mill Lane. Getting to know Moss at Re Albi had made her wish to know Ivy better, if she could once get past the witch's suspicion and jealousy. She missed Moss, even though she had Lark here; she had learned from her and had come to love her, and Moss had given both her and Therru something they needed. She hoped to find a replacement of that here. But Ivy, though a great deal cleaner and more reliable than Moss, had no intention of giving up her dislike of Tenar. She treated her overtures of friendship with the contempt that, Tenar admitted, they perhaps deserved. "You go your way, I go mine," the witch told her in everything but words; and Tenar obeyed, though she continued to treat Ivy with marked respect when they met. She had, she thought, slighted her too often and too long, and owed her reparation. Evidently agreeing, the witch accepted her due with unbending ire.

In mid-autumn the sorcerer Beech came up the valley, called by a rich farmer to treat his gout. He stayed on awhile in the Middle Valley villages as he usually did, and passed one afternoon at Oak Farm, checking up on Therru and talking with Tenar. He wanted to know anything she would tell him of Ogion's last days. He was the pupil of a pupil of Ogion's and a devout admirer of the mage of Gont. Tenar found it was not so hard to talk about Ogion as about other people of Re Albi, and told him all she could. When she had done he asked a little cautiously, "And the Archmage—did he come?"

"Yes," Tenar said.

Beech, a smooth-skinned, mild-looking man in his forties, tending a little to fat, with dark half-circles under his eyes that belied the blandness of his face, glanced at her, and asked nothing.

"He came after Ogion's death. And left," she said. And presently, "He's not archmage now. You knew that?"

Beech nodded.

"Is there any word of their choosing a new archmage?"

The sorcerer shook his head. "There was a ship in from the Enlades not long ago, but no word from her crew of anything but the coronation. They were full of that! And it sounds as if all auspices and events were fortunate. If the goodwill of mages is valuable, then this young king of ours is a rich man. . . . And an active one,

it seems. There's an order come overland from Gont Port just before I left Valmouth, for the nobles and merchants and the mayor and his council to meet together and see to it that the bailiffs of the district be worthy and accountable men, for they're the King's officers now, and are to do his will and enact his law. Well, you can imagine how Lord Heno greeted that!" Heno was a notable patron of pirates, who had long kept most of the bailiffs and sea-sheriffs of South Gont in his pocket. "But there were men willing to face up to Heno, with the King standing behind them. They dismissed the old lot then and there, and named fifteen new bailiffs, decent men, paid out of the mayor's funds. Heno stormed off swearing destruction. It's a new day! Not all at once, of course, but it's coming. I wish Master Ogion had lived to see it."

"He did," Tenar said. "As he was dying, he smiled, and he said, 'All changed. . . .'"

Beech took this in his sober way, nodding slowly. "All changed," he repeated.

After a while he said, "The little one's doing very well."

"Well enough . . . Sometimes I think not well enough."

"Mistress Goha," said the sorcerer, "if I or any sorcerer or witch or I daresay wizard had kept her, and used all the power of healing of the Art Magic for her all these months since she was injured, she wouldn't be better off. Maybe not as well as she is. You have done *all* that can be done, mistress. You have done a wonder."

She was touched by his earnest praise, and yet it made her sad; and she told him why. "It isn't enough," she said. "I can't heal her. She is . . . What is she to do? What will become of her?" She ran off the thread she had been spinning onto the spindle-shank, and said, "I am afraid."

"For her," Beech said, half querying.

"Afraid because her fear draws to it, to her, the cause of her fear. Afraid because —"

But she could not find the words for it.

"If she lives in fear, she will do harm," she said at last. "I'm afraid of that."

The sorcerer pondered. "I've thought," he said at last in his diffident way, "that maybe, if she has the gift, as I think she does, she might be trained a bit in the Art. And, as a witch, her . . . appearance wouldn't be so much against her—possibly." He cleared his throat. "There are witches who do very creditable work," he said.

Tenar ran a little of the thread she had spun between her fingers, testing it for evenness and strength. "Ogion told me to teach her. 'Teach her all,' he said, and then, 'Not Roke.' I don't know what he meant."

Beech had no difficulty with it. “He meant that the learning of Roke—the High Arts—wouldn’t be suitable for a girl,” he explained. “Let alone one so handicapped. But if he said to teach her all but that lore, it would seem that he too saw her way might well be the witches’ way.” He pondered again, more cheerfully, having got the weight of Ogion’s opinion on his side. “In a year or two, when she’s quite strong, and grown a bit more, you might think of asking Ivy to begin teaching her a bit. Not too much, of course, even of that kind of thing, till she has her true name.”

Tenar felt a strong, immediate resistance to the suggestion. She said nothing, but Beech was a sensitive man. “Ivy’s dour,” he said. “But what she knows, she does honestly. Which can’t be said of all witches. *Weak as women’s magic*, you know, and *wicked as women’s magic!* But I’ve known witches with real healing power. Healing befits a woman. It comes natural to her. And the child might be drawn to that—having been so hurt herself.”

His kindness was, Tenar thought, innocent.

She thanked him, saying that she would think carefully about what he had said. And indeed she did so.

Before the month was out, the villages of Middle Valley had met at the Round Barn of Sodeva to appoint their own bailiffs and officers of the peace and to levy a tax upon themselves to pay the bailiffs’ wages with. Such were the King’s orders, brought to the mayors and elders of the villages, and readily obeyed, for there were as many sturdy beggars and thieves on the roads as ever, and the villagers and farmers were eager to have order and safety. Some ugly rumors went about, such as that Lord Heno had formed a Council of Scoundrels and was enlisting all the blackguards in the countryside to go about in gangs breaking the heads of the King’s bailies; but most people said, “Just let ’em try!” and went home telling each other that now an honest man could sleep safe abed at night, and what went wrong the King was setting right, though the taxes were beyond all reason and they’d all be poor men forever trying to pay them.

Tenar was glad to hear of all this from Lark, but did not pay it much heed. She was working very hard; and since she had got home she had, almost without being aware of it, resolved not to let the thought of Handy or any such ruffian rule her life or Therru’s. She could not keep the child with her every moment, renewing her terrors, forever reminding her of what she could not remember and live. The child must be free and know herself to be free, to grow in grace.

She had gradually lost the shrinking, fearful manner, and by now went all about the farm and the byways and even into the village by herself. Tenar said no word of caution to her, even when she had to prevent herself from doing so. Therru was safe on the farm, safe in the village, no one was going to hurt her: that must be taken as unquestionable. And indeed Tenar did not often question it. With herself and Shandy and Clearbrook around the place, and Sis and Tiff down in the lower house, and Lark's family all over the village, in the sweet autumn of the Middle Valley, what harm was going to come to the child?

She'd get a dog, too, when she heard of one she wanted: one of the big grey Gontish sheep-guards, with their wise, curly heads.

Now and then she thought, as she had at Re Albi, I must be teaching the child! Ogion said so. But somehow nothing seemed to get taught to her but farm work, and stories, in the evening, as the nights drew in and they began to sit by the kitchen fire after supper before they went to bed. Maybe Beech was right, and Therru should be sent to a witch to learn what witches knew. It was better than apprenticing her to a weaver, as Tenar had thought of doing. But not all that much better. And she was still not very big; and was very ignorant for her age, for she had been taught nothing before she came to Oak Farm. She had been like a little animal, barely knowing human speech, and no human skills. She learned quickly and was twice as obedient and diligent as Lark's unruly girls and laughing, lazy boys. She could clean and serve and spin, cook a little, sew a little, look after poultry, fetch the cows, and do excellent work in the dairy. A proper farm-lassie, old Tiff called her, fawning a bit. Tenar had also seen him make the sign to avert evil, surreptitiously, when Therru passed him. Like most people, Tiff believed that you are what happens to you. The rich and strong must have virtue; one to whom evil has been done must be bad, and may rightly be punished.

In which case it would not help much if Therru became the properest farm-lassie in Gont. Not even prosperity would diminish the visible brand of what had been done to her. So Beech had thought of her being a witch, accepting, making use, of the brand. Was that what Ogion had meant, when he said "Not Roke"—when he said "They will fear her"? Was that all?

One day when a managed chance brought them together in the village street, Tenar said to Ivy, "There's a question I want to ask you, Mistress Ivy. A matter of your profession."

The witch eyed her. She had a scathing eye.

"My profession, is it?"

Tenar nodded, steady.

"Come on, then," Ivy said with a shrug, leading off down Mill Lane to her little house.

It was not a den of infamy and chickens, like Moss's house, but it was a witch-house, the beams hung thick with dried and drying herbs, the fire banked under grey ash with one tiny coal winking like a red eye, a lithe, fat, black cat with one white mustache sleeping up on a shelf, and everywhere a profusion of little boxes, pots, ewers, trays, and stoppered bottles, all aromatic, pungent or sweet or strange.

"What can I do for you, Mistress Goha?" Ivy asked, very dry, when they were inside.

"Tell me, if you will, if you think my ward, Therru, has any gift for your art—any power in her."

"She? Of course!" said the witch.

Tenar was a bit floored by the prompt and contemptuous answer. "Well," she said. "Beech seemed to think so."

"A blind bat in a cave could see it," said Ivy. "Is that all?"

"No. I want your advice. When I've asked my question, you can tell me the price of the answer. Fair?"

"Fair."

"Should I prentice Therru for a witch, when she's a bit older?"

Ivy was silent for a minute, deciding on her fee, Tenar thought. Instead, she answered the question. "I would not take her," she said.

"Why?"

"I'd be afraid to," the witch answered, with a sudden fierce stare at Tenar.

"Afraid? Of what?"

"Of her! What is she?"

"A child. An ill-used child!"

"That's not all she is."

Dark anger came into Tenar and she said, "Must a prentice witch be a virgin, then?"

Ivy stared. She said after a moment, "I didn't mean that."

"What did you mean?"

"I mean I don't know what she is. I mean when she looks at me with that one eye seeing and one eye blind I don't know what she sees. I see you go about with her like she was any child, and I think, What are they? What's the strength of that woman, for she's not a fool, to hold a fire by the hand, to spin thread with the

whirlwind? They say, mistress, that you lived as a child yourself with the Old Ones, the Dark Ones, the Ones Underfoot, and that you were queen and servant of those powers. Maybe that's why you're not afraid of this one. What power she is, I don't know, I don't say. But it's beyond my teaching, I know that—or Beech's, or any witch or wizard I ever knew! I'll give you my advice, mistress, free and feeless. It's this: Beware. Beware her, the day she finds her strength! That's all."

"I thank you, Mistress Ivy," Tenar said with all the formality of the Priestess of the Tombs of Atuan, and went out of the warm room into the thin, biting wind of the end of autumn.

She was still angry. Nobody would help her, she thought. She knew the job was beyond her, they didn't have to tell her that—but none of them would help her. Ogion had died, and old Moss ranted, and Ivy warned, and Beech kept clear, and Ged—the one who might really have helped—Ged ran away. Ran off like a whipped dog, and never sent sign or word to her, never gave a thought to her or Therru, but only to his own precious shame. That was his child, his nurseling. That was all he cared about. He had never cared or thought about her, only about power—her power, his power, how he could use it, how he could make more power of it. Putting the broken Ring together, making the Rune, putting a king on the throne. And when his power was gone, still it was all he could think about: that it was gone, lost, leaving him only himself, his shame, his emptiness.

You aren't being fair, Goha said to Tenar.

Fair! said Tenar. Did he play fair?

Yes, said Goha. He did. Or tried to.

Well, then, he can play fair with the goats he's herding; it's nothing to me, said Tenar, trudging homeward in the wind and the first, sparse, cold rain.

"Snow tonight, maybe," said her tenant Tiff, meeting her on the road beside the meadows of the Kaheda.

"Snow so soon? I hope not."

"Freeze, anyway, for sure."

And it froze when the sun was down: rain puddles and watering troughs skimming over, then opaqued with ice; the reeds by the Kaheda stilled, bound in ice; the wind itself stilled as if frozen, unable to move.

Beside the fire—a sweeter fire than Ivy's, for the wood was that of an old apple that had been taken down in the orchard last spring—Tenar and Therru sat to spin and talk after supper was cleared away.

"Tell the story about the cat ghosts," Therru said in her husky voice as she

started the wheel to spin a mass of dark, silky goat's-wool into fleecefell yarn.

"That's a summer story."

Therru cocked her head.

"In winter the stories should be the great stories. In winter you learn the *Creation of Eá*, so that you can sing it at the Long Dance when summer comes. In winter you learn the Winter Carol and the *Deed of the Young King*, and at the Festival of Sunreturn, when the sun turns north to bring the spring, you can sing them."

"I can't sing," the girl whispered.

Tenar was winding spun yarn off the distaff into a ball, her hands deft and rhythmic.

"Not only the voice sings," she said. "The mind sings. The prettiest voice in the world's no good if the mind doesn't know the songs." She untied the last bit of yarn, which had been the first spun. "You have strength, Therru, and strength that is ignorant is dangerous."

"Like the ones who wouldn't learn," Therru said. "The wild ones." Tenar did not know what she meant, and looked her question. "The ones that stayed in the west," Therru said.

"Ah—the dragons—in the song of the Woman of Kemay. Yes. Exactly. So, which will we start with—how the islands were raised from the sea, or how King Morred drove back the Black Ships?"

"The islands," Therru whispered. Tenar had rather hoped she would choose the *Deed of the Young King*, for she saw Lebannen's face as Morred's; but the child's choice was the right one. "Very well," she said. She glanced up at Ogion's great Lore-books on the mantel, encouraging herself that if she forgot, she could find the words there; and drew breath; and began.

By her bedtime Therru knew how Segoy had raised the first of the islands from the depths of Time. Instead of singing to her, Tenar sat on the bed after tucking her in, and they recited together, softly, the first stanza of the song of the Making.

Tenar carried the little oil lamp back to the kitchen, listening to the absolute silence. The frost had bound the world, locked it. No star showed. Blackness pressed at the single window of the kitchen. Cold lay on the stone floors.

She went back to the fire, for she was not sleepy yet. The great words of the song had stirred her spirit, and there was still anger and unrest in her from her talk with Ivy. She took the poker to rouse up a little flame from the backlog. As she struck the log, there was an echo of the sound in the back of the house.

She straightened up and stood listening.

Again: a soft, dull thump or thud—outside the house—at the dairy window?

The poker still in her hand, Tenar went down the dark hall to the door that gave on the cool-room. Beyond the cool-room was the dairy. The house was built against a low hill, and both those rooms ran back into the hill like cellars, though on a level with the rest of the house. The cool-room had only air-vents; the dairy had a door and a window, low and wide like the kitchen window, in its one outside wall. Standing at the cool-room door, she could hear that window being pried or jimmied, and men's voices whispering.

Flint had been a methodical householder. Every door but one of his house had a bar-bolt on each side of it, a stout length of cast iron set in slides. All were kept clean and oiled; none were ever locked.

She slipped the bolt across the cool-room door. It slid into place without a sound, fitting snug into the heavy iron slot on the doorjamb.

She heard the outer door of the dairy opened. One of them had finally thought to try it, before they broke the window, and found it wasn't locked. She heard the mutter of voices again. Then silence, long enough that she heard her heartbeat drumming in her ears so loud she feared she could not hear any sound over it. She felt her legs trembling and trembling, and felt the cold of the floor creep up under her skirt like a hand.

"It's open," a man's voice whispered near her, and her heart leapt painfully. She put her hand on the bolt, thinking it was open—she had unlocked not locked it—She had almost slid it back when she heard the door between the cool-room and the dairy creak, opening. She knew that creak of the upper hinge. She knew the voice that had spoken, too, but in a different way of knowing. "It's a storeroom," Handy said, and then, as the door she stood against rattled against the bolt, "This one's locked." It rattled again. A thin blade of light, like a knife blade, flicked between the door and the jamb. It touched her breast, and she drew back as if it had cut her.

The door rattled again, but not much. It was solid, solidly hinged, and the bolt was firm.

They muttered together on the other side of the door. She knew they were planning to come around and try the front of the house. She found herself at the front door, bolting it, not knowing how she came there. Maybe this was a nightmare. She had had this dream, that they were trying to get into the house, that they drove thin knives through the cracks of the doors. The doors—was there any

other door they could get in? The windows—the shutters of the bedroom windows—Her breath came so short she thought she could not get to Therru's room, but she was there, she brought the heavy wooden shutters across the glass. The hinges were stiff, and they came together with a bang. Now they knew. Now they were coming. They would come to the window of the next room, her room. They would be there before she could close the shutters. And they were.

She saw the faces, blurs moving in the darkness outside, as she tried to free the left-hand shutter from its hasp. It was stuck. She could not make it move. A hand touched the glass, flattening white against it.

"There she is."

"Let us in. We won't hurt you."

"We just want to talk to you."

"He just wants to see his little girl."

She got the shutter free and dragged it across the window. But if they broke the glass they would be able to push the shutters open from the outside. The fastening was only a hook that would pull out of the wood if forced.

"Let us in and we won't hurt you," one of the voices said.

She heard their feet on the frozen ground, crackling in the fallen leaves. Was Therru awake? The crash of the shutters closing might have wakened her, but she had made no sound. Tenar stood in the doorway between her room and Therru's. It was pitch-dark, silent. She was afraid to touch the child and waken her. She must stay in the room with her. She must fight for her. She had had the poker in her hand, where had she put it? She had put it down to close the shutters. She could not find it. She groped for it in the blackness of the room that seemed to have no walls.

The front door, which led into the kitchen, rattled, shaken in its frame.

If she could find the poker she would stay in here, she would fight them.

"Here!" one of them called, and she knew what he had found. He was looking up at the kitchen window, broad, unshuttered, easy to reach.

She went, very slowly it seemed, groping, to the door of the room. It was Therru's room now. It had been her children's room. The nursery. That was why there was no lock on the inner side of the door. So the children could not lock themselves in and be frightened if the bolt stuck.

Around back of the hill, through the orchard, Clearbrook and Shandy would be asleep in their cottage. If she called, maybe Shandy would hear. If she opened the bedroom window and called—or if she waked Therru and they climbed out the

window and ran through the orchard—but the men were there, right there, waiting.

It was more than she could bear. The frozen terror that had bound her broke, and in rage she ran into the kitchen that was all red light in her eyes, grabbed up the long, sharp butcher knife from the block, flung back the door-bolt, and stood in the doorway. "Come on, then!" she said.

As she spoke there was a howl and a sucking gasp, and a man yelled, "Look out!" Another shouted, "Here! Here!"

Then there was silence.

Light from the open doorway shot across the black ice of puddles, glittered on the black branches of the oaks and on fallen silver leaves, and as her eyes cleared she saw that something was crawling toward her on the path, a dark mass or heap crawling toward her, making a high, sobbing wail. Behind the light a black shape ran and darted, and long blades shone.

"Tenar!"

"Stop there," she said, raising the knife.

"Tenar! It's me—Hawk, Sparrowhawk!"

"Stay there," she said.

The darting black shape stood still next to the black mass lying on the path. The light from the doorway shone dim on a body, a face, a long-tined pitchfork held upright, like a wizard's staff, she thought. "Is that you?" she said.

He was kneeling now by the black thing on the path.

"I killed him, I think," he said. He looked over his shoulder, stood up. There was no sign or sound of the other men.

"Where are they?"

"Ran. Give me a hand, Tenar."

She held the knife in one hand. With the other she took hold of the arm of the man that lay huddled up on the path. Ged took him under the shoulder and they dragged him up the step and into the house. He lay on the stone floor of the kitchen, and blood ran out of his chest and belly like water from a pitcher. His upper lip was drawn back from his teeth, and only the whites of his eyes showed.

"Lock the door," Ged said, and she locked the door.

"Linens in the press," she said, and he got a sheet and tore it for bandages, which she bound round and round the man's belly and breast, into which three of the four tines of the pitchfork had driven full force, making three ragged springs of blood that dripped and squirted as Ged supported the man's torso so that she could wrap the bandages.

"What are you doing here? Did you come with them?"

"Yes. But they didn't know it. That's about all you can do, Tenar." He let the man's body sag down, and sat back, breathing hard, wiping his face with the back of his bloody hand. "I think I killed him," he said again.

"Maybe you did." Tenar watched the bright red spots spread slowly on the heavy linen that wrapped the man's thin, hairy chest and belly. She stood up, and swayed, very dizzy. "Get by the fire," she said. "You must be perishing."

She did not know how she had known him in the dark outside. By his voice, maybe. He wore a bulky shepherd's winter coat of cut fleece with the leather side out, and a shepherd's knit watch cap pulled down; his face was lined and weathered, his hair long and iron-grey. He smelled like woodsmoke, and frost, and sheep. He was shivering, his whole body shaking. "Get by the fire," she said again. "Put wood on it."

He did so. Tenar filled the kettle and swung it out on its iron arm over the blaze.

There was blood on her skirt, and she used an end of linen soaked in cold water to clean it. She gave the cloth to Ged to clean the blood off his hands. "What do you mean," she said, "you came with them but they didn't know it?"

"I was coming down. From the mountain. On the road from the springs of the Kaheda." He spoke in a flat voice as if out of breath, and his shivering made his speech slur. "Heard men behind me, and I went aside. Into the woods. Didn't feel like talking. I don't know. Something about them. I was afraid of them."

She nodded impatiently and sat down across the hearth from him, leaning forward to listen, her hands clenched tight in her lap. Her damp skirt was cold against her legs.

"I heard one of them say 'Oak Farm' as they went by. After that I followed them. One of them kept talking. About the child."

"What did he say?"

He was silent. He said finally, "That he was going to get her back. Punish her, he said. And get back at you. For stealing her, he said. He said—" He stopped.

"That he'd punish me, too."

"They all talked. About, about that."

"That one isn't Handy." She nodded toward the man on the floor. "Is it the . . .?"

"He said she was his." Ged looked at the man too, and back at the fire. "He's dying. We should get help."

"He won't die," Tenar said. "I'll send for Ivy in the morning. The others are still

out there—how many of them?"

"Two."

"If he dies he dies, if he lives he lives. Neither of us is going out." She got to her feet, in a spasm of fear. "Did you bring in the pitchfork, Ged?"

He pointed to it, the four long tines shining as it leaned against the wall beside the door.

She sat down in the hearthseat again, but now she was shaking, trembling from head to foot, as he had done. He reached across the hearth to touch her arm. "It's all right," he said.

"What if they're still out there?"

"They ran."

"They could come back."

"Two against two? And we've got the pitchfork."

She lowered her voice to a bare whisper to say, in terror, "The pruning hook and the scythes are in the barn lean-to."

He shook his head. "They ran. They saw—him—and you in the door."

"What did you do?"

"He came at me. So I came at him."

"I mean, before. On the road."

"They got cold, walking. It started to rain, and they got cold, and started talking about coming here. Before that it was only this one, talking about the child and you, about teaching—teaching lessons—" His voice dried up. "I'm thirsty," he said.

"So am I. The kettle's not boiling yet. Go on."

He took breath and tried to tell his story coherently. "The other two didn't listen to him much. Heard it all before, maybe. They were in a hurry to get on. To get to Valmouth. As if they were running from somebody. Getting away. But it got cold, and he went on about Oak Farm, and the one with the cap said, 'Well, why not just go there and spend the night with—'"

"With the widow, yes."

Ged put his face in his hands. She waited.

He looked into the fire, and went on steadily. "Then I lost them for a while. The road came out level into the valley, and I couldn't follow along the way I'd been doing, in the woods, just behind them. I had to go aside, through the fields, keeping out of their sight. I don't know the country here, only the road. I was afraid if I cut across the fields I'd get lost, miss the house. And it was getting dark. I

thought I'd missed the house, overshot it. I came back to the road, and almost ran into them—at the turn there. They'd seen the old man go by. They decided to wait till it was dark and they were sure nobody else was coming. They waited in the barn. I stayed outside. Just through the wall from them."

"You must be frozen," Tenar said dully.

"It was cold." He held his hands to the fire as if the thought of it had chilled him again. "I found the pitchfork by the lean-to door. They went around to the back of the house when they came out. I could have come to the front door then to warn you, it's what I should have done, but all I could think of was to take them by surprise—I thought it was my only advantage, chance. . . . I thought the house would be locked and they'd have to break in. But then I heard them going in, at the back, there. I went in—into the dairy—after them. I only just got out, when they came to the locked door." He gave a kind of laugh. "They went right by me in the dark. I could have tripped them. . . . One of them had a flint and steel, he'd burn a little tinder when they wanted to see a lock. They came around front. I heard you putting up the shutters: I knew you'd heard them. They talked about smashing the window they'd seen you at. Then the one with the cap saw the window—that window—" He nodded toward the kitchen window, with its deep, broad inner sill. "He said, 'Get me a rock, I'll smash that right open,' and they came to where he was, and they were about to hoist him up to the sill. So I let out a yell, and he dropped down, and one of them—this one—came running right at me."

"Ah, ah," gasped the man lying on the floor, as if telling Ged's tale for him. Ged got up and bent over him.

"He's dying, I think."

"No, he's not," Tenar said. She could not stop shaking entirely, but it was only an inward tremor now. The kettle was singing. She made a pot of tea, and laid her hands on the thick pottery sides of the teapot while it steeped. She poured out two cups, then a third, into which she put a little cold water. "It's too hot to drink," she told Ged, "hold it a minute first. I'll see if this'll go into him." She sat down on the floor by the man's head, lifted it on one arm, put the cup of cooled tea to his mouth, pushed the rim between the bared teeth. The warm stuff ran into his mouth; he swallowed. "He won't die," she said. "The floor's like ice. Help me move him nearer the fire."

Ged started to take the rug from a bench that ran along the wall between the chimney and the hall. "Don't use that, it's a good piece of weaving," Tenar said, and she went to the closet and brought out a worn-out felt cloak, which she spread

out as a bed for the man. They hauled the inert body onto it, lapped it over him. The soaked red spots on the bandages had grown no larger.

Tenar stood up, and stood motionless.

"Therru," she said.

Ged looked round, but the child was not there. Tenar went hurriedly out of the room.

The children's room, the child's room, was perfectly dark and quiet. She felt her way to the bed, and laid her hand on the warm curve of the blanket over Therru's shoulder.

"Therru?"

The child's breathing was peaceful. She had not waked. Tenar could feel the heat of her body, like a radiance in the cold room.

As she went out, Tenar ran her hand across the chest of drawers and touched cold metal: the poker she had laid down when she closed the shutters. She brought it back to the kitchen, stepped over the man's body, and hung the poker on its hook on the chimney. She stood looking down at the fire.

"I couldn't do anything," she said. "What should I have done? Run out—right away—shouted, and run to Clearbrook and Shandy. They wouldn't have had time to hurt Therru."

"They would have been in the house with her, and you outside it, with the old man and woman. Or they could have picked her up and gone clear away with her. You did what you could. What you did was right. Timed right. The light from the house, and you coming out with the knife, and me there—they could see the pitchfork then—and him down. So they ran."

"Those that could," said Tenar. She turned and stirred the man's leg a little with the toe of her shoe, as if he were an object she was a little curious about, a little repelled by, like a dead viper. "You did the right thing," she said.

"I don't think he even saw it. He ran right onto it. It was like—" He did not say what it was like. He said, "Drink your tea," and poured himself more from the pot keeping warm on the hearthbricks. "It's good. Sit down," he said, and she did so.

"When I was a boy," he said after a time, "the Kargs raided my village. They had lances—long, with feathers tied to the shaft—"

She nodded. "Warriors of the God-Brothers," she said.

"I made a . . . a fog-spell. To confuse them. But they came on, some of them. I saw one of them run right onto a pitchfork—like him. Only it went clear through him. Below the waist."

“You hit a rib,” Tenar said.

He nodded.

“It was the only mistake you made,” she said. Her teeth were chattering now. She drank her tea. “Ged,” she said, “what if they come back?”

“They won’t.”

“They could set fire to the house.”

“This house?” He looked around at the stone walls.

“The hay barn—”

“They won’t be back,” he said doggedly.

“No.”

They held their cups with care, warming their hands on them.

“She slept through it.”

“It’s well she did.”

“But she’ll see him—here—in the morning—”

They stared at each other.

“If I’d killed him—if he’d die!” Ged said with rage. “I could drag him out and bury him—”

“Do it.”

He merely shook his head angrily.

“What does it matter, why, why can’t we do it!” Tenar demanded.

“I don’t know.”

“As soon as it gets light—”

“I’ll get him out of the house. Wheelbarrow. The old man can help me.”

“He can’t lift anything anymore. I’ll help you.”

“However I can do it, I’ll cart him off to the village. There’s a healer of some kind there?”

“A witch, Ivy.”

She felt all at once abysmally, infinitely weary. She could scarcely hold the cup in her hand.

“There’s more tea,” she said, thick-tongued.

He poured himself another cupful.

The fire danced in her eyes. The flames swam, flared up, sank away, brightened again against the sooty stone, against the dark sky, against the pale sky, the gulfs of evening, the depths of air and light beyond the world. Flames of yellow, orange, orange-red, red tongues of flame, flame-tongues, the words she could not speak. Tenar.

“We call the star Tehanu,” she said.

“Tenar, my dear. Come on. Come with me.”

They were not at the fire. They were in the dark—in the dark hall. The dark passage. They had been there before, leading each other, following each other, in the darkness underneath the earth.

“This is the way,” she said.

Chapter 12

Winter

She was waking, not wanting to waken. Faint grey shone at the window in thin slits through the shutters. Why was the window shuttered? She got up hurriedly and went down the hall to the kitchen. No one sat by the fire, no one lay on the floor. There was no sign of anyone, anything. Except the teapot and three cups on the counter.

Therru got up about sunrise, and they breakfasted as usual; clearing up, the girl asked, "What happened?" She lifted a corner of wet linen from the soaking-tub in the pantry. The water in the tub was veined and clouded with brownish red.

"Oh, my period came on early," Tenar said, startled at the lie as she spoke it.

Therru stood a moment motionless, her nostrils flared and her head still, like an animal getting a scent. Then she dropped the sheeting back into the water, and went out to feed the chickens.

Tenar felt ill; her bones ached. The weather was still cold, and she stayed indoors as much as she could. She tried to keep Therru in, but when the sun came out with a keen, bright wind, Therru wanted to be out in it.

"Stay with Shandy in the orchard," Tenar said.

Therru said nothing as she slipped out.

The burned and deformed side of her face was made rigid by the destruction of muscles and the thickness of the scar-surface, but as the scars got older and as Tenar learned by long usage not to look away from it as deformity but to see it as face, it had expressions of its own. When Therru was frightened, the burned and darkened side "closed in," as Tenar thought, drawing together, hardening. When she was excited or intent, even the blind eye socket seemed to gaze, and the scars reddened and were hot to touch. Now, as she went out, there was a queer look to her, as if her face were not human at all, an animal, some strange horny-skinned wild creature with one bright eye, silent, escaping.

And Tenar knew that as she had lied to her for the first time, Therru for the first time was going to disobey her. The first but not the last time.

She sat down at the fireside with a weary sigh, and did nothing at all for a while.

A rap at the door: Clearbrook and Ged—no, Hawk she must call him—Hawk standing on the doorstep. Old Clearbrook was full of talk and importance, Ged dark and quiet and bulky in his grimy sheepskin coat. "Come in," she said. "Have some tea. What's the news?"

"Tried to get away, down to Valmouth, but the men from Kahedanan, the bailies, come down and 'twas in Cherry's outhouse they found 'em," Clearbrook announced, waving his fist.

"He escaped?" Horror caught at her.

"The other two," Ged said. "Not him."

"See, they found the body up in the old shambles on Round Hill, all beat to pieces like, up in the old shambles there, by Kahedanan, so ten, twelve of 'em 'pointed theirselves bailies then and there and come after them. And there was a search all through the villages last night, and this morning before 'twas hardly light they found 'em hiding out in Cherry's outhouse. Half-froze they was."

"He's dead, then?" she asked, bewildered.

Ged had shucked off the heavy coat and was now sitting on the cane-bottom chair by the door to undo his leather gaiters. "*He's* alive," he said in his quiet voice. "Ivy has him. I took him in this morning on the muck-cart. There were people out on the road before daylight, hunting for all three of them. They'd killed a woman, up in the hills."

"What woman?" Tenar whispered.

Her eyes were on Ged's. He nodded slightly.

Clearbrook wanted the story to be his, and took it up loudly: "I talked with some o' them from up there and they told me they'd all four of 'em been traipsing and camping and vagranting about near Kahedanan, and the woman would come into the village to beg, all beat about and burns and bruises all over her. They'd send her in, the men would, see, like that to beg, and then she'd go back to 'em, and she told people if she went back with nothing they'd beat her more, so they said why go back? But if she didn't they'd come after her, she said, see, and she'd always go with 'em. But then they finally went too far and beat her to death, and they took and left her body in the old shambles there where there's still some o' the stink left, you know, maybe thinking that was hiding what they done. And they came away then, down here, just last night. And why didn't you shout and call last night,

Goha? Hawk says they was right here, sneaking about the house, when he come on 'em. I surely would have heard, or Shandy would, her ears might be sharper than mine. Did you tell her yet?"

Tenar shook her head.

"I'll just go tell her," said the old man, delighted to be first with the news, and he clumped off across the yard. He turned back halfway. "Never would have picked you as useful with a pitchfork!" he shouted to Ged, and slapped his thigh, laughing, and went on.

Ged slipped off the heavy gaiters, took off his muddy shoes and set them on the doorstep, and came over to the fire in his stocking feet. Trousers and jerkin and shirt of homespun wool: a Gontish goatherd, with a canny face, a hawk nose, and clear, dark eyes.

"There'll be people out soon," he said. "To tell you all about it, and hear what happened here again. They've got the two that ran off shut up now in a wine cellar with no wine in it, and fifteen or twenty men guarding them, and twenty or thirty boys trying to get a peek. . . ." He yawned, shook his shoulders and arms to loosen them, and with a glance at Tenar asked permission to sit down at the fire.

She gestured to the hearthseat. "You must be worn out," she whispered.

"I slept a little, here, last night. Couldn't stay awake." He yawned again. He looked up at her, gauging, seeing how she was.

"It was Therru's mother," she said. Her voice would not go above a whisper.

He nodded. He sat leaning forward a bit, his arms on his knees, as Flint had used to sit, gazing into the fire. They were very alike and entirely unlike, as unlike as a buried stone and a soaring bird. Her heart ached, and her bones ached, and her mind was bewildered among foreboding and grief and remembered fear and a troubled lightness.

"The witch has got our man," he said. "Tied down in case he feels lively. With the holes in him stuffed full of spiderwebs and blood-stanching spells. She says he'll live to hang."

"To hang."

"It's up to the King's Courts of Law, now that they're meeting again. Hanged or set to slave-labor."

She shook her head, frowning.

"You wouldn't just let him go, Tenar," he said gently, watching her.

"No."

"They must be punished," he said, still watching her.

"'Punished.' That's what *he* said. Punish the child. She's bad. She must be punished. Punish me, for taking her. For being—" She struggled to speak. "I don't want punishment!—It should not have happened.—I wish you'd killed him!"

"I did my best," Ged said.

After a good while she laughed, rather shakily. "You certainly did."

"Think how easy it would have been," he said, looking into the coals again, "when I was a wizard. I could have set a binding-spell on them, up there on the road, before they knew it. I could have marched them right down to Valmouth like a flock of sheep. Or last night, here, think of the fireworks I could have set off! They'd never have known what hit them."

"They still don't," she said.

He glanced at her. There was in his eye the faintest, irrepressible gleam of triumph.

"No," he said. "They don't."

"Useful with a pitchfork," she murmured.

He yawned enormously.

"Why don't you go in and get some sleep? The second room down the hall. Unless you want to entertain company. I see Lark and Daisy coming, and some of the children." She had got up, hearing voices, to look out the window.

"I'll do that," he said, and slipped away.

Lark and her husband, Daisy the blacksmith's wife, and other friends from the village came by all day long to tell and be told all, as Ged had said. She found that their company revived her, carried her away from the constant presence of last night's terror, little by little, till she could begin to look back on it as something that had happened, not something that was happening, that must always be happening to her.

That was also what Therru had to learn to do, she thought, but not with one night: with her life.

She said to Lark when the others had gone, "What makes me rage at myself is how stupid I was."

"I did tell you you ought to keep the house locked."

"No—Maybe—That's just it."

"I know," said Lark.

"But I meant, when they were here—I could have run out and fetched Shandy and Clearbrook—maybe I could have taken Therru. Or I could have gone to the lean-to and got the pitchfork myself. Or the apple-pruner. It's seven feet long with a blade like a razor: I keep it the way Flint kept it. Why didn't I do that? Why didn't I do something? Why did I just lock myself in—when it wasn't any good trying to? If he—If Hawk hadn't been here—All I did was trap myself and Therru. I did finally go to the door with the butcher knife, and I shouted at them. I was half crazy. But that wouldn't have scared them off."

"I don't know," Lark said. "It was crazy, but maybe . . . I don't know. What could you do but lock the doors? But it's like we're all our lives locking the doors. It's the house we live in."

They looked around at the stone walls, the stone floors, the stone chimney, the sunny window of the kitchen of Oak Farm, Farmer Flint's house.

"That girl, that woman they murdered," Lark said, looking shrewdly at Tenar. "She was the same one."

Tenar nodded.

"One of them told me she was pregnant. Four, five months along."

They were both silent.

"Trapped," Tenar said.

Lark sat back, her hands on the skirt on her heavy thighs, her back straight, her handsome face set. "Fear," she said. "What are we so afraid of? Why do we let 'em tell us we're afraid? What is it *they're* afraid of?" She picked up the stocking she had been darning, turned it in her hands, was silent awhile; finally she said, "What are they afraid of us for?"

Tenar spun and did not answer.

Therru came running in, and Lark greeted her: "There's my honey! Come give me a hug, my honey girl!"

Therru hugged her hastily. "Who are the men they caught?" she demanded in her hoarse, toneless voice, looking from Lark to Tenar.

Tenar stopped her wheel. She spoke slowly.

"One was Handy. One was a man called Shag. The one that was hurt is called Hake." She kept her eyes on Therru's face; she saw the fire, the scar reddening. "The woman they killed was called Senny, I think."

"Senini," the child whispered.

Tenar nodded.

"Did they kill her dead?"

She nodded again.

"Tadpole says they were *here*."

She nodded again.

The child looked around the room, as the women had done; but her look was utterly unacceptant, seeing no walls.

"Will you kill them?"

"They may be hanged."

"Dead?"

"Yes."

Therru nodded, half indifferently. She went out again, rejoining Lark's children by the well house.

The two women said nothing. They spun and mended, silent, by the fire, in Flint's house.

After a long time Lark said, "What's become of the fellow, the shepherd, that followed 'em here? Hawk, you said he's called?"

"He's asleep in there," said Tenar, nodding to the back of the house.

"Ah," said Lark.

The wheel purred. "I knew him before last night."

"Ah. Up at Re Albi, did you?"

Tenar nodded. The wheel purred.

"To follow those three, and take 'em on in the dark with a pitchfork, that took a bit of courage, now. Not a young man, is he?"

"No." After a while she went on, "He'd been ill, and needed work. So I sent him over the mountain to tell Clearbrook to take him on here. But Clearbrook thinks he can still do it all himself, so he sent him up above the Springs for the summer herding. He was coming back from that."

"Think you'll keep him on here, then?"

"If he likes," said Tenar.

Another group came out to Oak Farm from the village, wanting to hear Goha's story and tell her their part in the great capture of the murderers, and look at the pitchfork and compare its four long tines to the three bloody spots on the bandages of the man called Hake, and talk it all over again. Tenar was glad to see the evening come, and call Therru in, and shut the door.

She raised her hand to latch it. She lowered her hand and forced herself to turn from it, leaving it unlocked.

"Sparrowhawk's in your room," Therru informed her, coming back to the kitchen with eggs from the cool-room.

"I meant to tell you he was here—I'm sorry."

"I know him," Therru said, washing her face and hands in the pantry. And when Ged came in, heavy-eyed and unkempt, she went straight to him and put up her arms.

"Therru," he said, and took her up and held her. She clung to him briefly, then broke free.

"I know the beginning part of the *Creation*," she told him.

"Will you sing it to me?" Again glancing at Tenar for permission, he sat down in his place at the hearth.

"I can only say it."

He nodded and waited, his face rather stern. The child said:

> *The making from the unmaking,*
> *The ending from the beginning,*
> *Who shall know surely?*
> *What we know is the doorway between*
> *them that we enter departing.*
> *Among all beings ever returning,*
> *the eldest, the Doorkeeper, Segoy . . .*

The child's voice was like a metal brush drawn across metal, like dry leaves, like the hiss of fire burning. She spoke to the end of the first stanza:

> *Then from the foam bright Eá broke.*

Ged nodded brief, firm approval. "Good," he said.

"Last night," Tenar said. "Last night she learned it. It seems a year ago."

"I can learn more," said Therru.

"You will," Ged told her.

"Now finish cleaning the squash, please," said Tenar, and the child obeyed.

"What shall I do?" Ged asked. Tenar paused, looking at him.

“I need that kettle filled and heated.”

He nodded, and took the kettle to the pump.

They made and ate their supper and cleared it away.

“Say the *Making* again as far as you know it,” Ged said to Therru, at the hearth, “and we’ll go on from there.”

She said the second stanza once with him, once with Tenar, once by herself.

“Bed,” said Tenar.

“You didn’t tell Sparrowhawk about the King.”

“You tell him,” Tenar said, amused at this pretext for delay.

Therru turned to Ged. Her face, scarred and whole, seeing and blind, was intent, fiery. “The King came in a ship. He had a sword. He gave me the bone dolphin. His ship was flying, but I was sick, because Handy touched me. But the King touched me there and the mark went away.” She showed her round, thin arm. Tenar stared. She had forgotten the mark.

“Someday I want to fly to where he lives,” Therru told Ged. He nodded. “I will do that,” she said. “Do you know him?”

“Yes. I know him. I went on a long journey with him.”

“Where?”

“To where the sun doesn’t rise and the stars don’t set. And back from that place.”

“Did you fly?”

He shook his head. “I can only walk,” he said

The child pondered, and then as if satisfied said, “Good night,” and went off to her room. Tenar followed her; but Therru did not want to be sung to sleep. “I can say the *Making* in the dark,” she said. “*Both* stanzas.”

Tenar came back to the kitchen and sat down again across the hearth from Ged.

“How she’s changing!” she said. “I can’t keep up with her. I’m old to be bringing up a child. And she . . . She obeys me, but only because she wants to.”

“It’s the only justification for obedience,” Ged observed.

“But when she does take it into her head to disobey me, what can I do? There’s a wildness in her. Sometimes she’s my Therru, sometimes she’s something else, out of reach. I asked Ivy if she’d think of training her. Beech suggested it. Ivy said no. ‘Why not?’ I aid. ‘I’m afraid of her!’ she said. . . . But you’re not afraid of her. Nor she of you. You and Lebannen are the only men she’s let touch her. *I* let that—that Handy—I can’t talk about it. Oh, I’m tired! I don’t understand anything. . . .”

Ged laid a knot on the fire to burn small and slow, and they both watched the

leap and flutter of the flames.

"I'd like you to stay here, Ged," she said. "If you like."

He did not answer at once. She said, "Maybe you're going on to Havnor—"

"No, no. I have nowhere to go. I was looking for work."

"Well, there's plenty to be done here. Clearbrook won't admit it, but his arthritis has about finished him for anything but gardening. I've been wanting help ever since I came back. I could have told the old blockhead what I thought of him for sending you off up the mountain that way, but it's no use. He wouldn't listen."

"It was a good thing for me," Ged said. "It was the time I needed."

"You were herding sheep?"

"Goats. Right up at the top of the grazings. A boy they had took sick, and Serry took me on, sent me up there the first day. They keep 'em up there high and late, so the under-wool grows thick. This last month I had the mountain pretty much to myself. Serry sent me up that coat and some supplies, and said to keep the herd up as high as I could as long as I could. So I did. It was fine, up there."

"Lonely," she said.

He nodded, half smiling.

"You always have been alone."

"Yes, I have."

She said nothing. He looked at her.

"I'd like to work here," he said.

"That's settled, then," she said. After a while she added, "For the winter, anyway."

The frost was harder tonight. Their world was perfectly silent except for the whisper of the fire. The silence was like a presence between them. She lifted her head and looked at him.

"Well," she said, "which bed shall I sleep in, Ged? The child's, or yours?"

He drew breath. He spoke low. "Mine, if you will."

"I will."

The silence held him. She could see the effort he made to break from it. "If you'll be patient with me," he said.

"I have been patient with you for twenty-five years," she said. She looked at him and began to laugh. "Come—come on, my dear—better late than never! I'm only an old woman. . . . Nothing is wasted, nothing is ever wasted. You taught me that." She stood up, and he stood; she put out her hands, and he took them. They embraced, and their embrace became close. They held each other so fiercely, so

dearly, that they stopped knowing anything but each other. It did not matter which bed they meant to sleep in. They lay that night on the hearthstones, and there she taught Ged the mystery that the wisest man could not teach him.

He built up the fire once, and fetched the good weaving off the bench. Tenar made no objection this time. Her cloak and his sheepskin coat were their blankets.

They woke again at dawn. A faint silvery light lay on the dark, half-leafless branches of the oaks outside the window. Tenar stretched out full length to feel his warmth against her. After a while she murmured, "He was lying here. Hake. Right under us . . ."

Ged made a small noise of protest.

"Now you're a man indeed," she said. "Stuck another man full of holes, first, and lain with a woman, second. That's the proper order, I suppose."

"Hush," he murmured, turning to her, laying his head on her shoulder. "Don't."

"I will, Ged. Poor man! There's no mercy in me, only justice. I wasn't trained to mercy. Love is the only grace I have. Oh, Ged, don't fear me! You were a man when I first saw you! It's not a weapon or a woman can make a man, or magery either, or any power, anything but himself."

They lay in warmth and sweet silence.

"Tell me something."

He murmured assent sleepily.

"How did you happen to hear what they were saying? Hake and Handy and the other one. How did you happen to be just there, just then?"

He raised himself up on one elbow so he could look at her face. His own face was so open and vulnerable in its ease and fulfillment and tenderness that she had to reach up and touch his mouth, there where she had kissed it first, months ago, which led to his taking her into his arms again, and the conversation was not continued in words.

There were formalities to be got through. The chief of them was to tell Clearbrook and the other tenants of Oak Farm that she had replaced "the old master" with a hired hand. She did so promptly and bluntly. They could not do anything about it, nor did it entail any threat to them. A widow's tenure of her husband's property was contingent on there being no male heir or claimant. Flint's son the seaman was the heir, and Flint's widow was merely holding the farm for him. If she died, it would go to Clearbrook to hold for the heir; if Spark never claimed it, it would go

to a distant cousin of Flint's in Kahedanan. The two couples who did not own the land but held a life interest in the work and profit of the farming, as was common on Gont, could not be dislodged by any man the widow took up with, even if she married him; but she feared they might resent her lack of fidelity to Flint, whom they had after all known longer than she had. To her relief they made no objections at all. "Hawk" had won their approval with one jab of a pitchfork. Besides, it was only good sense in a woman to want a man in the house to protect her. If she took him into her bed, well, the appetites of widows were proverbial. And, after all, she was a foreigner.

The attitude of the villagers was much the same. A bit of whispering and sniggering, but little more. It seemed that being respectable was easier than Moss thought; or perhaps it was that used goods had little value.

She felt as soiled and diminished by their acceptance as she would have by their disapproval. Only Lark freed her from shame, by making no judgments at all, and using no words—man, woman, widow, foreigner—in place of what she saw, but simply looking, watching her and Hawk with interest, curiosity, envy, and generosity.

Because Lark did not see Hawk through the words herdsman, hired hand, widow's man, but looked at him himself, she saw a good deal that puzzled her. His dignity and simplicity were not greater than that of other men she had known, but were a little different in quality; there was a size to him, she thought, not height or girth, certainly, but soul and mind. She said to Ivy, "That man hasn't lived among goats all his life. He knows more about the world than he does about a farm."

"I'd say he's a sorcerer who's been accursed or lost his power some way," the witch said. "It happens."

"Ah," said Lark.

But the word "archmage" was too great and grand a word to bring from far-off pomps and palaces and fit to the dark-eyed, grey-haired man at Oak Farm, and she never did that. If she had, she could not have been as comfortable with him as she was. Even the idea of his having been a sorcerer made her a bit uneasy, the word getting in the way of the man, until she actually saw him again. He was up in one of the old apple trees in the orchard pruning out deadwood, and he called out a greeting to her as she came to the farm. His name fit him well, she thought, perched up there, and she waved at him, and smiled as she went on.

Tenar had not forgotten the question she had asked him on the hearthstones under the sheepskin coat. She asked it again, a few days or months later—time went

along very sweet and easy for them in the stone house, on the winterbound farm. "You never told me," she said, "how you came to hear them talking on the road."

"I told you, I think. I'd gone aside, hidden, when I heard men coming behind me."

"Why?"

"I was alone, and knew there were some gangs around."

"Yes, of course—But then just as they passed, Hake was talking about Therru?"

"He said 'Oak Farm,' I think."

"It's all perfectly possible. It just seems so convenient."

Knowing she did not disbelieve him, he lay back and waited.

"It's the kind of thing that happens to a wizard," she said.

"And others."

"Maybe."

"My dear, you're not trying to . . . reinstate me?"

"No. No, not at all. Would that be a sensible thing to do? If you were a wizard, would you be here?"

They were in the big oak-framed bed, well covered with sheepskins and feather-coverlets, for the room had no fireplace and the night was one of hard frost on fallen snow.

"But what I want to know is this. Is there something besides what you call power —that comes before it, maybe? Or something that power is just one way of using? Like this. Ogion said of you once that before you'd had any learning or training as a wizard at all, you were a mage. Mage-born, he said. So I imagined that, to have power, one must first have room for the power. An emptiness to fill. And the greater the emptiness the more power can fill it. But if the power never was got, or was taken away, or was given away—still that would be there."

"That emptiness," he said.

"Emptiness is one word for it. Maybe not the right word."

"Potentiality?" he said, and shook his head. "What is able to be . . . to become."

"I think you were there on that road, just there just then, because of that—because that is what happens to you. You didn't make it happen. You didn't cause it. It wasn't because of your 'power.' It happened to you. Because of your—emptiness."

After a while he said, "This isn't far from what I was taught as a boy on Roke: that true magery lies in doing only what you must do. But this would go further. Not to do, but to be done to. . . ."

"I don't think that's quite it. It's more like what true doing rises from. Didn't you come and save my life—didn't you run a fork into Hake? That was 'doing,' all right, doing what you must do. . . ."

He pondered again, and finally asked her, "Is this a wisdom taught you when you were Priestess of the Tombs?"

"No." She stretched a little, gazing into the darkness. "Arha was taught that to be powerful she must sacrifice. Sacrifice herself and others. A bargain: give, and so get. And I cannot say that that's untrue. But my soul can't live in that narrow place —this for that, tooth for tooth, death for life. . . . There is a freedom beyond that. Beyond payment, retribution, redemption—beyond all the bargains and the balances, there is freedom."

"The doorway between them," he said softly.

That night Tenar dreamed. She dreamed that she saw the doorway of the *Creation of Eá*. It was a little window of gnarled, clouded, heavy glass, set low in the west wall of an old house above the sea. The window was locked. It had been bolted shut. She wanted to open it, but there was a word or a key, something she had forgotten, a word, a key, a name, without which she could not open it. She sought for it in rooms of stone that grew smaller and darker till she found that Ged was holding her, trying to wake her and comfort her, saying, "It's all right, dear love, it will be all right!"

"I can't get free!" she cried, clinging to him.

He soothed her, stroking her hair; they lay back together, and he whispered, "Look."

The old moon had risen. Its white brilliance on the fallen snow was reflected into the room, for cold as it was Tenar would not have the shutters closed. All the air above them was luminous. They lay in shadow, but it seemed as if the ceiling were a mere veil between them and endless, silver, tranquil depths of light.

It was a winter of heavy snows on Gont, and a long winter. The harvest had been a good one. There was food for the animals and people, and not much to do but eat it and stay warm.

Therru knew the *Creation of Eá* all through. She spoke the Winter Carol and the *Deed of the Young King* on the day of Sunreturn. She knew how to handle a piecrust, how to spin on the wheel, and how to make soap. She knew the name and use of every plant that showed above the snow, and a good deal of other lore, herbal and verbal, that Ged had stowed away in his head from his short

apprenticeship with Ogion and his long years at the School on Roke. But he had not taken down the Runes or the Lore-books from the mantelpiece, nor had he taught the child any word of the Language of the Making.

He and Tenar spoke of this. She told him how she had taught Therru the one word, *tolk*, and then had stopped, for it had not seemed right, though she did not know why.

"I thought perhaps it was because I'd never truly spoken that language, never used it in magery. I thought perhaps she should learn it from a true speaker of it."

"No man is that."

"No woman is half that."

"I meant that only the dragons speak it as their native tongue."

"Do they learn it?"

Struck by the question, he was slow to answer, evidently calling to mind all he had been told and knew of the dragons. "I don't know," he said at last. "What do we know about them? Would they teach as we do, mother to child, elder to younger? Or are they like the animals, teaching some things, but born knowing most of what they know? Even that we don't know. But my guess would be that the dragon and the speech of the dragon are one. One being."

"And they speak no other tongue."

He nodded. "They do not learn," he said. "They are."

Therru came through the kitchen. One of her tasks was to keep the kindling box filled, and she was busy at it, bundled up in a cut-down lambskin jacket and cap, trotting back and forth from the woodhouse to the kitchen. She dumped her load in the box by the chimney corner and set off again.

"What is it she sings?" Ged asked.

"Therru?"

"When she's alone."

"But she never sings. She can't."

"Her way of singing. 'Farther west than west . . .'"

"Ah!" said Tenar. "That story! Did Ogion never tell you about the Woman of Kemay?"

"No," he said, "tell me."

She told him the tale as she spun, and the purr and hush of the wheel went along with the words of the story. At the end of it she said, "When the Master Windkey told me how he'd come looking for 'a woman on Gont,' I thought of her. But she'd be dead by now, no doubt. And how would a fisherwoman who was a dragon be an

archmage, anyhow!"

"Well, the Patterner didn't say that a woman on Gont was to be archmage," said Ged. He was mending a badly torn pair of breeches, sitting up in the window ledge to get what light the dark day afforded. It was a half-month after Sunreturn and the coldest time yet.

"What did he say, then?"

"'A woman on Gont.' So you told me."

"But they were asking who was to be the next archmage."

"And got no answer to that question."

"Infinite are the arguments of mages," said Tenar rather drily.

Ged bit the thread off and rolled the unused length around two fingers.

"I learned to quibble a bit, on Roke," he admitted. "But this isn't a quibble, I think. 'A woman on Gont' can't become archmage. No woman can be archmage. She'd unmake what she became in becoming it. The Mages of Roke are men—their power is the power of men, their knowledge is the knowledge of men. Both manhood and magery are built on one rock: power belongs to men. If women had power, what would men be but women who can't bear children? And what would women be but men who can?"

"Hah!" went Tenar; and presently, with some cunning, she said, "Haven't there been queens? Weren't they women of power?"

"A queen's only a she-king," said Ged.

She snorted.

"I mean, men give her power. They let her use their power. But it isn't hers, is it? It isn't because she's a woman that she's powerful, but despite it."

She nodded. She stretched, sitting back from the spinning wheel. "What is a woman's power, then?" she asked

"I don't think we know."

"When has a woman power because she's a woman? With her children, I suppose. For a while . . ."

"In her house, maybe."

She looked around the kitchen. "But the doors are shut," she said, "the doors are locked."

"Because you're valuable."

"Oh, yes. We're precious. So long as we're powerless . . . I remember when I first learned that! Kossil threatened me—me, the One Priestess of the Tombs. And I realized that I was helpless. I had the honor; but she had the power, from the

God-king, the man. Oh, it made me angry! And frightened me . . . Lark and I talked about this once. She said, 'Why are men *afraid* of women?'"

"If your strength is only the other's weakness, you live in fear," Ged said.

"Yes; but women seem to fear their own strength, to be afraid of themselves."

"Are they ever taught to trust themselves?" Ged asked, and as he spoke Therru came in on her work again. His eyes and Tenar's met.

"No," she said. "Trust is not what we're taught." She watched the child stack the wood in the box. "If power were trust," she said. "I like that word. If it weren't all these arrangements—one above the other—kings and masters and mages and owners—It all seems so unnecessary. Real power, real freedom, would lie in trust, not force."

"As children trust their parents," he said.

They were both silent.

"As things are," he said, "even trust corrupts. The men on Roke trust themselves and one another. Their power is pure, nothing taints its purity, and so they take that purity for wisdom. They cannot imagine doing wrong."

She looked up at him. He had never spoken about Roke thus before, from wholly outside it, free of it.

"Maybe they need some women there to point that possibility out to them," she said, and he laughed.

She restarted the wheel. "I still don't see why, if there can be she-kings, there can't be she-archmages."

Therru was listening.

"Hot snow, dry water," said Ged, a Gontish saying. "Kings are given power by other men. A mage's power is his own—himself."

"And it's a male power. Because we don't even know what a woman's power is. All right. I see. But all the same, why can't they find an archmage—a he-archmage?"

Ged studied the tattered inseam of the breeches. "Well," he said, "if the Patterner wasn't answering their question, he was answering one they didn't ask. Maybe what they have to do is ask it."

"Is it a riddle?" Therru asked.

"Yes," said Tenar. "But we don't know the riddle. We only know the answer to it. The answer is: A woman on Gont."

"There's lots of them," Therru said after pondering a bit. Apparently satisfied by this, she went out for the next load of kindling.

Ged watched her go. "All changed," he said. "All . . . Sometimes I think, Tenar—I wonder if Lebannen's kingship is only a beginning. A doorway . . . And he the doorkeeper. Not to pass through."

"He seems so young," Tenar said, tenderly.

"Young as Morred was when he met the Black Ships. Young as I was when I . . ." He stopped, looking out the window at the grey, frozen fields through the leafless trees. "Or you, Tenar, in that dark place . . . What's youth or age? I don't know. Sometimes I feel as if I'd been alive for a thousand years; sometimes I feel my life's been like a flying swallow seen through the chink of a wall. I have died and been reborn, both in the Dry Land and here under the sun, more than once. And the *Making* tells us that we have all returned and return forever to the source, and that the source is ceaseless. *Only in dying, life* . . . I thought about that when I was up with the goats on the mountain, and a day went on forever and yet no time passed before the evening came, and morning again. . . . I learned goat wisdom. So I thought, What is this grief of mine for? What man am I mourning? Ged the Archmage? Why is Hawk the goatherd sick with grief and shame for him? What have I done that I should be ashamed?"

"Nothing," Tenar said. "Nothing, ever!"

"Oh, yes," said Ged. "All the greatness of men is founded on shame, made out of it. So Hawk the goatherd wept for Ged the Archmage. And looked after the goats, also, as well as a boy his age could be expected to do."

After a while Tenar smiled. She said, a little shyly, "Moss said you were about fifteen."

"That would be about right. Ogion named me in the autumn; and the next summer I was off to Roke. . . . Who was that boy? An emptiness . . . A freedom."

"Who is Therru, Ged?"

He did not answer until she thought he was not going to answer, and then he said, "So made—what freedom is there for her?"

"We are our freedom, then?"

"I think so."

"You seemed, in your power, as free as man can be. But at what cost? What made you free? And I . . . I was made, molded like clay, by the will of the women serving the Old Powers, or serving the men who made all services and ways and places, I no longer know which. Then I went free, with you, for a moment, and with Ogion. But it was not *my* freedom. Only it gave me choice; and I chose. I chose to mold myself like clay to the use of a farm and a farmer and our children. I

made myself a vessel. I know its shape. But not the clay. Life danced me. I know the dances. But I don't know who the dancer is."

"And she," Ged said after a long silence, "if she should ever dance—"

"They will fear her," Tenar whispered. Then the child came back in, and the conversation turned to the bread dough raising in the box by the stove. They talked so, quietly and long, passing from one thing to another and round and back, for half the brief day, often, spinning and sewing their lives together with words, the years and the deeds and the thoughts they had not shared. Then again they would be silent, working and thinking and dreaming, and the silent child was with them.

So the winter passed, till lambing season was on them, and the work got very heavy for a while as the days lengthened and grew bright. Then the swallows came from the isles under the sun, from the South Reach, where the star Gobardon shines in the constellation of Ending; but all the swallows' talk with one another was about beginning.

Chapter 13

The Master

Like the swallows, the ships began to fly among the islands with the return of spring. In the villages there was talk, secondhand from Valmouth, of the king's ships harrying the harriers, driving well-established pirates to ruin, confiscating their ships and fortunes. Lord Heno himself sent out his three finest, fastest ships, captained by the sorcerer-seawolf Tally, who was feared by every merchantman from Soléa to the Andrades; his fleet was to ambush the King's ships off Oranéa and destroy them. But it was one of the King's ships that came into Valmouth Bay with Tally in chains aboard, and under orders to escort Lord Heno to Gont Port to be tried for piracy and murder. Heno barricaded himself in his stone manor house in the hills behind Valmouth, but neglected to light a fire, it being warm spring weather; so five or six of the King's young soldiers dropped in on him by way of the chimney, and the whole troop walked him chained through the streets of Valmouth and carried him off to justice.

When he heard this, Ged said with love and pride, "All that a king can do, he will do well."

Handy and Shag had been taken promptly off on the north road to Gont Port, and when his wounds healed enough Hake was carried there by ship, to be tried for murder at the King's Courts of Law. The news of their sentence to the galleys caused much satisfaction and self-congratulation in Middle Valley, to which Tenar, and Therru beside her, listened in silence.

There came other ships bearing other men sent by the King, not all of them popular among the townsfolk and villagers of rude Gont: royal sheriffs, sent to report on the system of bailiffs and officers of the peace and to hear complaints and grievances from the common people; tax reporters and tax collectors; noble visitors to the little lords of Gont, inquiring politely as to their fealty to the Crown in Havnor; and wizardly men, who went here and there, seeming to do little and say

less.

"I think they're hunting for a new archmage after all," said Tenar.

"Or looking for abuses of the art—" Ged said, "sorcery gone wrong."

Tenar was going to say, "Then they should look in the manor house of Re Albi!" but her tongue stumbled on the words. What was I going to say? she thought. Did I ever tell Ged about—I'm getting forgetful. What was it I was going to tell Ged? Oh, that we'd better mend the lower pasture gate before the cows get out.

There was always something, a dozen things, in the front of her mind, business of the farm. "Never one thing, for you," Ogion had said. Even with Ged to help her, all her thoughts and days went into the business of the farm. He shared the housework with her as Flint had not; but Flint had been a farmer, and Ged was not. He learned fast, but there was a lot to learn. They worked. There was little time for talk, now. At the day's end there was supper together, and bed together, and sleep, and wake at dawn and back to work, and so round and so round, like the wheel of a water mill, rising full and emptying, the days like the bright water falling.

"Hello, Mother," said the thin fellow at the farmyard gate. She thought it was Lark's eldest and said, "What brings you by, lad?" Then she looked back at him across the clucking chickens and the parading geese.

"Spark!" she cried, and scattered the poultry, running to him.

"Well, well," he said. "Don't carry on."

He let her embrace him and stroke his face. He came in and sat down in the kitchen, at the table.

"Have you eaten? Did you see Apple?"

"I could eat."

She rummaged in the well-stocked larder. "What ship are you on? Still the *Gull*?"

"No." A pause. "My ship's broke up."

She turned in horror—"Wrecked?"

"No." He smiled without humor. "Crew's broke up. King's men took her over."

"But—it wasn't a pirate ship—"

"No."

"Then why—?"

"Said the captain was running some goods they wanted," he said, unwillingly. He was as thin as ever, but looked older, tanned dark, lank-haired, with a long, narrow face like Flint's but still narrower, harder.

"Where's Dad?" he said.

Tenar stood still.

"You didn't stop by your sister's."

"No," he said, indifferent.

"Flint died three years ago," she said. "Of a stroke. In the fields—on the path up from the lambing pens. Clearbrook found him. It was three years ago."

There was a silence. He did not know what to say, or had nothing to say.

She put food before him. He began to eat so hungrily that she set out more at once.

"When did you eat last?"

He shrugged, and ate.

She sat down across the table from him. Late-spring sunshine poured in the low window across the table and shone on the brass fender in the hearth.

He pushed the plate away at last.

"So who's been running the farm?" he asked.

"What's that to you, son?" she asked him, gently but dryly.

"It's mine," he said, in a rather similar tone.

After a minute Tenar got up and cleared his dishes away. "So it is."

"You can stay, o' course," he said, very awkwardly, perhaps attempting to joke; but he was not a joking man. "Old Clearbrook still around?"

"They're all still here. And a man called Hawk, and a child I keep. Here. In the house. You'll have to sleep in the loft-room. I'll put the ladder up." She faced him again. "Are you here for a stay, then?"

"I might be."

So Flint had answered her questions for twenty years, denying her right to ask them by never answering yes or no, maintaining a freedom based on her ignorance; a poor, narrow sort of freedom, she thought.

"Poor lad," she said, "your crew broken up, and your father dead, and strangers in your house, all in a day. You'll want some time to get used to it all. I'm sorry, my son. But I'm glad you're here. I thought of you often, on the seas, in the storms, in winter."

He said nothing. He had nothing to offer, and was unable to accept. He pushed back his chair and was about to get up when Therru came in. He stared, half-risen —"What happened to her?" he said.

"She was burned. Here's my son I told you about, Therru, the sailor, Spark. Therru's your sister, Spark."

"Sister!"

“By adoption.”

“Sister!” he said again, and looked around the kitchen as if for witness, and stared at his mother.

She stared back.

He went out, going wide of Therru, who stood motionless. He slammed the door behind him.

Tenar started to speak to Therru and could not.

“Don’t cry,” said the child who did not cry, coming to her, touching her arm. “Did he hurt you?”

“Oh Therru! Let me hold you!” She sat down at the table with Therru on her lap and in her arms, though the girl was getting big to be held, and had never learned how to do it easily. But Tenar held her and wept, and Therru bent her scarred face down against Tenar’s, till it was wet with tears.

Ged and Spark came in at dusk from opposite ends of the farm. Spark had evidently talked with Clearbrook and thought the situation over, and Ged was evidently trying to size it up. Very little was said at supper, and that cautiously. Spark made no complaint about not having his own room back, but ran up the ladder to the storage-loft like the sailor he was, and was apparently satisfied with the bed his mother had made him there, for he did not come back down till late in the morning.

He wanted breakfast then, and expected it to be served to him. His father had always been waited on by mother, wife, daughter. Was he less a man than his father? Was she to prove it to him? She served him his meal and cleared it away for him, and went back to the orchard where she and Therru and Shandy were burning off a plague of tent caterpillars that threatened to destroy the new-set fruit.

Spark went off to join Clearbrook and Tiff. And he stayed mostly with them, as the days passed. The heavy work requiring muscle and the skilled work with crops and sheep was done by Ged, Shandy, and Tenar, while the two old men who had been there all their lives, his father’s men, took him about and told him how they managed it all, and truly believed they were managing it all, and shared their belief with him.

Tenar became miserable in the house. Only outdoors, at the farmwork, did she have relief from the anger, the shame that Spark’s presence brought her.

"My turn," she said to Ged, bitterly, in the starlit darkness of their room. "My turn to lose what I was proudest of."

"What have you lost?"

"My son. The son I did not bring up to be a man. I failed. I failed him." She bit her lip, gazing dry-eyed into the dark.

Ged did not try to argue with her or persuade her out of her grief. He asked, "Do you think he'll stay?"

"Yes. He's afraid to try and go back to sea. He didn't tell me the truth, or not all the truth, about his ship. He was second mate. I suppose he was involved in carrying stolen goods. Secondhand piracy. I don't care. Gontish sailors are all half-pirate. But he lies about it. He lies. He is jealous of you. A dishonest, envious man."

"Frightened, I think," Ged said. "Not wicked. And it is his farm."

"Then he can have it! And may it be as generous to him as—"

"No, dear love," Ged said, catching her with both voice and hands—"don't speak—don't say the evil word!" He was so urgent, so passionately earnest, that her anger turned right about into the love that was its source, and she cried, "I wouldn't curse him, or this place! I didn't mean it! Only it makes me so sorry, so ashamed! I am so sorry, Ged!"

"No, no, no. My dear, I don't care what the boy thinks of me. But he's very hard on you."

"And Therru. He treats her like—He said, he said to me, 'What did she do, to look like that?' What did *she do*—!"

Ged stroked her hair, as he often did, with a light, slow, repeated caress that would make them both sleepy with loving pleasure.

"I could go off goat-herding again," he said at last. "It would make things easier for you here. Except for the work . . ."

"I'd rather come with you."

He stroked her hair, and seemed to be considering. "I suppose we might," he said. "There were a couple of families up there sheep-herding, above Lissu. But then comes the winter. . . ."

"Maybe some farmer would take us on. I know the work—and sheep—and you know goats—and you're quick at everything—"

"Useful with pitchforks," he murmured, and got a little sob of a laugh from her.

The next morning Spark was up early to breakfast with them, for he was going fishing with old Tiff. He got up from the table, saying with a better grace than

usual, “I’ll bring a mess of fish for supper.”

Tenar had made resolves overnight. She said, “Wait; you can clear off the table, Spark. Set the dishes in the sink and put water on ’em. They’ll be washed with the supper things.”

He stared a moment and said, “That’s women’s work,” putting on his cap.

“It’s anybody’s work who eats in this kitchen.”

“Not mine,” he said flatly, and went out.

She followed him. She stood on the doorstep. “Hawk’s, but not yours?” she demanded.

He merely nodded, going on across the yard.

“It’s too late,” she said, turning back to the kitchen. “Failed, failed.” She could feel the lines in her face, stiff, beside the mouth, between the eyes. “You can water a stone,” she said, “but it won’t grow.”

“You have to start when they’re young and tender,” Ged said. “Like me.”

This time she couldn’t laugh.

They came back to the house from the day’s work and saw a man talking with Spark at the front gate.

“That’s the fellow from Re Albi, isn’t it?” said Ged, whose eyes were very good.

“Come along, Therru,” Tenar said, for the child had stopped short. “What fellow?” She was rather nearsighted, and squinted across the yard. “Oh, it’s what’s his name, the sheep-dealer. Townsend. What’s he back here for, the carrion crow!”

Her mood all day had been fierce, and Ged and Therru wisely said nothing.

She went to the men at the gate.

“Did you come about the ewe lambs, Townsend? You’re a year late; but there’s some of this year’s yet in the fold.”

“So the master’s been telling me,” said Townsend.

“Has he,” said Tenar.

Spark’s face went darker than ever at her tone.

“I won’t interrupt you and the master, then,” said she, and was turning away when Townsend spoke: “I’ve got a message for you, Goha.”

“Third time’s the charm.”

“The old witch, you know, old Moss, she’s in a bad way. She said, since I was coming down to Middle Valley, she said, ‘Tell Mistress Goha I’d like to see her before I die, if there’s a chance of her coming.’”

Crow, carrion crow, Tenar thought, looking with hatred at the bearer of bad news.

“She’s ill?”

“Sick to death,” Townsend said, with a kind of smirk that might be intended for sympathy. “Took sick in the winter, and she’s failing fast, and so she said to tell you she wants bad to see you, before she dies.”

“Thank you for bringing the message,” Tenar said soberly, and turned to go to the house. Townsend went on with Spark to the sheepfolds.

As they prepared dinner, Tenar said to Ged and Therru, “I must go.”

“Of course,” Ged said. “The three of us, if you like.”

“Would you?” For the first time that day her face lightened, the storm cloud lifted. “Oh,” she said, “that’s—that’s good—I didn’t want to ask, I thought maybe—Therru, would you like to go back to the little house, Ogion’s house, for a while?”

Therru stood still to think. “I could see my peach tree,” she said.

“Yes, and Heather—and Sippy—and Moss—poor Moss! Oh, I have longed, I have longed to go back up there, but it didn’t seem right. There was the farm to run—and all—”

It seemed to her that there was some other reason she had not gone back, had not let herself think of going back, had not even known till now that she yearned to go; but whatever the reason was it slipped away like a shadow, a word forgotten. “Has anyone looked after Moss, I wonder, did anyone send for a healer? She’s the only healer on the Overfell, but there’s people down in Gont Port who could help her, surely. Oh, poor Moss! I want to go—It’s too late, but tomorrow, tomorrow early. And the master can make his own breakfast!”

“He’ll learn,” said Ged.

“No, he won’t. He’ll find some fool woman to do it for him. Ah!” She looked around the kitchen, her face bright and fierce. “I hate to leave her the twenty years I’ve scoured that table. I hope she appreciates it!”

Spark brought Townsend in for supper, but the sheep-dealer would not stay the night, though he was of course offered a bed in common hospitality. It would have been one of their beds, and Tenar did not like the thought. She was glad to see him go off to his hosts in the village in the blue twilight of the spring evening.

“We’ll be off to Re Albi first thing tomorrow, son,” she said to Spark. “Hawk and Therru and I.”

He looked a little frightened.

“Just go off like that?”

“So you went; so you came,” said his mother. “Now look here, Spark: this is

your father's money-box. There's seven ivory pieces in it, and those credit counters from old Bridgeman, but he'll never pay, he hasn't got anything to pay with. These four Andradean pieces Flint got from selling sheepskins to the ship's outfitter in Valmouth four years running, back when you were a boy. These three Havnorian ones are what Tholy paid us for the High Creek farm. I had your father buy that farm, and I helped him clear it and sell it. I'll take those three pieces, for I've earned them. The rest, and the farm, is yours. You're the master."

The tall, thin young man stood there with his gaze on the money-box.

"Take it all. I don't want it," he said in a low voice.

"I don't need it. But I thank you, my son. Keep the four pieces. When you marry, call them my gift to your wife."

She put the box away in the place behind the big plate on the top shelf of the dresser, where Flint had always kept it. "Therru, get your things ready now, because we'll go very early."

"When are you coming back?" Spark asked, and the tone of his voice made Tenar think of the restless, frail child he had been. But she said only, "I don't know, my dear. If you need me, I'll come."

She busied herself getting out their travel shoes and packs. "Spark," she said, "you can do something for me."

He had sat down in the hearthseat, looking uncertain and morose. "What?"

"Go down to Valmouth, soon, and see your sister. And tell her that I've gone back to the Overfell. Tell her, if she wants me, just send word."

He nodded. He watched Ged, who had already packed his few belongings with the neatness and dispatch of one who had traveled much, and was now putting up the dishes to leave the kitchen in good order. That done, he sat down opposite Spark to run a new cord through the eyelets of his pack to close it at the top.

"There's a knot they use for that," Spark said. "Sailor's knot."

Ged silently handed the pack across the hearth, and watched as Spark silently demonstrated the knot.

"Slips up, see," he said, and Ged nodded.

They left the farm in the dark and cold of the morning. Sunlight comes late to the western side of Gont Mountain, and only walking kept them warm till at last the sun got round the great mass of the south peak and shone on their backs.

Therru was twice the walker she had been the summer before, but it was still a two days' journey for them. Along in the afternoon, Tenar asked, "Shall we try to

get on to Oak Springs today? There's a sort of inn. We had a cup of milk there, remember, Therru?"

Ged was looking up the mountainside with a faraway expression. "There's a place I know. . . ."

"Fine," said Tenar.

A little before they came to the high corner of the road from which Gont Port could first be seen, Ged turned aside from the road into the forest that covered the steep slopes above it. The westering sun sent slanting red-gold rays into the darkness between the trunks and under the branches. They climbed half a mile or so, on no path Tenar could see, and came out on a little step or shelf of the mountainside, a meadow sheltered from the wind by the cliffs behind it and the trees about it. From there one could see the heights of the mountain to the north, and between the tops of great firs there was one clear view of the western sea. It was entirely silent there except when the wind breathed in the firs. One mountain lark sang long and sweet, away up in the sunlight, before dropping to her nest in the untrodden grass.

The three of them ate their bread and cheese. They watched darkness rise up the mountain from the sea. They made their bed of cloaks and slept, Therru next to Tenar next to Ged. In the deep night Tenar woke. An owl was calling nearby, a sweet repeated note like a bell, and far off up the mountain its mate replied like the ghost of a bell. Tenar thought, I'll watch the stars set in the sea, but she fell asleep again at once in peace of heart.

She woke in the grey morning to see Ged sitting up beside her, his cloak pulled round his shoulders, looking out through the gap westward. His dark face was quite still, full of silence, as she had seen it once long ago on the beach of Atuan. His eyes were not downcast, as then; he looked into the illimitable west. Looking with him she saw the day coming, the glory of rose and gold reflected clear across the sky.

He turned to her, and she said to him, "I have loved you since I first saw you."

"Life-giver," he said and leaned forward, kissing her breast and mouth. She held him a moment. They got up, and waked Therru, and went on their way; but as they entered the trees Tenar looked back once at the little meadow as if charging it to keep faith with her happiness there.

The first day of the journey their goal had been journeying. This day they would come to Re Albi. So Tenar's mind was much on Aunty Moss, wondering what had befallen her and whether she was indeed dying. But as the day and the way went

on, her mind would not hold to the thought of Moss, or any thought. She was tired. She did not like walking this way again to death. They passed Oak Springs, and went down into the gorge, and started up again. By the last long uphill stretch to the Overfell, her legs were hard to lift, and her mind was stupid and confused, fastening upon one word or image until it became meaningless—the dish-cupboard in Ogion's house, or the words *bone dolphin*, which came into her head from seeing Therru's grass bag of toys, and repeated themselves endlessly.

Ged strode along at his easy traveler's gait, and Therru trudged right beside him, the same Therru who had worn out on this long climb less than a year ago, and had to be carried. But that had been after a longer day of walking. And the child had still been recovering from her punishment.

She was getting old, too old to walk so far so fast. It was so hard going uphill. An old woman should stay home by her fireside. The bone dolphin, the bone dolphin. Bone, bound, the binding-spell. The bone man and the bone animal. There they went ahead. They were waiting for her. She was slow. She was tired. She toiled on up the last stretch of the hill and came up to them where the road came out on the level of the Overfell. To the left were the roofs of Re Albi slanting down toward the cliff's edge. To the right the road went up to the manor house. "This way," Tenar said.

"No," the child said, pointing left, to the village.

"This way," Tenar repeated, and set off on the right-hand way. Ged came with her.

They walked between the walnut orchards and the fields of grass. It was a warm late afternoon of early summer. Birds sang in the orchard trees near and far. He came walking down the road from the great house toward them, the one whose name she could not remember.

"Welcome!" he said, and stopped, smiling at them.

They stopped.

"What great personages have come to honor the house of the Lord of Re Albi," he said. Tuaho, that was not his name. The bone dolphin, the bone animal, the bone child.

"My Lord Archmage!" He bowed low, and Ged bowed to him.

"And my Lady Tenar of Atuan!" He bowed even lower to her, and she got down on her knees in the road. Her head sank down, till she put her hands in the dirt and crouched until her mouth too was on the dirt of the road.

"Now crawl," he said, and she began to crawl toward him.

"Stop," he said, and she stopped.

"Can you talk?" he asked. She said nothing, having no words that would come to her mouth, but Ged replied in his usual quiet voice, "Yes."

"Where's the monster?"

"I don't know."

"I thought the witch would bring her familiar with her. But she brought you instead. The Lord Archmage Sparrowhawk. What a splendid substitute! All I can do to witches and monsters is cleanse the world of them. But to you, who used at one time to be a man, I can talk; you are capable of rational speech, at least. And capable of understanding punishment. You thought you were safe, I suppose, with your king on the throne, and my master, our master, destroyed. You thought you'd had your will, and destroyed the promise of eternal life, didn't you?"

"No," said Ged's voice.

She could not see them. She could see only the dirt of the road, and taste it in her mouth. She heard Ged speak. He said, "In dying is life."

"Quack, quack, quote the Songs, Master of Roke—schoolmaster! What a funny sight to see, the great Archmage all got up like a goatherd, and not an ounce of magic in him—not a word of power. Can you say a spell, Archmage? Just a little spell—just a tiny charm of illusion? No? Not a word? My master defeated you. Now do you know it? You did not conquer him. His power lives! I might keep you alive here awhile, to see that power—my power. To see the old man I keep from death—and I might use your life for that if I need it—and to see your meddling king make a fool of himself, with his mincing lords and stupid wizards, looking for a woman! A woman to rule us! But the rule is here, the mastery is here, here, in this house. All this year I've been gathering others to me, men who know the true power. From Roke, some of them, from right under the noses of the schoolmasters. And from Havnor, from under the nose of that so-called Son of Morred, who wants a woman to rule him, your king who thinks he's so safe he can go by his true name. Do you know my name, Archmage? Do you remember me, four years ago, when you were the great Master of Masters and I was a lowly student at Roke?"

"You were called Aspen," said the patient voice.

"And my true name?"

"I don't know your true name."

"What? You don't know it? Can't you find it? Don't mages know all names?"

"I'm not a mage."

"Oh, say it again."

“I’m not a mage.”

“I like to hear you say it. Say it again.”

“I’m not a mage.”

“But I am!”

“Yes.”

“Say it!”

“You are a mage.”

“Ah! This is better than I hoped! I fished for the eel and caught the whale! Come on, then, come meet my friends. You can walk. She can crawl.”

So they went up the road to the manor house of the Lord of Re Albi and went in, Tenar on hands and knees on the road, and on the marble steps up to the door, and on the marble pavements of the halls and rooms.

Inside the house it was dark. With the darkness came a darkness into Tenar’s mind, so that she understood less and less of what was said. Only some words and voices came to her clearly. What Ged said she understood, and when he spoke she thought of his name, and clung to it in her mind. But he spoke very seldom, and only to answer the one whose name was not Tuaho. That one spoke to her now and then, calling her Bitch. “This is my new pet,” he said to other men, several of them that were there in the darkness where candles made shadows. “See how well trained she is? Roll over, Bitch!” She rolled over, and the men laughed.

“She had a whelp,” he said, “that I planned to finish punishing, since it was left half-burned. But she brought me a bird she’d caught instead, a sparrowhawk. Tomorrow we’ll teach it to fly.”

Other voices said words, but she did not understand words anymore.

Something was fastened around her neck and she was made to crawl up more stairs and into a room that smelled of urine and rotting meat and sweet flowers. Voices spoke. A cold hand like a stone struck her head feebly while something laughed, “Eh, eh, eh,” like an old door creaking back and forth. Then she was kicked and made to crawl down halls. She could not crawl fast enough, and was kicked in the breasts and in the mouth. Then there was a door that crashed, and silence, and the dark. She heard somebody crying and thought it was the child, her child. She wanted the child not to cry. At last it stopped.

Chapter 14

Tehanu

The child turned left and went some way before she looked back, letting the blossoming hedgerow hide her.

The one called Aspen, whose name was Erisen, and whom she saw as a forked and writhing darkness, had bound her mother and father, with a thong through her tongue and a thong through his heart, and was leading them up toward the place where he hid. The smell of the place was sickening to her, but she followed a little way to see what he did. He led them in and shut the door behind them. It was a stone door. She could not enter there.

She needed to fly, but she could not fly; she was not one of the winged ones.

She ran as fast as she could across the fields, past Aunty Moss's house, past Ogion's house and the goats' house, onto the path along the cliff and to the edge of the cliff, where she was not to go because she could see it only with one eye. She was careful. She looked carefully with that eye. She stood on the edge. The water was far below, and the sun was setting far away. She looked into the west with the other eye, and called with the other voice the name she had heard in her mother's dream.

She did not wait for an answer, but turned round again and went back—first past Ogion's house to see if her peach tree had grown. The old tree stood bearing many small, green peaches, but there was no sign of the seedling. The goats had eaten it. Or it had died because she had not watered it. She stood a little while looking at the ground there, then drew a long breath and went on back across the fields to Aunty Moss's house.

Chickens going to roost squawked and fluttered, protesting her entrance. The little hut was dark and very full of smells. "Aunty Moss?" she said, in the voice she had for these people.

"Who's there?"

The old woman was in her bed, hiding. She was frightened, and tried to make stone around her to keep everyone away, but it didn't work; she was not strong enough.

"Who is it? Who's there? Oh dearie—oh dearie child, my little burned one, my pretty, what are you doing here? Where's she, where's she, your mother, oh, is she here? Did she come? Don't come in, don't come in, dearie, there's a curse on me, he cursed the old woman, don't come near me! Don't come near!"

She wept. The child put out her hand and touched her. "You're cold," she said.

"You're like fire, child, your hand burns me. Oh, don't look at me! He made my flesh rot, and shrivel, and rot again, but he won't let me die—he said I'd bring you here. I tried to die, I tried, but he held me, he held me living against my will, he won't let me die, oh, let me die!"

"You shouldn't die," the child said, frowning.

"Child," the old woman whispered, "dearie—call me by my name."

"Hatha," the child said.

"Ah. I knew . . . Set me free, dearie!"

"I have to wait," the child said. "Till they come."

The witch lay easier, breathing without pain. "Till who come, dearie?" she whispered.

"My people."

The witch's big, cold hand lay like a bundle of sticks in hers. She held it firmly. It was as dark now outside the hut as inside it. Hatha, who was called Moss, slept; and presently the child, sitting on the floor beside her cot, with a hen perched nearby, slept also.

Men came when the light came. He said, "Up, Bitch! Up!" She got to her hands and knees. He laughed, saying, "All the way up! You're a clever bitch, you can walk on your hind legs, can't you? That's it. Pretend to be human! We have a way to go now. Come!" The strap was still around her neck, and he jerked it. She followed him.

"Here, you lead her," he said, and now it was that one, the one she loved, but she did not know his name anymore, who held the strap.

They all came out of the dark place. Stone yawned to let them pass and ground together behind them.

He was always close beside her and the one who held the strap. Others came behind, three or four men.

The fields were grey with dew. The mountain was dark against a pale sky. Birds were beginning to sing in the orchards and hedgerows, louder and louder.

They came to the edge of the world and walked along it for a while until they came to where the ground was only rock and the edge was very narrow. There was a line in the rock, and she looked at that.

"He can push her," he said. "And then the hawk can fly, all by himself."

He unfastened the strap from around her neck.

"Go stand at the edge," he said. She followed the mark in the stone out to the edge. The sea was below her, nothing else. The air was out beyond her.

"Now, Sparrowhawk will give her a push," he said. "But first, maybe she wants to say something. She has so much to say. Women always do. Isn't there anything you'd like to say to us, Lady Tenar?"

She could not speak, but she pointed to the sky above the sea.

"Albatross," he said.

She laughed aloud.

In the gulfs of light, from the doorway of the sky, the dragon flew, fire trailing behind the coiling, mailed body. Tenar spoke then.

"Kalessin!" she cried, and then turned, seizing Ged's arm, pulling him down to the rock, as the roar of fire went over them, the rattle of mail and the hiss of wind in upraised wings, the clash of the talons like scytheblades on the rock.

The wind blew from the sea. A tiny thistle growing in a cleft in the rock near her hand nodded and nodded in the wind from the sea.

Ged was beside her. They were crouched side by side, the sea behind them and the dragon before them.

It looked at them sidelong from one long, yellow eye.

Ged spoke in a hoarse, shaking voice, in the dragon's language. Tenar understood the words, which were only, "Our thanks, Eldest."

Looking at Tenar, Kalessin spoke, in the huge voice like a broom of metal dragged across a gong: *"Aro Tehanu?"*

"The child," Tenar said—"Therru!" She got to her feet to run, to seek her child. She saw her coming along the ledge of rock between the mountain and the sea, toward the dragon.

"Don't run, Therru!" she cried, but the child had seen her and was running, running straight to her. They clung to each other.

The dragon turned its enormous, rust-dark head to watch them with both eyes.

The nostril pits, big as kettles, were bright with fire, and wisps of smoke curled from them. The heat of the dragon's body beat through the cold sea wind.

"Tehanu," the dragon said.

The child turned to look at it.

"Kalessin," she said.

Then Ged, who had remained kneeling, stood up, though shakily, catching Tenar's arm to steady himself. He laughed. "Now I know who called thee, Eldest!" he said.

"I did," the child said. "I did not know what else to do, Segoy."

She still looked at the dragon, and she spoke in the language of the dragons, the words of the Making.

"It was well, child," the dragon said. "I have sought thee long."

"Shall we go there now?" the child asked. "Where the others are, on the other wind?"

"Would you leave these?"

"No," said the child. "Can they not come?"

"They cannot come. Their life is here."

"I will stay with them," she said, with a little catch of breath.

Kalessin turned aside to give that immense furnace-blast of laughter or contempt or delight or anger—"Hah!" Then, looking again at the child, "It is well. Thou hast work to do here."

"I know," the child said.

"I will come back for thee," Kalessin said, "in time." And, to Ged and Tenar, "I give you my child, as you will give me yours."

"In time," Tenar said.

Kalessin's great head bowed very slightly, and the long, sword-toothed mouth curled up at the corner.

Ged and Tenar drew aside with Therru as the dragon turned, dragging its armor across the ledge, placing its taloned feet carefully, gathering its black haunches like a cat, till it sprang aloft. The vaned wings shot up crimson in the new light, the spurred tail rang hissing on the rock, and it flew, it was gone—a gull, a swallow, a thought.

Where it had been lay scorched rags of cloth and leather, and other things.

"Come away," Ged said.

But the woman and the child stood and looked at those things.

"They are bone people," Therru said. She turned away then and set off. She went ahead of the man and woman along the narrow path.

"Her native tongue," Ged said. "Her mother tongue."

"Tehanu," said Tenar. "Her name is Tehanu."

"She has been given it by the giver of names."

"She has been Tehanu since the beginning. Always, she has been Tehanu."

"Come on!" the child said, looking back at them. "Aunty Moss is sick."

They were able to move Moss out into the light and air, to wash her sores, and to burn the foul linens of her bed, while Therru brought clean bedding from Ogion's house. She also brought Heather the goat-girl back with her. With Heather's help they got the old woman comfortable in her bed, with her chickens; and Heather promised to come back with something for them to eat.

"Someone must go down to Gont Port," Ged said, "for the wizard there. To look after Moss; she can be healed. And to go to the manor house. The old man will die now. The grandson might live, if the house is made clean. . . ." He had sat down on the doorstep of Moss's house. He leaned his head back against the doorjamb, in the sunlight, and closed his eyes. "Why do we do what we do?" he said.

Tenar was washing her face and hands and arms in a basin of clear water she had drawn from the pump. She looked round when she was done. Utterly spent, Ged had fallen asleep, his face a little upturned to the morning light. She sat down beside him on the doorstep and laid her head against his shoulder. Are we spared? she thought. How is it we are spared?

She looked down at Ged's hand, relaxed and open on the earthen step. She thought of the thistle that nodded in the wind, and of the taloned foot of the dragon with its scales of red and gold. She was half-asleep when the child sat down beside her.

"Tehanu," she murmured.

"The little tree died," the child said.

After a while Tenar's weary, sleepy mind understood, and woke up enough to make a reply. "Are there peaches on the old tree?"

They spoke low, not to waken the sleeping man.

"Only little green ones."

"They'll ripen, after the Long Dance. Soon now."

"Can we plant one?"

"More than one, if you like. Is the house all right?"

"It's empty."

"Shall we live there?" She roused a little more, and put her arm around the child. "I have money," she said, "enough to buy a herd of goats, and Turby's winter-pasture, if it's still for sale. Ged knows where to take them up the mountain, summers. . . . I wonder if the wool we combed is still there?" So saying, she thought, We left the books, Ogion's books! On the mantel at Oak Farm—for Spark, poor boy, he can't read a word of them!

But it did not seem to matter. There were new things to be learned, no doubt. And she could send somebody for the books, if Ged wanted them. And for her spinning wheel. Or she could go down herself, come autumn, and see her son, and visit with Lark, and stay a while with Apple. They would have to replant Ogion's garden right away if they wanted any vegetables of their own this summer. She thought of the rows of beans and the scent of the bean flowers. She thought of the small window that looked west. "I think we can live there," she said.

Afterword

Between the last chapter of *The Tombs of Atuan* and the first chapter of *Tehanu*, twenty-five years or so pass, time enough for the girl Tenar to become a widow with grown children.

Between the last chapter of *The Farthest Shore* and the fourth chapter of *Tehanu*, a day or two passes, time enough for the dragon Kalessin to carry Ged from Roke to Gont.

Between finishing *The Farthest Shore* and beginning *Tehanu*, eighteen years of my life passed, time enough for me to learn how to write this book.

I never thought of Earthsea as a trilogy, but for a long time I saw it as a three-legged chair.

I knew Tenar's story needed to be told, and that she and Ged had to be brought together. So right after finishing the third book, I began the fourth one. But—though I knew Tenar had not stayed with Ogion but had gone off and married a farmer and lived an ordinary, unmagical life—I didn't know why. The story got stuck. I couldn't go on. It took years of living my own ordinary life, and a great deal of learning how to think about such things, mostly from other women, before I could understand why Tenar did what she did and who she was at the end of it. Then at last I could write *Tehanu*.

When it came out, some reviewers and readers were disappointed. It wasn't like the first three books. It wasn't what they expected. Nobody had made a fuss when I reversed the racist tradition of white heroes and black villains; but now I was messing around with gender. And sex.

Heroic fantasies, even in 1990 and even if they included women heroes, were (and mostly still are) based on institutions, hierarchies, and values constructed by men. True to the tradition, the characters in the first and third books of Earthsea were almost exclusively male, and in *Tombs* Tenar shares the stage with Ged. But *Tehanu* is all about women and children to start with. Ogion appears only to die, and when Ged arrives he seems a broken man, so weak he takes refuge with a

common witch and then goes off to herd goats, leaving Tenar alone to deal with incomprehension and malevolence. Where's the guy with the shining staff? Who's going to do the big magic? A little girl? Oh, come on. That's not a hero tale!

I didn't want it to be. By the time I wrote this book I needed to look at heroics from outside and underneath, from the point of view of the people who are not included. The ones who can't do magic. The ones who don't have shining staffs or swords. Women, kids, the poor, the old, the powerless. Unheroes, ordinary people —my people. I didn't want to change Earthsea, but I needed to see what Earthsea looked like to us.

Some readers who identified with Ged as a male power figure thought I'd betrayed and degraded him in some sort of feminist spasm of revenge. So far as I know, I had no spasms and didn't betray Ged. Quite the opposite, I think. In *Tehanu* he can become, finally, fully a man. He is no longer the servant of his power.

But where did the power go? Is the magic, in fact, dying out of Earthsea, as it seemed was happening in the third book?

I don't think that's the case, but certainly there's a great change taking place in the world, only just beginning to be visible, and not yet comprehensible. Ogion sees it as he dies. Tenar has intuitions of it, from the story of the Woman of Kemay, from the painted fan in the old weaver's house, from her dreams, from what she knows and doesn't know about her adopted daughter, Therru.

Therru is the key to the book. It wasn't till I saw her that I could begin to write it. But what I saw took me aback. Therru isn't ordinary at all. Her life has been ruined at the start. She is not just powerless, but crippled, deformed, and terrorized. She cannot be healed. The cruel wrong done her came with the breakdown of the society of Earthsea, which the new king may be able to repair; but for Therru, what reparation?

"What cannot be mended must be transcended."

Maybe the change coming into Earthsea has something to do with no longer identifying freedom with power, with separating being free from being in control. There is a kind of refusal to serve power that isn't a revolt or a rebellion, but a revolution in the sense of reversing meanings, of changing how things are understood. Anyone who has been able to break from the grip of a controlling, crippling belief or bigotry or enforced ignorance knows the sense of coming out into the light and air, of release, being set free to fly, to transcend.

In both *The Tombs of Atuan* and *Tehanu*, books in which women are central to the story, there's a kind of anger which I don't think is in *A Wizard* or *The Farthest Shore*. It's the anger of the underdog, fury against social injustice, the vengeful rage women have too often been made to feel. I'd finally learned to acknowledge such anger in myself and to try to express it without injustice. So Ged the Archmage could be grandly serene as he paralyzed pirates with a wave of his staff, but Ged the goatherd in blind fury uses a pitchfork on his enemy. And so Aspen, the wizard of Re Albi, is detestable in a way even Cob is not, because Aspen flaunts all the behaviors that cause such anger—fear and loathing of women, the arrogance of the powerful, and the sick human lust to dominate that leads to endless cruelty.

It's not surprising that *Tehanu* was labeled "feminist." But the word is used so variously that it's worse than useless. If you see feminism as vindictive prejudice against men, the label lets you dismiss the book unread; if you see feminism as a belief in superior properties unique to women and expect the book to confirm that belief, you'll find it equivocal.

The conversation between Tenar and the witch Moss in the fifth chapter is a case in point. Is it "feminist"? Moss is pretty contemptuous of men in general, having been treated by them with contempt all her life. That's all right, and I find her discussion of men's power and women's power harsh, incomplete, but interesting. Then she goes off into an incantatory praise of mysterious female knowledge: "Who knows where a woman begins or ends? . . . I have roots, I have roots deeper than this island. . . . I go back into the dark!" And she ends with a rhetorical question—"Who'll ask the dark its name?"

"I will," Tenar says. "I lived long enough in the dark."

I've often seen Moss's rhapsody quoted with approval. Tenar's fierce answer almost always goes unquoted, unnoticed. Yet it refuses Moss's self-admiring mysticism. And all Tenar's life is in it.

Tenar is three people. As young Arha she lived a cruel, rigid, mindless life of ritual obedience in a community of women worshiping the Dark Powers, the Nameless Ones. She broke free from this prison and came away with Ged, who could give her back her true name and show her the power of knowing the names of things. Then she took a second, more obscure step to freedom, by refusing to stay with the kind teacher, Ogion, whose wisdom was not quite what she needed. She'd had enough of the celibate, sexless life in Atuan. Thinking the best way to learn where a woman begins and ends was to live a woman's life as fully as she knew how, and take all the chances a woman takes, she went off to get married, to

live as Goha, the farmer's wife, to bear children and bring them up.

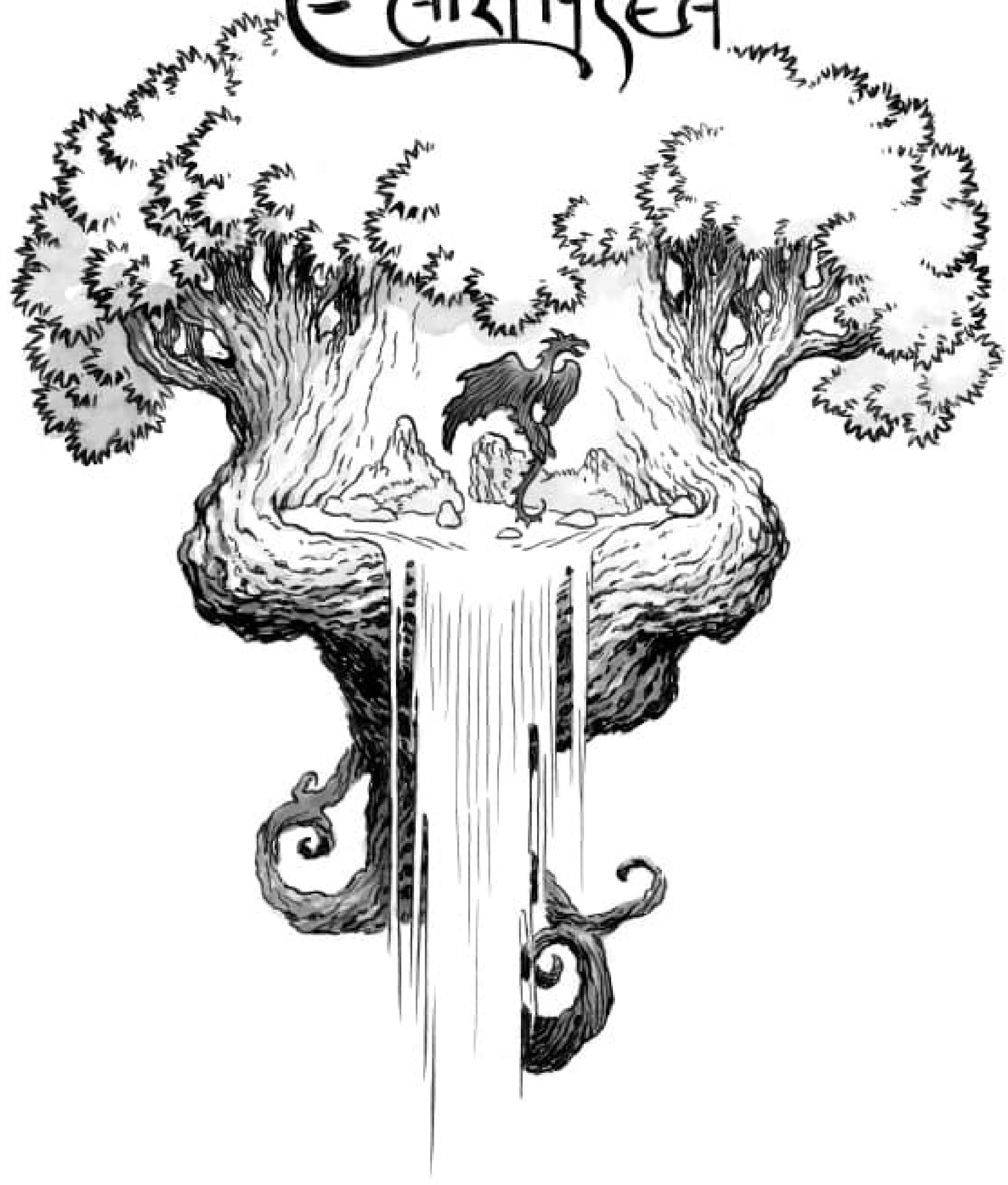
Now, older, and having made herself responsible for a damaged and vulnerable child, she knows she is ready, not for vague, innate mystical insights, but for the wisdom she needs and has earned. Beyond the obscure worship of dark earth-powers, and beyond the common sense of daily life, she wants understanding. Living the mystery of daily life, she longs for the clear light of thought. Tenar has a fine, strong mind. The two people best able to see and respect that in her were Ged and Ogion. Ogion is gone; Ged has come back to her.

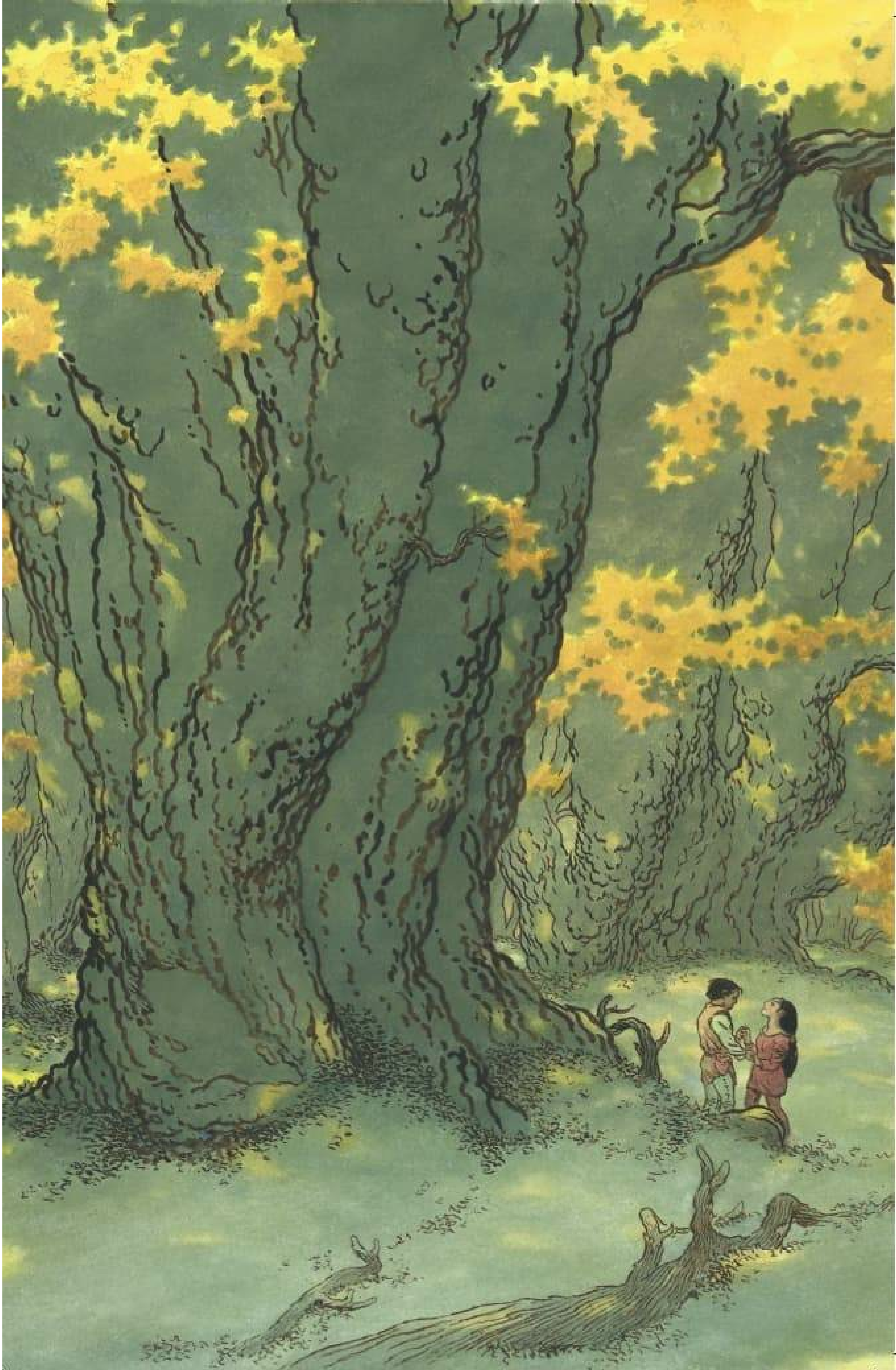
But Ged, too, is in desperate need of a new wisdom. He has lost so much: his fame and high standing, the gift that shaped his life since he was a boy, the use of all he learned on Roke. How is he to live as an ordinary man? Now all his magic's gone, used up, given away, can he even respect himself? Was he (as Moss slyly asked) ever anything but his power—is there anything left of him when it's gone but an empty shell?

Tenar may know the answer to that question, but for Ged to be able to answer it himself, as he must, he has to find out what he gave up to become a man of power. Which might be defined as everything but that power. Or which might be seen as a different kind of learning. The kind of learning ordinary people get from talking in the kitchen on winter evenings . . .

Or is it beyond learning—is it the kind of magic that men lost, but the dragons kept?

Tales from Earthsea





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Foreword

At the end of the fourth book of Earthsea, *Tehanu*, the story had arrived at what I felt to be *now*. And, just as in the now of the so-called real world, I didn't know what would happen next. I could guess, foretell, fear, hope, but I didn't know.

Unable to continue Tehanu's story (because it hadn't happened yet) and foolishly assuming that the story of Ged and Tenar had reached its happily-ever-after, I gave the book a subtitle: "The Last Book of Earthsea."

O foolish writer. *Now* moves. Even in storytime, dreamtime, once-upon-a time, *now* isn't *then*.

Seven or eight years after *Tehanu* was published, I was asked to write a story set in Earthsea. A mere glimpse at the place told me that things had been happening there while I wasn't looking. It was high time to go back and find out what was going on *now*.

I also wanted information on various things that had happened back *then*, before Ged and Tenar were born. A good deal about Earthsea, about wizards, about Roke Island, about dragons, had begun to puzzle me. In order to understand current events, I needed to do some historical research, to spend some time in the Archives of the Archipelago.

The way one does research into nonexistent history is to tell the story and find out what happened. I believe this isn't very different from what historians of the so-called real world do. Even if we are present at some historic event, do we comprehend it—can we even remember it—until we can tell it as a story? And for events in times or places outside our own experience, we have nothing to go on but the stories other people tell us. Past events exist, after all, only in memory, which is a form of imagination. The event is real *now*, but once it's *then*, its continuing reality is entirely up to us, dependent on our energy and honesty. If we let it drop from memory, only imagination can restore the least glimmer of it. If we lie about the past, forcing it to tell a story we want it to tell, to mean what we want it to mean, it loses its reality, becomes a fake. To bring the past along with us through time in

the hold-alls of myth and history is a heavy undertaking; but as Lao Tzu says, wise people march along with the baggage wagons.

When you construct or reconstruct a world that never existed, a wholly fictional history, the research is of a somewhat different order, but the basic impulse and techniques are much the same. You look at what happens and try to see why it happens, you listen to what the people there tell you and watch what they do, you think about it seriously, and you try to tell it honestly, so that the story will have weight and make sense.

The five tales in this book explore or extend the world established by the first four Earthsea novels. Each is a story in its own right, but they will profit by being read after, not before, the novels.

"The Finder" takes place about three hundred years before the time of the novels, in a dark and troubled time; its story casts light on how some of the customs and institutions of the Archipelago came to be. "The Bones of the Earth" is about the wizards who taught the wizard who first taught Ged, and shows that it takes more than one mage to stop an earthquake. "Darkrose and Diamond" might take place at any time during the last couple of hundred years in Earthsea; after all, a love story can happen at any time, anywhere. "On the High Marsh" is a story from the brief but eventful six years that Ged was Archmage of Earthsea. And the last story, "Dragonfly," which takes place a few years after the end of *Tehanu*, is the bridge between that book and the next one, *The Other Wind* (to be published soon). A dragon bridge.

So that my mind could move about among the years and centuries without getting things all out of order, and to keep contradictions and discrepancies at a minimum while I was writing these stories, I became (somewhat) more systematic and methodical, and put my knowledge of the peoples and their history together into "A Description of Earthsea." Its function is like that of the first big map I drew of all the Archipelago and the Reaches, when I began to work on *A Wizard of Earthsea* over thirty years ago: I needed to know where things are, and how to get from here to there—in time as well as in space.

Because this kind of fictional fact, like maps of imaginary realms, is of real interest to some readers, I include the description after the stories. I also redrew the geographical maps for this book, and while doing so, happily discovered a very

old one in the Archives in Havnor.

In the years since I began to write about Earthsea I've changed, of course, and so have the people who read the books. All times are changing times, but ours is one of massive, rapid moral and mental transformation. Archetypes turn into millstones, large simplicities get complicated, chaos becomes elegant, and what everybody knows is true turns out to be what some people used to think.

It's unsettling. For all our delight in the impermanent, the entrancing flicker of electronics, we also long for the unalterable. We cherish the old stories for their changelessness. Arthur dreams eternally in Avalon. Bilbo can go "there and back again," and "there" is always the beloved familiar Shire. Don Quixote sets out forever to kill a windmill . . . So people turn to the realms of fantasy for stability, ancient truths, immutable simplicities.

And the mills of capitalism provide them. Supply meets demand. Fantasy becomes a commodity, an industry.

Commodified fantasy takes no risks: it invents nothing, but imitates and trivializes. It proceeds by depriving the old stories of their intellectual and ethical complexity, turning their action to violence, their actors to dolls, and their truth-telling to sentimental platitude. Heroes brandish their swords, lasers, wands, as mechanically as combine harvesters, reaping profits. Profoundly disturbing moral choices are sanitized, made cute, made safe. The passionately conceived ideas of the great storytellers are copied, stereotyped, reduced to toys, molded in bright-colored plastic, advertised, sold, broken, junked, replaceable, interchangeable.

What the commodifiers of fantasy count on and exploit is the insuperable imagination of the reader, child or adult, which gives even these dead things life—of a sort, for a while.

Imagination like all living things lives *now*, and it lives with, from, on true change. Like all we do and have, it can be co-opted and degraded; but it survives commercial and didactic exploitation. The land outlasts the empires. The conquerors may leave desert where there was forest and meadow, but the rain will fall, the rivers will run to the sea. The unstable, mutable, untruthful realms of Once-upon-a-time are as much a part of human history and thought as the nations in our kaleidoscopic atlases, and some are more enduring.

We have inhabited both the actual and the imaginary realms for a long time. But we don't live in either place the way our parents or ancestors did. Enchantment alters with age, and with the age.

We know a dozen different Arthurs now, all of them true. The Shire changed irrevocably even in Bilbo's lifetime. Don Quixote went riding out to Argentina and met Jorge Luis Borges there. *Plus c'est la même chose, plus ça change.*

It's been a joy to me to go back to Earthsea and find it still there, entirely familiar, and yet changed and still changing. What I thought was going to happen isn't what's happening, people aren't who—or what—I thought they were, and I lose my way on islands I thought I knew by heart.

So these are reports of my explorations and discoveries: tales from Earthsea for those who have liked or think they might like the place, and who are willing to accept these hypotheses:

> *things change:*
> *authors and wizards are not always to be trusted:*
> *nobody can explain a dragon.*

The Finder

I. In the Dark Time

This is the first page of the *Book of the Dark*, written some six hundred years ago in Berila, on Enlad:

> "After Elfarran and Morred perished and the Isle of Soléa sank beneath the sea, the Council of the Wise governed for the child Serriadh until he took the throne. His reign was bright but brief. The kings who followed him in Enlad were seven, and their realm increased in peace and wealth. Then the dragons came to raid among the western lands, and wizards went out in vain against them. King Akambar moved the court from Berila in Enlad to the City of Havnor, whence he sent out his fleet against invaders from the Kargad Lands and drove them back into the East. But still they sent raiding ships even as far as the Inmost Sea. Of the fourteen Kings of Havnor the last was Maharion, who made peace both with the dragons and the Kargs, but at great cost. And after the Ring of the Runes was broken, and Erreth-Akbe died with the great dragon, and Maharion the Brave was killed by treachery, it seemed that no good thing happened in the Archipelago.
>
> "Many claimed Maharion's throne, but none could keep it, and the quarrels of the claimants divided all loyalties. No commonwealth was left and no justice, only the will of the wealthy. Men of noble houses, merchants, and pirates, any who could hire soldiers and wizards called himself a lord, claiming lands and cities as his property. The warlords made those they conquered slaves, and those they hired were in truth slaves, having only their masters to safeguard them from rival warlords seizing the lands, and sea-pirates raiding the ports, and bands and hordes of lawless,

> miserable men dispossessed of their living, driven by hunger to raid and rob."

The *Book of the Dark*, written late in the time it tells of, is a compilation of self-contradictory histories, partial biographies, and garbled legends. But it's the best of the records that survived the dark years. Wanting praise, not history, the warlords burnt the books in which the poor and powerless might learn what power is.

But when the lore-books of a wizard came into a warlord's hands he was likely to treat them with caution, locking them away to keep them harmless or giving them to a wizard in his hire to do with as he wished. In the margins of the spells and word lists and in the endpapers of these books of lore a wizard or his prentice might record a plague, a famine, a raid, a change of masters, along with the spells worked in such events and their success or unsuccess. Such random records reveal a clear moment here and there, though all between those moments is darkness. They are like glimpses of a lighted ship far out at sea, in darkness, in the rain.

And there are songs, old lays and ballads from small islands and from the quiet uplands of Havnor, that tell the story of those years.

Havnor Great Port is the city at the heart of the world, white-towered above its bay; on the tallest tower the sword of Erreth-Akbe catches the first and last of daylight. Through that city passes all the trade and commerce and learning and craft of Earthsea, a wealth not hoarded. There the King sits, having returned after the healing of the Ring, in sign of healing. And in that city, in these latter days, men and women of the islands speak with dragons, in sign of change.

But Havnor is also the Great Isle, a broad, rich land; and in the villages inland from the port, the farmlands of the slopes of Mount Onn, nothing ever changes much. There a song worth singing is likely to be sung again. There old men at the tavern talk of Morred as if they had known him when they too were young and heroes. There girls walking out to fetch the cows home tell stories of the women of the Hand, who are forgotten everywhere else in the world, even on Roke, but remembered among those silent, sunlit roads and fields and in the kitchens by the hearths where housewives work and talk.

In the time of the kings, mages gathered in the court of Enlad and later in the court of Havnor to counsel the king and take counsel together, using their arts to pursue goals they agreed were good. But in the dark years, wizards sold their skills to the highest bidder, pitting their powers one against the other in duels and

combats of sorcery, careless of the evils they did, or worse than careless. Plagues and famines, the failure of springs of water, summers with no rain and years with no summer, the birth of sickly and monstrous young to sheep and cattle, the birth of sickly and monstrous children to the people of the isles—all these things were charged to the practices of wizards and witches, and all too often rightly so.

So it became dangerous to practice sorcery, except under the protection of a strong warlord; and even then, if a wizard met up with one whose powers were greater than his own, he might be destroyed. And if a wizard let down his guard among the common folk, they too might destroy him if they could, seeing him as the source of the worst evils they suffered, a malign being. In those years, in the minds of most people, all magic was black.

It was then that village sorcery, and above all women's witchery, came into the ill repute that has clung to it since. Witches paid dearly for practicing the arts they thought of as their own. The care of pregnant beasts and women, birthing, teaching the songs and rites, the fertility and order of field and garden, the building and care of the house and its furniture, the mining of ores and metals—these great things had always been in the charge of women. A rich lore of spells and charms to ensure the good outcome of such undertakings was shared among the witches. But when things went wrong at the birth, or in the field, that would be the witches' fault. And things went wrong more often than right, with the wizards warring, using poisons and curses recklessly to gain immediate advantage without thought for what followed after. They brought drought and storm, blights and fires and sicknesses across the land, and the village witch was punished for them. She didn't know why her charm of healing caused the wound to gangrene, why the child she brought into the world was imbecile, why her blessing seemed to burn the seed in the furrows and blight the apple on the tree. But for these ills, somebody had to be to blame: and the witch or sorcerer was there, right there in the village or the town, not off in the warlord's castle or fort, not protected by armed men and spells of defense. Sorcerers and witches were drowned in the poisoned wells, burned in the withered fields, buried alive to make the dead earth rich again.

So the practice of their lore and the teaching of it had become perilous. Those who undertook it were often those already outcast, crippled, deranged, without family, old—women and men who had little to lose. The wise man and wise woman, trusted and held in reverence, gave way to the stock figures of the shuffling, impotent village sorcerer with his trickeries, the hag-witch with her potions used in aid of lust, jealousy, and malice. And a child's gift for magic

became a thing to dread and hide.

This is a tale of those times. Some of it is taken from the *Book of the Dark*, and some comes from Havnor, from the upland farms of Onn and the woodlands of Faliern. A story may be pieced together from such scraps and fragments, and though it will be an airy quilt, half made of hearsay and half of guesswork, yet it may be true enough. It's a tale of the Founding of Roke, and if the Masters of Roke say it didn't happen so, let them tell us how it happened otherwise. For a cloud hangs over the time when Roke first became the Isle of the Wise, and it may be that the wise men put it there.

II. Otter

There was an otter in our brook
That every mortal semblance took,
Could any spell of magic make,
And speak the tongues of man and drake.
So runs the water away, away,
So runs the water away.

Otter was the son of a boatwright who worked in the shipyards of Havnor Great Port. His mother gave him his country name; she was a farm woman from Endlane village, around northwest of Mount Onn. She had come to the city seeking work, as many came. Decent folk in a decent trade in troubled times, the boatwright and his family were anxious not to come to notice lest they come to grief. And so, when it became clear that the boy had a gift of magery, his father tried to beat it out of him.

"You might as well beat a cloud for raining," said Otter's mother.

"Take care you don't beat evil into him," said his aunt.

"Take care he doesn't turn your belt on you with a spell!" said his uncle.

But the boy played no tricks against his father. He took his beatings in silence and learned to hide his gift.

It didn't seem to him to amount to much. It was such an easy matter to him to make a silvery light shine in a dark room, or find a lost pin by thinking about it, or true up a warped joint by running his hands over the wood and talking to it, that he couldn't see why they made a fuss over such things. But his father raged at him for his "shortcuts," even struck him once on the mouth when he was talking to the work, and insisted that he do his carpentry with tools, in silence.

His mother tried to explain. "It's as if you'd found some great jewel," she said, "and what's one of us to do with a diamond but hide it? Anybody rich enough to buy it from you is strong enough to kill you for it. Keep it hid. And keep away from great people and their crafty men!"

"Crafty men" is what they called wizards in those days.

One of the gifts of power is to know power. Wizard knows wizard, unless the concealment is very skillful. And the boy had no skills at all except in boat-building, of which he was a promising scholar by the age of twelve. About that time the midwife who had helped his mother at his birth came by and said to his parents, “Let Otter come to me in the evenings after work. He should learn the songs and be prepared for his naming day.”

That was all right, for she had done the same for Otter’s elder sister, and so his parents sent him to her in the evenings. But she taught Otter more than the song of the Creation. She knew his gift. She and some men and women like her, people of no fame and some of questionable reputation, had all in some degree that gift; and they shared, in secret, what lore and craft they had. “A gift untaught is a ship unguided,” they said to Otter, and they taught him all they knew. It wasn’t much, but there were some beginnings of the great arts in it; and though he felt uneasy at deceiving his parents, he couldn’t resist this knowledge, and the kindness and praise of his poor teachers. “It will do you no harm if you never use it for harm,” they told him, and that was easy for him to promise them.

At the stream Serrenen, where it runs within the north wall of the city, the midwife gave Otter his true name, by which he is remembered in islands far from Havnor.

Among these people was an old man whom they called, among themselves, the Changer. He showed Otter a few spells of illusion; and when the boy was fifteen or so, the old man took him out into the fields by Serrenen to show him the one spell of true change he knew. “First let’s see you turn that bush into the seeming of a tree,” he said, and promptly Otter did so. Illusion came so easy to the boy that the old man took alarm. Otter had to beg and wheedle him for any further teaching and finally to promise him, swearing on his own true and secret name, that if he learned the Changer’s great spell he would never use it but to save a life, his own or another’s.

Then the old man taught it to him. But it wasn’t much use, Otter thought, since he had to hide it.

What he learned working with his father and uncle in the shipyard he could use, at least; and he was becoming a good craftsman, even his father would admit that.

Losen, a sea-pirate who called himself King of the Inmost Sea, was then the chief warlord in the city and all the east and south of Havnor. Exacting tribute from that rich domain, he spent it to increase his soldiery and the fleets he sent out to take slaves and plunder from other lands. As Otter’s uncle said, he kept the shipwrights

busy. They were grateful to have work in a time when men seeking work found only beggary, and rats ran in the courts of Maharion. They did an honest job, Otter's father said, and what the work was used for was none of their concern.

But the other learning he had been given had made Otter touchy in these matters, delicate of conscience. The big galley they were building now would be rowed to war by Losen's slaves and would bring back slaves as cargo. It galled him to think of the good ship in that vicious usage. "Why can't we build fishing boats, the way we used to?" he asked, and his father said, "Because the fishermen can't pay us."

"Can't pay us as well as Losen does. But we could live," Otter argued.

"You think I can turn the King's order down? You want to see me sent to row with the slaves in the galley we're building? Use your head, boy!"

So Otter worked along with them with a clear head and an angry heart. They were in a trap. What's the use of a gift of power, he thought, if not to get out of a trap?

His conscience as a craftsman would not let him fault the carpentry of the ship in any way; but his conscience as a wizard told him he could put a hex on her, a curse woven right into her beams and hull. Surely that was using the secret art to a good end? For harm, yes, but only to harm the harmful. He did not talk to his teachers about it. If he was doing wrong, it was none of their fault and they would know nothing about it. He thought about it for a long time, working out how to do it, making the spell very carefully. It was the reversal of a finding charm: a losing charm, he called it to himself. The ship would float, and handle well, and steer, but she would never steer quite true.

It was the best he could do in protest against the misuse of good work and a good ship. He was pleased with himself. When the ship was launched (and all seemed well with her, for her fault would not show up until she was out on the open sea) he could not keep from his teachers what he had done, the little circle of old men and midwives, the young hunchback who could speak with the dead, the blind girl who knew the names of things. He told them his trick, and the blind girl laughed, but the old people said, "Look out. Take care. Keep hidden."

In Losen's service was a man who called himself Hound, because, as he said, he had a nose for witchery. His employment was to sniff Losen's food and drink and garments and women, anything that might be used by enemy wizards against him; and also to inspect his warships. A ship is a fragile thing in a dangerous element,

vulnerable to spells and hexes. As soon as Hound came aboard the new galley he scented something. “Well, well,” he said, “who’s this?” He walked to the helm and put his hand on it. “This is clever,” he said. “But who is it? A newcomer, I think.” He sniffed appreciatively. “Very clever,” he said.

They came to the house in Boatwright Street after dark. They kicked the door in, and Hound, standing among the armed and armored men, said, “Him. Let the others be.” And to Otter he said, “Don’t move,” in a low, amicable voice. He sensed great power in the young man, enough that he was a little afraid of him. But Otter’s distress was too great and his training too slight for him to think of using magic to free himself or stop the men’s brutality. He flung himself at them and fought them like an animal till they knocked him on the head. They broke Otter’s father’s jaw and beat his aunt and mother senseless to teach them not to bring up crafty men. Then they carried Otter away.

Not a door opened in the narrow street. Nobody looked out to see what the noise was. Not till long after the men were gone did some neighbors creep out to comfort Otter’s people as best they could. “Oh, it’s a curse, a curse, this wizardry!” they said.

Hound told his master that they had the hexer in a safe place, and Losen said, “Who was he working for?”

“He worked in your shipyard, your highness.” Losen liked to be called by kingly titles.

“Who hired him to hex the ship, fool?”

“It seems it was his own idea, your majesty.”

“Why? What was he going to get out of it?”

Hound shrugged. He didn’t choose to tell Losen that people hated him disinterestedly.

“He’s crafty, you say. Can you use him?”

“I can try, your highness.”

“Tame him or bury him,” said Losen, and turned to more important matters.

Otter’s humble teachers had taught him pride. They had trained into him a deep contempt for wizards who worked for such men as Losen, letting fear or greed

pervert magic to evil ends. Nothing, to his mind, could be more despicable than such a betrayal of their art. So it troubled him that he couldn't despise Hound.

He had been stowed in a storeroom of one of the old palaces that Losen had appropriated. It had no window, its door was cross-grained oak barred with iron, and spells had been laid on that door that would have kept a far more experienced wizard captive. There were men of great skill and power in Losen's pay.

Hound did not consider himself to be one of them. "All I have is a nose," he said. He came daily to see that Otter was recovering from his concussion and dislocated shoulder, and to talk with him. He was, as far as Otter could see, well-meaning and honest. "If you won't work for us they'll kill you," he said. "Losen can't have fellows like you on the loose. You'd better hire on while he'll take you."

"I can't."

Otter stated it as an unfortunate fact, not as a moral assertion. Hound looked at him with appreciation. Living with the pirate king, he was sick of boasts and threats, of boasters and threateners.

"What are you strongest in?"

Otter was reluctant to answer. He had to like Hound, but didn't have to trust him. "Shape-changing," he mumbled at last.

"Shape-taking?"

"No. Just tricks. Turn a leaf to a gold piece. Seemingly."

In those days they had no fixed names for the various kinds and arts of magic, nor were the connections among those arts clear. There was—as the wise men of Roke would say later—no science in what they knew. But Hound knew pretty surely that his prisoner was concealing his talents.

"Can't change your own form, even seemingly?"

Otter shrugged.

It was hard for him to lie. He thought he was awkward at it because he had no practice. Hound knew better. He knew that magic itself resists untruth. Conjuring, sleight of hand, and false commerce with the dead are counterfeits of magic, glass to the diamond, brass to the gold. They are fraud, and lies flourish in that soil. But the art of magic, though it may be used for false ends, deals with what is real, and the words it works with are the true words. So true wizards find it hard to lie about their art. In their heart they know that their lie, spoken, may change the world.

Hound was sorry for him. "You know, if it was Gelluk questioning you, he'd have everything you know out of you just with a word or two, and your wits with it. I've seen what old Whiteface leaves behind when he asks questions. Listen, can

you work with the wind at all?"

Otter hesitated and said, "Yes."

"D'you have a bag?"

Weatherworkers used to carry a leather sack in which they said they kept the winds, untying it to let a fair wind loose or to capture a contrary one. Maybe it was only for show, but every weatherworker had a bag, a great long sack or a little pouch.

"At home," Otter said. It wasn't a lie. He did have a pouch at home. He kept his fine-work tools and his bubble level in it. And he wasn't altogether lying about the wind. Several times he had managed to bring a bit of magewind into the sail of a boat, though he had no idea how to combat or control a storm, as a ship's weatherworker must do. But he thought he'd rather drown in a gale than be murdered in this hole.

"But you wouldn't be willing to use that skill in the King's service?"

"There is no king in Earthsea," the young man said, stern and righteous.

"In my master's service, then," Hound amended, patient.

"No," Otter said, and hesitated. He felt he owed this man an explanation. "See, it's not so much won't as can't. I thought of making plugs in the planking of that galley, near the keel—you know what I mean by plugs? They'd work out as the timbers work when she gets in a heavy sea." Hound nodded. "But I couldn't do it. I'm a shipbuilder. I can't build a ship to sink. With the men aboard her. My hands wouldn't do it. So I did what I could. I made her go her own way. Not his way."

Hound smiled. "They haven't undone what you did yet, either," he said. "Old Whiteface was crawling all over her yesterday, growling and muttering. Ordered the helm replaced." He meant Losen's chief mage, a pale man from the North named Gelluk, who was much feared in Havnor.

"That won't do it."

"Could you undo the spell you put on her?"

A flicker of complacency showed in Otter's tired, battered young face. "No," he said. "I don't think anybody can."

"Too bad. You might have used that to bargain with."

Otter said nothing.

"A nose, now, is a useful thing, a salable thing," Hound went on. "Not that I'm looking for competition. But a finder can always find work, as they say . . . You ever been in a mine?"

The guesswork of a wizard is close to knowledge, though he may not know what

it is he knows. The first sign of Otter's gift, when he was two or three years old, was his ability to go straight to anything lost, a dropped nail, a mislaid tool, as soon as he understood the word for it. And as a boy one of his dearest pleasures had been to go alone out into the countryside and wander along the lanes or over the hills, feeling through the soles of his bare feet and throughout his body the veins of water underground, the lodes and knots of ore, the lay and interfolding of the kinds of rock and earth. It was as if he walked in a great building, seeing its passages and rooms, the descents to airy caverns, the glimmer of branched silver in the walls; and as he went on, it was as if his body became the body of earth, and he knew its arteries and organs and muscles as his own. This power had been a delight to him as a boy. He had never sought any use for it. It had been his secret.

He did not answer Hound's question.

"What's below us?" Hound pointed to the floor, paved with rough slate flags.

Otter was silent a while. Then he said in a low voice, "Clay, and gravel, and under that the rock that bears garnets. All under this part of the city is that rock. I don't know the names."

"You can learn 'em."

"I know how to build boats, how to sail boats."

"You'll do better away from the ships, all the fighting and raiding. The King's working the old mines at Samory, round the mountain. There you'd be out of his way. Work for him you must, if you want to stay alive. I'll see that you're sent there. If you'll go."

After a little silence Otter said, "Thanks." And he looked up at Hound, one brief, questioning, judging glance.

Hound had taken him, had stood and seen his people beaten senseless, had not stopped the beating. Yet he spoke as a friend. Why? said Otter's look. Hound answered it.

"Crafty men need to stick together," he said. "Men who have no art at all, nothing but wealth—they pit us one against the other, for their gain not ours. We sell 'em our power. Why do we? If we went our own way together, we'd do better, maybe."

Hound meant well in sending the young man to Samory, but he did not understand the quality of Otter's will. Nor did Otter himself. He was too used to obeying

others to see that in fact he had always followed his own bent, and too young to believe that anything he did could kill him.

He planned, as soon as they took him out of his cell, to use the old Changer's spell of self-transformation and so escape. Surely his life was in danger, and it would be all right to use the spell? Only he couldn't decide what to turn himself into—a bird, or a wisp of smoke, what would be safest? But while he was thinking about it, Losen's men, used to wizard's tricks, drugged his food and he ceased to think of anything at all. They dumped him into a mule-cart like a sack of oats. When he showed signs of reviving during the journey, one of them bashed him on the head, remarking that he wanted to make sure he got his rest.

When he came to himself, sick and weak from the poison and with an aching skull, he was in a room with brick walls and bricked-up windows. The door had no bars and no visible lock. But when he tried to get to his feet he felt bonds of sorcery holding his body and mind, resilient, clinging, tightening as he moved. He could stand, but could not take a step towards the door. He could not even reach his hand out. It was a horrible sensation, as if his muscles were not his own. He sat down again and tried to hold still. The spell-bonds around his chest kept him from breathing deeply, and his mind felt stifled too, as if his thoughts were crowded into a space too small for them.

After a long time the door opened and several men came in. He could do nothing against them as they gagged him and bound his arms behind him. "Now you won't weave charms nor speak spells, young 'un," said a broad, strong man with a furrowed face, "but you can nod your head well enough, right? They sent you here as a dowser. If you're a good dowser you'll feed well and sleep easy. Cinnabar, that's what you're to nod for. The King's wizard says it's still here somewhere about these old mines. And he wants it. So it's best for us that we find it. Now I'll walk you out. It's like I'm the water finder and you're my wand, see? You lead on. And if you want to go this way or that way you dip your head, so. And when you know there's ore underfoot, you stamp on the place, so. Now that's the bargain, right? And if you play fair I will."

He waited for Otter to nod, but Otter stood motionless. "Sulk away," the man said. "If you don't like this work, there's always the roaster."

The man, whom the others called Licky, led him out into a hot, bright morning that dazzled his eyes. Leaving his cell he had felt the spell-bonds loosen and fall away, but there were other spells woven about other buildings of the place, especially around a tall stone tower, filling the air with sticky lines of resistance and

repulsion. If he tried to push forward into them his face and belly stung with jabs of agony, so that he looked at his body in horror for the wound; but there was no wound. Gagged and bound, without his voice and hands to work magic, he could do nothing against these spells. Licky had tied one end of a braided leather cord around his neck and held the other end, following him. He let Otter walk into a couple of the spells, and after that Otter avoided them. Where they were was plain enough: the dusty pathways bent to miss them.

Leashed like a dog, he walked along, sullen and shivering with sickness and rage. He stared around him, seeing the stone tower, stacks of wood by its wide doorway, rusty wheels and machines by a pit, great heaps of gravel and clay. Turning his sore head made him dizzy.

"If you're a dowser, better dowse," said Licky, coming up alongside him and looking sidelong into his face. "And if you're not, you'd better dowse all the same. That way you'll stay above ground longer."

A man came out of the stone tower. He passed them, walking hurriedly with a queer shambling gait, staring straight ahead. His chin shone and his chest was wet with spittle leaking from his lips.

"That's the roaster tower," said Licky. "Where they cook the cinnabar to get the metal from it. Roasters die in a year or two. Where to, dowser?"

After a bit Otter nodded left, away from the grey stone tower. They walked on towards a long, treeless valley, past grass-grown dumps and tailings.

"All under here's worked out long since," Licky said. And Otter had begun to be aware of the strange country under his feet: empty shafts and rooms of dark air in the dark earth, a vertical labyrinth, the deepest pits filled with unmoving water. "Never was much silver, and the watermetal's long gone. Listen, young 'un, do you even know what cinnabar is?"

Otter shook his head.

"I'll show you some. That's what Gelluk's after. The ore of watermetal. Watermetal eats all the other metals, even gold, see. So he calls it the King. If you find him his King, he'll treat you well. He's often here. Come on, I'll show you. Dog can't track till he's had the scent."

Licky took him down into the mines to show him the gangues, the kinds of earth the ore was likely to occur in. A few miners were working at the end of a long level.

Because they were smaller than men and could move more easily in narrow places, or because they were at home with the earth, or most likely because it was the custom, women had always worked the mines of Earthsea. These miners were

free women, not slaves like the workers in the roaster tower. Gelluk had made him foreman over the miners, Licky said, but he did no work in the mine; the miners forbade it, earnestly believing it was the worst of bad luck for a man to pick up a shovel or shore a timber. “Suits me,” Licky said.

A shock-haired, bright-eyed woman with a candle bound to her forehead set down her pick to show Otter a little cinnabar in a bucket, brownish red clots and crumbs. Shadows leapt across the earth face at which the miners worked. Old timbers creaked, dirt sifted down. Though the air ran cool through the darkness, the drifts and levels were so low and narrow the miners had to stoop and squeeze their way. In places the ceilings had collapsed. Ladders were shaky. The mine was a terrifying place; yet Otter felt a sense of shelter in it. He was half sorry to go back up into the burning day.

Licky did not take him into the roaster tower, but back to the barracks. From a locked room he brought out a small, soft, thick, leather bag that weighed heavy in his hands. He opened it to show Otter the little pool of dusty brilliance lying in it. When he closed the bag the metal moved in it, bulging, pressing, like an animal trying to get free.

“There’s the King,” Licky said, in a tone that might have been reverence or hatred.

Though not a sorcerer, Licky was a much more formidable man than Hound. Yet like Hound he was brutal not cruel. He demanded obedience, but nothing else. Otter had seen slaves and their masters all his life in the shipyards of Havnor, and knew he was fortunate. At least in daylight, when Licky was his master.

He could eat only in the cell, where they took his gag off. Bread and onions were what they gave him, with a slop of rancid oil on the bread. Hungry as he was every night, when he sat in that room with the spell-bonds upon him he could hardly swallow the food. It tasted of metal, of ash. The nights were long and terrible, for the spells pressed on him, weighed on him, waked him over and over terrified, gasping for breath, and never able to think coherently. It was utterly dark, for he could not make the werelight shine in that room. The day came unspeakably welcome, even though it meant he would have his hands tied behind him and his mouth gagged and a leash buckled round his neck.

Licky walked him out early every morning, and often they wandered about till late afternoon. Licky was silent and patient. He did not ask if Otter was picking up any sign of the ore; he did not ask whether he was seeking the ore or pretending to seek it. Otter himself could not have answered the question. In these aimless

wanderings the knowledge of the underground would enter him as it used to do, and he would try to close himself off to it. "I will not work in the service of evil!" he told himself. Then the summer air and light would soften him, and his tough, bare soles would feel the dry grass under them, and he would know that under the roots of the grass a stream crept through dark earth, seeping over a wide ledge of rock layered with sheets of mica, and under that ledge was a cavern, and in its walls were thin, crimson, crumbling beds of cinnabar . . . He made no sign. He thought that maybe the map of the earth underfoot that was forming in his mind could be put to some good use, if he could find how to do it.

But after ten days or so, Licky said, "Master Gelluk's coming here. If there's no ore for him, he'll likely find another dowser."

Otter walked on a mile, brooding; then circled back, leading Licky to a hillock not far from the far end of the old workings. There he nodded downward and stamped his foot.

Back in the cell room, when Licky had unleashed him and untied his gag, he said, "There's some ore there. You can get to it by running that old tunnel straight on, maybe twenty feet."

"A good bit of it?"

Otter shrugged.

"Just enough to keep going on, eh?"

Otter said nothing.

"Suits me," said Licky.

Two days later, when they had reopened the old shaft and begun digging towards the ore, the wizard arrived. Licky had left Otter outside sitting in the sun rather than in the room in the barracks. Otter was grateful to him. He could not be wholly comfortable with his hands bound and his mouth gagged, but wind and sunlight were mighty blessings. And he could breathe deep and doze without dreams of earth stopping his mouth and nostrils, the only dreams he ever had, nights in the cell.

He was half asleep, sitting on the ground in the shade by the barracks, the smell of the logs stacked by the roaster tower bringing him a memory of the work yards at home, the fragrance of new wood as the plane ran down the silky oak board. Some noise or movement roused him. He looked up and saw the wizard standing before him, looming above him.

Gelluk wore fantastic clothes, as many of his kind did in those days. A long robe of Lorbanery silk, scarlet, embroidered in gold and black with runes and symbols,

and a wide-brimmed, peak-crowned hat made him seem taller than a man could be. Otter did not need to see his clothes to know him. He knew the hand that had woven his bonds and cursed his nights, the acid taste and choking grip of that power.

"I think I've found my little finder," said Gelluk. His voice was deep and soft, like the notes of a viol. "Sleeping in the sunshine, like one whose work has been well done. So you've sent them digging for the Red Mother, have you? Did you know the Red Mother before you came here? Are you a courtier of the King? Here, now, there's no need for ropes and knots." Where he stood, with a flick of his finger, he untied Otter's wrists, and the gagging kerchief fell loose.

"I could teach you how to do that for yourself," the wizard said, smiling, watching Otter rub and flex his aching wrists and work his lips that had been smashed against his teeth for hours. "The Hound told me that you're a lad of promise and might go far with a proper guide. If you'd like to visit the Court of the King, I can take you there. But maybe you don't know the King I'm talking of?"

Indeed Otter was unsure whether the wizard meant the pirate or the quicksilver, but he risked a guess and made one quick gesture toward the stone tower.

The wizard's eyes narrowed and his smile broadened.

"Do you know his name?"

"The watermetal," Otter said.

"So the vulgar call it, or quicksilver, or the water of weight. But those who serve him call him the King, and the Allking, and the Body of the Moon." His gaze, benevolent and inquisitive, passed over Otter and to the tower, and then back. His face was large and long, whiter than any face Otter had seen, with bluish eyes. Grey and black hairs curled here and there on his chin and cheeks. His calm, open smile showed small teeth, several of them missing. "Those who have learned to see truly can see him as he is, the lord of all substances. The root of power lies in him. Do you know what we call him in the secrecy of his palace?"

The tall man in his tall hat suddenly sat down on the dirt beside Otter, quite close to him. His breath smelled earthy. His light eyes gazed directly into Otter's eyes. "Would you like to know? You can know anything you like. I need have no secrets from you. Nor you from me," and he laughed, not threateningly, but with pleasure. He gazed at Otter again, his large, white face smooth and thoughtful. "Powers you have, yes, all kinds of little traits and tricks. A clever lad. But not too clever; that's good. Not too clever to learn, like some . . . I'll teach you, if you like. Do you like learning? Do you like knowledge? Would you like to know the name

we call the King when he's all alone in his brightness in his courts of stone? His name is Turres. Do you know that name? It's a word in the language of the Allking. His own name in his own language. In our base tongue we would say Semen." He smiled again and patted Otter's hand. "For he is the seed and fructifier. The seed and source of might and right. You'll see. You'll see. Come along! Come along! Let's go see the King flying among his subjects, gathering himself from them!" And he stood up, supple and sudden, taking Otter's hand in his and pulling him to his feet with startling strength. He was laughing with excitement.

Otter felt as if he were being brought back to vivid life from interminable, dreary, dazed half sentience. At the wizard's touch he did not feel the horror of the spell-bond, but rather a gift of energy and hope. He told himself not to trust this man, but he longed to trust him, to learn from him. Gelluk was powerful, masterful, strange, yet he had set him free. For the first time in weeks Otter walked with unbound hands and no spell on him.

"This way, this way," Gelluk murmured. "No harm will come to you." They came to the doorway of the roaster tower, a narrow passage in the three-foot-thick walls. He took Otter's arm, for the young man hesitated.

Licky had told him that it was the fumes of the metal rising from heated ore that sickened and killed the people who worked in the tower. Otter had never entered it nor seen Licky enter it. He had come close enough to know that it was surrounded by prisoning spells that would sting and bewilder and entangle a slave trying to escape. Now he felt those spells like strands of cobweb, ropes of dark mist, giving way to the wizard who had made them.

"Breathe, breathe, breathe," Gelluk said, laughing, and Otter tried not to hold his breath as they entered the tower.

The roasting pit took up the center of a huge domed chamber. Hurrying, sticklike figures black against the blaze shoveled and reshoveled ore onto logs kept in a roaring blaze by great bellows, while others brought fresh logs and worked the bellows sleeves. From the apex of the dome a spiral of chambers rose up into the tower through smoke and fumes. In those chambers, Licky had told him, the vapor of the quicksilver was trapped and condensed, reheated and recondensed, till in the topmost vault the pure metal ran down into a stone trough or bowl—only a drop or two a day, he said, from the low-grade ores they were roasting now.

"Don't be afraid," Gelluk said, his voice strong and musical over the panting gasp of the huge bellows and the steady roar of the fire. "Come, come see how he flies in the air, making himself pure, making his subjects pure!" He drew Otter to

the edge of the roasting pit. His eyes shone in the flare and dazzle of the flames. "Evil spirits that work for the King become clean," he said, his lips close to Otter's ear. "As they slaver, the dross and stains flow out of them. Illness and impurities fester and run free from their sores. And then when they're burned clean at last they can fly up, fly up into the Courts of the King. Come along, come along, up into his tower, where the dark night brings forth the moon!"

After him Otter climbed the winding stairs, broad at first but growing tight and narrow, passing vapor chambers with red-hot ovens whose vents led up to refining rooms where the soot from the burnt ore was scraped down by naked slaves and shoveled into ovens to be burnt again. They came to the topmost room. Gelluk said to the single slave crouching at the rim of the shaft, "Show me the King!"

The slave, short and thin, hairless, with running sores on his hands and arms, uncapped a stone cup by the rim of the condensing shaft. Gelluk peered in, eager as a child. "So tiny," he murmured. "So young. The tiny Prince, the baby Lord, Lord Turres. Seed of the world! Soul-jewel!"

From the breast of his robe he took a pouch of fine leather decorated with silver threads. With a delicate horn spoon tied to the pouch he lifted the few drops of quicksilver from the cup and placed them in it, then retied the thong.

The slave stood by, motionless. All the people who worked in the heat and fumes of the roaster tower were naked or wore only breechclout and moccasins. Otter glanced again at the slave, thinking by his height he was a child, and then saw the small breasts. It was a woman. She was bald. Her joints were swollen knobs in her bone-thin limbs. She looked up once at Otter, moving her eyes only. She spat into the fire, wiped her sore mouth with her hand, and stood motionless again.

"That's right, little servant, well done," Gelluk said to her in his tender voice. "Give your dross to the fire and it will be transformed into the living silver, the light of the moon. Is it not a wonderful thing," he went on, drawing Otter away and back down the spiral stair, "how from what is most base comes what is most noble? That is a great principle of the art! From the vile Red Mother is born the Allking. From the spittle of a dying slave is made the silver Seed of Power."

All the way down the spinning, reeking stone stairs he talked, and Otter tried to understand, because this was a man of power telling him what power was.

But when they came out into the daylight again his head kept on spinning in the dark, and after a few steps he doubled over and vomited on the ground.

Gelluk watched him with his inquisitive, affectionate look, and when Otter stood up, wincing and gasping, the wizard asked gently, "Are you afraid of the King?"

Otter nodded.

"If you share his power he won't harm you. To fear a power, to fight a power, is very dangerous. To love power and to share it is the royal way. Look. Watch what I do." Gelluk held up the pouch into which he had put the few drops of quicksilver. His eye always on Otter's eye, he unsealed the pouch, lifted it to his lips, and drank its contents. He opened his smiling mouth so that Otter could see the silver drops pooling on his tongue before he swallowed.

"Now the King is in my body, the noble guest of my house. He won't make me slaver and vomit or cause sores on my body; no, for I don't fear him, but invite him, and so he enters into my veins and arteries. No harm comes to me. My blood runs silver. I see things unknown to other men. I share the secrets of the King. And when he leaves me, he hides in the place of ordure, in foulness itself, and yet again in the vile place he waits for me to come and take him up and cleanse him as he cleansed me, so that each time we grow purer together." The wizard took Otter's arm and walked along with him. He said, smiling and confidential, "I am one who shits moonlight. You will not know another such. And more than that, more than that, the King enters into my seed. He is my semen. I am Turres and he is me . . ."

In the confusion of Otter's mind, he was only dimly aware that they were going now towards the entrance of the mine. They went underground. The passages of the mine were a dark maze like the wizard's words. Otter stumbled on, trying to understand. He saw the slave in the tower, the woman who had looked at him. He saw her eyes.

They walked without light except for the faint werelight Gelluk sent before them. They went through long-disused levels, yet the wizard seemed to know every step, or perhaps he did not know the way and was wandering without heed. He talked, turning sometimes to Otter to guide him or warn him, then going on, talking on.

They came to where the miners were extending the old tunnel. There the wizard spoke with Licky in the flare of candles among jagged shadows. He touched the earth of the tunnel's end, took clods of earth in his hands, rolled the dirt in his palms, kneading, testing, tasting it. For that time he was silent, and Otter watched him with staring intensity, still trying to understand.

Licky came back to the barracks with them. Gelluk bade Otter goodnight in his soft voice. Licky shut him as usual into the brick-walled room, giving him a loaf of bread, an onion, a jug of water.

Otter crouched as always in the uneasy oppression of the spell-bond. He drank

thirstily. The sharp earthy taste of the onion was good, and he ate it all.

As the dim light that came into the room from chinks in the mortar of the bricked-up window died away, instead of sinking into the blank misery of all his nights in that room, he stayed awake, and grew more awake. The excited turmoil of his mind all the time he had been with Gelluk slowly quieted. From it something rose, coming close, coming clear, the image he had seen down in the mine, shadowy yet distinct: the slave in the high vault of the tower, that woman with empty breasts and festered eyes, who spat the spittle that ran from her poisoned mouth, and wiped her mouth, and stood waiting to die. She had looked at him.

He saw her now more clearly than he had seen her in the tower. He saw her more clearly than he had ever seen anyone. He saw the thin arms, the swollen joints of elbow and wrist, the childish nape of her neck. It was as if she was with him in the room. It was as if she was in him, as if she was him. She looked at him. He saw her look at him. He saw himself through her eyes.

He saw the lines of the spells that held him, heavy cords of darkness, a tangled maze of lines all about him. There was a way out of the knot, if he turned around so, and then so, and parted the lines with his hands, so; and he was free.

He could not see the woman any more. He was alone in the room, standing free.

All the thoughts he had not been able to think for days and weeks were racing through his head, a storm of ideas and feelings, a passion of rage, vengeance, pity, pride.

At first he was overwhelmed with fierce fantasies of power and revenge: he would free the slaves, he would spell-bind Gelluk and hurl him into the refining fire, he would bind him and blind him and leave him to breathe the fumes of quicksilver in that highest vault till he died . . . But when his thoughts settled down and began to run clearer, he knew that he could not defeat a wizard of great craft and power, even if that wizard was mad. If he had any hope it was to play on his madness, and lead the wizard to defeat himself.

He pondered. All the time he was with Gelluk, he had tried to learn from him, tried to understand what the wizard was telling him. Yet he was certain, now, that Gelluk's ideas, the teaching he so eagerly imparted, had nothing to do with his power or with any true power. Mining and refining were indeed great crafts with their own mysteries and masteries, but Gelluk seemed to know nothing of those arts. His talk of the Allking and the Red Mother was mere words. And not the right words. But how did Otter know that?

In all his flood of talk the only word Gelluk had spoken in the Old Tongue, the

language of which wizards' spells were made, was the word *turres*. He had said it meant semen. Otter's own gift of magery had recognised that meaning as the true one. Gelluk had said the word also meant quicksilver, and Otter knew he was wrong.

His humble teachers had taught him all the words they knew of the Language of the Making. Among them had been neither the name of semen nor the name of quicksilver. But his lips parted, his tongue moved. *"Ayezur,"* he said.

His voice was the voice of the slave in the stone tower. It was she who knew the true name of quicksilver and spoke it through him.

Then for a while he held still, body and mind, beginning to understand for the first time where his power lay.

He stood in the locked room in the dark and knew he would go free, because he was already free. A storm of praise ran through him.

After a while, deliberately, he re-entered the trap of spell-bonds, went back to his old place, sat down on the pallet, and went on thinking. The prisoning-spell was still there, yet it had no power over him now. He could walk into it and out of it as if it were mere lines painted on the floor. Gratitude for this freedom beat in him as steady as his heartbeat.

He thought what he must do, and how he must do it. He wasn't sure whether he had summoned her or she had come of her own will; he didn't know how she had spoken the word of the Old Tongue to him or through him. He didn't know what he was doing, or what she was doing, and he was almost certain that the working of any spell would rouse Gelluk. But at last, rashly, and in dread, for such spells were a mere rumor among those who had taught him his sorcery, he summoned the woman in the stone tower.

He brought her into his mind and saw her as he had seen her, there, in that room, and called out to her; and she came.

Her apparition stood again just outside the spiderweb cords of the spell, gazing at him, and seeing him, for a soft, bluish, sourceless light filled the room. Her sore, raw lips quivered but she did not speak.

He spoke, giving her his true name: "I am Medra."

"I am Anieb," she whispered.

"How can we get free?"

"His name."

"Even if I knew it . . . When I'm with him I can't speak."

"If I was with you, I could use it."

"I can't call you."

"But I can come," she said.

She looked round, and he looked up. Both knew that Gelluk had sensed something, had wakened. Otter felt the bonds close and tighten, and the old shadow fall.

"I will come, Medra," she said. She held out her thin hand in a fist, then opened it palm up as if offering him something. Then she was gone.

The light went with her. He was alone in the dark. The cold grip of the spells took him by the throat and choked him, bound his hands, pressed on his lungs. He crouched, gasping. He could not think; he could not remember. "Stay with me," he said, and did not know who he spoke to. He was frightened, and did not know what he was frightened of. The wizard, the power, the spell . . . It was all darkness. But in his body, not in his mind, burned a knowledge he could not name any more, a certainty that was like a tiny lamp held in his hands in a maze of caverns underground. He kept his eyes on that seed of light.

Weary, evil dreams of suffocation came to him, but took no hold on him. He breathed deep. He slept at last. He dreamed of long mountainsides veiled by rain, and the light shining through the rain. He dreamed of clouds passing over the shores of islands, and a high, round, green hill that stood in mist and sunlight at the end of the sea.

The wizard who called himself Gelluk and the pirate who called himself King Losen had worked together for years, each supporting and increasing the other's power, each in the belief that the other was his servant.

Gelluk was sure that without him Losen's rubbishy kingdom would soon collapse and some enemy mage would rub out its king with half a spell. But he let Losen act the master. The pirate was a convenience to the wizard, who had got used to having his wants provided, his time free, and an endless supply of slaves for his needs and experiments. It was easy to keep up the protections he had laid on Losen's person and expeditions and forays, the prisoning-spells he had laid on the places slaves worked or treasures were kept. Making those spells had been a different matter, a long hard work. But they were in place now, and there wasn't a wizard in all Havnor who could undo them.

Gelluk had never met a man he feared. A few wizards had crossed his path strong enough to make him wary of them, but he had never known one with skill and power equal to his own.

Of late, entering always deeper into the mysteries of a certain lore-book brought back from the Isle of Way by one of Losen's raiders, Gelluk had become indifferent to most of the arts he had learned or had discovered for himself. The book convinced him that all of them were only shadows or hints of a greater mastery. As one true element controlled all substances, one true knowledge contained all others. Approaching ever closer to that mastery, he understood that the crafts of wizards were as crude and false as Losen's title and rule. When he was one with the true element, he would be the one true king. Alone among men he would speak the words of making and unmaking. He would have dragons for his dogs.

In the young dowser he recognised a power, untaught and inept, which he could use. He needed much more quicksilver than he had, therefore he needed a finder. Finding was a base skill. Gelluk had never practiced it, but he could see that the young fellow had the gift. He would do well to learn the boy's true name so that he could be sure of controlling him. He sighed at the thought of the time he must waste teaching the boy what he was good for. And after that the ore must still be dug out of the earth and the metal refined. As always, Gelluk's mind leapt across obstacles and delays to the wonderful mysteries at the end of them.

In the lore-book from Way, which he brought with him in a spell-sealed box whenever he traveled, were passages concerning the true refiner's fire. Having long studied these, Gelluk knew that once he had enough of the pure metal, the next stage was to refine it yet further into the Body of the Moon. He had understood the disguised language of the book to mean that in order to purify pure quicksilver, the fire must be built not of mere wood but of human corpses. Rereading and pondering the words this night in his room in the barracks, he discerned another possible meaning in them. There was always another meaning in the words of this lore. Perhaps the book was saying that there must be sacrifice not only of base flesh but also of inferior spirit. The great fire in the tower should burn not dead bodies but living ones. Living and conscious. Purity from foulness: bliss from pain. It was all part of the great principle, perfectly clear once seen. He was sure he was right, had at last understood the technique. But he must not hurry, he must be patient, must make certain. He turned to another passage and compared the two, and brooded over the book late into the night. Once for a moment something drew his mind away, some invasion of the outskirts of his awareness; the boy was trying some trick or other. Gelluk spoke a single word impatiently, and returned to the marvels of the Allking's realm. He never noticed that his prisoner's dreams had escaped him.

Next day he had Licky send him the boy. He looked forward to seeing him, to being kind to him, teaching him, petting him a bit as he had done yesterday. He sat down with him in the sun. Gelluk was fond of children and animals. He liked all beautiful things. It was pleasant to have a young creature about. Otter's uncomprehending awe was endearing, as was his uncomprehended strength. Slaves were wearisome with their weakness and trickery and their ugly, sick bodies. Of course Otter was his slave, but the boy need not know it. They could be teacher and prentice. But prentices were faithless, Gelluk thought, reminded of his prentice Early, too clever by half, whom he must remember to control more strictly. Father and son, that's what he and Otter could be. He would have the boy call him Father. He recalled that he had intended to find out his true name. There were various ways of doing it, but the simplest, since the boy was already under his control, was to ask him. "What is your name?" he said, watching Otter intently.

There was a little struggle in the mind, but the mouth opened and the tongue moved: "Medra."

"Very good, very good, Medra," said the wizard. "You may call me Father."

"You must find the Red Mother," he said, the day after that. They were sitting side by side again outside the barracks. The autumn sun was warm. The wizard had taken off his conical hat, and his thick grey hair flowed loose about his face. "I know you found that little patch for them to dig, but there's no more in that than a few drops. It's scarcely worth burning for so little. If you are to help me, and if I am to teach you, you must try a little harder. I think you know how." He smiled at Otter. "Don't you?"

Otter nodded.

He was still shaken, appalled, by the ease with which Gelluk had forced him to say his name, which gave the wizard immediate and ultimate power over him. Now he had no hope of resisting Gelluk in any way. That night he had been in utter despair. But then Anieb had come into his mind: come of her own will, by her own means. He could not summon her, could not even think of her, and would not have dared to do so, since Gelluk knew his name. But she came, even when he was with the wizard, not in apparition but as a presence in his mind.

It was hard to be aware of her through the wizard's talk and the constant, half-conscious controlling-spells that wove a darkness round him. But when Otter

could do so, then it was not so much as if she was with him, as that she was him, or that he was her. He saw through her eyes. Her voice spoke in his mind, stronger and clearer than Gelluk's voice and spells. Through her eyes and mind he could see, and think. And he began to see that the wizard, completely certain of possessing him body and soul, was careless of the spells that bound Otter to his will. A bond is a connection. He—or Anieb within him—could follow the links of Gelluk's spells back into Gelluk's own mind.

Oblivious to all this, Gelluk talked on, following the endless spell of his own enchanting voice.

"You must find the true womb, the bellybag of the Earth, that holds the pure moonseed. Did you know that the Moon is the Earth's father? Yes, yes; and he lay with her, as is the father's right. He quickened her base clay with the true seed. But she will not give birth to the King. She is strong in her fear and wilful in her vileness. She holds him back and hides him deep, fearing to give birth to her master. That is why, to give him birth, she must be burned alive."

Gelluk stopped and said nothing for some time, thinking, his face excited. Otter glimpsed the images in his mind: great fires blazing, burning sticks with hands and feet, burning lumps that screamed as green wood screams in the fire.

"Yes," Gelluk said, his deep voice soft and dreamy, "she must be burned alive. And then, only then, he will spring forth, shining! Oh, it's time, and past time. We must deliver the King. We must find the great lode. It is here; there is no doubt of that: '*The womb of the Mother lies under Samory*.'"

Again he paused. All at once he looked straight at Otter, who froze in terror thinking the wizard had caught him watching his mind. Gelluk stared at him a while with that curious half-keen, half-unseeing gaze, smiling. "Little Medra!" he said, as if just discovering he was there. He patted Otter's shoulder. "I know you have the gift of finding what's hidden. Quite a great gift, were it suitably trained. Have no fear, my son. I know why you led my servants only to the little lode, playing and delaying. But now that I've come, you serve me, and have nothing to be afraid of. And there's no use trying to conceal anything from me, is there? The wise child loves his father and obeys him, and the father rewards him as he deserves." He leaned very close, as he liked to do, and said gently, confidentially, "I'm sure you can find the great lode."

"I know where it is," Anieb said.

Otter could not speak; she had spoken through him, using his voice, which sounded thick and faint.

Very few people ever spoke to Gelluk unless he compelled them to. The spells by which he silenced, weakened, and controlled all who approached him were so habitual to him that he gave them no thought. He was used to being listened to, not to listening. Serene in his strength and obsessed with his ideas, he had no thought beyond them. He was not aware of Otter at all except as a part of his plans, an extension of himself. "Yes, yes, you will," he said, and smiled again.

But Otter was intensely aware of Gelluk, both physically and as a presence of immense controlling power; and it seemed to him that Anieb's speaking had taken away that much of Gelluk's power over him, gaining him a place to stand, a foothold. Even with Gelluk so close to him, fearfully close, he managed to speak.

"I will take you there," he said, stiffly, laboriously.

Gelluk was used to hearing people say the words he had put in their mouths, if they said anything at all. These were words he wanted but had not expected to hear. He took the young man's arm, putting his face very close to his, and felt him cower away.

"How clever you are," he said. "Have you found better ore than that patch you found first? Worth the digging and the roasting?"

"It is the lode," the young man said.

The slow stiff words carried great weight.

"The great lode?" Gelluk looked straight at him, their faces not a hand's breadth apart. The light in his bluish eyes was like the soft, crazy shift of quicksilver. "The womb?"

"Only the Master can go there."

"What Master?"

"The Master of the House. The King."

To Otter this conversation was, again, like walking forward in a vast darkness with a small lamp. Anieb's understanding was that lamp. Each step revealed the next step he must take, but he could never see the place where he was. He did not know what was coming next, and did not understand what he saw. But he saw it, and went forward, word by word.

"How do you know of that House?"

"I saw it."

"Where? Near here?"

Otter nodded.

"Is it in the earth?"

Tell him what he sees, Anieb whispered in Otter's mind, and he spoke: "A

stream runs through darkness over a glittering roof. Under the roof is the House of the King. The roof stands high above the floor, on high pillars. The floor is red. All the pillars are red. On them are shining runes."

Gelluk caught his breath. Presently he said, very softly, "Can you read the runes?"

"I cannot read them." Otter's voice was toneless. "I cannot go there. No one can enter there in the body but only the King. Only he can read what is written."

Gelluk's white face had gone whiter; his jaw trembled a little. He stood up, suddenly, as he always did. "Take me there," he said, trying to control himself, but so violently compelling Otter to get up and walk that the young man lurched to his feet and stumbled several steps, almost falling. Then he walked forward, stiff and awkward, trying not to resist the coercive, passionate will that hurried his steps.

Gelluk pressed close beside him, often taking his arm. "This way," he said several times. "Yes, yes! This is the way." Yet he was following Otter. His touch and his spells pushed him, rushed him, but in the direction Otter chose to go.

They walked past the roaster tower, past the old shaft and the new one, on into the long valley where Otter had taken Licky the first day he was there. It was late autumn now. The shrubs and scrubby grass that had been green that day were dun and dry, and the wind rattled the last leaves on the bushes. To their left a little stream ran low among willow thickets. Mild sunlight and long shadows streaked the hillsides.

Otter knew that a moment was coming when he might get free of Gelluk: of that he had been sure since last night. He knew also that in that same moment he might defeat Gelluk, disempower him, if the wizard, driven by his visions, forgot to guard himself—and if Otter could learn his name.

The wizard's spells still bound their minds together. Otter pressed rashly forward into Gelluk's mind, seeking his true name. But he did not know where to look or how to look. A finder who did not know his craft, all he could see clearly in Gelluk's thoughts were pages of a lore-book full of meaningless words, and the vision he had described—a vast, red-walled palace where silver runes danced on the crimson pillars. But Otter could not read the book or the runes. He had never learned to read.

All this time he and Gelluk were going on farther from the tower, away from Anieb, whose presence sometimes weakened and faded. Otter dared not try to summon her.

Only a few steps ahead of them now was the place where underfoot,

underground, two or three feet down, dark water crept and seeped through soft earth over the ledge of mica. Under that opened the hollow cavern and the lode of cinnabar.

Gelluk was almost wholly absorbed in his own vision, but since Otter's mind and his were connected, he saw something of what Otter saw. He stopped, gripping Otter's arm. His hand shook with eagerness.

Otter pointed at the low slope that rose before them. "The King's House is there," he said. Gelluk's attention turned entirely away from him then, fixed on the hillside and the vision he saw within it. Then Otter could call to Anieb. At once she came into his mind and being, and was there with him.

Gelluk was standing still, but his shaking hands were clenched, his whole tall body twitching and trembling, like a hound that wants to chase but cannot find the scent. He was at a loss. There was the hillside with its grass and bushes in the last of the sunlight, but there was no entrance. Grass growing out of gravelly dirt; the seamless earth.

Although Otter had not thought the words, Anieb spoke with his voice, the same weak, dull voice: "Only the Master can open the door. Only the King has the key."

"The key," Gelluk said.

Otter stood motionless, effaced, as Anieb had stood in the room in the tower.

"The key," Gelluk repeated, urgent.

"The key is the King's name."

That was a leap in the darkness. Which of them had said it?

Gelluk stood tense and trembling, still at a loss. "Turres," he said, after a time, almost in a whisper.

The wind blew in the dry grass.

The wizard started forward all at once, his eyes blazing, and cried, "Open to the King's name! I am Tinaral!" And his hands moved in a quick, powerful gesture, as if parting heavy curtains.

The hillside in front of him trembled, writhed, and opened. A gash in it deepened, widened. Water sprang up out of it and ran across the wizard's feet.

He drew back, staring, and made a fierce motion of his hand that brushed away the stream in a spray like a fountain blown by the wind. The gash in the earth grew deeper, revealing the ledge of mica. With a sharp rending crack the glittering stone split apart. Under it was darkness.

The wizard stepped forward. "I come," he said in his joyous, tender voice, and

he strode fearlessly into the raw wound in the earth, a white light playing around his hands and his head. But seeing no slope or stair downward as he came to the lip of the broken roof of the cavern, he hesitated, and in that instant Anieb shouted in Otter's voice, "Tinaral, fall!"

Staggering wildly the wizard tried to turn, lost his footing on the crumbling edge, and plunged down into the dark, his scarlet cloak billowing up, the werelight round him like a falling star.

"Close!" Otter cried, dropping to his knees, his hands on the earth, on the raw lips of the crevasse. "Close, Mother! Be healed, be whole!" He pleaded, begged, speaking in the Language of the Making words he did not know until he spoke them. "Mother, be whole!" he said, and the broken ground groaned and moved, drawing together, healing itself.

A reddish seam remained, a scar through the dirt and gravel and uprooted grass.

The wind rattled the dry leaves on the scrub-oak bushes. The sun was behind the hill, and clouds were coming over in a low, grey mass.

Otter crouched there at the foot of the hillslope, alone.

The clouds darkened. Rain passed through the little valley, falling on the dirt and the grass. Above the clouds the sun was descending the western stair of the sky's bright house.

Otter sat up at last. He was wet, cold, bewildered. Why was he here?

He had lost something and had to find it. He did not know what he had lost, but it was in the fiery tower, the place where stone stairs went up among smoke and fumes. He had to go there. He got to his feet and shuffled, lame and unsteady, back down the valley.

He had no thought of hiding or protecting himself. Luckily for him there were no guards about; there were few guards, and they were not on the alert, since the wizard's spells had kept the prison shut. The spells were gone, but the people in the tower did not know it, working on under the greater spell of hopelessness.

Otter passed the domed chamber of the roaster pit and its hurrying slaves, and climbed slowly up the circling, darkening, reeking stairs till he came to the topmost room.

She was there, the sick woman who could heal him, the poor woman who held the treasure, the stranger who was himself.

He stood silent in the doorway. She sat on the stone floor near the crucible, her thin body greyish and dark like the stones. Her chin and breasts were shiny with the spittle that ran from her mouth. He thought of the spring of water that had run

from the broken earth.

"Medra," she said. Her sore mouth could not speak clearly. He knelt down and took her hands, looking into her face.

"Anieb," he whispered, "come with me."

"I want to go home," she said.

He helped her stand. He made no spell to protect or hide them. His strength had been used up. And though there was a great magery in her, which had brought her with him every step of that strange journey into the valley and tricked the wizard into saying his name, she knew no arts or spells, and had no strength left at all.

Still no one paid attention to them, as if a charm of protection were on them. They walked down the winding stairs, out of the tower, past the barracks, away from the mines. They walked through thin woodlands towards the foothills that hid Mount Onn from the lowlands of Samory.

Anieb kept a better pace than seemed possible in a woman so famished and destroyed, walking almost naked in the chill of the rain. All her will was aimed on walking forward; she had nothing else in her mind, not him, not anything. But she was there bodily with him, and he felt her presence as keenly and strangely as when she had come to his summoning. The rain ran down her naked head and body. He made her stop to put on his shirt. He was ashamed of it, for it was filthy, he having worn it all these weeks. She let him pull it over her head and then walked right on. She could not go quickly, but she went steadily, her eyes fixed on the faint cart track they followed, till the night came early under the rain clouds, and they could not see where to set their feet.

"Make the light," she said. Her voice was a whimper, plaintive. "Can't you make the light?"

"I don't know," he said, but he tried to bring the werelight round them, and after a while the ground glimmered faintly before their feet.

"We should find shelter and rest," he said.

"I can't stop," she said, and started to walk again.

"You can't walk all night."

"If I lie down I won't get up. I want to see the Mountain."

Her thin voice was hidden by the many-voiced rain sweeping over the hills and

through the trees.

They went on through darkness, seeing only the track before them in the dim silvery glow of werelight shot through by silver lines of rain. When she stumbled he caught her arm. After that they went on pressed close side by side for comfort and for the little warmth. They walked slower, and yet slower, but they walked on. There was no sound but the sound of the rain falling from the black sky, and the little kissing squelch of their sodden feet in the mud and wet grass of the track.

"Look," she said, halting. "Medra, look."

He had been walking almost asleep. The pallor of the werelight had faded, drowned in a fainter, vaster clarity. Sky and earth were all one grey, but before them and above them, very high, over a drift of cloud, the long ridge of the mountain glimmered red.

"There," Anieb said. She pointed at the mountain and smiled. She looked at her companion, then slowly down at the ground. She sank down kneeling. He knelt with her, tried to support her, but she slid down in his arms. He tried to keep her head at least from the mud of the track. Her limbs and face twitched, her teeth chattered. He held her close against him, trying to warm her.

"The women," she whispered, "the hand. Ask them. In the village. I did see the Mountain."

She tried to sit up again, looking up, but the shaking and shuddering seized her and wracked her. She began to gasp for breath. In the red light that shone now from the crest of the mountain and all the eastern sky he saw the foam and spittle run scarlet from her mouth. Sometimes she clutched at him, but she did not speak again. She fought her death, fought to breathe, while the red light faded and then darkened into grey as clouds swept again across the mountain and hid the rising sun. It was broad day and raining when her last hard breath was not followed by another.

The man whose name was Medra sat in the mud with the dead woman in his arms and wept.

A carter walking at his mule's head with a load of oakwood came upon them and took them both to Woodedge. He could not make the young man let go of the dead woman. Weak and shaky as he was, he would not set his burden down on the load, but clambered into the cart holding her, and held her all the miles to Woodedge. All he said was "She saved me," and the carter asked no questions.

"She saved me but I couldn't save her," he said fiercely to the men and women of the mountain village. He still would not let her go, holding the rain-wet, stiffened

body against him as if to defend it.

Very slowly they made him understand that one of the women was Anieb's mother, and that he should give Anieb to her to hold. He did so at last, watching to see if she was gentle with his friend and would protect her. Then he followed another woman meekly enough. He put on dry clothing she gave him to put on, and ate a little food she gave him to eat, and lay down on the pallet she led him to, and sobbed in weariness, and slept.

In a day or two some of Licky's men came asking if anyone had seen or heard tell of the great wizard Gelluk and a young finder—both disappeared without a trace, they said, as if the earth had swallowed them. Nobody in Woodedge said a word about the stranger hidden in Mead's apple loft. They kept him safe. Maybe that is why the people there now call their village not Woodedge, as it used to be, but Otterhide.

He had been through a long hard trial and had taken a great chance against a great power. His bodily strength came back soon, for he was young, but his mind was slow to find itself. He had lost something, lost it forever, lost it as he found it.

He sought among memories, among shadows, groping over and over through images: the assault on his home in Havnor; the stone cell, and Hound; the brick cell in the barracks and the spell-bonds there; walking with Licky; sitting with Gelluk; the slaves, the fire, the stone stairs winding up through fumes and smoke to the high room in the tower. He had to regain it all, to go through it all, searching. Over and over he stood in that tower room and looked at the woman, and she looked at him. Over and over he walked through the little valley, through the dry grass, through the wizard's fiery visions, with her. Over and over he saw the wizard fall, saw the earth close. He saw the red ridge of the mountain in the dawn. Anieb died while he held her, her ruined face against his arm. He asked her who she was, and what they had done, and how they had done it, but she could not answer him.

Her mother Ayo and her mother's sister Mead were wise women. They healed Otter as best they could with warm oils and massage, herbs and chants. They talked to him and listened when he talked. Neither of them had any doubt but that he was a man of great power. He denied this. "I could have done nothing without your daughter," he said.

"What did she do?" Ayo asked, softly.

He told her, as well as he could. "We were strangers. Yet she gave me her

name," he said. "And I gave her mine." He spoke haltingly, with long pauses. "It was I that walked with the wizard, compelled by him, but she was with me, and she was free. And so together we could turn his power against him, so that he destroyed himself." He thought for a long time, and said, "She gave me her power."

"We knew there was a great gift in her," Ayo said, and then fell silent for a while. "We didn't know how to teach her. There are no teachers left on the mountain. King Losen's wizards destroyed the sorcerers and witches. There's no one to turn to."

"Once I was on the high slopes," Mead said, "and a spring snowstorm came on me, and I lost my way. She came there. She came to me, not in the body, and guided me to the track. She was only twelve then."

"She walked with the dead, sometimes," Ayo said very low. "In the forest, down towards Faliern. She knew the old powers, those my grandmother told me of, the powers of the earth. They were strong there, she said."

"But she was only a girl like the others, too," Mead said, and hid her face. "A good girl," she whispered.

After a while Ayo said, "She went down to Firn with some of the young folk. To buy fleece from the shepherds there. A year ago last spring. That wizard they spoke of came there, casting spells. Taking slaves."

Then they were all silent.

Ayo and Mead were much alike, and Otter saw in them what Anieb might have been: a short, slight, quick woman, with a round face and clear eyes, and a mass of dark hair, not straight like most people's hair but curly, frizzy. Many people in the west of Havnor had hair like that.

But Anieb had been bald, like all the slaves in the roaster tower.

Her use-name had been Flag, the blue iris of the springs. Her mother and aunt called her Flag when they spoke of her.

"Whatever I am, whatever I can do, it's not enough," he said.

"It's never enough," Mead said. "And what can anyone do alone?"

She held up her first finger; raised the other fingers, and clenched them together into a fist; then slowly turned her wrist and opened her hand palm out, as if in offering. He had seen Anieb make that gesture. It was not a spell, he thought, watching intently, but a sign. Ayo was watching him.

"It is a secret," she said.

"Can I know the secret?" he asked after a while.

“You already know it. You gave it to Flag. She gave it to you. Trust.”

“Trust,” the young man said. “Yes. But against—Against them?—Gelluk’s gone. Maybe Losen will fall now. Will it make any difference? Will the slaves go free? Will beggars eat? Will justice be done? I think there’s an evil in us, in humankind. Trust denies it. Leaps across it. Leaps the chasm. But it’s there. And everything we do finally serves evil, because that’s what we are. Greed and cruelty. I look at the world, at the forests and the mountain here, the sky, and it’s all right, as it should be. But we aren’t. People aren’t. We’re wrong. We do wrong. No animal does wrong. How could they? But we can, and we do. And we never stop.”

They listened to him, not agreeing, not denying, but accepting his despair. His words went into their listening silence, and rested there for days, and came back to him changed.

“We can’t do anything without each other,” he said. “But it’s the greedy ones, the cruel ones who hold together and strengthen each other. And those who won’t join them stand each alone.” The image of Anieb as he had first seen her, a dying woman standing alone in the tower room, was always with him. “Real power goes to waste. Every wizard uses his arts against the others, serving the men of greed. What good can any art be used that way? It’s wasted. It goes wrong, or it’s thrown away. Like slaves’ lives. Nobody can be free alone. Not even a mage. All of them working their magic in prison cells, to gain nothing. There’s no way to use power for good.”

Ayo closed her hand and opened it palm up, a fleeting sketch of a gesture, of a sign.

A man came up the mountain to Woodedge, a charcoal burner from Firn. “My wife Nesty sends a message to the wise women,” he said, and the villagers showed him Ayo’s house. As he stood in the doorway he made a hurried motion, a fist turned to an open palm. “Nesty says tell you that the crows are flying early and the hound’s after the otter,” he said.

Otter, sitting by the fire shelling walnuts, held still. Mead thanked the messenger and brought him in for a cup of water and a handful of shelled nuts. She and Ayo chatted with him about his wife. When he had gone she turned to Otter.

“The Hound serves Losen,” he said. “I’ll go today.”

Mead looked at her sister. “Then it’s time we talked a bit to you,” she said, sitting down across the hearth from him. Ayo stood by the table, silent. A good fire burned in the hearth. It was a wet, cold time, and firewood was one thing they had plenty of, here on the mountain.

“There’s people all over these parts, and maybe beyond, who think, as you said, that nobody can be wise alone. So these people try to hold to each other. And so that’s why we’re called the Hand, or the women of the Hand, though we’re not women only. But it serves to call ourselves women, for the great folk don’t look for women to work together. Or to have thoughts about such things as rule or misrule. Or to have any powers.”

“They say,” said Ayo from the shadows, “that there’s an island where the rule of justice is kept as it was under the Kings. Morred’s Isle, they call it. But it’s not Enlad of the Kings, nor Éa. It’s south, not north of Havnor, they say. There they say the women of the Hand have kept the old arts. And they teach them, not keeping them secret each to himself, as the wizards do.”

“Maybe with such teaching you could teach the wizards a lesson,” Mead said.

“Maybe you can find that island,” said Ayo.

Otter looked from one to the other. Clearly they had told him their own greatest secret and their hope.

“Morred’s Isle,” he said.

“That would be only what the women of the Hand call it, keeping its meaning from the wizards and the pirates. To them no doubt it would bear some other name.”

“It would be a terrible long way,” said Mead.

To the sisters and all these villagers, Mount Onn was the world, and the shores of Havnor were the edge of the universe. Beyond that was only rumor and dream.

“You’ll come to the sea, going south, they say,” said Ayo.

“He knows that, sister,” Mead told her. “Didn’t he tell us he was a ship carpenter? But it’s a terrible long way down to the sea, surely. With this wizard on your scent, how are you to go there?”

“By the grace of water, that carries no scent,” Otter said, standing up. A litter of walnut shells fell from his lap, and he took the hearth broom and swept them into the ashes. “I’d better go.”

“There’s bread,” Ayo said, and Mead hurried to pack hard bread and hard cheese and walnuts into a pouch made of a sheep’s stomach. They were very poor people. They gave him what they had. So Anieb had done.

“My mother was born in Endlane, round by Faliern Forest,” Otter said. “Do you know that town? She’s called Rose, Rowan’s daughter.”

“The carters go down to Endlane, summers.”

“If somebody could talk to her people there, they’d get word to her. Her

brother, Littleash, used to come to the city every year or two."

They nodded.

"If she knew I was alive," he said.

Anieb's mother nodded. "She'll hear it."

"Go on now," said Mead.

"Go with the water," said Ayo.

He embraced them, and they him, and he left the house.

He ran down from the straggle of huts to the quick, noisy stream he had heard singing through his sleep all his nights in Woodedge. He prayed to it. "Take me and save me," he asked it. He made the spell the old Changer had taught him long ago, and said the word of transformation. Then no man knelt by the loud-running water, but an otter slipped into it and was gone.

III. Tern

There was a wise man on our hill
Who found his way to work his will.
He changed his shape, he changed his name,
But ever the other will be the same.
So runs the water away, away,
So runs the water away.

One winter afternoon on the shore of the Onneva River where it fingers out into the north bight of the Great Bay of Havnor, a man stood up on the muddy sand: a man poorly dressed and poorly shod, a thin brown man with dark eyes and hair so fine and thick it shed the rain. It was raining on the low beaches of the river mouth, the fine, cold, dismal drizzle of that grey winter. His clothes were soaked. He hunched his shoulders, turned about, and set off towards a wisp of chimney smoke he saw far down the shore. Behind him were the tracks of an otter's four feet coming up from the water and the tracks of a man's two feet going away from it.

Where he went then, the songs don't tell. They say only that he wandered, "he wandered long from land to land." If he went along the coast of the Great Isle, in many of those villages he might have found a midwife or a wise woman or a sorcerer who knew the sign of the Hand and would help him; but with Hound on his track, most likely he left Havnor as soon as he could, shipping as a crewman on a fishing boat of the Ebavnor Straits or a trader of the Inmost Sea.

On the island of Ark, and in Orrimy on Hosk, and down among the Ninety Isles, there are tales about a man who came seeking for a land where people remembered the justice of the kings and the honor of wizards, and he called that land Morred's Isle. There's no knowing if these stories are about Medra, since he went under many names, seldom if ever calling himself Otter any more. Gelluk's fall had not brought Losen down. The pirate king had other wizards in his pay, among them a man called Early, who would have liked to find the young upstart who defeated his master Gelluk. And Early had a good chance of tracing him. Losen's power stretched all across Havnor and the north of the Inmost Sea, growing with the

years; and the Hound's nose was as keen as ever.

Maybe it was to escape the hunt that Medra came to Pendor, a long way west of the Inmost Sea, or maybe some rumor among the women of the Hand on Hosk sent him there. Pendor was a rich island, then, before the dragon Yevaud despoiled it. Wherever Medra had gone until then, he had found the lands like Havnor or worse, sunk in warfare, raids, and piracy, the fields full of weeds, the towns full of thieves. Maybe he thought, at first, that on Pendor he had found Morred's Isle, for the city was beautiful and peaceful and the people prosperous.

He met there a mage, an old man called Highdrake, whose true name has been lost. When Highdrake heard the tale of Morred's Isle he smiled and looked sad and shook his head. "Not here," he said. "Not this. The Lords of Pendor are good men. They remember the kings. They don't seek war or plunder. But they send their sons west dragon hunting. In sport. As if the dragons of the West Reach were ducks or geese for the killing! No good will come of that."

Highdrake took Medra as his student, gratefully. "I was taught my art by a mage who gave me freely all he knew, but I never found anybody to give that knowledge to, until you came," he told Medra. "The young men come to me and they say, 'What good is it? Can you find gold?' they say. 'Can you teach me how to make stones into diamonds? Can you give me a sword that will kill a dragon? What's the use of talking about the balance of things? There's no profit in it,' they say. No profit!" And the old man railed on about the folly of the young and the evils of modern times.

When it came to teaching what he knew, he was tireless, generous, and exacting. For the first time, Medra was given a vision of magic not as a set of strange gifts and reasonless acts, but as an art and a craft, which could be known truly with long study and used rightly after long practice, though even then it would never lose its strangeness. Highdrake's mastery of spells and sorcery was not much greater than his pupil's, but he had clear in his mind the idea of something very much greater, the wholeness of knowledge. And that made him a mage.

Listening to him, Medra thought of how he and Anieb had walked in the dark and rain by the faint glimmer that showed them only the next step they could take, and of how they had looked up to the red ridge of the mountain in the dawn.

"Every spell depends on every other spell," said Highdrake. "Every motion of a single leaf moves every leaf of every tree on every isle of Earthsea! There is a pattern. That's what you must look for and look to. Nothing goes right but as part of the pattern. Only in it is freedom."

Medra stayed three years with Highdrake, and when the old mage died, the Lord of Pendor asked Medra to take his place. Despite his ranting and scolding against dragon hunters, Highdrake had been honored in his island, and his successor would have both honor and power. Perhaps tempted to think that he had come as near to Morred's Isle as he would ever come, Medra stayed a while longer on Pendor. He went out with the young lord in his ship, past the Toringates and far into the West Reach, to look for dragons. There was a great longing in his heart to see a dragon. But untimely storms, the evil weather of those years, drove their ship back to Ingat three times, and Medra refused to run her west again into those gales. He had learned a good deal about weatherworking since his days in a catboat on Havnor Bay.

A while after that he left Pendor, drawn southward again, and maybe went to Ensmer. In one guise or another he came at last to Geath in the Ninety Isles.

There they fished for whales, as they still do. That was a trade he wanted no part of. Their ships stank and their town stank. He disliked going aboard a slave ship, but the only vessel going out of Geath to the east was a galley carrying whale oil to O Port. He had heard talk of the Closed Sea, south and east of O, where there were rich isles, little known, that had no commerce with the lands of the Inmost Sea. What he sought might be there. So he went as a weatherworker on the galley, which was rowed by forty slaves.

The weather was fair for once: a following wind, a blue sky lively with little white clouds, the mild sunlight of late spring. They made good way from Geath. Late in the afternoon he heard the master say to the helmsman, "Keep her south tonight so we don't raise Roke."

He had not heard of that island, and asked, "What's there?"

"Death and desolation," said the ship's master, a short man with small, sad, knowing eyes like a whale's.

"War?"

"Years back. Plague, black sorcery. The waters all round it are cursed."

"Worms," said the helmsman, the master's brother. "Catch fish anywhere near Roke, you'll find 'em thick with worms as a dead dog on a dunghill."

"Do people still live there?" Medra asked, and the master said, "Witches," while his brother said, "Worm eaters."

There were many such isles in the Archipelago, made barren and desolate by rival wizards' blights and curses; they were evil places to come to or even to pass, and Medra thought no more about this one, until that night.

Sleeping out on deck with the starlight on his face, he had a simple, vivid dream: it was daylight, clouds racing across a bright sky, and across the sea he saw the sunlit curve of a high green hill. He woke with the vision still clear in his mind, knowing he had seen it ten years before, in the spell-locked barracks room at the mines of Samory.

He sat up. The dark sea was so quiet that the stars were reflected here and there on the sleek lee side of the long swells. Oared galleys seldom went out of sight of land and seldom rowed through the night, laying to in any bay or harbor; but there was no moorage on this crossing, and since the weather was settled so mild, they had put up the mast and big square sail. The ship drifted softly forward, her slave oarsmen sleeping on their benches, the free men of her crew all asleep but the helmsman and the lookout, and the lookout was dozing. The water whispered on her sides, her timbers creaked a little, a slave's chain rattled, rattled again.

"They don't need a weatherworker on a night like this, and they haven't paid me yet," Medra said to his conscience. He had waked from his dream with the name Roke in his mind. Why had he never heard of the isle or seen it on a chart? It might be accursed and deserted as they said, but wouldn't it be set down on the charts?

"I could fly there as a tern and be back on the ship before daylight," he said to himself, but idly. He was bound for O Port. Ruined lands were all too common. No need to fly to seek them. He made himself comfortable in his coil of cable and watched the stars. Looking west, he saw the four bright stars of the Forge, low over the sea. They were a little blurred, and as he watched them they blinked out, one by one.

The faintest little sighing tremor ran over the slow, smooth swells.

"Master," Medra said, afoot, "wake up."

"What now?"

"A witchwind coming. Following. Get the sail down."

No wind stirred. The air was soft, the big sail hung slack. Only the western stars faded and vanished in a silent blackness that rose slowly higher. The master looked at that. "Witchwind, you say?" he asked, reluctant.

Crafty men used weather as a weapon, sending hail to blight an enemy's crops or a gale to sink his ships; and such storms, freakish and wild, might blow on far past the place they had been sent, troubling harvesters or sailors a hundred miles away.

"Get the sail down," Medra said, peremptory. The master yawned and cursed and began to shout commands. The crewmen got up slowly and slowly began to take the awkward sail in, and the oarmaster, after asking several questions of the

master and Medra, began to roar at the slaves and stride among them rousing them right and left with his knotted rope. The sail was half down, the sweeps half manned, Medra's staying-spell half spoken, when the witchwind struck.

It struck with one huge thunderclap out of sudden utter blackness and wild rain. The ship pitched like a horse rearing and then rolled so hard and far that the mast broke loose from its footing, though the stays held. The sail struck the water, filled, and pulled the galley right over, the great sweeps sliding in their oarlocks, the chained slaves struggling and shouting on their benches, barrels of oil breaking loose and thundering over one another—pulled her over and held her over, the deck vertical to the sea, till a huge storm wave struck and swamped her and she sank. All the shouting and screaming of men's voices was suddenly silent. There was no noise but the roar of the rain on the sea, lessening as the freak wind passed on eastward. Through it one white seabird beat its wings up from the black water and flew, frail and desperate, to the north.

Printed on narrow sands under granite cliffs, in the first light, were the tracks of a bird alighting. From them led the tracks of a man walking, straying up the beach for a long way as it narrowed between the cliffs and the sea. Then the tracks ceased.

Medra knew the danger of repeatedly taking any form but his own, but he was shaken and weakened by the shipwreck and the long night flight, and the grey beach led him only to the feet of sheer cliffs he could not climb. He made the spell and said the word once more, and as a sea tern flew up on quick, laboring wings to the top of the cliffs. Then, possessed by flight, he flew on over a shadowy sunrise land. Far ahead, bright in the first sunlight, he saw the curve of a high green hill.

To it he flew, and on it landed, and as he touched the earth he was a man again.

He stood there for a while, bewildered. It seemed to him that it was not by his own act or decision that he had taken his own form, but that in touching this ground, this hill, he had become himself. A magic greater than his own prevailed here.

He looked about, curious and wary. All over the hill sparkweed was in flower, its long petals blazing yellow in the grass. Children on Havnor knew that flower. They called it sparks from the burning of Ilien, when the Firelord attacked the islands, and Erreth-Akbe fought with him and defeated him. Tales and songs of the heroes rose up in Medra's memory as he stood there: Erreth-Akbe and the heroes before him, the Eagle Queen, Heru, Akambar who drove the Kargs into the east, and Serriadh the peacemaker, and Elfarran of Soléa, and Morred, the White Enchanter,

the beloved king. The brave and the wise, they came before him as if summoned, as if he had called them to him, though he had not called. He saw them. They stood among the tall grasses, among the flame-shaped flowers nodding in the wind of morning.

Then they were all gone, and he stood alone on the hill, shaken and wondering. "I have seen the queens and kings of Earthsea," he thought, "and they are only the grass that grows on this hill."

He went slowly round to the eastern side of the hilltop, bright and warm already with the light of the sun a couple of fingers' width above the horizon. Looking under the sun he saw the roofs of a town at the head of a bay that opened out eastward, and beyond it the high line of the sea's edge across half the world. Turning west he saw fields and pastures and roads. To the north were long green hills. In a fold of land southward a grove of tall trees drew his gaze and held it. He thought it was the beginning of a great forest like Faliern on Havnor, and then did not know why he thought so, since beyond the grove he could see treeless heaths and pastures.

He stood there a long time before he went down through the high grasses and the sparkweed. At the foot of the hill he came into a lane. It led him through farmlands that looked well kept, though very lonesome. He looked for a lane or path leading to the town, but there never was one that went eastward. Not a soul was in the fields, some of which were newly ploughed. No dog barked as he went by. Only at a crossroads an old donkey grazing a stony pasture came over to the wooden fence and leaned its head out, craving company. Medra stopped to stroke the grey-brown, bony face. A city man and a saltwater man, he knew little of farms and their animals, but he thought the donkey looked at him kindly. "Where am I, donkey?" he said to it. "How do I get to the town I saw?"

The donkey leaned its head hard against his hand so that he would go on scratching the place just above its eyes and below its ears. When he did so, it flicked its long right ear. So when he parted from the donkey he took the right hand of the crossroad, though it looked as if it would lead back to the hill; and soon enough he came among houses, and then onto a street that brought him down at last into the town at the head of the bay.

It was as strangely quiet as the farmlands. Not a voice, not a face. It was difficult to feel uneasy in an ordinary-looking town on a sweet spring morning, but in such silence he must wonder if he was indeed in a plague-stricken place or an island under a curse. He went on. Between a house and an old plum tree was a wash line,

the clothes pinned on it flapping in the sunny breeze. A cat came round the corner of a garden, no abandoned starveling but a white-pawed, well-whiskered, prosperous cat. And at last, coming down the steep little street, which here was cobbled, he heard voices.

He stopped to listen, and heard nothing.

He went on to the foot of the street. It opened into a small market square. People were gathered there, not many of them. They were not buying or selling. There were no booths or stalls set up. They were waiting for him.

Ever since he had walked on the green hill above the town and had seen the bright shadows in the grass, his heart had been easy. He was expectant, full of a sense of great strangeness, but not frightened. He stood still and looked at the people who came to meet him.

Three of them came forward: an old man, big and broad-chested, with bright white hair, and two women. Wizard knows wizard, and Medra knew they were women of power.

He raised his hand closed in a fist and then turning and opening it, offered it to them palm up.

"Ah," said one of the women, the taller of the two, and she laughed. But she did not answer the gesture.

"Tell us who you are," the white-haired man said, courteously enough, but without greeting or welcome. "Tell us how you came here."

"I was born in Havnor and trained as a shipwright and a sorcerer. I was on a ship bound from Geath to O Port. I was spared alone from drowning, last night, when a witchwind struck." He was silent then. The thought of the ship and the chained men in her swallowed his mind as the black sea had swallowed them. He gasped, as if coming up from drowning.

"How did you come here?"

"As . . . as a bird, a tern. Is this Roke Island?"

"You changed yourself?"

He nodded.

"Whom do you serve?" asked the shorter and younger of the women, speaking for the first time. She had a keen, hard face, with long black brows.

"I have no master."

"What was your errand in O Port?"

"In Havnor, years ago, I was in servitude. Those who freed me told me about a place where there are no masters, and the rule of Serriadh is remembered, and the

arts are honored. I have been looking for that place, that island, seven years."

"Who told you about it?"

"Women of the Hand."

"Anyone can make a fist and show a palm," said the tall woman, pleasantly. "But not everyone can fly to Roke. Or swim, or sail, or come in any way at all. So we must ask what brought you here."

Medra did not answer at once. "Chance," he said at last, "favoring long desire. Not art. Not knowledge. I think I've come to the place I sought, but I don't know. I think you may be the people they told me of, but I don't know. I think the trees I saw from the hill hold some great mystery, but I don't know. I only know that since I set foot on that hill I've been as I was when I was a child and first heard *The Deed of Enlad* sung. I am lost among wonders."

The white-haired man looked at the two women. Other people had come forward, and there was some quiet talk among them.

"If you stayed here, what would you do?" the black-browed woman asked him.

"I can build boats, or mend them, and sail them, I can find, above and under ground. I can work weather, if you have any need of that. And I'll learn the art from any who will teach me."

"What do you want to learn?" asked the taller woman in her mild voice.

Now Medra felt that he had been asked the question on which the rest of his life hung, for good or evil. Again he stood silent a while. He started to speak, and didn't speak, and finally spoke. "I could not save one, not one, not the one who saved me," he said. "Nothing I know could have set her free. I know nothing. If you know how to be free, I beg you, teach me!"

"Free!" said the tall woman, and her voice cracked like a whip. Then she looked at her companions, and after a while she smiled a little. Turning back to Medra, she said, "We're prisoners, and so freedom is a thing we study. You came here through the walls of our prison. Seeking freedom, you say. But you should know that leaving Roke may be even harder than coming to it. Prison within prison, and some of it we have built ourselves." She looked at the others. "What do you say?" she asked them.

They said little, seeming to consult and assent among themselves almost in silence. At last the shorter woman looked with her fierce eyes at Medra. "Stay if you will," she said.

"I will."

"What will you have us call you?"

"Tern," he said; and so he was called.

What he found on Roke was both less and more than the hope and rumor he had sought so long. Roke Island was, they told him, the heart of Earthsea. The first land Segoy raised from the waters in the beginning of time was bright Éa of the northern sea, and the second was Roke. That green hill, Roke Knoll, was founded deeper than all the islands. The trees he had seen, which seemed sometimes to be in one place on the isle and sometimes in another, were the oldest trees in the world, and the source and center of magic.

"If the Grove were cut, all wizardry would fail. The roots of those trees are the roots of knowledge. The patterns the shadows of their leaves make in the sunlight write the words Segoy spoke in the Making."

So said Ember, his fierce, black-browed teacher.

All the teachers of the art magic on Roke were women. There were no men of power, few men at all, on the island.

Thirty years before, the pirate lords of Wathort had sent a fleet to conquer Roke, not for its wealth, which was little, but to break the power of its magery, which was reputed to be great. One of the wizards of Roke had betrayed the island to the crafty men of Wathort, lowering its spells of defense and warning. Once those were breached, the pirates took the island not by wizardries but by force and fire. Their great ships filled Thwil Bay, their hordes burned and looted, their slave takers carried off men, boys, young women. Little children and the old they slaughtered. They fired every house and field they came to. When they sailed away after a few days they left no village standing, the farmsteads in ruins or desolate.

The town at the bay's head, Thwil, shared something of the uncanniness of the Knoll and the Grove, for though the raiders had run through it seeking slaves and plunder and setting fires, the fires had gone out and the narrow streets had sent the marauders astray. Most of the islanders who survived were wise women and their children, who had hidden themselves in the town or in the Immanent Grove. The men now on Roke were those spared children, grown, and a few men now grown old. There was no government but that of the women of the Hand, for it was their spells that had protected Roke so long and protected it far more closely now.

They had little trust in men. A man had betrayed them. Men had attacked them. It was men's ambitions, they said, that had perverted all the arts to ends of gain. "We do not deal with their governments," said tall Veil in her mild voice.

And yet Ember said to Medra, "We were our own undoing."

Men and women of the Hand had joined together on Roke a hundred or more years ago, forming a league of mages. Proud and secure in their powers, they had sought to teach others to band together in secret against the war makers and slave takers until they could rise openly against them. Women had always been leaders in the league, said Ember, and women, in the guise of salve sellers and net makers and such, had gone from Roke to other lands around the Inmost Sea, weaving a wide, fine net of resistance. Even now there were strands and knots of that net left. Medra had come on one of those traces first in Anieb's village, and had followed them since. But they had not led him here. Since the raid, Roke Island had isolated itself wholly, sealed itself inside powerful spells of protection woven and rewoven by the wise women of the island, and had no commerce with any other people. "We can't save them," Ember said. "We couldn't save ourselves."

Veil, with her gentle voice and smile, was implacable. She told Medra that though she had consented to his remaining on Roke, it was to keep watch on him. "You broke through our defenses once," she said. "All that you say of yourself may be true, and may not. What can you tell me that would make me trust you?"

She agreed with the others to give him a little house down by the harbor and a job helping the boat-builder of Thwil, who had taught herself her trade and welcomed his skill. Veil put no difficulties in his path and always greeted him kindly. But she had said, "What can you tell me that would make me trust you?" and he had no answer for her.

Ember usually scowled when he greeted her. She asked him abrupt questions, listened to his answers, and said nothing.

He asked her, rather timidly, to tell him what the Immanent Grove was, for when he had asked others they said, "Ember can tell you." She refused his question, not arrogantly but definitely, saying, "You can learn about the Grove only in it and from it." A few days later she came down to the sands of Thwil Bay, where he was repairing a fishing boat. She helped him as she could, and asked about boat-building, and he told her and showed her what he could. It was a peaceful afternoon, but after it she went off in her abrupt way. He felt some awe of her; she was incalculable. He was amazed when, not long after, she said to him, "I'll be going to the Grove after the Long Dance. Come if you like."

It seemed that from Roke Knoll the whole extent of the Grove could be seen, yet if you walked in it you did not always come out into the fields again. You walked on under the trees. In the inner Grove they were all of one kind, which grew nowhere else, yet had no name in Hardic but "tree." In the Old Speech, Ember said, each of

those trees had its own name. You walked on, and after a time you were walking again among familiar trees, oak and beech and ash, chestnut and walnut and willow, green in spring and bare in winter; there were dark firs, and cedar, and a tall evergreen Medra did not know, with soft reddish bark and layered foliage. You walked on, and the way through the trees was never twice the same. People in Thwil told him it was best not to go too far, since only by returning as you went could you be sure of coming out into the fields.

"How far does the forest go?" Medra asked, and Ember said, "As far as the mind goes."

The leaves of the trees spoke, she said, and the shadows could be read. "I am learning to read them," she said.

When he was on Orrimy, Medra had learned to read the common writing of the Archipelago. Later, Highdrake of Pendor had taught him some of the runes of power. That was known lore. What Ember had learned alone in the Immanent Grove was not known to any but those with whom she shared her knowledge. She lived all summer under the eaves of the Grove, having no more than a box to keep the mice and wood rats from her small store of food, a shelter of branches, and a cook fire near a stream that came out of the woods to join the little river running down to the bay.

Medra camped nearby. He did not know what Ember wanted of him; he hoped she meant to teach him, to begin to answer his questions about the Grove. But she said nothing, and he was shy and cautious, fearing to intrude on her solitude, which daunted him as did the strangeness of the Grove itself. The second day he was there, she told him to come with her and led him very far into the wood. They walked for hours in silence. In the summer midday the woods were silent. No bird sang. The leaves did not stir. The aisles of the trees were endlessly different and all the same. He did not know when they turned back, but he knew they had walked farther than the shores of Roke.

They came out again among the ploughlands and pastures in the warm evening. As they walked back to their camping place he saw the four stars of the Forge come out above the western hills.

Ember parted from him with only a "Good night."

The next day she said, "I'm going to sit under the trees." Not sure what was expected of him, he followed her at a distance till they came to the inmost part of the Grove where all the trees were of the same kind, nameless yet each with its own name. When she sat down on the soft leaf mold between the roots of a big old tree,

he found himself a place not far away to sit; and as she watched and listened and was still, he watched and listened and was still. So they did for several days. Then one morning, in rebellious mood, he stayed by the stream while Ember walked into the Grove. She did not look back.

Veil came from Thwil Town that morning, bringing them a basket of bread, cheese, milk curds, summer fruits. "What have you learned?" she asked Medra in her cool, gentle way, and he answered, "That I'm a fool."

"Why so, Tern?"

"A fool could sit under the trees forever and grow no wiser."

The tall woman smiled a little. "My sister has never taught a man before," she said. She glanced at him, and gazed away, over the summery fields. "She's never looked at a man before," she said.

Medra stood silent. His face felt hot. He looked down. "I thought," he said, and stopped.

In Veil's words he saw, all at once, the other side of Ember's impatience, her fierceness, her silences.

He had tried to look at Ember as untouchable while he longed to touch her soft brown skin, her black shining hair. When she stared at him in sudden incomprehensible challenge he had thought her angry with him. He feared to insult, to offend her. What did she fear? His desire? Her own?—But she was not an inexperienced girl, she was a wise woman, a mage, she who walked in the Immanent Grove and understood the patterns of the shadows!

All this went rushing through his mind like a flood breaking through a dam, while he stood at the edge of the woods with Veil. "I thought mages kept themselves apart," he said at last. "Highdrake said that to make love is to unmake power."

"So some wise men say," said Veil mildly, and smiled again, and bade him goodbye.

He spent the whole afternoon in confusion, angry. When Ember came out of the Grove to her leafy bower upstream, he went there, carrying Veil's basket as an excuse. "May I talk to you?" he said.

She nodded shortly, frowning her black brows.

He said nothing. She squatted down to find out what was in the basket. "Peaches!" she said, and smiled.

"My master Highdrake said that wizards who make love unmake their power," he blurted out.

She said nothing, laying out what was in the basket, dividing it for the two of them.

"Do you think that's true?" he asked.

She shrugged. "No," she said.

He stood tongue-tied. After a while she looked up at him. "No," she said in a soft, quiet voice, "I don't think it's true. I think all the true powers, all the old powers, at root are one."

He still stood there, and she said, "Look at the peaches! They're all ripe. We'll have to eat them right away."

"If I told you my name," he said, "my true name—"

"I'd tell you mine," she said. "If that . . . if that's how we should begin."

They began, however, with the peaches.

They were both shy. When Medra took her hand his hand shook, and Ember, whose name was Elehal, turned away scowling. Then she touched his hand very lightly. When he stroked the sleek black flow of her hair she seemed only to endure his touch, and he stopped. When he tried to embrace her she was stiff, rejecting him. Then she turned and, fierce, hasty, awkward, seized him in her arms. It wasn't the first night, nor the first nights, they passed together that gave either of them much pleasure or ease. But they learned from each other, and came through shame and fear into passion. Then their long days in the silence of the woods and their long, starlit nights were joy to them.

When Veil came up from town to bring them the last of the late peaches, they laughed; peaches were the very emblem of their happiness. They tried to make her stay and eat supper with them, but she wouldn't. "Stay here while you can," she said.

The summer ended too soon that year. Rain came early; snow fell in autumn even as far south as Roke. Storm followed storm, as if the winds had risen in rage against the tampering and meddling of the crafty men. Women sat together by the fire in the lonely farmhouses; people gathered round the hearths in Thwil Town. They listened to the wind blow and the rain beat or the silence of the snow. Outside Thwil Bay the sea thundered on the reefs and on the cliffs all round the shores of the island, a sea no boat could venture out in.

What they had they shared. In that it was indeed Morred's Isle. Nobody on Roke starved or went unhoused, though nobody had much more than they needed. Hidden from the rest of the world not only by sea and storm but by their defenses that disguised the island and sent ships astray, they worked and talked and sang the

songs, *The Winter Carol* and *The Deed of the Young King*. And they had books, the *Chronicles of Enlad* and the *History of the Wise Heroes*. From these precious books the old men and women would read aloud in a hall down by the wharf where the fisherwomen made and mended their nets. There was a hearth there, and they would light the fire. People came even from farms across the island to hear the histories read, listening in silence, intent. "Our souls are hungry," Ember said.

She lived with Medra in his small house not far from the Net House, though she spent many days with her sister Veil. Ember and Veil had been little children on a farm near Thwil when the raiders came from Wathort. Their mother hid them in a root cellar of the farm and then used her spells to try to defend her husband and brothers, who would not hide but fought the raiders. They were butchered with their cattle. The house and barns were burnt. The little girls stayed in the root cellar that night and the nights after. Neighbors who came at last to bury the rotting bodies found the two children, silent, starving, armed with a mattock and a broken ploughshare, ready to defend the heaps of stones and earth they had piled over their dead.

Medra knew only a hint of this story from Ember. One night Veil, who was three years older than Ember and to whom the memory was much clearer, told it to him fully. Ember sat with them, listening in silence.

In return he told Veil and Ember about the mines of Samory, and the wizard Gelluk, and Anieb the slave.

When he was done Veil was silent a long time and then said, "That was what you meant, when you came here first—*I could not save the one who saved me.*"

"And you asked me, *What can you tell me that could make me trust you?*"

"You have told me," Veil said.

Medra took her hand and put his forehead against it. Telling his story he had kept back tears. He could not do so now.

"She gave me freedom," he said. "And I still feel that all I do is done through her and for her. No, not for her. We can do nothing for the dead. But for . . ."

"For us," said Ember. "For us who live, in hiding, neither killed nor killing. The dead are dead. The great and mighty go their way unchecked. All the hope left in the world is in the people of no account."

"Must we hide forever?"

"Spoken like a man," said Veil with her gentle, wounded smile.

"Yes," said Ember. "We must hide, and forever if need be. Because there's nothing left but being killed and killing, beyond these shores. You say it, and I

believe it."

"But you can't hide true power," Medra said. "Not for long. It dies in hiding, unshared."

"Magic won't die on Roke," said Veil. "*On Roke all spells are strong*. So said Ath himself. And you have walked under the trees . . . Our job must be to keep that strength. Hide it, yes. Hoard it, as a young dragon hoards up its fire. And share it. But only here. Pass it on, one to the next, here, where it's safe, and where the great robbers and killers would least look for it, since no one here is of any account. And one day the dragon will come into its strength. If it takes a thousand years . . ."

"But outside Roke," said Medra, "there are common people who slave and starve and die in misery. Must they do so for a thousand years with no hope?"

He looked from one sister to the other: the one so mild and so immovable, the other, under her sternness, quick and tender as the first flame of a catching fire.

"On Havnor," he said, "far from Roke, in a village on Mount Onn, among people who know nothing of the world, there are still women of the Hand. That net hasn't broken after so many years. How was it woven?"

"Craftily," said Ember.

"And cast wide!" He looked from one to the other again. "I wasn't well taught, in the City of Havnor," he said. "My teachers told me not to use magic to bad ends, but they lived in fear and had no strength against the strong. They gave me all they had to give, but it was little. It was by mere luck I didn't go wrong. And by Anieb's gift of strength to me. But for her I'd be Gelluk's servant now. Yet she herself was untaught, and so enslaved. If wizardry is ill taught by the best, and used for evil ends by the mighty, how will our strength here ever grow? What will the young dragon feed on?"

"This is the center," said Veil. "We must keep to the center. And wait."

"We must give what we have to give," said Medra. "If all but us are slaves, what's our freedom worth?"

"The true art prevails over the false. The pattern will hold," Ember said, frowning. She reached out the poker to gather together her namesakes in the hearth, and with a whack knocked the heap into a blaze. "That I know. But our lives are short, and the pattern's very long. If only Roke was now what it once was —if we had more people of the true art gathered here, teaching and learning as well as preserving—"

"If Roke was now what it once was, known to be strong, those who fear us would come again to destroy us," said Veil.

“The solution lies in secrecy,” said Medra. “But so does the problem.”

“Our problem is with men,” Veil said, “if you’ll forgive me, dear brother. Men are of more account to other men than women and children are. We might have fifty witches here and they’ll pay little heed. But if they knew we had five men of power, they’d seek to destroy us again.”

“So though there were men among us we were the *women* of the Hand,” said Ember.

“You still are,” Medra said. “Anieb was one of you. She and you and all of us live in the same prison.”

“What can we do?” said Veil.

“Learn our strength!” said Medra.

“A school,” Ember said. “Where the wise might come to learn from one another, to study the pattern . . . The Grove would shelter us.”

“The lords of war despise scholars and schoolmasters,” said Medra.

“I think they fear them too,” said Veil.

So they talked, that long winter, and others talked with them. Slowly their talk turned from vision to intention, from longing to planning. Veil was always cautious, warning of dangers. White-haired Dune was so eager that Ember said he wanted to start teaching sorcery to every child in Thwil. Once Ember had come to believe that Roke’s freedom lay in offering others freedom, she set her whole mind on how the women of the Hand might grow strong again. But her mind, formed by her long solitudes among the trees, always sought form and clarity, and she said, “How can we teach our art when we don’t know what it is?”

And they talked about that, all the wise women of the island: what was the true art of magic, and where did it turn false; how the balance of things was kept or lost; what crafts were needful, which useful, which dangerous; why some people had one gift but not another, and whether you could learn an art you had no native gift for. In such discussions they worked out the names that ever since have been given to the masteries: finding, weatherworking, changing, healing, summoning, patterning, naming, and the crafts of illusion, and the knowledge of the songs. Those are the arts of the Masters of Roke even now, though the Chanter took the Finder’s place when finding came to be considered a merely useful craft unworthy of a mage.

And it was in these discussions that the school on Roke began.

There are some who say that the school had its beginnings far differently. They say that Roke used to be ruled by a woman called the Dark Woman, who was in

league with the Old Powers of the earth. They say she lived in a cave under Roke Knoll, never coming into the daylight, but weaving vast spells over land and sea that compelled men to her evil will, until the first Archmage came to Roke, unsealed and entered the cave, defeated the Dark Woman, and took her place.

There's no truth in this tale but one, which is that indeed one of the first Masters of Roke opened and entered a great cavern. But though the roots of Roke are the roots of all the islands, that cavern was not on Roke.

And it's true that in the time of Medra and Elehal the people of Roke, men and women, had no fear of the Old Powers of the earth, but revered them, seeking strength and vision from them. That changed with the years.

Spring came late again that year, cold and stormy. Medra set to boat-building. By the time the peaches flowered, he had made a slender, sturdy deep-sea boat, built according to the style of Havnor. He called her *Hopeful*. Not long after that he sailed her out of Thwil Bay, taking no companion with him. "Look for me at the end of summer," he said to Ember.

"I'll be in the Grove," she said. "And my heart with you, my dark otter, my white tern, my love, Medra."

"And mine with you, my ember of fire, my flowering tree, my love, Elehal."

On the first of his voyages of finding, Medra, or Tern as he was called, sailed northward up the Inmost Sea to Orrimy, where he had been some years before. There were people of the Hand there whom he trusted. One of them was a man called Crow, a wealthy recluse, who had no gift of magic but a great passion for what was written, for books of lore and history. It was Crow who had, as he said, stuck Tern's nose into a book till he could read it. "Illiterate wizards are the curse of Earthsea!" he cried. "Ignorant power is a bane!" Crow was a strange man, wilful, arrogant, obstinate, and, in defense of his passion, brave. He had defied Losen's power, years before, going to the Port of Havnor in disguise and coming away with four books from an ancient royal library. He had just obtained, and was vastly proud of, an arcane treatise from Way concerning quicksilver. "Got that from under Losen's nose too," he said to Tern. "Come have a look at it! It belonged to a famous wizard."

"Tinaral," said Tern. "I knew him."

"Book's trash, is it?" said Crow, who was quick to pick up signals if they had to do with books.

"I don't know. I'm after bigger prey."

Crow cocked his head.

"The Book of Names."

"Lost with Ath when he went into the west," Crow said.

"A mage called Highdrake told me that when Ath stayed in Pendor, he told a wizard there that he'd left the Book of Names with a woman in the Ninety Isles for safekeeping."

"A woman! For safekeeping! In the Ninety Isles! Was he mad?"

Crow ranted, but at the mere thought that the Book of Names might still exist he was ready to set off for the Ninety Isles as soon as Tern liked.

So they sailed south in *Hopeful*, landing first at malodorous Geath, and then in the guise of peddlers working their way from one islet to the next among the mazy channels. Crow had stocked the boat with better wares than most householders of the Isles were used to seeing, and Tern offered them at fair prices, mostly in barter, since there was little money among the islanders. Their popularity ran ahead of them. It was known that they would trade for books, if the books were old and uncanny. But in the Isles all books were old and all uncanny, what there was of them.

Crow was delighted to get a water-stained bestiary from the time of Akambar in return for five silver buttons, a pearl-hilted knife, and a square of Lorbanery silk. He sat in *Hopeful* and crooned over the antique descriptions of harikki and otak and ice-bear. But Tern went ashore on every isle, showing his wares in the kitchens of the housewives and the sleepy taverns where the old men sat. Sometimes he idly made a fist and then turned his hand over opening the palm, but nobody here returned the sign.

"Books?" said a rush plaiter on North Sudidi. "Like that there?" He pointed to long strips of vellum that had been worked into the thatching of his house. "They good for something else?" Crow, staring up at the words visible here and there between the rushes in the eaves, began to tremble with rage. Tern hurried him back to the boat before he exploded.

"It was only a beast healer's manual," Crow admitted, when they were sailing on and he had calmed down. "'Spavined,' I saw, and something about ewes' udders. But the ignorance! the brute ignorance! To roof his house with it!"

"And it was useful knowledge," Tern said. "How can people be anything but ignorant when knowledge isn't saved, isn't taught? If books could be brought together in one place . . ."

"Like the Library of the Kings," said Crow, dreaming of lost glories.

"Or your library," said Tern, who had become a subtler man than he used to be.

"Fragments," Crow said, dismissing his life's work. "Remnants!"

"Beginnings," said Tern.

Crow only sighed.

"I think we might go south again," Tern said, steering for the open channel. "Towards Pody."

"You have a gift for the business," Crow said. "You know where to look. Went straight to that bestiary in the barn loft . . . But there's nothing much to look for here. Nothing of importance. Ath wouldn't have left the greatest of all the lore-books among boors who'd make thatch of it! Take us to Pody if you like. And then back to Orrimy. I've had about enough."

"And we're out of buttons," Tern said. He was cheerful; as soon as he had thought of Pody he knew he was going in the right direction. "Perhaps I can find some along the way," he said. "It's my gift, you know."

Neither of them had been on Pody. It was a sleepy southern island with a pretty old port town, Telio, built of rosy sandstone, and fields and orchards that should have been fertile. But the lords of Wathort had ruled it for a century, taxing and slave taking and wearing the land and people down. The sunny streets of Telio were sad and dirty. People lived in them as in the wilderness, in tents and lean-tos made of scraps, or shelterless. "Oh, this won't do," Crow said, disgusted, avoiding a pile of human excrement. "These creatures don't have books, Tern!"

"Wait, wait," his companion said. "Give me a day."

"It's dangerous," Crow said, "it's pointless," but he made no further objection. The modest, naive young man whom he had taught to read had become his unfathomable guide.

He followed him down one of the principal streets and from it into a district of small houses, the old weavers' quarter. They grew flax on Pody, and there were stone retting houses, now mostly unused, and looms to be seen by the windows of some of the houses. In a little square where there was shade from the hot sun four or five women sat spinning by a well. Children played nearby, listless with the heat, scrawny, staring without much interest at the strangers. Tern had walked there unhesitating, as if he knew where he was going. Now he stopped and greeted the women.

"Oh, pretty man," said one of them with a smile, "don't even show us what you have in your pack there, for I haven't a penny of copper or ivory, nor seen one for a month."

"You might have a bit of linen, though, mistress? woven, or thread? Linen of Pody is the best—so I've heard as far as Havnor. And I can tell the quality of what you're spinning. A beautiful thread it is." Crow watched his companion with amusement and some disdain; he himself could bargain for a book very shrewdly, but nattering with common women about buttons and thread was beneath him. "Let me just open this up," Tern was saying as he spread his pack out on the cobbles, and the women and the dirty, timid children drew closer to see the wonders he would show them. "Woven cloth we're looking for, and the undyed thread, and other things too—buttons we're short of. If you had any of horn or bone, maybe? I'd trade one of these little velvet caps here for three or four buttons. Or one of these rolls of ribbon; look at the color of it. Beautiful with your hair, mistress! Or paper, or books. Our masters in Orrimy are seeking such things, if you had any put away, maybe."

"Oh, you are a pretty man," said the woman who had spoken first, laughing, as he held the red ribbon up to her black braid. "And I wish I had something for you!"

"I won't be so bold as to ask for a kiss," said Medra, "but an open hand, maybe?"

He made the sign; she looked at him for a moment. "That's easy," she said softly, and made the sign in return, "but not always safe, among strangers."

He went on showing his wares and joking with the women and children. Nobody bought anything. They gazed at the trinkets as if they were treasures. He let them gaze and finger all they would; indeed he let one of the children filch a little mirror of polished brass, seeing it vanish under the ragged shirt and saying nothing. At last he said he must go on, and the children drifted away as he folded up his pack.

"I have a neighbor," said the black-braided woman, "who might have some paper, if you're after that."

"Written on?" said Crow, who had been sitting on the well coping, bored. "Marks on it?"

She looked him up and down. "Marks on it, sir," she said. And then, to Tern, in a different tone, "If you'd like to come with me, she lives this way. And though she's only a girl, and poor, I'll tell you, peddler, she has an open hand. Though perhaps not all of us do."

"Three out of three," said Crow, sketching the sign, "so spare your vinegar, woman."

"Oh, it's you who have it to spare, sir. We're poor folk here. And ignorant," she said, with a flash of her eyes, and led on.

She brought them to a house at the end of a lane. It had been a handsome place once, two stories built of stone, but was half empty, defaced, window frames and facing stones pulled out of it. They crossed a courtyard with a well in it. She knocked at a side door, and a girl opened it.

"Ach, it's a witch's den," Crow said, at the whiff of herbs and aromatic smoke, and he stepped back.

"Healers," their guide said. "Is she ill again, Dory?"

The girl nodded, looking at Tern, then at Crow. She was thirteen or fourteen, heavyset though thin, with a sullen, steady gaze.

"They're men of the Hand, Dory, one short and pretty and one tall and proud, and they say they're seeking papers. I know you had some once, though you may not now. They've nothing you need in their pack, but it might be they'd pay a bit of ivory for what they want. Is it so?" She turned her bright eyes on Tern, and he nodded.

"She's very sick, Rush," the girl said. She looked again at Tern. "You're not a healer?" It was an accusation.

"No."

"She is," said Rush. "Like her mother and her mother's mother. Let us in, Dory, or me at least, to speak to her." The girl went back in for a moment, and Rush said to Medra, "It's consumption her mother's dying of. No healer could cure her. But she could heal the scrofula, and touch for pain. A wonder she was, and Dory bade fair to follow her."

The girl motioned them to come in. Crow chose to wait outside. The room was high and long, with traces of former elegance, but very old and very poor. Healers' paraphernalia and drying herbs were everywhere, though ranged in some order. Near the fine stone fireplace, where a tiny wisp of sweet herbs burned, was a bedstead. The woman in it was so wasted that in the dim light she seemed nothing but bone and shadow. As Tern came close she tried to sit up and to speak. Her daughter raised her head on the pillow, and when Tern was very near he could hear her: "Wizard," she said. "Not by chance."

A woman of power, she knew what he was. Had she called him there?

"I'm a finder," he said. "And a seeker."

"Can you teach her?"

"I can take her to those who can."

"Do it."

"I will."

She laid her head back and closed her eyes.

Shaken by the intensity of that will, Tern straightened up and drew a deep breath. He looked round at the girl, Dory. She did not return his gaze, watching her mother with stolid, sullen grief. Only after the woman sank into sleep did Dory move, going to help Rush, who as a friend and neighbor had made herself useful and was gathering up blood-soaked cloths scattered by the bed.

"She bled again just now, and I couldn't stop it," Dory said. Tears ran out of her eyes and down her cheeks. Her face hardly changed.

"Oh child, oh lamb," said Rush, taking her into her embrace; but though she hugged Rush, Dory did not bend.

"She's going there, to the wall, and I can't go with her," she said. "She's going alone and I can't go with her—Can't you go there?" She broke away from Rush, looking again at Tern. "You can go there!"

"No," he said. "I don't know the way."

Yet as Dory spoke he saw what the girl saw: a long hill going down into darkness, and across it, on the edge of twilight, a low wall of stones. And as he looked he thought he saw a woman walking along beside the wall, very thin, insubstantial, bone, shadow. But she was not the dying woman in the bed. She was Anieb.

Then that was gone and he stood facing the witch-girl. Her look of accusation slowly changed. She put her face in her hands.

"We have to let them go," he said.

She said, "I know."

Rush glanced from one to the other with her keen, bright eyes. "Not only a handy man," she said, "but a crafty man. Well, you're not the first."

He looked his question.

"This is called Ath's House," she said.

"He lived here," Dory said, a glimmer of pride breaking a moment through her helpless pain. "The Mage Ath. Long ago. Before he went into the west. All my foremothers were wise women. He stayed here. With them."

"Give me a basin," Rush said. "I'll get water to soak these."

"I'll get the water," Tern said. He took the basin and went out to the courtyard, to the well. Just as before, Crow was sitting on the coping, bored and restless.

"Why are we wasting time here?" he demanded, as Tern let the bucket down

into the well. “Are you fetching and carrying for witches now?”

“Yes,” Tern said, “and I will till she dies. And then I’ll take her daughter to Roke. And if you want to read the Book of Names, you can come with us.”

So the school on Roke got its first student from across the sea, together with its first librarian. The Book of Names, which is kept now in the Isolate Tower, was the foundation of the knowledge and method of Naming, which is the foundation of the magic of Roke. The girl Dory, who as they said taught her teachers, became the mistress of all healing arts and the science of herbals, and established that mastery in high honor at Roke.

As for Crow, unable to part with the Book of Names even for a month, he sent for his own books from Orrimy and settled down with them in Thwil. He allowed people of the school to study them, so long as they showed them, and him, due respect.

So the pattern of the years was set for Tern. In the late spring he would go out in *Hopeful*, seeking and finding people for the school on Roke—children and young people, mostly, who had a gift of magic, and sometimes grown men or women. Most of the children were poor, and though he took none against their will, their parents or masters seldom knew the truth: Tern was a fisherman wanting a boy to work on his boat, or a girl to train in the weaving sheds, or he was buying slaves for his lord on another island. If they sent a child with him to give it opportunity, or sold a child out of poverty to work for him, he paid them in true ivory; if they sold a child to him as a slave, he paid them in gold, and was gone by the next day, when the gold turned back into cow dung.

He traveled far in the Archipelago, even out into the East Reach. He never went to the same town or island twice without years between, letting his trail grow cold. Even so he began to be spoken of. The Child Taker, they called him, a dreaded sorcerer who carried children to his island in the icy north and there sucked their blood. In villages on Way and Felkway they still tell children about the Child Taker, as an encouragement to distrust strangers.

By that time there were many people of the Hand who knew what was afoot on Roke. Young people came there sent by them. Men and women came to be taught and to teach. Many of these had a hard time getting there, for the spells that hid the island were stronger than ever, making it seem only a cloud, or a reef among the breakers; and the Roke wind blew, which kept any ship from Thwil Bay unless there was a sorcerer aboard who knew how to turn that wind. Still they came, and

as the years went on a larger house was needed for the school than any in Thwil Town.

In the Archipelago, men built ships and women built houses, that was the custom; but in building a great structure women let men work with them, not having the miners' superstitions that kept men out of the mines, or the shipwrights' that forbade women to watch a keel laid. So both men and women of great power raised the Great House on Roke. Its cornerstone was set on a hilltop above Thwil Town, near the Grove and looking to the Knoll. Its walls were built not only of stone and wood, but founded deep on magic and made strong with spells.

Standing on that hill, Medra had said, "There is a vein of water, just under where I stand, that will not go dry." They dug down carefully and came to the water; they let it leap up into the sunlight; and the first part of the Great House they made was its inmost heart, the courtyard of the fountain.

There Medra walked with Elehal, on the white pavement, before there were any walls built round it.

She had planted a young rowan from the Grove beside the fountain. They came to be sure it was thriving. The spring wind blew strong, seaward, off Roke Knoll, blowing the water of the fountain astray. Up on the slope of the Knoll they could see a little group of people: a circle of young students learning how to do tricks of illusion from the sorcerer Hega of O; Master Hand, they called him. The sparkweed, past flowering, cast its ashes on the wind. There were streaks of grey in Ember's hair.

"Off you go, then," she said, "and leave us to settle this matter of the Rule." Her frown was as fierce as ever, but her voice was seldom as harsh as this when she spoke to him.

"I'll stay if you want, Elehal."

"I do want you to stay. But don't stay! You're a finder, you have to go find. It's only that agreeing on the Way—or the Rule, Waris wants us to call it—is twice the work of building the House. And causes ten times the quarrels. I wish I could get away from it! I wish I could just walk with you, like this . . . And I wish you wouldn't go north."

"Why do we quarrel?" he said rather despondently.

"Because there are more of us! Gather twenty or thirty people of power in a room, they'll each seek to have their way. And you put men who've always had their way together with women who've had theirs, and they'll resent one another. And then, too, there are some true and real divisions among us, Medra. They must

be settled, and they can't be settled easily. Though a little goodwill would go a long way."

"Is it Waris?"

"Waris and several other men. And they *are* men, and they make that important beyond anything else. To them, the Old Powers are abominable. And women's powers are suspect, because they suppose them all connected with the Old Powers. As if those Powers were to be controlled or used by any mortal soul! But they put men where we put the world. And so they hold that a true wizard must be a man. And celibate."

"Ah, that," Medra said, rueful.

"That indeed. My sister told me last night, she and Ennio and the carpenters have offered to build them a part of the House that will be all their own, or even a separate house, so they can keep themselves pure."

"Pure?"

"It's not my word, it's Waris's. But they've refused. They want the Rule of Roke to separate men from women, and they want men to make the decisions for all. Now what compromise can we make with them? Why did they come here, if they won't work with us?"

"We should send away the men who won't."

"Away? In anger? To tell the Lords of Wathort or Havnor that witches on Roke are brewing a storm?"

"I forget—I always forget," he said, downcast again. "I forget the walls of the prison. I'm not such a fool when I'm outside them . . . When I'm here I can't believe it is a prison. But outside, without you, I remember . . . I don't want to go, but I have to go. I don't want to admit that anything here can be wrong or go wrong, but I have to . . . I'll go this time, and I will go north, Elehal. But when I come back I'll stay. What I need to find I'll find here. Haven't I found it already?"

"No," she said, "only me . . . But there's a great deal of seeking and finding to be done in the Grove. Enough to keep even you from being restless. Why north?"

"To reach out the Hand to Enlad and Éa. I've never gone there. We know nothing about their wizardries. *Enlad of the Kings, and bright Éa, eldest of isles!* Surely we'll find allies there."

"But Havnor lies between us," she said.

"I won't sail my boat across Havnor, dear love. I plan to go around it. By water." He could always make her laugh; he was the only one who could. When he was away, she was quiet-voiced and even-tempered, having learned the uselessness of

impatience in the work that must be done. Sometimes she still scowled, sometimes she smiled, but she did not laugh. When she could, she went to the Grove alone, as she had always done. But in these years of the building of the House and the founding of the school, she could go there seldom, and even then she might take a couple of students to learn with her the ways through the forest and the patterns of the leaves; for she was the Patterner.

Tern left late that year on his journey. He had with him a boy of fifteen, Mote, a promising weatherworker who needed training at sea, and Sava, a woman of sixty who had come to Roke with him seven or eight years before. Sava had been one of the women of the Hand on the isle of Ark. Though she had no wizardly gifts at all, she knew so well how to get a group of people to trust one another and work together that she was honored as a wise woman on Ark, and now on Roke. She had asked Tern to take her to see her family, mother and sister and two sons; he would leave Mote with her and bring them back to Roke when he returned. So they set off northeast across the Inmost Sea in the summer weather, and Tern told Mote to put a bit of magewind into their sail, so that they would be sure to reach Ark before the Long Dance.

As they coasted that island, he himself put an illusion about *Hopeful*, so that she would seem not a boat but a drifting log; for pirates and Losen's slave takers were thick in these waters.

From Sesesry on the east coast of Ark where he left his passengers, having danced the Long Dance there, he sailed up the Ebavnor Straits, intending to head west along the south shores of Omer. He kept the illusion spell about his boat. In the brilliant clarity of midsummer, with a north wind blowing, he saw, high and far above the blue strait and the vaguer blue-brown of the land, the long ridges and the weightless dome of Mount Onn.

Look, Medra. Look!

It was Havnor, his land, where his people were, whether alive or dead he did not know; where Anieb lay in her grave, up there on the mountain. He had never been back, never come this close. It had been how long? Sixteen years, seventeen years. Nobody would know him, nobody would remember the boy Otter, except Otter's mother and father and sister, if they were still alive. And surely there were people of the Hand in the Great Port. Though he had not known of them as a boy, he should know them now.

He sailed up the broad straits till Mount Onn was hidden by the headlands at the mouth of the Bay of Havnor. He would not see it again unless he went through

that narrow passage. Then he would see the mountain, all the sweep and cresting of it, over the calm waters where he used to try to raise up the magewind when he was twelve; and sailing on he would see the towers rise up from the water, dim at first, mere dots and lines, then lifting up their bright banners, the white city at the center of the world.

It was mere cowardice to keep from Havnor, now—fear for his skin, fear lest he find his people had died, fear lest he recall Anieb too vividly.

For there had been times when he felt that, as he had summoned her living, so dead she might summon him. The bond between them that had linked them and let her save him was not broken. Many times she had come into his dreams, standing silent as she stood when he first saw her in the reeking tower at Samory. And he had seen her, years ago, in the vision of the dying healer in Telio, in the twilight, beside the wall of stones.

He knew now, from Elehal and others on Roke, what that wall was. It lay between the living and the dead. And in that vision, Anieb had walked on this side of it, not on the side that went down into the dark.

Did he fear her, who had freed him?

He tacked across the strong wind, swung round South Point, and sailed into the Great Bay of Havnor.

Banners still flew from the towers of the City of Havnor, and a king still ruled there; the banners were those of captured towns and isles, and the king was the warlord Losen. Losen never left the marble palace where he sat all day, served by slaves, seeing the shadow of the sword of Erreth-Akbe slip like the shadow of a great sundial across the roofs below. He gave orders, and the slaves said, "It is done, your majesty." He held audiences, and old men came and said, "We obey, your majesty." He summoned his wizards, and the mage Early came, bowing low. "Make me walk!" Losen shouted, beating his paralysed legs with his weak hands.

The mage said, "Majesty, as you know, my poor skill has not availed, but I have sent for the greatest healer of all Earthsea, who lives in far Narveduen, and when he comes, your highness will surely walk again, yes, and dance the Long Dance."

Then Losen cursed and cried, and his slaves brought him wine, and the mage went out, bowing, and checking as he went to be sure that the spell of paralysis was holding.

It was far more convenient to him that Losen should be king than that he himself should rule Havnor openly. Men of arms didn't trust men of craft and didn't like to serve them. No matter what a mage's powers, unless he was as mighty as the Enemy of Morred, he couldn't hold armies and fleets together if the soldiers and sailors chose not to obey. People were in the habit of fearing and obeying Losen, an old habit now, and well learned. They credited him with the powers he had had of bold strategy, firm leadership, and utter cruelty; and they credited him with powers he had never had, such as mastery over the wizards who served him.

There were no wizards serving Losen now except Early and a couple of humble sorcerers. Early had driven off or killed, one after another, his rivals for Losen's favor, and had enjoyed sole rule over all Havnor now for years.

When he was Gelluk's prentice and assistant, he had encouraged his master in the study of the lore of Way, finding himself free while Gelluk was off doting on his quicksilver. But Gelluk's abrupt fate had shaken him. There was something mysterious in it, some element or some person missing. Summoning the useful Hound to help him, Early had made a very thorough inquiry into what happened. Where Gelluk was, of course, was no mystery. Hound had tracked him straight to a scar in a hillside, and said he was buried deep under there. Early had no wish to exhume him. But the boy who had been with him, Hound could not track: could not say whether he was under that hill with Gelluk, or had got clean away. He had left no spell traces as the mage did, said Hound, and it had rained very hard all the night after, and when Hound thought he had found the boy's tracks, they were a woman's; and she was dead.

Early did not punish Hound for his failure, but he remembered it. He was not used to failures and did not like them. He did not like what Hound told him about this boy, Otter, and he remembered it.

The desire for power feeds off itself, growing as it devours. Early suffered from hunger. He starved. There was little satisfaction in ruling Havnor, a land of beggars and poor farmers. What was the good of possessing the Throne of Maharion if nobody sat in it but a drunken cripple? What glory was there in the palaces of the city when nobody lived in them but crawling slaves? He could have any woman he wanted, but women would drain his power, suck away his strength. He wanted no woman near him. He craved an enemy: an opponent worth destroying.

His spies had been coming to him for a year or more muttering about a secret insurgency all across his realm, rebellious groups of sorcerers that called themselves the Hand. Eager to find his enemy, he had one such group investigated.

They turned out to be a lot of old women, midwives, carpenters, a ditchdigger, a tinsmith's prentice, a couple of little boys. Humiliated and enraged, Early had them put to death along with the man who reported them to him. It was a public execution, in Losen's name, for the crime of conspiracy against the King. There had perhaps not been enough of that kind of intimidation lately. But it went against his grain. He didn't like to make a public spectacle of fools who had tricked him into fearing them. He would rather have dealt with them in his own way, in his own time. To be nourishing, fear must be immediate; he needed to see people afraid of him, hear their terror, smell it, taste it. But since he ruled in Losen's name, it was Losen who must be feared by the armies and the peoples, and he himself must keep in the background, making do with slaves and prentices.

Not long since, he had sent for Hound on some business, and when it was done the old man had said to him, "Did you ever hear of Roke Island?"

"South and west of Kamery. The Lord of Wathort's owned it for forty or fifty years."

Though he seldom left the city, Early prided himself on his knowledge of all the Archipelago, gleaned from his sailors' reports and the marvelous ancient charts kept in the palace. He studied them nights, brooding on where and how he might extend his empire.

Hound nodded, as if its location was all that had interested him in Roke.

"Well?"

"One of the old women you had tortured before they burned the lot, you know? Well, the fellow who did it told me. She talked about her son on Roke. Calling out to him to come, you know. But like as if he had the power to."

"Well?"

"Seemed odd. Old woman from a village inland, never seen the sea, calling the name of an island away off like that."

"The son was a fisherman who talked about his travels."

Early waved his hand. Hound sniffed, nodded, and left.

Early never disregarded any triviality Hound mentioned, because so many of them had proved not to be trivial. He disliked the old man for that, and because he was unshakable. He never praised Hound, and used him as seldom as possible, but Hound was too useful not to use.

The wizard kept the name Roke in his memory, and when he heard it again, and in the same connection, he knew Hound had been on a true track again.

Three children, two boys of fifteen or sixteen and a girl of twelve, were taken by

one of Losen's patrols south of Omer, running a stolen fishing boat with the magewind. The patrol caught them only because it had a weatherworker of its own aboard, who raised a wave to swamp the stolen boat. Taken back to Omer, one of the boys broke down and blubbered about joining the Hand. Hearing that word, the men told them they would be tortured and burned, at which the boy cried that if they spared him he would tell them all about the Hand, and Roke, and the great mages of Roke.

"Bring them here," Early said to the messenger.

"The girl flew away, lord," the man said unwillingly.

"Flew away?"

"She took bird form. Osprey, they said. Didn't expect that from a girl so young. Gone before they knew it."

"Bring the boys, then," Early said with deadly patience.

They brought him one boy. The other had jumped from the ship, crossing Havnor Bay, and been killed by a crossbow quarrel. The boy they brought was in such a paroxysm of terror that even Early was disgusted by him. How could he frighten a creature already blind and beshatten with fear? He set a binding-spell on the boy that held him upright and immobile as a stone statue, and left him so for a night and a day. Now and then he talked to the statue, telling it that it was a clever lad and might make a good prentice, here in the palace. Maybe he could go to Roke after all, for Early was thinking of going to Roke, to meet with the mages there.

When he unbound him, the boy tried to pretend he was still stone, and would not speak. Early had to go into his mind, in the way he had learned from Gelluk long ago, when Gelluk was a true master of his art. He found out what he could. Then the boy was no good for anything and had to be disposed of. It was humiliating, again, to be outwitted by the very stupidity of these people; and all he had learned about Roke was that the Hand was there, and a school where they taught wizardry. And he had learned a man's name.

The idea of a school for wizards made him laugh. A school for wild boars, he thought, a college for dragons! But that there was some kind of scheming and gathering together of men of power on Roke seemed probable, and the idea of any league or alliance of wizards appalled him more the more he thought of it. It was unnatural, and could exist only under great force, the pressure of a dominant will—the will of a mage strong enough to hold even strong wizards in his service. There was the enemy he wanted!

Hound was down at the door, they said. Early sent for him to come up. "Who's

Tern?" he asked as soon as he saw the old man.

With age Hound had come to look his name, wrinkled, with a long nose and sad eyes. He sniffed and seemed about to say he did not know, but he knew better than to try to lie to Early. He sighed. "Otter," he said. "Him that killed old Whiteface."

"Where's he hiding?"

"Not hiding at all. Went about the city, talking to people. Went to see his mother in Endlane, round the mountain. He's there now."

"You should have told me at once," Early said.

"Didn't know you were after him. I've been after him a long time. He fooled me." Hound spoke without rancor.

"He tricked and killed a great mage, my master. He's dangerous. I want vengeance. Who did he talk to here? I want them. Then I'll see to him."

"Some old women down by the docks. An old sorcerer. His sister."

"Get them here. Take my men."

Hound sniffed, sighed, nodded.

There was not much to be got from the people his men brought to him. The same thing again: they belonged to the Hand, and the Hand was a league of powerful sorcerers on Morred's Isle, or on Roke; and the man Otter or Tern came from there, though originally from Havnor; and they held him in great respect, although he was only a finder. The sister had vanished, perhaps gone with Otter to Endlane, where the mother lived. Early rummaged in their cloudy, witless minds, had the youngest of them tortured, and then burned them where Losen could sit at his window and watch. The King needed some diversions.

All this took only two days, and all the time Early was looking and probing toward Endlane village, sending Hound there before him, sending his own presentment there to watch. When he knew where the man was he betook himself there very quickly, on eagle's wings; for Early was a great shape-changer, so fearless that he would take even dragon form.

He knew it was well to use caution with this man. Otter had defeated Tinaral, and there was this matter of Roke. There was some strength in him or with him. Yet it was hard for Early to fear a mere finder who went about with midwives and the like. He could not bring himself to sneak and skulk. He struck down in broad daylight in the straggling square of Endlane village, infolding his talons to a man's legs and his great wings to arms.

A child ran bawling to its mammy. No one else was about. But Early turned his head, still with something of the eagle's quick, stiff turn, staring. Wizard knows

wizard, and he knew which house his prey was in. He walked to it and flung the door open.

A slight, brown man sitting at the table looked up at him.

Early raised his hand to lay the binding-spell on him. His hand was stayed, held immobile half lifted at his side.

This was a contest, then, a foe worth fighting! Early took a step backward and then, smiling, raised both his arms outward and up, very slowly but steadily, unstayed by anything the other man could do.

The house vanished. No walls, no roof, nobody. Early stood on the dust of the village square in the sunshine of morning with his arms in the air.

It was only illusion, of course, but it checked him a moment in his spell, and then he had to undo the illusion, bringing back the door frame around him, the walls and roof beams, the gleam of light on crockery, the hearth stones, the table. But nobody sat at the table. His enemy was gone.

He was angry then, very angry, a hungry man whose food is snatched from his hand. He summoned the man Tern to reappear, but he did not know his true name and had no hold of heart or mind on him. The summons went unanswered.

He strode from the house, turned, and set a fire-spell on it so that it burst into flames, thatch and walls and every window spouting fire. Women ran out of it screaming. They had been hiding no doubt in the back room; he paid them no attention. "Hound," he thought. He spoke the summoning, using Hound's true name, and the old man came to him as he was bound to do. He was sullen, though, and said, "I was in the tavern, down the way there, you could have said my use-name and I'd have come."

Early looked at him once. Hound's mouth snapped shut and stayed shut.

"Speak when I let you," the wizard said. "Where is the man?"

Hound nodded northeastwards.

"What's there?"

Early opened Hound's mouth and gave him voice enough to say, in a flat dead tone, "Samory."

"What form is he in?"

"Otter," said the flat voice.

Early laughed. "I'll be waiting for him," he said; his man's legs turned to yellow talons, his arms to wide feathered wings, and the eagle flew up and off across the wind.

Hound sniffed, sighed, and followed, trudging along unwillingly, while behind

him in the village the flames died down, and children cried, and women shouted curses after the eagle.

The danger in trying to do good is that the mind comes to confuse the intent of goodness with the act of doing things well.

That is not what the otter was thinking as it swam fast down the Yennava. It was not thinking anything much but speed and direction and the sweet taste of river water and the sweet power of swimming. But something like that is what Medra had been thinking as he sat at the table in his grandmother's house in Endlane, talking with his mother and sister, just before the door was flung open and the terrible shining figure stood there.

Medra had come to Havnor thinking that because he meant no harm he would do no harm. He had done irreparable harm. Men and women and children had died because he was there. They had died in torment, burned alive. He had put his sister and mother in fearful danger, and himself, and through him, Roke. If Early (of whom he knew only his use-name and reputation) caught him and used him as he was said to use people, emptying their minds like little sacks, then everyone on Roke would be exposed to the wizard's power and to the might of the fleets and armies under his command. Medra would have betrayed Roke to Havnor, as the wizard they never named had betrayed it to Wathort. Maybe that man, too, had thought he could do no harm.

Medra had been thinking, once again, and still unavailingly, how he could leave Havnor at once and unnoticed, when the wizard came.

Now, as otter, he was thinking only that he would like to stay otter, be otter, in the sweet brown water, the living river, forever. There is no death for an otter, only life to the end. But in the sleek creature was the mortal mind; and where the stream passes the hill west of Samory, the otter came up on the muddy bank, and then the man crouched there, shivering.

Where to now? Why had he come here?

He had not thought. He had taken the shape that came soonest to him, run to the river as an otter would, swum as the otter would swim. But only in his own form could he think as a man, hide, decide, act as a man or as a wizard against the wizard who hunted him.

He knew he was no match for Early. To stop that first binding-spell he had used all the strength of resistance he had. The illusion and the shape-change were all the tricks he had to play. If he faced the wizard again he would be destroyed. And

Roke with him. Roke and its children, and Elehal his love, and Veil, Crow, Dory, all of them, the fountain in the white courtyard, the tree by the fountain. Only the Grove would stand. Only the green hill, silent, immovable. He heard Elehal say to him, *Havnor lies between us.* He heard her say, *All the true powers, all the old powers, at root are one.*

He looked up. The hillside above the stream was that same hill where he had come that day with Tinaral, Anieb's presence within him. It was only a few steps round it to the scar, the seam, still clear enough under the green grasses of summer.

"Mother," he said, on his knees there, "Mother, open to me."

He laid his hands on the seam of earth, but there was no power in them.

"Let me in, mother," he whispered in the tongue that was as old as the hill. The ground shivered a little and opened.

He heard an eagle scream. He got to his feet. He leapt into the dark.

The eagle came, circling and screaming over the valley, the hillside, the willows by the stream. It circled, searching and searching, and flew back as it had come.

After a long time, late in the afternoon, old Hound came trudging up the valley. He stopped now and then and sniffed. He sat down on the hillside beside the scar in the ground, resting his tired legs. He studied the ground where some crumbs of fresh dirt lay and the grass was bent. He stroked the bent grass to straighten it. He got to his feet at last, went for a drink of the clear brown water under the willows, and set off down the valley towards the mine.

Medra woke in pain, in darkness. For a long time that was all there was. The pain came and went, the darkness remained. Once it lightened a little into a twilight in which he could dimly see. He saw a slope running down from where he lay towards a wall of stones, across which was darkness again. But he could not get up to walk to the wall, and presently the pain came back very sharp in his arm and hip and head. Then the darkness came around him, and then nothing.

Thirst: and with it pain. Thirst, and the sound of water running.

He tried to remember how to make light. Anieb said to him, plaintively, "Can't you make the light?" But he could not. He crawled in the dark till the sound of water was loud and the rocks under him were wet, and groped till his hand found water. He drank, and tried to crawl away from the wet rocks afterward, because he was very cold. One arm hurt and had no strength in it. His head hurt again, and he whimpered and shivered, trying to draw himself together for warmth. There was no warmth and no light.

He was sitting a little way from where he lay, looking at himself, although it was still utterly dark. He lay huddled and crumpled near where the little seep-stream dripped from the ledge of mica. Not far away lay another huddled heap, rotted red silk, long hair, bones. Beyond it the cavern stretched away. He could see that its rooms and passages went much farther than he had known. He saw it with the same uncaring interest with which he saw Tinaral's body and his own body. He felt a mild regret. It was only fair that he should die here with the man he had killed. It was right. Nothing was wrong. But something in him ached, not the sharp body pain, a long ache, lifelong.

"Anieb," he said.

Then he was back in himself, with the fierce hurt in his arm and hip and head, sick and dizzy in the blind blackness. When he moved, he whimpered; but he sat up. I have to live, he thought. I have to remember how to live. How to make light. I have to remember. I have to remember the shadows of the leaves.

How far does the forest go?

As far as the mind goes.

He looked up into the darkness. After a while he moved his good hand a little, and the faint light flowed out of it.

The roof of the cavern was far above him. The trickle of water dripping from the mica ledge glittered in short dashes in the werelight.

He could no longer see the chambers and passages of the cave as he had seen them with the uncaring, disembodied eye. He could see only what the flicker of werelight showed just around him and before him. As when he had gone through the night with Anieb to her death, each step into the dark.

He got to his knees, and thought then to whisper, "Thank you, mother." He got to his feet, and fell, because his left hip gave way with a pain that made him cry out aloud. After a while he tried again, and stood up. Then he started forward.

It took him a long time to cross the cavern. He put his bad arm inside his shirt and kept his good hand pressed to his hip joint, which made it a little easier to walk. The walls narrowed gradually to a passage. Here the roof was much lower, just above his head. Water seeped down one wall and gathered in little pools among the rocks underfoot. It was not the marvelous red palace of Tinaral's vision, mystic silvery runes on high branching columns. It was only the earth, only dirt, rock, water. The air was cool and still. Away from the dripping of the stream it was silent. Outside the gleam of werelight it was dark.

Medra bowed his head, standing there. "Anieb," he said, "can you come back this far? I don't know the way." He waited a while.

He saw darkness, heard silence. Slow and halting, he entered the passage.

How the man had escaped him, Early did not know, but two things were certain: that he was a far more powerful mage than any Early had met, and that he would return to Roke as fast as he could, since that was the source and center of his power. There was no use trying to get there before him; he had the lead. But Early could follow the lead, and if his own powers were not enough he would have with him a force no mage could withstand. Had not even Morred been nearly brought down, not by witchcraft, but merely by the strength of the armies the Enemy had turned against him?

"Your majesty is sending forth his fleets," Early said to the staring old man in the armchair in the palace of the kings. "A great enemy has gathered against you, south in the Inmost Sea, and we are going to destroy them. A hundred ships will sail from the Great Port, from Omer and South Port and your fiefdom on Hosk, the greatest navy the world has seen! I shall lead them. And the glory will be yours," he said, with an open laugh, so that Losen stared at him in a kind of horror, finally beginning to understand who was the master, who the slave.

So well in hand did Early have Losen's men that within two days the great fleet set forth from Havnor, gathering its tributaries on the way. Eighty ships sailed past

Ark and Ilien on a true and steady magewind that bore them straight for Roke. Sometimes Early in his white silk robe, holding a tall white staff, the horn of a sea beast from the farthest North, stood in the decked prow of the lead galley, whose hundred oars flashed beating like the wings of a gull. Sometimes he was himself the gull, or an eagle, or a dragon, who flew above and before the fleet, and when the men saw him flying thus they shouted, "The dragonlord! the dragonlord!"

They came ashore in Ilien for water and food. Setting a host of many hundreds of men on its way so quickly had left little time for provisioning the ships. They overran the towns along the west shore of Ilien, taking what they wanted, and did the same on Vissti and Kamery, looting what they could and burning what they left. Then the great fleet turned west, heading for the one harbor of Roke Island, the Bay of Thwil. Early knew of the harbor from the maps in Havnor, and knew there was a high hill above it. As they came nearer, he took dragon form and soared up high above his ships, leading them, gazing into the west for the sight of that hill.

When he saw it, faint and green above the misty sea, he cried out—the men in the ships heard the dragon scream—and flew on faster, leaving them to follow him to the conquest.

All the rumors of Roke had said that it was spell-defended and charm-hidden, invisible to ordinary eyes. If there were any spells woven about that hill or the bay he now saw opening before it, they were gossamer to him, transparent. Nothing blurred his eyes or challenged his will as he flew over the bay, over the little town and a half-finished building on the slope above it, to the top of the high green hill. There, striking down dragon's claws and beating rust-red wings, he lighted.

He stood in his own form. He had not made the change himself. He stood alert, uncertain.

The wind blew, the long grass nodded in the wind. Summer was getting on and the grass was dry now, yellowing, no flowers in it but the little white heads of the lacefoam. A woman came walking up the hill towards him through the long grass. She followed no path, and walked easily, without haste.

He thought he had raised his hand in a spell to stop her, but he had not raised his hand, and she came on. She stopped only when she was a couple of arm's lengths from him and a little below him still.

"Tell me your name," she said, and he said, "Teriel."

"Why did you come here, Teriel?"

"To destroy you."

He stared at her, seeing a round-faced woman, middle-aged, short and strong,

with grey in her hair and dark eyes under dark brows, eyes that held his, held him, brought the truth out of his mouth.

"Destroy us? Destroy this hill? The trees there?" She looked down to a grove of trees not far from the hill. "Maybe Segoy who made them could unmake them. Maybe the earth will destroy herself. Maybe she'll destroy herself through our hands, in the end. But not through yours. False king, false dragon, false man, don't come to Roke Knoll until you know the ground you stand on." She made one gesture of her hand, downward to the earth. Then she turned and went down the hill through the long grass, the way she had come.

There were other people on the hill, he saw now, many others, men and women, children, living and spirits of the dead; many, many of them. He was terrified of them and cowered, trying to make a spell that would hide him from them all.

But he made no spell. He had no magic left in him. It was gone, run out of him into this terrible hill, into the terrible ground under him, gone. He was no wizard, only a man like the others, powerless.

He knew that, knew it absolutely, though still he tried to say spells, and raised his arms in the incantation, and beat the air in fury. Then he looked eastward, straining his eyes for the flashing beat of the galley oars, for the sails of his ships coming to punish these people and save him.

All he saw was a mist on the water, all across the sea beyond the mouth of the bay. As he watched it thickened and darkened, creeping out over the slow waves.

Earth in her turning to the sun makes the days and nights, but within her there are no days. Medra walked through the night. He was very lame, and could not always keep up the were-light. When it failed he had to stop and sit down and sleep. The sleep was never death, as he thought it was. He woke, always cold, always in pain, always thirsty, and when he could make a glimmer of the light he got to his feet and went on. He never saw Anieb but he knew she was there. He followed her. Sometimes there were great rooms. Sometimes there were pools of motionless water. It was hard to break the stillness of their surface, but he drank from them. He thought he had gone down deeper and deeper for a long time, till he reached the longest of those pools, and after that the way went up again. Sometimes now Anieb followed him. He could say her name, though she did not answer. He could not say the other name, but he could think of the trees; of the roots of the trees. This was the kingdom of the roots of the trees. How far does the forest go? As far as forests go. As long as the lives, as deep as the roots of the trees. As long as leaves

cast shadows. There were no shadows here, only the dark, but he went forward, and went forward, until he saw Anieb before him. He saw the flash of her eyes, the cloud of her curling hair. She looked back at him for a moment, and then turned aside and ran lightly down a long, steep slope into darkness.

Where he stood it was not wholly dark. The air moved against his face. Far ahead, dim, small, there was a light that was not werelight. He went forward. He had been crawling for a long time now, dragging the right leg, which would not bear his weight. He went forward. He smelled the wind of evening and saw the sky of evening through the branches and leaves of trees. An arched oak root formed the mouth of the cave, no bigger than a man or a badger needed to crawl through. He crawled through. He lay there under the root of the tree, seeing the light fade and a star or two come out among the leaves.

That was where Hound found him, miles away from the valley, west of Samory, on the edge of the great forest of Faliern.

"Got you," the old man said, looking down at the muddy, lax body. He added, "Too late," regretfully. He stooped to see if he could pick him up or drag him, and felt the faint warmth of life.

"You're tough," he said. "Here, wake up. Come on. Otter, wake up."

He recognised Hound, though he could not sit up and could barely speak. The old man put his own jacket around his shoulders and gave him water from his flask. Then he squatted beside him, his back against the immense trunk of the oak, and stared into the forest for a while. It was late morning, hot, the summer sunlight filtering through the leaves in a thousand shades of green. A squirrel scolded, far up in the oak, and a jay replied. Hound scratched his neck and sighed.

"The wizard's off on the wrong track, as usual," he said at last. "Said you'd gone to Roke Island and he'd catch you there. I said nothing."

He looked at the man he knew only as Otter.

"You went in there, that hole, with the old wizard, didn't you? Did you find him?"

Medra nodded.

"Hmn," Hound went, a short, grunting laugh. "You find what you look for, don't you? Like me." He saw that his companion was in distress, and said, "I'll get you out of here. Fetch a carter from the village down there, when I've got my breath. Listen. Don't fret. I haven't hunted you all these years to give you to Early. The way I gave you to Gelluk. I was sorry for that. I thought about it. What I said to you about men of a craft sticking together. And who we work for. Couldn't see

that I had much choice about that. But having done you a disfavor, I thought if I came across you again I'd do you a favor, if I could. As one finder to the other, see?"

Otter's breath was coming hard. Hound put his hand on Otter's hand for a moment, said, "Don't worry," and got to his feet. "Rest easy," he said.

He found a carter who would carry them down to Endlane. Otter's mother and sister were living with cousins while they rebuilt their burned house as best they could. They welcomed him with disbelieving joy. Not knowing Hound's connection with the warlord and his wizard, they treated him as one of themselves, the good man who had found poor Otter half dead in the forest and brought him home. A wise man, said Otter's mother Rose, surely a wise man. Nothing was too good for such a man.

Otter was slow to recover, to heal. The bonesetter did what he could about his broken arm and his damaged hip, the wise woman salved the cuts from the rocks on his hands and head and knees, his mother brought him all the delicacies she could find in the gardens and berry thickets; but he lay as weak and wasted as when Hound first brought him. There was no heart in him, the wise woman of Endlane said. It was somewhere else, being eaten up with worry or fear or shame.

"So where is it?" Hound said.

Otter, after a long silence, said, "Roke Island."

"Where old Early went with the great fleet. I see. Friends there. Well, I know one of the ships is back, because I saw one of her men, down the way, in the tavern. I'll go ask about. Find out if they got to Roke and what happened there. What I can tell you is that it seems old Early is late coming home. Hmn, hmn," he went, pleased with his joke. "Late coming home," he repeated, and got up. He looked at Otter, who was not much to look at. "Rest easy," he said, and went off.

He was gone several days. When he returned, riding in a horse-drawn cart, he had such a look about him that Otter's sister hurried in to tell him, "Hound's won a battle or a fortune! He's riding behind a city horse, in a city cart, like a prince!"

Hound came in on her heels. "Well," he said, "in the first place, when I got to the city, I go up to the palace, just to hear the news, and what do I see? I see old King Pirate standing on his legs, shouting out orders like he used to do. Standing up! Hasn't stood for years. Shouting orders! And some of 'em did what he said, and some of 'em didn't. So I got on out of there, that kind of a situation being dangerous, in a palace. Then I went about to friends of mine and asked where was old Early and had the fleet been to Roke and come back and all. Early, they said,

nobody knew about Early. Not a sign of him nor from him. Maybe I could find him, they said, joking me, hmn. They know I love him. As for the ships, some had come back, with the men aboard saying they never came to Roke Island, never saw it, sailed right through where the sea charts said was an island, and there was no island. Then there were some men from one of the great galleys. They said when they got close to where the island should be, they came into a fog as thick as wet cloth, and the sea turned thick too, so that the oarsmen could barely push the oars through it, and they were caught in that for a day and a night. When they got out, there wasn't another ship of all the fleet on the sea, and the slaves were near rebelling, so the master brought her home as quick as he could. Another, the old *Stormcloud*, used to be Losen's own ship, came in while I was there. I talked to some men off her. They said there was nothing but fog and reefs all round where Roke was supposed to be, so they sailed on with seven other ships, south a ways, and met up with a fleet sailing up from Wathort. Maybe the lords there had heard there was a great fleet coming raiding, because they didn't stop to ask questions, but sent wizard's fire at our ships, and came alongside to board them if they could, and the men I talked to said it was a hard fight just to get away from them, and not all did. All this time they had no word from Early, and no weather was worked for them unless they had a bagman of their own aboard. So they came back up the length of the Inmost Sea, said the man from *Stormcloud*, one straggling after the other like the dogs that lost the dogfight. Now, do you like the news I bring you?"

Otter had been struggling with tears; he hid his face. "Yes," he said, "thanks."

"Thought you might. As for King Losen," Hound said, "who knows." He sniffed and sighed. "If I was him I'd retire," he said. "I think I'll do that myself."

Otter had got control of his face and voice. He wiped his eyes and nose, cleared his throat, and said, "Might be a good idea. Come to Roke. Safer."

"Seems to be a hard place to find," Hound said.

"I can find it," said Otter.

IV. Medra

There was an old man by our door
Who opened it to rich or poor;
Many came there both small and great,
But few could pass through Medra's Gate.
So runs the water away, away,
So runs the water away.

Hound stayed in Endlane. He could make a living as a finder there, and he liked the tavern, and Otter's mother's hospitality.

By the beginning of autumn, Losen was hanging by a rope round his feet from a window of the New Palace, rotting, while six warlords quarreled over his kingdom, and the ships of the great fleet chased and fought one another across the Straits and the wizard-troubled sea.

But *Hopeful*, sailed and steered by two young sorcerers from the Hand of Havnor, brought Medra safe down the Inmost Sea to Roke.

Ember was on the dock to meet him. Lame and very thin, he came to her and took her hands, but he could not lift his face to hers. He said, "I have too many deaths on my heart, Elehal."

"Come with me to the Grove," she said.

They went there together and stayed till the winter came. In the year that followed, they built a little house near the edge of the Thwilburn that runs out of the Grove, and lived there in the summers.

They worked and taught in the Great House. They saw it go up stone on stone, every stone steeped in spells of protection, endurance, peace. They saw the Rule of Roke established, though never so firmly as they might wish, and always against opposition; for mages came from other islands and rose up from among the students of the school, women and men of power, knowledge, and pride, sworn by the Rule to work together and for the good of all, but each seeing a different way to do it.

Growing old, Elehal wearied of the passions and questions of the school and was

drawn more and more to the trees, where she went alone, as far as the mind can go. Medra walked there too, but not so far as she, for he was lame.

After she died, he lived a while alone in the small house near the Grove.

One day in autumn he came back to the school. He went in by the garden door, which gives on the path through the fields to Roke Knoll. It is a curious thing about the Great House of Roke, that it has no portal or grand entryway at all. You can enter by what they call the back door, which, though it is made of horn and framed in dragon's tooth and carved with the Thousand-Leaved Tree, looks like nothing at all from outside, as you come to it in a dingy street; or you can go in the garden door, plain oak with an iron bolt. But there is no front door.

He came through the halls and stone corridors to the inmost place, the marble-paved courtyard of the fountain, where the tree Elehal had planted now stood tall, its berries reddening.

Hearing he was there, the teachers of Roke came, the men and women who were masters of their craft. Medra had been the Master Finder, until he went to the Grove. A young woman now taught that art, as he had taught it to her.

"I've been thinking," he said. "There are eight of you. Nine's a better number. Count me as a master again, if you will."

"What will you do, Master Tern?" asked the Summoner, a grey-haired mage from Ilien.

"I'll keep the door," Medra said. "Being lame, I won't go far from it. Being old, I'll know what to say to those who come. Being a finder, I'll find out if they belong here."

"That would spare us much trouble and some danger," said the young Finder.

"How will you do it?" the Summoner asked.

"I'll ask them their name," Medra said. He smiled. "If they'll tell me, they can come in. And when they think they've learned everything, they can go out again. If they can tell me my name."

So it was. For the rest of his life, Medra kept the doors of the Great House on Roke. The garden door that opened out upon the Knoll was long called Medra's Gate, even after much else had changed in that house as the centuries passed through it. And still the ninth Master of Roke is the Doorkeeper.

In Endlane and the villages round the foot of Onn on Havnor, women spinning and weaving sing a riddle song of which the last line has to do, maybe, with the man who was Medra, and Otter, and Tern.

Three things were that will not be:
Soléa’s bright isle above the wave,
A dragon swimming in the sea,
A seabird flying in the grave.

Darkrose and Diamond

A Boat Song from West Havnor

Where my love is going
There will I go.
Where his boat is rowing
I will row.

We will laugh together,
Together we will cry.
If he lives I will live,
If he dies I die.

Where my love is going
There will I go.
Where his boat is rowing
I will row.

In the west of Havnor, among hills forested with oak and chestnut, is the town of Glade. A while ago, the rich man of that town was a merchant called Golden. Golden owned the mill that cut the oak boards for the ships they built in Havnor South Port and Havnor Great Port; he owned the biggest chestnut groves; he owned the carts and hired the carters that carried the timber and the chestnuts over the hills to be sold. He did very well from trees, and when his son was born, the mother said, "We could call him Chestnut, or Oak, maybe?" But the father said, "Diamond," diamond being in his estimation the one thing more precious than gold.

So little Diamond grew up in the finest house in Glade, a fat, bright-eyed baby, a ruddy, cheerful boy. He had a sweet singing voice, a true ear, and a love of music,

so that his mother, Tuly, called him Songsparrow and Skylark, among other loving names, for she never really did like "Diamond." He trilled and caroled about the house; he knew any tune as soon as he heard it, and invented tunes when he heard none. His mother had the wise woman Tangle teach him *The Creation of Éa* and *The Deed of the Young King*, and at Sunreturn when he was eleven years old he sang *The Winter Carol* for the Lord of the Western Land, who was visiting his domain in the hills above Glade. The Lord and his Lady praised the boy's singing and gave him a tiny gold box with a diamond set in the lid, which seemed a kind and pretty gift to Diamond and his mother. But Golden was a bit impatient with the singing and the trinkets. "There are more important things for you to do, son," he said. "And greater prizes to be earned."

Diamond thought his father meant the business—the loggers, the sawyers, the sawmill, the chestnut groves, the pickers, the carters, the carts—all that work and talk and planning, those complicated, adult matters. He never felt that it had much to do with him, so how was he to have as much to do with it as his father expected? Maybe he'd find out when he grew up.

But in fact Golden wasn't thinking only about the business. He had observed something about his son that made him not exactly set his eyes higher than the business, but glance above it from time to time, and then shut his eyes.

At first he thought Diamond had a knack such as many children had and then lost, a stray spark of magery. When he was a little boy, Golden himself had been able to make his own shadow shine and sparkle. His family had praised him for the trick and made him show it off to visitors; and then when he was seven or eight he lost the hang of it and never could do it again.

When he saw Diamond come down the stairs without touching the stairs, he thought his eyes had deceived him; but a few days later, he saw the child float up the stairs, just a finger gliding along the oaken banister. "Can you do that coming down?" Golden asked, and Diamond said, "Oh, yes, like this," and sailed back down smooth as a cloud on the south wind.

"How did you learn to do that?"

"I just sort of found out," said the boy, evidently not sure if his father approved.

Golden did not praise the boy, not wanting to make him self-conscious or vain about what might be a passing, childish gift, like his sweet treble voice. There was too much fuss already made over that.

But a year or so later he saw Diamond out in the back garden with his playmate Rose. The children were squatting on their haunches, heads close together,

laughing. Something intense or uncanny about them made him pause at the window on the stairs landing and watch them. A thing between them was leaping up and down, a frog? a toad? a big cricket? He went out into the garden and came up near them, moving so quietly, though he was a big man, that they in their absorption did not hear him. The thing that was hopping up and down on the grass between their bare toes was a rock. When Diamond raised his hand the rock jumped up in the air, and when he shook his hand a little the rock hovered in the air, and when he flipped his fingers downward it fell to earth.

"Now you," Diamond said to Rose, and she started to do what he had done, but the rock only twitched a little. "Oh," she whispered, "there's your dad."

"That's very clever," Golden said.

"Di thought it up," Rose said.

Golden did not like the child. She was both outspoken and defensive, both rash and timid. She was a girl, and a year younger than Diamond, and a witch's daughter. He wished his son would play with boys his own age, his own sort, from the respectable families of Glade. Tuly insisted on calling the witch "the wise woman," but a witch was a witch and her daughter was no fit companion for Diamond. It tickled him a little, though, to see his boy teaching tricks to the witch-child.

"What else can you do, Diamond?" he asked.

"Play the flute," Diamond said promptly, and took out of his pocket the little fife his mother had given him for his twelfth birthday. He put it to his lips, his fingers danced, and he played a sweet, familiar tune from the western coast, "Where My Love Is Going."

"Very nice," said the father. "But anybody can play the fife, you know."

Diamond glanced at Rose. The girl turned her head away, looking down.

"I learned it really quickly," Diamond said.

Golden grunted, unimpressed.

"It can do it by itself," Diamond said, and held out the fife away from his lips. His fingers danced on the stops, and the fife played a short jig. It hit several false notes and squealed on the last high note. "I haven't got it right yet," Diamond said, vexed and embarrassed.

"Pretty good, pretty good," his father said. "Keep practicing." And he went on. He was not sure what he ought to have said. He did not want to encourage the boy to spend any more time on music, or with this girl; he spent too much already, and neither of them would help him get anywhere in life. But this gift, this undeniable

gift—the rock hovering, the unblown fife—Well, it would be wrong to make too much of it, but probably it should not be discouraged.

In Golden's understanding, money was power, but not the only power. There were two others, one equal, one greater. There was birth. When the Lord of the Western Land came to his domain near Glade, Golden was glad to show him fealty. The Lord was born to govern and to keep the peace, as Golden was born to deal with commerce and wealth, each in his place; and each, noble or common, if he served well and honestly, deserved honor and respect. But there were also lesser lords whom Golden could buy and sell, lend to or let beg, men born noble who deserved neither fealty nor honor. Power of birth and power of money were contingent, and must be earned lest they be lost.

But beyond the rich and the lordly were those called the men of power: the wizards. Their power, though little exercised, was absolute. In their hands lay the fate of the long-kingless kingdom of the Archipelago.

If Diamond had been born to that kind of power, if that was his gift, then all Golden's dreams and plans of training him in the business, and having him help in expanding the carting route to a regular trade with South Port, and buying up the chestnut forests above Reche—all such plans dwindled into trifles. Might Diamond go (as his mother's uncle had gone) to the School of Wizards on Roke Island? Might he (as that uncle had done) gain glory for his family and dominion over lord and commoner, becoming a mage in the Court of the Lords Regent in the Great Port of Havnor? Golden all but floated up the stairs himself, borne on such visions.

But he said nothing to the boy and nothing to the boy's mother. He was a consciously close-mouthed man, distrustful of visions until they could be made acts; and she, though a dutiful, loving wife and mother and housekeeper, already made too much of Diamond's talents and accomplishments. Also, like all women, she was inclined to babble and gossip, and indiscriminate in her friendships. The girl Rose hung about with Diamond because Tuly encouraged Rose's mother, the witch Tangle, to visit, consulting her every time Diamond had a hangnail, and telling her more than she or anyone ought to know about Golden's household. His business was none of the witch's business. On the other hand, Tangle might be able to tell him if his son in fact showed promise, had a talent for magery . . . but he flinched away from the thought of asking her, asking a witch's opinion on anything, least of all a judgment on his son.

He resolved to wait and watch. Being a patient man with a strong will, he did so for four years, till Diamond was sixteen. A big, well-grown youth, good at games

and lessons, he was still ruddy-faced and bright-eyed and cheerful. He had taken it hard when his voice changed, the sweet treble going all untuned and hoarse. Golden had hoped that that was the end of his singing, but the boy went on wandering about with itinerant musicians, ballad singers and such, learning all their trash. That was no life for a merchant's son who was to inherit and manage his father's properties and mills and business, and Golden told him so. "Singing time is over, son," he said. "You must think about being a man."

Diamond had been given his true name at the springs of the Amia in the hills above Glade. The wizard Hemlock, who had known his great-uncle the mage, came up from South Port to name him. And Hemlock was invited to his nameday party the year after, a big party, beer and food for all, and new clothes, a shirt or skirt or shift for every child, which was an old custom in the West of Havnor, and dancing on the village green in the warm autumn evening. Diamond had many friends, all the boys his age in town and all the girls too. The young people danced, and some of them had a bit too much beer, but nobody misbehaved very badly, and it was a merry and memorable night. The next morning Golden told his son again that he must think about being a man.

"I have thought some about it," said the boy, in his husky voice.

"And?"

"Well, I—" said Diamond, and stuck.

"I'd always counted on your going into the family business," Golden said. His tone was neutral, and Diamond said nothing. "Have you had any ideas of what you want to do?"

"Sometimes."

"Did you talk at all to Master Hemlock?"

Diamond hesitated and said, "No." He looked a question at his father.

"I talked to him last night," Golden said. "He said to me that there are certain natural gifts which it's not only difficult but actually wrong, harmful, to suppress."

The light had come back into Diamond's dark eyes.

"The master said that such gifts or capacities, untrained, are not only wasted, but may be dangerous. The art must be learned, and practiced, he said."

Diamond's face shone.

"But, he said, it must be learned and practiced for its own sake."

Diamond nodded eagerly.

"If it's a real gift, an unusual capacity, that's even more true. A witch with her love potions can't do much harm, but even a village sorcerer, he said, must take

care, for if the art is used for base ends, it becomes weak and noxious . . . Of course, even a sorcerer gets paid. And wizards, as you know, live with lords, and have what they wish."

Diamond was listening intently, frowning a little.

"So, to be blunt about it, if you have this gift, Diamond, it's of no use, directly, to our business. It has to be cultivated on its own terms, and kept under control—learned and mastered. Only then, he said, can your teachers begin to tell you what to do with it, what good it will do you. Or others," he added conscientiously.

There was a long pause.

"I told him," Golden said, "that I had seen you, with a turn of your hand and a single word, change a wooden carving of a bird into a bird that flew up and sang. I've seen you make a light glow in thin air. You didn't know I was watching. I've watched and said nothing for a long time. I didn't want to make too much of mere childish play. But I believe you have a gift, perhaps a great gift. When I told Master Hemlock what I'd seen you do, he agreed with me. He said that you may go study with him in South Port for a year, or perhaps longer."

"Study with Master Hemlock?" said Diamond, his voice up half an octave.

"If you wish."

"I, I, I never thought about it. Can I think about it? For a while—a day?"

"Of course," Golden said, pleased with his son's caution. He had thought Diamond might leap at the offer, which would have been natural, perhaps, but painful to the father, the owl who had—perhaps—hatched out an eagle.

For Golden looked on the art magic with genuine humility as something quite beyond him—not a mere toy, such as music or tale telling, but a practical business of immense potential, which his business could never quite equal. And he was also, though he wouldn't have put it that way, afraid of wizards. A bit contemptuous of sorcerers, with their sleights and illusions and gibble-gabble, but afraid of wizards.

"Does Mother know?" Diamond asked.

"She will when the time comes. She has no part to play in your decision, Diamond. Women know nothing of these matters and have nothing to do with them. You must make your choice alone, as a man. Do you understand that?" Golden was earnest, seeing his chance to begin to wean the lad from his mother. She as a woman would cling, but he as a man must learn to let go. And Diamond nodded sturdily enough to satisfy his father, though he had a thoughtful look.

"Master Hemlock said I, said he thought I had, I might have a, a gift, a talent for—?"

Golden reassured him that the wizard had actually said so, though of course what kind of gift remained to be seen. The boy's modesty was a great relief to him. He had half-consciously dreaded that Diamond would triumph over him, asserting his power right away—that mysterious, dangerous, incalculable power against which Golden's wealth and mastery and dignity shrank to impotence.

"Thank you, Father," the boy said. Golden embraced him and left, well pleased with him.

Their meeting place was in the sallows, the willow thickets down by the Amia as it ran below the smithy. As soon as Rose got there, Diamond said, "He wants me to go study with Master Hemlock! What am I going to do?"

"Study with the wizard?"

"He thinks I have this huge great talent. For magic."

"Who does?"

"Father does. He saw some of the stuff we were practicing. But he says Hemlock says I should come study with him because it might be dangerous not to. Oh," and Diamond beat his head with his hands.

"But you do have a talent."

He groaned and scoured his scalp with his knuckles. He was sitting on the dirt in their old play place, a kind of bower deep in the willows, where they could hear the stream running over the stones nearby and the clang-clang of the smithy further off. The girl sat down facing him.

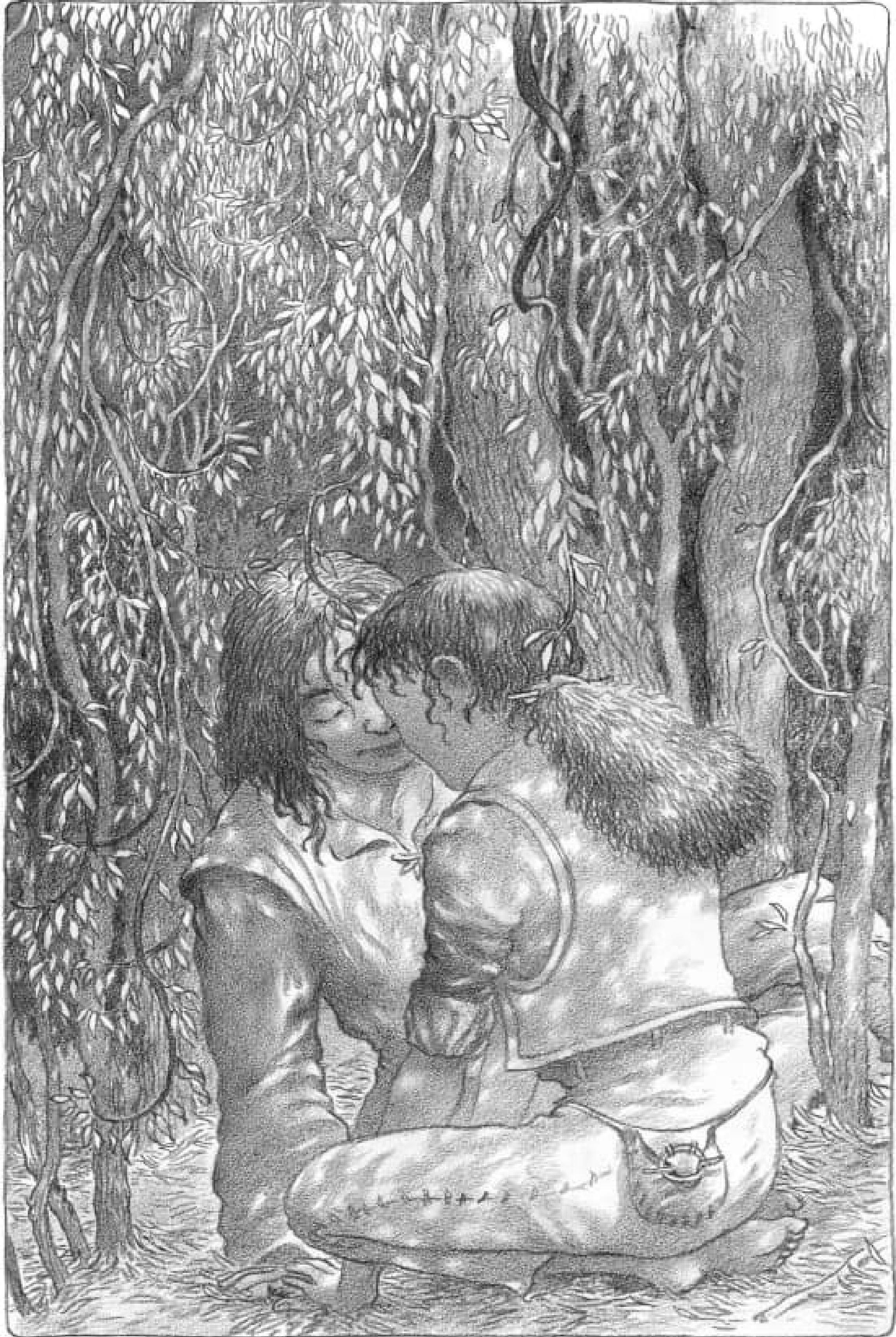
"Look at all the stuff you can do," she said. "You couldn't do any of it if you didn't have a gift."

"A little gift," Diamond said indistinctly. "Enough for tricks."

"How do you know that?"

Rose was very dark-skinned, with a cloud of crinkled hair, a thin mouth, an intent, serious face. Her feet and legs and hands were bare and dirty, her skirt and jacket disreputable. Her dirty toes and fingers were delicate and elegant, and a necklace of amethysts gleamed under the torn, buttonless jacket. Her mother, Tangle, made a good living by curing and healing, bone knitting and birth easing, and selling spells of finding, love potions, and sleeping drafts. She could afford to dress herself and her daughter in new clothes, buy shoes, and keep clean, but it didn't occur to her to do so. Nor was housekeeping one of her interests. She and Rose lived mostly on boiled chicken and fried eggs, as she was often paid in poultry. The yard of their two-room house was a wilderness of cats and hens. She

liked cats, toads, and jewels. The amethyst necklace had been payment for the safe delivery of a son to Golden's head forester. Tangle herself wore armfuls of bracelets and bangles that flashed and crashed when she flicked out an impatient spell. At times she wore a kitten on her shoulder. She was not an attentive mother. Rose had demanded, at seven years old, "Why did you have me if you didn't want me?"



"How can you deliver babies properly if you haven't had one?" said her mother.

"So I was practice," Rose snarled.

"Everything is practice," Tangle said. She was never ill-natured. She seldom thought to do anything much for her daughter, but never hurt her, never scolded her, and gave her whatever she asked for, dinner, a toad of her own, the amethyst necklace, lessons in witchcraft. She would have provided new clothes if Rose had asked for them, but she never did. Rose had looked after herself from an early age; and this was one of the reasons Diamond loved her. With her, he knew what freedom was. Without her, he could attain it only when he was hearing and singing and playing music.

"I do have a gift," he said now, rubbing his temples and pulling his hair.

"Stop destroying your head," Rose told him.

"I know Tarry thinks I do."

"Of course you do! What does it matter what Tarry thinks? You already play the harp about nine times better than he ever did."

This was another of the reasons Diamond loved her.

"Are there any wizard musicians?" he asked, looking up.

She pondered. "I don't know."

"I don't either. Morred and Elfarran sang to each other, and he was a mage. I think there's a Master Chanter on Roke, that teaches the lays and the histories. But I never heard of a wizard being a musician."

"I don't see why one couldn't be." She never saw why something could not be. Another reason he loved her.

"It always seemed to me they're sort of alike," he said, "magic and music. Spells and tunes. For one thing, you have to get them just exactly right."

"Practice," Rose said, rather sourly. "I know." She flicked a pebble at Diamond. It turned into a butterfly in midair. He flicked a butterfly back at her, and the two flitted and flickered a moment before they fell back to earth as pebbles. Diamond and Rose had worked out several such variations on the old stone-hopping trick.

"You ought to go, Di," she said. "Just to find out."

"I know."

"What if you got to be a wizard! Oh! Think of the stuff you could teach me! Shape-changing—We could be anything. Horses! Bears!"

"Moles," Diamond said. "Honestly, I feel like hiding underground. I always thought Father was going to make me learn his kind of stuff, after I got my name. But all this year he's kept sort of holding off. I guess he had this in mind all along.

But what if I go down there and I'm not any better at being a wizard than I am at bookkeeping? Why can't I do what I know I *can* do?"

"Well, why can't you do it all? The magic and the music, anyhow? You can always hire a bookkeeper."

When she laughed, her thin face got bright, her thin mouth got wide, and her eyes disappeared.

"Oh, Darkrose," Diamond said, "I love you."

"Of course you do. You'd better. I'll witch you if you don't."

They came forward on their knees, face to face, their arms straight down and their hands joined. They kissed each other all over their faces. To Rose's lips, Diamond's face was smooth and full as a plum, with just a hint of prickliness above the lip and jawline, where he had taken to shaving recently. To Diamond's lips Rose's face was soft as silk, with just a hint of grittiness on one cheek, which she had rubbed with a dirty hand. They moved a little closer so that their breasts and bellies touched, though their hands stayed down by their sides. They went on kissing.

"Darkrose," he breathed in her ear, his secret name for her.

She said nothing, but breathed very warm in his ear, and he moaned. His hands clenched hers. He drew back a little. She drew back.

They sat back on their ankles.

"Oh Di," she said, "it will be awful when you go."

"I won't go," he said. "Anywhere. Ever."

But of course he went down to Havnor South Port, in one of his father's carts driven by one of his father's carters, along with Master Hemlock. As a rule, people do what wizards advise them to do. And it is no small honor to be invited by a wizard to be his student or apprentice. Hemlock, who had won his staff on Roke, was used to having boys come to him begging to be tested and, if they had the gift for it, taught. He was a little curious about this boy whose cheerful good manners hid some reluctance or self-doubt. It was the father's idea, not the boy's, that he was gifted. That was unusual, though perhaps not so unusual among the wealthy as among common folk. At any rate he came with a very good prenticing fee paid beforehand in gold and ivory. If he had the makings of a wizard Hemlock would train him, and if he had, as Hemlock suspected, a mere childish flair, then he'd be sent home with what remained of his fee. Hemlock was an honest, upright, humorless, scholarly wizard with little interest in feelings or ideas. His gift was for

names. “The art begins and ends in naming,” he said, which indeed is true, although there may be a good deal between the beginning and the end.

So Diamond, instead of learning spells and illusions and transformations and all such gaudy tricks, as Hemlock called them, sat in a narrow room at the back of the wizard’s narrow house on a narrow back street of the old city, memorising long, long lists of words, words of power in the Language of the Making. Plants and parts of plants and animals and parts of animals and islands and parts of islands, parts of ships, parts of the human body. The words never made sense, never made sentences, only lists. Long, long lists.

His mind wandered. “Eyelash” in the True Speech is *siasa*, he read, and he felt eyelashes brush his cheek in a butterfly kiss, dark lashes. He looked up startled and did not know what had touched him. Later when he tried to repeat the word, he stood dumb.

“Memory, memory,” Hemlock said. “Talent’s no good without memory!” He was not harsh, but he was unyielding. Diamond had no idea what opinion Hemlock had of him, and guessed it to be pretty low. The wizard sometimes had him come with him to his work, mostly laying spells of safety on ships and houses, purifying wells, and sitting on the councils of the city, seldom speaking but always listening. Another wizard, not Roke-trained but with the healer’s gift, looked after the sick and dying of South Port. Hemlock was glad to let him do so. His own pleasure was in studying and, as far as Diamond could see, doing no magic at all. “Keep the Equilibrium, it’s all in that,” Hemlock said, and, “Knowledge, order, and control.” Those words he said so often that they made a tune in Diamond’s head and sang themselves over and over: knowledge, or-der, and contro—l . . .

When Diamond put the lists of names to tunes he made up, he learned them much faster; but then the tune would come as part of the name, and he would sing out so clearly—for his voice had re-established itself as a strong, dark tenor—that Hemlock winced. Hemlock’s was a very silent house.

Mostly the pupil was supposed to be with the master, or studying the lists of names in the room where the lore-books and wordbooks were, or asleep. Hemlock was a stickler for early abed and early afoot. But now and then Diamond had an hour or two free. He always went down to the docks and sat on a pier side or a water stair and thought about Darkrose. As soon as he was out of the house and away from Master Hemlock, he began to think about Darkrose, and went on thinking about her and very little else. It surprised him a little. He thought he ought to be homesick, to think about his mother. He did think about his mother quite

often, and often was homesick, lying on his cot in his bare and narrow little room after a scanty supper of cold pea porridge—for this wizard, at least, did not live in such luxury as Golden had imagined. Diamond never thought about Darkrose, nights. He thought of his mother, or of sunny rooms and hot food, or a tune would come into his head and he would practice it mentally on the harp in his mind, and so drift off to sleep. Darkrose would come to his mind only when he was down at the docks, staring out at the water of the harbor, the piers, the fishing boats, only when he was outdoors and away from Hemlock and his house.

So he cherished his free hours as if they were actual meetings with her. He had always loved her, but had not understood that he loved her beyond anyone and anything. When he was with her, even when he was down on the docks thinking of her, he was alive. He never felt entirely alive in Master Hemlock's house and presence. He felt a little dead. Not dead, but a little dead.

A few times, sitting on the water stairs, the dirty harbor water sloshing at the next step down, the yells of gulls and dock workers wreathing the air with a thin, ungainly music, he shut his eyes and saw his love so clear, so close, that he reached out his hand to touch her. If he reached out his hand in his mind only, as when he played the mental harp, then indeed he touched her. He felt her hand in his, and her cheek, warm-cool, silken-gritty, lay against his mouth. In his mind he spoke to her, and in his mind she answered, her voice, her husky voice saying his name, "Diamond . . ."

But as he went back up the streets of South Port he lost her. He swore to keep her with him, to think of her, to think of her that night, but she faded away. By the time he opened the door of Master Hemlock's house he was reciting lists of names, or wondering what would be for dinner, for he was hungry most of the time. Not till he could take an hour and run back down to the docks could he think of her.

So he came to feel that those hours were true meetings with her, and he lived for them, without knowing what he lived for until his feet were on the cobbles, and his eyes on the harbor and the far line of the sea. Then he remembered what was worth remembering.

The winter passed by, and the cold early spring, and with the warm late spring came a letter from his mother, brought by a carter. Diamond read it and took it to Master Hemlock, saying, "My mother wonders if I might spend a month at home this summer."

"Probably not," the wizard said, and then, appearing to notice Diamond, put down his pen and said, "Young man, I must ask you if you wish to continue

studying with me."

Diamond had no idea what to say. The idea of its being up to him had not occurred to him. "Do you think I ought to?" he asked at last.

"Probably not," the wizard said.

Diamond expected to feel relieved, released, but found he felt rejected, ashamed.

"I'm sorry," he said, with enough dignity that Hemlock glanced up at him.

"You could go to Roke," the wizard said.

"To Roke?"

The boy's drop-jawed stare irritated Hemlock, though he knew it shouldn't. Wizards are used to overweening confidence in the young of their kind. They expect modesty to come later, if at all. "I said Roke." Hemlock's tone said he was unused to having to repeat himself. And then, because this boy, this soft-headed, spoiled, moony boy had endeared himself to Hemlock by his uncomplaining patience, he took pity on him and said, "You should either go to Roke or find a wizard to teach you what you need. Of course you need what I can teach you. You need the names. The art begins and ends in naming. But that's not your gift. You have a poor memory for words. You must train it diligently. However, it's clear that you do have capacities, and that they need cultivation and discipline, which another man can give you better than I can." So does modesty breed modesty, sometimes, even in unlikely places. "If you were to go to Roke, I'd send a letter with you drawing you to the particular attention of the Master Summoner."

"Ah," said Diamond, floored. The Summoner's art is perhaps the most arcane and dangerous of all the arts of magic.

"Perhaps I am wrong," said Hemlock in his dry, flat voice. "Your gift may be for Pattern. Or perhaps it's an ordinary gift for shaping and transformation. I'm not certain."

"But you are—I do actually—"

"Oh yes. You are uncommonly slow, young man, to recognise your own capacities." It was spoken harshly, and Diamond stiffened up a bit.

"I thought my gift was for music," he said.

Hemlock dismissed that with a flick of his hand. "I am talking of the True Art," he said. "Now I will be frank with you. I advise you to write your parents—I shall write them too—informing them of your decision to go to the school on Roke, if that is what you decide; or to the Great Port, if the Mage Restive will take you on, as I think he will, with my recommendation. But I advise against visiting home. The entanglement of family, friends, and so on is precisely what you need to be free

of. Now, and henceforth."

"Do wizards have no family?"

Hemlock was glad to see a bit of fire in the boy. "They are one another's family," he said.

"And no friends?"

"They may be friends. Did I say it was an easy life?" A pause. Hemlock looked directly at Diamond. "There was a girl," he said.

Diamond met his gaze for a moment, looked down, and said nothing.

"Your father told me. A witch's daughter, a childhood playmate. He believed that you had taught her spells."

"She taught me."

Hemlock nodded. "That is quite understandable, among children. And quite impossible now. Do you understand that?"

"No," Diamond said.

"Sit down," said Hemlock. After a moment Diamond took the stiff, high-backed chair facing him.

"I can protect you here, and have done so. On Roke, of course, you'll be perfectly safe. The very walls, there . . . But if you go home, you must be willing to protect yourself. It's a difficult thing for a young man, very difficult—a test of a will that has not yet been steeled, a mind that has not yet seen its true goal. I very strongly advise that you not take that risk. Write your parents, and go to the Great Port, or to Roke. Half your year's fee, which I'll return to you, will see to your first expenses."

Diamond sat upright and still. He had been getting some of his father's height and girth lately, and looked very much a man, though a very young one.

"What did you mean, Master Hemlock, in saying that you had protected me here?"

"Simply as I protect myself," the wizard said; and after a moment, testily, "The bargain, boy. The power we give for our power. The lesser state of being we forgo. Surely you know that every true man of power is celibate."

There was a pause, and Diamond said, "So you saw to it . . . that I . . ."

"Of course. It was my responsibility as your teacher."

Diamond nodded. He said, "Thank you." Presently he stood up. "Excuse me, Master," he said. "I have to think."

"Where are you going?"

"Down to the waterfront."

"Better stay here."

"I can't think, here."

Hemlock might have known then what he was up against; but having told the boy he would not be his master any longer, he could not in conscience command him. "You have a true gift, Essiri," he said, using the name he had given the boy in the springs of the Amia, a word that in the Old Speech means Willow. "I don't entirely understand it. I think you don't understand it at all. Take care! To misuse a gift, or to refuse to use it, may cause great loss, great harm."

Diamond nodded, suffering, contrite, unrebellious, unmovable.

"Go on," the wizard said, and Diamond went.

Later Hemlock knew he should never have let the boy leave the house. He had underestimated Diamond's willpower, or the strength of the spell the girl had laid on him. Their conversation was in the morning; Hemlock went back to the ancient cantrip he was annotating; it was not till supper time that he thought about his pupil, and not until he had eaten supper alone that he admitted that Diamond had run away.

Hemlock was loath to practice any of the lesser arts of magic. He did not put out a finding-spell, as any sorcerer might have done. Nor did he call to Diamond in any way. He was angry; perhaps he was hurt. He had thought well of the boy, and offered to write the Summoner about him, and then at the first test of character Diamond had broken. "Glass," the wizard muttered. At least this weakness proved he was not dangerous. Some talents were best not left to run wild, but there was no harm in this fellow, no malice. No ambition. "No spine," said Hemlock to the silence of the house. "Let him crawl home to his mother."

Still it rankled him that Diamond had let him down flat, without a word of thanks or apology. So much for good manners, he thought.

As she blew out the lamp and got into bed, the witch's daughter heard an owl calling, the little, liquid hu-hu-hu-hu that made people call them laughing owls. She heard it with a mournful heart. That had been their signal, summer nights, when they sneaked out to meet in the willow grove down on the banks of the Amia, when everybody else was sleeping. She would not think of him at night. Back in the winter she had sent to him night after night. She had learned her mother's spell of sending, and knew that it was a true spell. She had sent him her touch, her voice saying his name, again and again. She had met a wall of air and silence. She touched nothing. He had walled her out. He would not hear.

Several times, all of a sudden, in the daytime, there had been a moment when she had known him close in mind and could touch him if she reached out. But at night she knew only his blank absence, his refusal of her. She had stopped trying to reach him months ago, but her heart was still very sore.

"Hu-hu-hu," said the owl, under her window, and then it said, "Darkrose!" Startled from her misery, she leapt out of bed and opened the shutters.

"Come on out," whispered Diamond, a shadow in the starlight.

"Mother's not home. Come in!" She met him at the door.

They held each other tight, hard, silent for a long time. To Diamond it was as if he held his future, his own life, his whole life, in his arms.

At last she moved, and kissed his cheek, and whispered, "I missed you, I missed you, I missed you. How long can you stay?"

"As long as I like."

She kept his hand and led him in. He was always a little reluctant to enter the witch's house, a pungent, disorderly place thick with the mysteries of women and witchcraft, very different from his own clean comfortable home, even more different from the cold austerity of the wizard's house. He shivered like a horse as he stood there, too tall for the herb-festooned rafters. He was very highly strung, and worn out, having walked forty miles in sixteen hours without food.

"Where's your mother?" he asked in a whisper.

"Sitting with old Ferny. She died this afternoon, Mother will be there all night. But how did you get here?"

"Walked."

"The wizard let you visit home?"

"I ran away."

"Ran away! Why?"

"To keep you."

He looked at her, that vivid, fierce, dark face in its rough cloud of hair. She wore only her shift, and he saw the infinitely delicate, tender rise of her breasts. He drew her to him again, but though she hugged him she drew away again, frowning.

"Keep me?" she repeated. "You didn't seem to worry about losing me all winter. What made you come back now?"

"He wanted me to go to Roke."

"To Roke?" She stared. "To Roke, Di? Then you really do have the gift—you could be a sorcerer?"

To find her on Hemlock's side was a blow.

"Sorcerers are nothing to him. He means I could be a wizard. Do magery. Not just witchcraft."

"Oh I see," Rose said after a moment. "But I don't see why you ran away."

They had let go of each other's hands.

"Don't you understand?" he said, exasperated with her for not understanding, because he had not understood. "A wizard can't have anything to do with women. With witches. With all that."

"Oh, I know. It's beneath them."

"It's not just beneath them—"

"Oh, but it is. I'll bet you had to unlearn every spell I taught you. Didn't you?"

"It isn't the same kind of thing."

"No. It isn't the High Art. It isn't the True Speech. A wizard mustn't soil his lips with common words. 'Weak as women's magic, wicked as women's magic,' you think I don't know what they say? So, why did you come back here?"

"To see you!"

"What for?"

"What do you think?"

"You never sent to me, you never let me send to you, all the time you were gone. I was just supposed to wait until you got tired of playing wizard. Well, I got tired of waiting." Her voice was nearly inaudible, a rough whisper.

"Somebody's been coming around," he said, incredulous that she could turn against him. "Who's been after you?"

"None of your business if there is! You go off, you turn your back on me. Wizards can't have anything to do with what I do, what my mother does. Well, I don't want anything to do with what you do, either, ever. So go!"

Starving, frustrated, misunderstood, Diamond reached out to hold her again, to make her body understand his body, repeating that first, deep embrace that had held all the years of their lives in it. He found himself standing two feet back, his hands stinging and his ears ringing and his eyes dazzled. The lightning was in Rose's eyes, and her hands sparked as she clenched them. "Never do that again," she whispered.

"Never fear," Diamond said, turned on his heel, and strode out. A string of dried sage caught on his head and trailed after him.

He spent the night in their old place in the sallows. Maybe he hoped she would come, but she did not come, and he soon slept in sheer weariness. He woke in the

first, cold light. He sat up and thought. He looked at life in that cold light. It was a different matter from what he had believed it. He went down to the stream in which he had been named. He drank, washed his hands and face, made himself look as decent as he could, and went up through the town to the fine house at the high end, his father's house.

After the first outcries and embraces, the servants and his mother sat him right down to breakfast. So it was with warm food in his belly and a certain chill courage in his heart that he faced his father, who had been out before breakfast seeing off a string of timber carts to the Great Port.

"Well, son!" They touched cheeks. "So Master Hemlock gave you a vacation?"

"No, sir. I left."

Golden stared, then filled his plate and sat down. "Left," he said.

"Yes, sir. I decided that I don't want to be a wizard."

"Hmf," said Golden, chewing. "Left of your own accord? Entirely? With the Master's permission?"

"Of my own accord entirely, without his permission."

Golden chewed very slowly, his eyes on the table. Diamond had seen his father look like this when a forester reported an infestation in the chestnut groves, and when he found a mule dealer had cheated him.

"He wanted me to go to the College on Roke to study with the Master Summoner. He was going to send me there. I decided not to go."

After a while Golden asked, still looking at the table, "Why?"

"It isn't the life I want."

Another pause. Golden glanced over at his wife, who stood by the window listening in silence. Then he looked at his son. Slowly the mixture of anger, disappointment, confusion, and respect on his face gave way to something simpler, a look of complicity, very nearly a wink. "I see," he said. "And what did you decide you want?"

A pause. "This," Diamond said. His voice was level. He looked neither at his father nor his mother.

"Hah!" said Golden. "Well! I will say I'm glad of it, son." He ate a small pork pie in one mouthful. "Being a wizard, going to Roke, all that, it never seemed real, not exactly. And with you off there, I didn't know what all this was for, to tell you the truth. All my business. If you're here, it adds up, you see. It adds up. Well! But listen here, did you just run off from the wizard? Did he know you were going?"

"No. I'll write him," Diamond said, in his new, level voice.

“He won’t be angry? They say wizards have short tempers. Full of pride.”

“He’s angry,” Diamond said, “but he won’t do anything.”

So it proved. Indeed, to Golden’s amazement, Master Hemlock sent back a scrupulous two-fifths of the prenticing fee. With the packet, which was delivered by one of Golden’s carters who had taken a load of spars down to South Port, was a note for Diamond. It said, “True art requires a single heart.” The direction on the outside was the Hardic rune for willow. The note was signed with Hemlock’s rune, which had two meanings: the hemlock tree, and suffering.

Diamond sat in his own sunny room upstairs, on his comfortable bed, hearing his mother singing as she went about the house. He held the wizard’s letter and reread the message and the two runes many times. The cold and sluggish mind that had been born in him that morning down in the sallows accepted the lesson. No magic. Never again. He had never given his heart to it. It had been a game to him, a game to play with Darkrose. Even the names of the True Speech that he had learned in the wizard’s house, though he knew the beauty and the power that lay in them, he could let go, let slip, forget. That was not his language.

He could speak his language only with her. And he had lost her, let her go. The double heart has no true speech. From now on he could talk only the language of duty: getting and spending, outlay and income, the profit and the loss.

And beyond that, nothing. There had been illusions, little spells, pebbles that turned to butterflies, wooden birds that flew on living wings for a minute or two. There had never been a choice, really. There was only one way for him to go.

Golden was immensely happy and quite unconscious of it. “Old man’s got his jewel back,” said the carter to the forester. “Sweet as new butter, he is.” Golden, unaware of being sweet, thought only how sweet life was. He had bought the Reche grove, at a very stiff price to be sure, but at least old Lowbough of Easthill hadn’t got it, and now he and Diamond could develop it as it ought to be developed. In among the chestnuts there were a lot of pines, which could be felled and sold for masts and spars and small lumber, and replanted with chestnut seedlings. It would in time be a pure stand like the Big Grove, the heart of his chestnut kingdom. In time, of course. Oak and chestnut don’t shoot up overnight like alder and willow. But there was time. There was time, now. The boy was barely seventeen, and he himself just forty-five. In his prime. He had been feeling old, but that was nonsense. He was in his prime. The oldest trees, past bearing, ought to come out with the pines. Some good wood for furniture could be salvaged from them.

"Well, well, well," he said to his wife, frequently, "all rosy again, eh? Got the apple of your eye back home, eh? No more moping, eh?"

And Tuly smiled and stroked his hand.

Once instead of smiling and agreeing, she said, "It's lovely to have him back, but," and Golden stopped hearing. Mothers were born to worry about their children, and women were born never to be content. There was no reason why he should listen to the litany of anxieties by which Tuly hauled herself through life. Of course she thought a merchant's life wasn't good enough for the boy. She'd have thought being King in Havnor wasn't good enough for him.

"When he gets himself a girl," Golden said, in answer to whatever it was she had been saying, "he'll be all squared away. Living with the wizards, you know, the way they are, it set him back a bit. Don't worry about Diamond. He'll know what he wants when he sees it!"

"I hope so," said Tuly.

"At least he's not seeing the witch's girl," said Golden. "That's done with." Later on it occurred to him that neither was his wife seeing the witch any more. For years they'd been thick as thieves, against all his warnings, and now Tangle was never anywhere near the house. Women's friendships never lasted. He teased her about it. Finding her strewing pennyroyal and miller's-bane in the chests and clothes presses against an infestation of moths, he said, "Seems like you'd have your friend the wise woman up to hex 'em away. Or aren't you friends any more?"

"No," his wife said in her soft, level voice, "we aren't."

"And a good thing too!" Golden said roundly. "What's become of that daughter of hers, then? Went off with a juggler, I heard?"

"A musician," Tuly said. "Last summer."

"A nameday party," said Golden. "Time for a bit of play, a bit of music and dancing, boy. Nineteen years old. Celebrate it!"

"I'll be going to Easthill with Sul's mules."

"No, no, no. Sul can handle it. Stay home and have your party. You've been working hard. We'll hire a band. Who's the best in the country? Tarry and his lot?"

"Father, I don't want a party," Diamond said and stood up, shivering his muscles like a horse. He was bigger than Golden now, and when he moved abruptly it was startling. "I'll go to Easthill," he said, and left the room.

"What's that all about?" Golden said to his wife, a rhetorical question. She

looked at him and said nothing, a non-rhetorical answer.

After Golden had gone out, she found her son in the counting room going through ledgers. She looked at the pages. Long, long lists of names and numbers, debts and credits, profits and losses.

"Di," she said, and he looked up. His face was still round and a bit peachy, though the bones were heavier and the eyes were melancholy.

"I didn't mean to hurt Father's feelings," he said.

"If he wants a party, he'll have it," she said. Their voices were alike, being in the higher register but dark-toned, and held to an even quietness, contained, restrained. She perched on a stool beside his at the high desk.

"I can't," he said, and stopped, and went on, "I really don't want to have any dancing."

"He's matchmaking," Tuly said, dry, fond.

"I don't care about that."

"I know you don't."

"The problem is . . ."

"The problem is the music," his mother said at last.

He nodded.

"My son, there is no reason," she said, suddenly passionate, "there is *no* reason why you should give up everything you love!"

He took her hand and kissed it as they sat side by side.

"Things don't mix," he said. "They ought to, but they don't. I found that out. When I left the wizard. I thought I could be everything. You know—do magic, play music, be Father's son, love Rose . . . It doesn't work that way. Things don't mix."

"They do, they do," Tuly said. "Everything is hooked together, tangled up!"

"Maybe things are, for women. But I . . . I can't be double-hearted."

"Double-hearted? You? You gave up wizardry because you knew that if you didn't, you'd betray it."

He took the word with a visible shock, but did not deny it.

"But why," she demanded, "why did you give up music?"

"I have to have a single heart. I can't play the harp while I'm bargaining with a mule breeder. I can't make ballads while I'm figuring what we have to pay the pickers to keep 'em from hiring out to Lowbough!" His voice shook a little now, a vibrato, and his eyes were not sad, but angry.

"So you put a spell on yourself," she said, "just as that wizard put one on you. A spell to keep you safe. To keep you with the mule breeders, and the nut pickers,

and these." She struck the ledger full of lists of names and figures, a flicking, dismissive tap. "A spell of silence," she said.

After a long time the young man said, "What else can I do?"

"I don't know, my dear. I do want you to be safe. I do love to see your father happy and proud of you. But I can't bear to see you unhappy, without pride! I don't know. Maybe you're right. Maybe for a man it's only one thing ever. But I miss hearing you sing."

She was in tears. They hugged, and she stroked his thick, shining hair and apologised for being cruel, and he hugged her again and said she was the kindest mother in the world, and so she went off. But as she left she turned back a moment and said, "Let him have the party, Di. Let yourself have it."

"I will," he said, to comfort her.

Golden ordered the beer and food and fireworks, but Diamond saw to hiring the musicians.

"Of course I'll bring my band," Tarry said, "fat chance I'd miss it! You'll have every tootler in the west of the world here for one of your dad's parties."

"You can tell 'em you're the band that's getting paid."

"Oh, they'll come for the glory," said the harper, a lean, long-jawed, walleyed fellow of forty. "Maybe you'll have a go with us yourself, then? You had a hand for it, before you took to making money. And the voice not bad, if you'd worked on it."

"I doubt it," Diamond said.

"That girl you liked, witch's Rose, she's running about with Labby, I hear. No doubt they'll come by."

"I'll see you then," said Diamond, looking big and handsome and indifferent, and walked off.

"Too high and mighty these days to stop and talk," said Tarry, "though I taught him all he knows of harping. But what's that to a rich man?"

Tarry's malice had left Diamond's nerves raw, and the thought of the party weighed on him till he lost his appetite. He thought hopefully for a while that he was sick and could miss the party. But the day came, and he was there. Not so evidently, so eminently, so flamboyantly there as his father, but present, smiling, dancing. All his childhood friends were there too, half of them married by now to the other half, it seemed, but there was still plenty of flirting going on, and several

pretty girls were always near him. He drank a good deal of Gadge Brewer's excellent beer, and found he could endure the music if he was dancing to it and talking and laughing while he danced. So he danced with all the pretty girls in turn, and then again with whichever one turned up again, which all of them did.

It was Golden's grandest party yet, with a dancing floor built on the town green down the way from Golden's house, and a tent for the old folks to eat and drink and gossip in, and new clothes for the children, and jugglers and puppeteers, some of them hired and some of them coming by to pick up whatever they could in the way of coppers and free beer. Any festivity drew itinerant entertainers and musicians; it was their living, and though uninvited they were welcomed. A tale singer with a droning voice and a droning bagpipe was singing *The Deed of the Dragonlord* to a group of people under the big oak on the hilltop. When Tarry's band of harp, fife, viol, and drum took time off for a breather and a swig, a new group hopped up onto the dance floor. "Hey, there's Labby's band!" cried the pretty girl nearest Diamond. "Come on, they're the best!"

Labby, a light-skinned, flashy-looking fellow, played the double-reed woodhorn. With him were a violist, a tabor player, and Rose, who played fife. Their first tune was a stampy, fast and brilliant, too fast for some of the dancers. Diamond and his partner stayed in, and people cheered and clapped them when they finished the dance, sweating and panting. "Beer!" Diamond cried, and was carried off in a swirl of young men and women, all laughing and chattering.

He heard behind him the next tune start up, the viol alone, strong and sad as a tenor voice: "Where My Love Is Going."

He drank a mug of beer down in one draft, and the girls with him watched the muscles in his strong throat as he swallowed, and they laughed and chattered, and he shivered all over like a cart horse stung by flies. He said, "Oh! I can't—!" He bolted off into the dusk beyond the lanterns hanging around the brewer's booth. "Where's he going?" said one, and another, "He'll be back," and they laughed and chattered.

The tune ended. "Darkrose," he said, behind her in the dark. She turned her head and looked at him. Their heads were on a level, she sitting cross-legged up on the dance platform, he kneeling on the grass.

"Come to the sallows," he said.

She said nothing. Labby, glancing at her, set his woodhorn to his lips. The drummer struck a triple beat on his tabor, and they were off into a sailor's jig.

When she looked around again Diamond was gone.

Tarry came back with his band in an hour or so, ungrateful for the respite and much the worse for beer. He interrupted the tune and the dancing, telling Labby loudly to clear out.

"Ah, pick your nose, harp picker," Labby said, and Tarry took offense, and people took sides, and while the dispute was at its brief height, Rose put her fife in her pocket and slipped away.

Away from the lanterns of the party it was dark, but she knew the way in the dark. He was there. The willows had grown, these two years. There was only a little space to sit among the green shoots and the long, falling leaves.

The music started up, distant, blurred by wind and the murmur of the river running.

"What did you want, Diamond?"

"To talk."

They were only voices and shadows to each other.

"So," she said.

"I wanted to ask you to go away with me," he said.

"When?"

"Then. When we quarreled. I said it all wrong. I thought . . ." A long pause. "I thought I could go on running away. With you. And play music. Make a living. Together. I meant to say that."

"You didn't say it."

"I know. I said everything wrong. I did everything wrong. I betrayed everything. The magic. And the music. And you."

"I'm all right," she said.

"Are you?"

"I'm not really good on the fife, but I'm good enough. What you didn't teach me, I can fill in with a spell, if I have to. And the band, they're all right. Labby isn't as bad as he looks. Nobody fools with me. We make a pretty good living. Winters, I go stay with Mother and help her out. So I'm all right. What about you, Di?"

"All wrong."

She started to say something, and did not say it.

"I guess we were children," he said. "Now . . ."

"What's changed?"

"I made the wrong choice."

"Once?" she said. "Or twice?"

"Twice."

“Third time’s the charm.”

Neither spoke for a while. She could just make out the bulk of him in the leafy shadows. “You’re bigger than you were,” she said. “Can you still make a light, Di? I want to see you.”

He shook his head.

“That was the one thing you could do that I never could. And you never could teach me.”

“I didn’t know what I was doing,” he said. “Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn’t.”

“And the wizard in South Port didn’t teach you how to make it work?”

“He only taught me names.”

“Why can’t you do it now?”

“I gave it up, Darkrose. I had to either do it and nothing else, or not do it. You have to have a single heart.”

“I don’t see why,” she said. “My mother can cure a fever and ease a childbirth and find a lost ring, maybe that’s nothing compared to what the wizards and the dragonlords can do, but it’s not nothing, all the same. And she didn’t give up anything for it. Having me didn’t stop her. She had me so that she could *learn* how to do it! Just because I learned how to play music from you, did I have to give up saying spells? I can bring a fever down now too. Why should you have to stop doing one thing so you can do the other?”

“My father,” he began, and stopped, and gave a kind of laugh. “They don’t go together,” he said. “The money and the music.”

“The father and the witch-girl,” said Darkrose.

Again there was silence between them. The leaves of the willows stirred.

“Would you come back to me?” he said. “Would you go with me, live with me, marry me, Darkrose?”

“Not in your father’s house, Di.”

“Anywhere. Run away.”

“But you can’t have me without the music.”

“Or the music without you.”

“I would,” she said.

“Does Labby want a harper?”

She hesitated; she laughed. “If he wants a fife player,” she said.

“I haven’t practiced ever since I left, Darkrose,” he said. “But the music was always in my head, and you . . .” She reached out her hands to him. They knelt

facing, the willow leaves moving across their hair. They kissed each other, timidly at first.

In the years after Diamond left home, Golden made more money than he had ever done before. All his deals were profitable. It was as if good fortune stuck to him and he could not shake it off. He grew immensely wealthy.

He did not forgive his son. It would have made a happy ending, but he would not have it. To leave so, without a word, on his nameday night, to go off with the witch-girl, leaving all the honest work undone, to be a vagrant musician, a harper twanging and singing and grinning for pennies—there was nothing but shame and pain and anger in it for Golden. So he had his tragedy.

Tuly shared it with him for a long time, since she could see her son only by lying to her husband, which she found hard to do. She wept to think of Diamond hungry, sleeping hard. Cold nights of autumn were a misery to her. But as time went on and she heard him spoken of as Diamond the sweet singer of the West of Havnor, Diamond who had harped and sung to the great lords in the Tower of the Sword, her heart grew lighter. And once, when Golden was down at South Port, she and Tangle took a donkey cart and drove over to Easthill, where they heard Diamond sing the *Lay of the Lost Queen*, while Rose sat with them, and Little Tuly sat on Tuly's knee. And if not a happy ending, that was a true joy, which may be enough to ask for, after all.

Where My Love Is Going

Easy and flowing *fine*

Where my love is go —— ing, There—will I go: Where his boat is row—ing I will row.

da capo al fine

We will laugh togeth — er, Together we will cry: If he lives— I will live, If he dies, I die.

The Bones of the Earth

It was raining again, and the wizard of Re Albi was sorely tempted to make a weather-spell, just a little, small spell, to send the rain on round the mountain. His bones ached. They ached for the sun to come out and shine through his flesh and dry them out. Of course he could say a pain spell, but all that would do was hide the ache for a while. There was no cure for what ailed him. Old bones need the sun. The wizard stood still in the doorway of his house, between the dark room and the rain-streaked open air, preventing himself from making a spell, and angry at himself for preventing himself and for having to be prevented.

He never swore—men of power do not swear, it is not safe—but he cleared his throat with a coughing growl, like a bear. A moment later a thunderclap rolled off the hidden upper slopes of Gont Mountain, echoing round from north to south, dying away in the cloud-filled forests.

A good sign, thunder, Dulse thought. It would stop raining soon. He pulled up his hood and went out into the rain to feed the chickens.

He checked the henhouse, finding three eggs. Red Bucca was setting. Her eggs were about due to hatch. The mites were bothering her, and she looked scruffy and jaded. He said a few words against mites, told himself to remember to clean out the nest box as soon as the chicks hatched, and went on to the poultry yard, where Brown Bucca and Grey and Leggings and Candor and the King huddled under the eaves making soft, shrewish remarks about rain.

"It'll stop by midday," the wizard told the chickens. He fed them and squelched back to the house with three warm eggs. When he was a child he had liked to walk in mud. He remembered enjoying the cool of it rising between his toes. He still liked to go barefoot, but no longer enjoyed mud; it was sticky stuff, and he disliked stooping to clean his feet before going into the house. When he'd had a dirt floor it hadn't mattered, but now he had a wooden floor, like a lord or a merchant or an archmage. To keep the cold and damp out of his bones. Not his own notion. Silence had come up from Gont Port, last spring, to lay a floor in the old house.

They had had one of their arguments about it. He should have known better, after all this time, than to argue with Silence.

"I've walked on dirt for seventy-five years," Dulse had said. "A few more won't kill me!"

To which Silence of course made no reply, letting him hear what he had said and feel its foolishness thoroughly.

"Dirt's easier to keep clean," he said, knowing the struggle already lost. It was true that all you had to do with a good hard-packed clay floor was sweep it and now and then sprinkle it to keep the dust down. But it sounded silly all the same.

"Who's to lay this floor?" he said, now merely querulous.

Silence nodded, meaning himself.

The boy was in fact a workman of the first order, carpenter, cabinetmaker, stonelayer, roofer; he had proved that when he lived up here as Dulse's student, and his life with the rich folk of Gont Port had not softened his hands. He brought the boards from Sixth's mill in Re Albi, driving Gammer's ox team; he laid the floor and polished it the next day, while the old wizard was up at Bog Lake gathering simples. When Dulse came home there it was, shining like a dark lake itself. "Have to wash my feet every time I come in," he grumbled. He walked in gingerly. The wood was so smooth it seemed soft to the bare sole. "Satin," he said. "You didn't do all that in one day without a spell or two. A village hut with a palace floor. Well, it'll be a sight, come winter, to see the fire shine in that! Or do I have to get me a carpet now? A fleecefell, on a golden warp?"

Silence smiled. He was pleased with himself.

He had turned up on Dulse's doorstep a few years ago. Well, no, twenty years ago it must be, or twenty-five. A while ago now. He had been truly a boy then, long-legged, rough-haired, soft-faced. A set mouth, clear eyes. "What do you want?" the wizard had asked, knowing what he wanted, what they all wanted, and keeping his eyes from those clear eyes. He was a good teacher, the best on Gont, he knew that. But he was tired of teaching, didn't want another prentice underfoot. And he sensed danger.

"To learn," the boy whispered.

"Go to Roke," the wizard said. The boy wore shoes and a good leather vest. He could afford or earn ship's passage to the school.

"I've been there."

At that Dulse looked him over again. No cloak, no staff.

"Failed? Sent away? Ran away?"

The boy shook his head at each question. He shut his eyes; his mouth was already shut. He stood there, intensely gathered, suffering: drew breath: looked straight into the wizard's eyes.

"My mastery is here, on Gont," he said, still speaking hardly above a whisper. "My master is Heleth."

At that the wizard whose true name was Heleth stood as still as he did, looking back at him, till the boy's gaze dropped.

In silence Dulse sought the boy's name, and saw two things: a fir cone, and the rune of the Closed Mouth. Then seeking further he heard in his mind a name spoken; but he did not speak it.

"I'm tired of teaching and talking," he said. "I need silence. Is that enough for you?"

The boy nodded once.

"Then to me you are Silence," the wizard said. "You can sleep in the nook under the west window. There's an old pallet in the woodhouse. Air it. Don't bring mice in with it." And he stalked off towards the Overfell, angry with the boy for coming and with himself for giving in; but it was not anger that made his heart pound. Striding along—he could stride, then—with the sea wind pushing at him always from the left and the early sunlight on the sea out past the vast shadow of the mountain, he thought of the Mages of Roke, the masters of the art magic, the professors of mystery and power. "He was too much for 'em, was he? And he'll be too much for me," he thought, and smiled. He was a peaceful man, but he did not mind a bit of danger.

He stopped then and felt the dirt under his feet. He was barefoot, as usual. When he was a student on Roke, he had worn shoes. But he had come back home to Gont, to Re Albi, with his wizard's staff, and kicked his shoes off. He stood still and felt the dust and rock of the cliff-top path under his feet, and the cliffs under that, and the roots of the island in the dark under that. In the dark under the waters all islands touched and were one. So his teacher Ard had said, and so his teachers on Roke had said. But this was his island, his rock, his dirt. His wizardry grew out of it. "My mastery is here," the boy had said, but it went deeper than mastery. That, perhaps, was something Dulse could teach him: what went deeper than mastery. What he had learned here, on Gont, before he ever went to Roke.

And the boy must have a staff. Why had Nemmerle let him leave Roke without one, empty-handed as a prentice or a witch? Power like that shouldn't go wandering about unchanneled and unsignaled.

My teacher had no staff, Dulse thought, and at the same moment thought, The boy wants his staff from me. Gontish oak, from the hands of a Gontish wizard. Well, if he earns it I'll make him one. If he can keep his mouth closed. And I'll leave him my lore-books. If he can clean out a henhouse, and understand the Glosses of Danemer, and keep his mouth closed.

The new student cleaned out the henhouse and hoed the bean patch, learned the meaning of the Glosses of Danemer and the Arcana of the Enlades, and kept his mouth closed. He listened. He heard what Dulse said; sometimes he heard what Dulse thought. He did what Dulse wanted and what Dulse did not know he wanted. His gift was far beyond Dulse's guidance, yet he had been right to come to Re Albi, and they both knew it.

Dulse thought sometimes in those years about sons and fathers. He had quarreled with his own father, a sorcerer-prospector, over his choice of Ard as his teacher. His father had shouted that a student of Ard's was no son of his, had nursed his rage, died unforgiving.

Dulse had seen young men weep for joy at the birth of a first son. He had seen poor men pay witches a year's earnings for the promise of a healthy boy, and a rich man touch his gold-bedizened baby's face and whisper, adoring, "My immortality!" He had seen men beat their sons, bully and humiliate them, spite and thwart them, hating the death they saw in them. He had seen the answering hatred in the sons' eyes, the threat, the pitiless contempt. And seeing it, Dulse knew why he had never sought reconciliation with his father.

He had seen a father and son work together from daybreak to sundown, the old man guiding a blind ox, the middle-aged man driving the iron-bladed plough, never a word spoken. As they started home the old man laid his hand a moment on the son's shoulder.

He had always remembered that. He remembered it now, when he looked across the hearth, winter evenings, at the dark face bent above a lore-book or a shirt that needed mending. The eyes cast down, the mouth closed, the spirit listening.

"Once in his lifetime, if he's lucky, a wizard finds somebody he can talk to." Nemmerle had said that to Dulse a night or two before Dulse left Roke, a year or two before Nemmerle was chosen Archmage. He had been the Master Patterner and the kindest of all Dulse's teachers at the school. "I think, if you stayed, Heleth, we could talk."

Dulse had been unable to answer at all for a while. Then, stammering, guilty at his ingratitude and incredulous at his obstinacy—"Master, I would stay, but my

work is on Gont. I wish it was here, with you—"

"It's a rare gift, to know where you need to be, before you've been to all the places you don't need to be. Well, send me a student now and then. Roke needs Gontish wizardry. I think we're leaving things out, here, things worth knowing . . ."

Dulse had sent students on to the school, three or four of them, nice lads with a gift for this or that; but the one Nemmerle waited for had come and gone of his own will, and what they had thought of him on Roke Dulse did not know. And Silence, of course, did not say. It was evident that he had learned there in two or three years what some boys learned in six or seven and many never learned at all. To him it had been mere groundwork.

"Why didn't you come to me first?" Dulse had demanded. "And then go to Roke, to put a polish on it?"

"I didn't want to waste your time."

"Did Nemmerle know you were coming to work with me?"

Silence shook his head.

"If you'd deigned to tell him your intentions, he might have sent a message to me."

Silence looked stricken. "Was he your friend?"

Dulse paused. "He was my master. Would have been my friend, perhaps, if I'd stayed on Roke. Have wizards friends? No more than they have wives, or sons, I suppose . . . Once he said to me that in our trade it's a lucky man who finds someone to talk to . . . Keep that in mind. If you're lucky, one day you'll have to open your mouth."

Silence bowed his rough, thoughtful head.

"If it hasn't rusted shut," Dulse added.

"If you ask me to, I'll talk," the young man said, so earnest, so willing to deny his whole nature at Dulse's request that the wizard had to laugh.

"I asked you not to," he said. "And it's not my need I spoke of. I talk enough for two. Never mind. You'll know what to say when the time comes. That's the art, eh? What to say, and when to say it. And the rest is silence."

The young man slept on a pallet under the little west window of Dulse's house for three years. He learned wizardry, fed the chickens, milked the cow. He suggested, once, that Dulse keep goats. He had not said anything for a week or so, a cold, wet week of autumn. He said, "You might keep some goats."

Dulse had the big lore-book open on the table. He had been trying to reweave

one of the Acastan Spells, much broken and made powerless by the Emanations of Fundaur centuries ago. He had just begun to get a sense of the missing word that might fill one of the gaps, he almost had it, and—"You might keep some goats," Silence said.

Dulse considered himself a wordy, impatient man with a short temper. The necessity of not swearing had been a burden to him in his youth, and for thirty years the imbecility of prentices, clients, cows, and chickens had tried him sorely. Prentices and clients were afraid of his tongue, though cows and chickens paid no attention to his outbursts. He had never been angry at Silence before. There was a very long pause.

"What for?"

Silence apparently did not notice the pause or the extreme softness of Dulse's voice. "Milk, cheese, roast kid, company," he said.

"Have you ever kept goats?" Dulse asked, in the same soft, polite voice.

Silence shook his head.

He was in fact a town boy, born in Gont Port. He had said nothing about himself, but Dulse had asked around a bit. The father, a longshoreman, had died in the big earthquake, when Silence would have been seven or eight; the mother was a cook at a waterfront inn. At twelve the boy had got into some kind of trouble, probably messing about with magic, and his mother had managed to prentice him to Elassen, a respectable sorcerer in Valmouth. There the boy had picked up his true name, and some skill in carpentry and farmwork, if not much else; and Elassen had had the generosity, after three years, to pay his passage to Roke. That was all Dulse knew about him.

"I dislike goat cheese," Dulse said.

Silence nodded, acceptant as always.

From time to time in the years since then, Dulse remembered how he hadn't lost his temper when Silence asked about keeping goats; and each time the memory gave him a quiet satisfaction, like that of finishing the last bite of a perfectly ripe pear.

After spending the next several days trying to recapture the missing word, he had set Silence to studying the Acastan Spells. Together they finally worked it out, a long toil. "Like ploughing with a blind ox," Dulse said.

Not long after that he gave Silence the staff he had made for him of Gontish oak.

And the Lord of Gont Port had tried once again to get Dulse to come down to do what needed doing in Gont Port, and Dulse had sent Silence down instead, and

there he had stayed.

And Dulse was standing on his own doorstep, three eggs in his hand and the rain running cold down his back.

How long had he been standing here? Why was he standing here? He had been thinking about mud, about the floor, about Silence. Had he been out walking on the path above the Overfell? No, that was years ago, years ago, in the sunlight. It was raining. He had fed the chickens, and come back to the house with three eggs, they were still warm in his hand, silky brown lukewarm eggs, and the sound of thunder was still in his mind, the vibration of thunder was in his bones, in his feet. Thunder?

No. There had been a thunderclap, a while ago. This was not thunder. He had had this queer feeling and had not recognised it, back—when? long ago, back before all the days and years he had been thinking of. When, when had it been?—before the earthquake. Just before the earthquake. Just before a half mile of the coast at Essary slumped into the sea, and people died crushed in the ruins of their villages, and a great wave swamped the wharfs at Gont Port.

He stepped down from the doorstep onto the dirt so that he could feel the ground with the nerves of his soles, but the mud slimed and fouled any messages the dirt had for him. He set the eggs down on the doorstep, sat down beside them, cleaned his feet with rainwater from the pot by the step, wiped them dry with the rag that hung on the handle of the pot, rinsed and wrung out the rag and hung it on the handle of the pot, picked up the eggs, stood up slowly, and went into his house.

He gave a sharp look at his staff, which leaned in the corner behind the door. He put the eggs in the larder, ate an apple quickly because he was hungry, and took up his staff. It was yew, bound at the foot with copper, worn to satin at the grip. Nemmerle had given it to him.

"Stand!" he said to it in its language, and let go of it. It stood as if he had driven it into a socket.

"To the root," he said impatiently, in the Language of the Making. "To the root!"

He watched the staff that stood on the shining floor. In a little while he saw it quiver very slightly, a shiver, a tremble.

"Ah, ah, ah," said the old wizard.

"What should I do?" he said aloud after a while.

The staff swayed, was still, shivered again.

"Enough of that, my dear," Dulse said, laying his hand on it. "Come now. No

wonder I kept thinking about Silence. I should send for him . . . send to him . . . No. What did Ard say? Find the center, find the center. That's the question to ask. That's what to do . . ." As he muttered on to himself, routing out his heavy cloak, setting water to boil on the small fire he had lighted earlier, he wondered if he had always talked to himself, if he had talked all the time when Silence lived with him. No. It had become a habit after Silence left, he thought, with the bit of his mind that went on thinking the ordinary thoughts of life, while the rest of it made preparations for terror and destruction.

He hard-boiled the three new eggs and one already in the larder and put them into a pouch along with four apples and a bladder of resinated wine, in case he had to stay out all night. He shrugged arthritically into his heavy cloak, took up his staff, told the fire to go out, and left.

He no longer kept a cow. He stood looking into the poultry yard, considering. The fox had been visiting the orchard lately. But the chickens would have to forage if he stayed away. They must take their chances, like everyone else. He opened their gate a little. Though the rain was no more than a misty drizzle now, they stayed hunched up under the henhouse eaves, disconsolate. The King had not crowed once this morning.

"Have you anything to tell me?" Dulse asked them.

Brown Bucca, his favorite, shook herself and said her name a few times. The others said nothing.

"Well, take care. I saw the fox on the full-moon night," Dulse said, and went on his way.

As he walked he thought; he thought hard; he recalled. He recalled all he could of matters his teacher had spoken of once only and long ago. Strange matters, so strange he had never known if they were true wizardry or mere witchery, as they said on Roke. Matters he certainly had never heard about on Roke, nor had he ever spoken about them there, maybe fearing the Masters would despise him for taking such things seriously, maybe knowing they would not understand them, because they were Gontish matters, truths of Gont. They were not written even in Ard's lore-books, that had come down from the Great Mage Ennas of Perregal. They were all word of mouth. They were home truths.

"If you need to read the Mountain," his teacher had told him, "go to the Dark Pond at the top of Semere's cow pasture. You can see the ways from there. You need to find the center. See where to go in."

"Go in?" the boy Dulse had whispered.

"What could you do from outside?"

Dulse was silent for a long time, and then said, "How?"

"Thus." And Ard's long arms stretched out and upward in the invocation of what Dulse would know later was a Great Spell of Transforming. Ard spoke the words of the spell awry, as teachers of wizardry must do lest the spell operate. Dulse knew the trick of hearing them aright and remembering them. When Ard was done, Dulse had repeated the words in his mind in silence, half-sketching the strange, awkward gestures that were part of them. All at once his hand stopped.

"But you can't undo this!" he said aloud.

Ard nodded. "It is irrevocable."

Dulse knew no transformation that was irrevocable, no spell that could not be unsaid, except the Word of Unbinding, which is spoken only once.

"But why—?"

"At need," Ard said.

Dulse knew better than to ask for explanation. The need to speak such a spell could not come often; the chance of his ever having to use it was very slight. He let the terrible spell sink down in his mind and be hidden and layered over with a thousand useful or beautiful or enlightening mageries and charms, all the lore and rules of Roke, all the wisdom of the books Ard had bequeathed him. Crude, monstrous, useless, it lay in the dark of his mind for sixty years, like the cornerstone of an earlier, forgotten house down in the cellar of a mansion full of lights and treasures and children.

The rain had ceased, though mist still hid the peak and shreds of cloud drifted through the high forests. Though not a tireless walker like Silence, who would have spent his life wandering in the forests of Gont Mountain if he could, Dulse had been born in Re Albi and knew the roads and ways around it as part of himself. He took the shortcut at Rissi's well and came out before midday on Semere's high pasture, a level step on the mountainside. A mile below it, all in sunlight now, the farm buildings stood in the lee of a hill across which a flock of sheep moved like a cloud-shadow. Gont Port and its bay were hidden under the steep, knotted hills that stood inland above the city.

Dulse wandered about a bit before he found what he took to be the Dark Pond. It was small, half mud and reeds, with one vague, boggy path to the water, and no tracks on that but goat hoofs. The water was dark, though it lay out under the bright sky and far above the peat soils. Dulse followed the goat tracks, growling when his foot slipped in the mud and he wrenched his ankle to keep from falling.

At the brink of the water he stood still. He stooped to rub his ankle. He listened.

It was absolutely silent.

No wind. No birdcall. No distant lowing or bleating or call of voice. As if all the island had gone still. Not a fly buzzed.

He looked at the dark water. It reflected nothing.

Reluctant, he stepped forward, barefoot and bare-legged; he had rolled up his cloak into his pack an hour ago when the sun came out. Reeds brushed his legs. The mud was soft and sucking under his feet, full of tangling reed-roots. He made no noise as he moved slowly out into the pool, and the circles of ripples from his movement were slight and small. It was shallow for a long way. Then his cautious foot felt no bottom, and he paused.

The water shivered. He felt it first on his thighs, a lapping like the tickling touch of fur; then he saw it, the trembling of the surface all over the pond. Not the round ripples he made, which had already died away, but a ruffling, a roughening, a shudder, again, and again.

"Where?" he whispered, and then said the word aloud in the language all things understand that have no other language.

There was the silence. Then a fish leapt from the black, shaking water, a white-grey fish the length of his hand, and as it leapt it cried out in a small, clear voice, in that same language, "Yaved!"

The old wizard stood there. He recollected all he knew of the names of Gont, brought all its slopes and cliffs and ravines into his mind, and in a minute he saw where Yaved was. It was the place where the ridges parted, just inland from Gont Port, deep in the knot of hills above the city. It was the place of the fault. An earthquake centered there could shake the city down, bring avalanche and tidal wave, close the cliffs of the bay together like hands clapping. Dulse shivered, shuddered all over like the water of the pool.

He turned and made for the shore, hasty, careless where he set his feet and not caring if he broke the silence by splashing and breathing hard. He slogged back up the path through the reeds till he reached dry ground and coarse grass, and heard the buzz of midges and crickets. He sat down then on the ground, hard, for his legs were shaking.

"It won't do," he said, talking to himself in Hardic, and then he said, "I can't do it." Then he said, "I can't do it by myself."

He was so distraught that when he made up his mind to call Silence he could not think of the opening of the spell, which he had known for sixty years; then when he

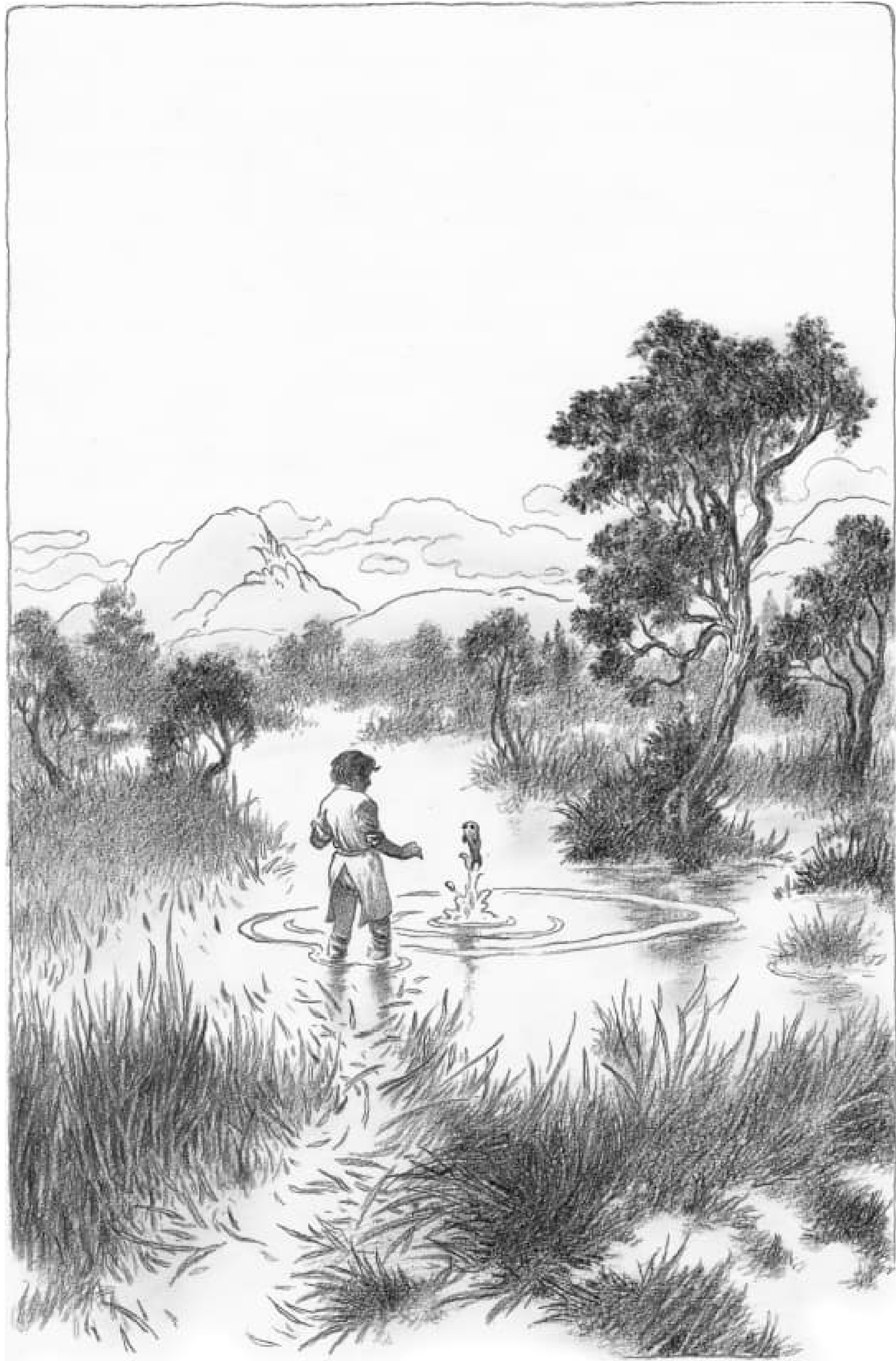
thought he had it, he began to speak a Summoning instead, and the spell had begun to work before he realised what he was doing and stopped and undid it word by word.

He pulled up some grass and rubbed at the slimy mud on his feet and legs. It was not dry yet, and only smeared about on his skin. "I hate mud," he whispered. Then he snapped his jaws and stopped trying to clean his legs. "Dirt, dirt," he said, gently patting the ground he sat on. Then, very slow, very careful, he began to speak the spell of calling.

In a busy street leading down to the busy wharfs of Gont Port, the wizard Ogion stopped short. The ship's captain beside him walked on several steps and turned to see Ogion talking to the air.

"But I will come, master!" he said. And then after a pause, "How soon?" And after a longer pause, he told the air something in a language the ship's captain did not understand, and made a gesture that darkened the air about him for an instant.

"Captain," he said, "I'm sorry, I must wait to spell your sails. An earthquake is near. I must warn the city. Do you tell them down there, every ship that can sail make for the open sea. Clear out past the Armed Cliffs! Good luck to you." And he turned and ran back up the street, a tall, strong man with rough greying hair, running now like a stag.



Gont Port lies at the inner end of a long narrow bay between steep shores. Its entrance from the sea is between two great headlands, the Gates of the Port, the Armed Cliffs, not a hundred feet apart. The people of Gont Port are safe from sea-pirates. But their safety is their danger: the long bay follows a fault in the earth, and jaws that have opened may shut.

When he had done what he could to warn the city, and seen all the gate guards and port guards doing what they could to keep the few roads out from becoming choked and murderous with panicky people, Ogion shut himself into a room in the signal tower of the Port, locked the door, for everybody wanted him at once, and sent a sending to the Dark Pond in Semere's cow pasture up on the Mountain.

His old master was sitting in the grass near the pond, eating an apple. Bits of eggshell flecked the ground near his legs, which were caked with drying mud. When he looked up and saw Ogion's sending he smiled a wide, sweet smile. But he looked old. He had never looked so old. Ogion had not seen him for over a year, having been busy; he was always busy in Gont Port, doing the business of the lords and people, never a chance to walk in the forests on the mountainside or to come sit with Heleth in the little house at Re Albi and listen and be still. Heleth was an old man, near eighty now; and he was frightened. He smiled with joy to see Ogion, but he was frightened.

"I think what we have to do," he said without preamble, "is try to hold the fault from slipping much. You at the Gates and me at the inner end, in the Mountain. Working together, you know. We might be able to. I can feel it building up, can you?"

Ogion shook his head. He let his sending sit down in the grass near Heleth, though it did not bend the stems of the grass where it stepped or sat. "I've done nothing but set the city in a panic and send the ships out of the bay," he said. "What is it you feel? How do you feel it?"

They were technical questions, mage to mage. Heleth hesitated before answering.

"I learned about this from Ard," he said, and paused again.

He had never told Ogion anything about his first teacher, a sorcerer of no fame even in Gont, and perhaps of ill fame. Ogion knew only that Ard had never gone to Roke, had been trained on Perregal, and that some mystery or shame darkened the name. Though he was talkative, for a wizard, Heleth was silent as a stone about some things. And so Ogion, who respected silence, had never asked him about his

teacher.

"It's not Roke magic," the old man said. His voice was dry, a little forced. "Nothing against the balance, though. Nothing sticky."

That had always been his word for evil doings, spells for gain, curses, black magic: "sticky stuff."

After a while, searching for words, he went on: "Dirt. Rocks. It's a dirty magic. Old. Very old. As old as Gont Island."

"The Old Powers?" Ogion murmured.

Heleth said, "I'm not sure."

"Will it control the earth itself?"

"More a matter of getting in with it, I think. Inside." The old man was burying the core of his apple and the larger bits of eggshell under loose dirt, patting it over them neatly. "Of course I know the words, but I'll have to learn what to do as I go. That's the trouble with the big spells, isn't it? You learn what you're doing while you do it. No chance to practice." He looked up. "Ah—there! You feel that?"

Ogion shook his head.

"Straining," Heleth said, his hand still absently, gently patting the dirt as one might pat a scared cow. "Quite soon now, I think. Can you hold the Gates open, my dear?"

"Tell me what you'll be doing—"

But Heleth was shaking his head: "No," he said. "No time. Not your kind of thing." He was more and more distracted by whatever it was he sensed in the earth or air, and through him Ogion too felt that gathering, intolerable tension.

They sat unspeaking. The crisis passed. Heleth relaxed a little and even smiled. "Very old stuff," he said, "what I'll be doing. I wish now I'd thought about it more. Passed it on to you. But it seemed a bit crude. Heavy-handed . . . She didn't say where she'd learned it. Here, of course . . . There are different kinds of knowledge, after all."

"She?"

"Ard. My teacher." Heleth looked up, his face unreadable, its expression possibly sly. "You didn't know that? No, I suppose I never mentioned it. I wonder what difference it made to her wizardry, her being a woman. Or to mine, my being a man . . . What matters, it seems to me, is whose house we live in. And who we let enter the house. This kind of thing—There! There again—"

His sudden tension and immobility, the strained face and inward look, were like those of a woman in labor when her womb contracts. That was Ogion's thought,

even as he asked, “What did you mean, ‘in the Mountain’?”

The spasm passed; Heleth answered, “Inside it. There at Yaved.” He pointed to the knotted hills below them. “I’ll go in, try to keep things from sliding around, eh? I’ll find out how when I’m doing it, no doubt. I think you should be getting back to yourself. Things are tightening up.” He stopped again, looking as if he were in intense pain, hunched and clenched. He struggled to stand up. Unthinking, Ogion held out his hand to help him.

“No use,” said the old wizard, grinning, “you’re only wind and sunlight. Now I’m going to be dirt and stone. You’d best go on. Farewell, Aihal. Keep the—keep the mouth open, for once, eh?”

Ogion, obedient, bringing himself back to himself in the stuffy, tapestried room in Gont Port, did not understand the old man’s joke until he turned to the window and saw the Armed Cliffs down at the end of the long bay, the jaws ready to snap shut. “I will,” he said, and set to it.

“What I have to do, you see,” the old wizard said, still talking to Silence because it was a comfort to talk to him even if he was no longer there, “is get into the mountain, right inside. But not the way a sorcerer-prospector does, not just slipping about between things and looking and tasting. Deeper. All the way in. Not the veins, but the bones. So,” and standing there alone in the high pasture, in the noon light, Heleth opened his arms wide in the gesture of invocation that opens all the greater spells; and he spoke.

Nothing happened as he said the words Ard had taught him, his old witch-teacher with her bitter mouth and her long, lean arms, the words spoken awry then, spoken truly now.

Nothing happened, and he had time to regret the sunlight and the sea wind, and to doubt the spell, and to doubt himself, before the earth rose up around him, dry, warm, and dark.

In there he knew he should hurry, that the bones of the earth ached to move, and that he must become them to guide them, but he could not hurry. There was on him the bewilderment of any transformation. He had in his day been fox, and bull, and dragonfly, and knew what it was to change being. But this was different, this slow enlargement. I am vastening, he thought.

He reached out towards Yaved, towards the ache, the suffering. As he came closer to it he felt a great strength flow into him from the west, as if Silence had taken him by the hand after all. Through that link he could send his own strength,

the Mountain's strength, to help. I didn't tell him I wasn't coming back, he thought, his last words in Hardic, his last grief, for he was in the bones of the mountain now. He knew the arteries of fire, and the beat of the great heart. He knew what to do. It was in no tongue of man that he said, "Be quiet, be easy. There now, there. Hold fast. So, there. We can be easy."

And he was easy, he was still, he held fast, rock in rock and earth in earth in the fiery dark of the mountain.

It was their mage Ogion whom the people saw stand alone on the roof of the signal tower on the wharf, when the streets ran up and down in waves, the cobbles bursting out of them, and walls of clay brick puffed into dust, and the Armed Cliffs leaned together, groaning. It was Ogion they saw, his hands held out before him, straining, parting: and the cliffs parted with them, and stood straight, unmoved. The city shuddered and stood still. It was Ogion who stopped the earthquake. They saw it, they said it.

"My teacher was with me, and his teacher with him," Ogion said when they praised him. "I could hold the Gate open because he held the Mountain still." They praised his modesty and did not listen to him. Listening is a rare gift, and men will have their heroes.

When the city was in order again, and the ships had all come back, and the walls were being rebuilt, Ogion escaped from praise and went up into the hills above Gont Port. He found the queer little valley called Trimmer's Dell, the true name of which in the Language of the Making was Yaved, as Ogion's true name was Aihal. He walked about there all one day, as if seeking something. In the evening he lay down on the ground and talked to it. "You should have told me. I could have said goodbye," he said. He wept then, and his tears fell on the dry dirt among the grass stems and made little spots of mud, little sticky spots.

He slept there on the ground, with no pallet or blanket between him and the dirt. At sunrise he got up and walked by the high road over to Re Albi. He did not go into the village, but past it to the house that stood alone north of the other houses at the beginning of the Overfell. The door stood open.

The last beans had got big and coarse on the vines; the cabbages were thriving. Three hens came clucking and pecking around the dusty dooryard, a red, a brown, a white; a grey hen was setting her clutch in the henhouse. There were no chicks, and no sign of the cock, the King, Heleth had called him. The king is dead, Ogion thought. Maybe a chick is hatching even now to take his place. He thought he

caught a whiff of fox from the little orchard behind the house.

He swept out the dust and leaves that had blown in the open doorway across the floor of polished wood. He set Heleth's mattress and blanket in the sun to air. "I'll stay here a while," he thought. "It's a good house." After a while he thought, "I might keep some goats."

On the High Marsh

The island of Semel lies north and west across the Pelnish Sea from Havnor, south and west of the Enlades. Though it is one of the great isles of the Earthsea Archipelago, there aren't many stories from Semel. Enlad has its glorious history, and Havnor its wealth, and Paln its ill repute, but Semel has only cattle and sheep, forests and little towns, and the great silent volcano called Andanden standing over all.

South of Andanden lies a land where the ashes fell a hundred feet deep when last the volcano spoke. Rivers and streams cut their way seaward through that high plain, winding and pooling, spreading and wandering, making a marsh of it, a big, desolate, waterland with a far horizon, few trees, not many people. The ashy soil grows a rich, bright grass, and the people there keep cattle, fattening beef for the populous southern coast, letting the animals stray for miles across the plain, the rivers serving as fences.

As mountains will, Andanden makes the weather. It gathers clouds around it. The summer is short, the winter long, out on the high marsh.

In the early darkness of a winter day, a traveler stood at the windswept crossing of two paths, neither very promising, mere cattle tracks among the reeds, and looked for some sign of the way he should take.

As he came down the last slope of the mountain, he had seen houses here and there out in the marshlands, a village not far away. He had thought he was on the way to the village, but had taken a wrong turning somewhere. Tall reeds rose up close beside the paths, so that if a light shone anywhere he could not see it. Water chuckled softly somewhere near his feet. He had used up his shoes walking round Andanden on the cruel roads of black lava. The soles were worn right through, and his feet ached with the icy damp of the marsh paths.

It grew darker quickly. A haze was coming up from the south, blotting out the sky. Only above the huge, dim bulk of the mountain did stars burn clearly. Wind whistled in the reeds, soft, dismal.

The traveler stood at the crossway and whistled back at the reeds.

Something moved on one of the tracks, something big, dark, in the darkness.

"Are you there, my dear?" said the traveler. He spoke in the Old Speech, the Language of the Making. "Come along, then, Ulla," he said, and the heifer came a step or two towards him, towards her name, while he walked to meet her. He made out the big head more by touch than sight, stroking the silken dip between her eyes, scratching her forehead at the roots of the nubbin horns. "Beautiful, you are beautiful," he told her, breathing her grassy breath, leaning against her large warmth. "Will you lead me, dear Ulla? Will you lead me where I need to go?"

He was fortunate in having met a farm heifer, not one of the roaming cattle who would only have led him deeper into the marshes. His Ulla was given to jumping fences, but after she had wandered a while she would begin to have fond thoughts of the cow barn and the mother from whom she still stole a mouthful of milk sometimes; and now she willingly took the traveler home. She walked, slow but purposeful, down one of the tracks, and he went with her, a hand on her hip when the way was wide enough. When she waded a knee-deep stream, he held on to her tail. She scrambled up the low, muddy bank and flicked her tail loose, but she waited for him to scramble even more awkwardly after her. Then she plodded gently on. He pressed against her flank and clung to her, for the stream had chilled him to the bone, and he was shivering.

"Moo," said his guide, softly, and he saw the dim, small square of yellow light just a little to his left.

"Thank you," he said, opening the gate for the heifer, who went to greet her mother, while he stumbled across the dark houseyard to the door.

It would be Berry at the door, though why he knocked she didn't know. "Come in, you fool!" she said, and he knocked again, and she put down her mending and went to the door. "Can you be drunk already?" she said, and then saw him.

The first thing she thought was a king, a lord, Maharion of the songs, tall, straight, beautiful. The next thing she thought was a beggar, a lost man, in dirty clothes, hugging himself with shivering arms.

He said, "I lost my way. Have I come to the village?" His voice was hoarse and harsh, a beggar's voice, but not a beggar's accent.

"It's a half mile on," said Gift.

"Is there an inn?"

"Not till you'd come to Oraby, a ten-twelve miles on south." She considered

only briefly. “If you need a room for the night, I have one. Or San might, if you’re going to the village.”

“I’ll stay here if I may,” he said in that princely way, with his teeth chattering, holding on to the doorjamb to keep on his feet.

“Take your shoes off,” she said, “they’re soaking. Come in then.” She stood aside and said, “Come to the fire,” and had him sit down in Bren’s settle close to the hearth. “Stir the fire up a bit,” she said. “Will you have a bit of soup? It’s still hot.”

“Thank you, mistress,” he muttered, crouching at the fire. She brought him a bowl of broth. He drank from it eagerly yet warily, as if long unaccustomed to hot soup.

“You came over the mountain?”

He nodded.

“Whatever for?”

“To come here,” he said. He was beginning to tremble less. His bare feet were a sad sight, bruised, swollen, sodden. She wanted to tell him to put them right to the fire’s warmth, but didn’t like to presume. Whatever he was, he wasn’t a beggar by choice.

“Not many come here to the High Marsh,” she said. “Peddlers and such. But not in winter.”

He finished his soup, and she took the bowl. She sat down in her place, the stool by the oil lamp to the right of the hearth, and took up her mending. “Get warm through, and then I’ll show you your bed,” she said. “There’s no fire in that room. Did you meet weather, up on the mountain? They say there’s been snow.”

“Some flurries,” he said. She got a good look at him now in the light of lamp and fire. He was not a young man, thin, not as tall as she had thought. It was a fine face, but there was something wrong, something amiss. He looks ruined, she thought, a ruined man.

“Why would you come to the Marsh?” she asked. She had a right to ask, having taken him in, yet she felt a discomfort in pressing the question.

“I was told there’s a murrain among the cattle here.” Now that he wasn’t all locked up with cold his voice was beautiful. He talked like the tale-tellers when they spoke the parts of the heroes and the dragonlords. Maybe he was a teller or a singer? But no; the murrain, he had said.

“There is.”

“I may be able to help the beasts.”

“You’re a curer?”

He nodded.

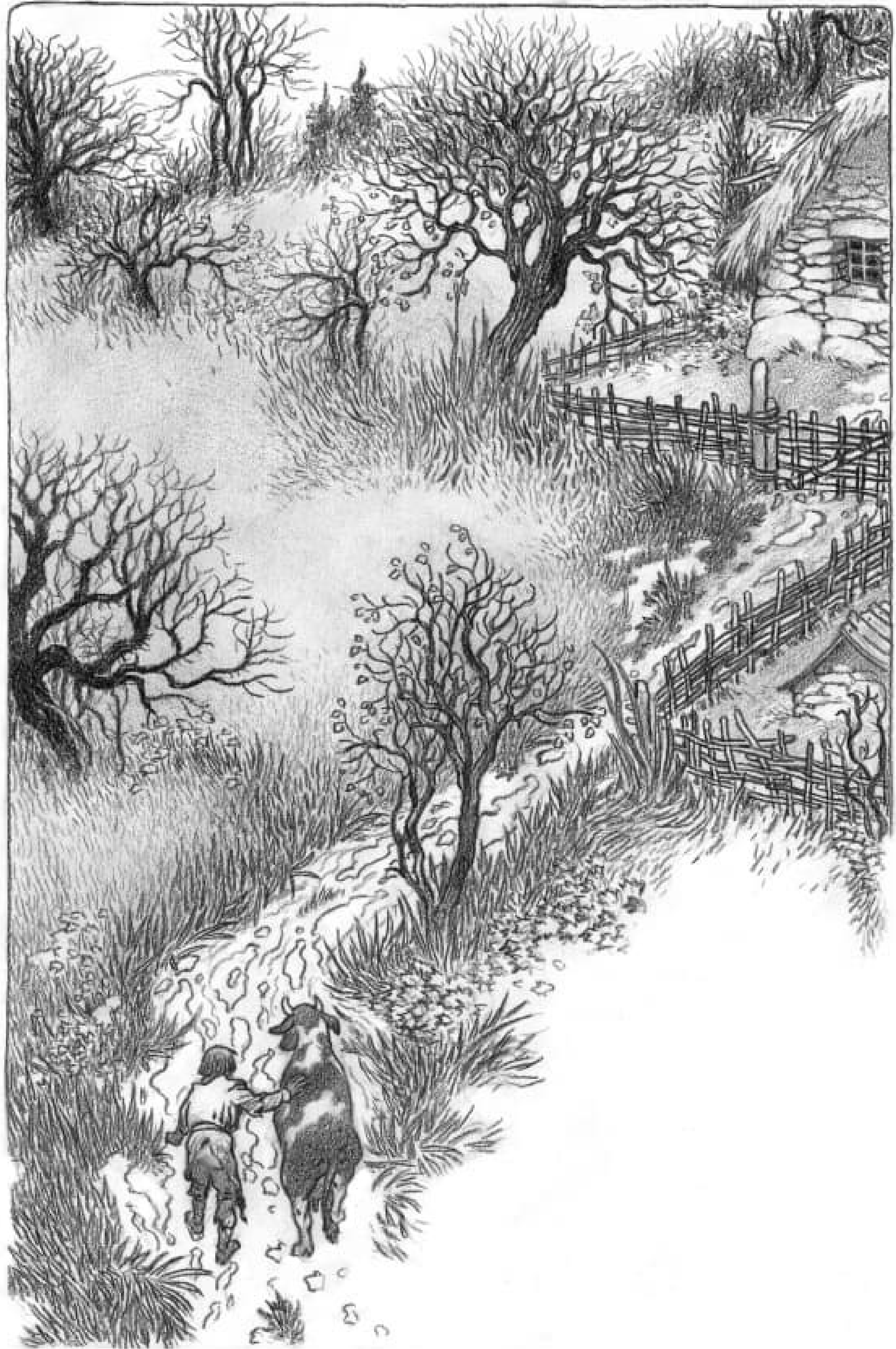
“Then you’ll be more than welcome. The plague is terrible among the cattle. And getting worse.”

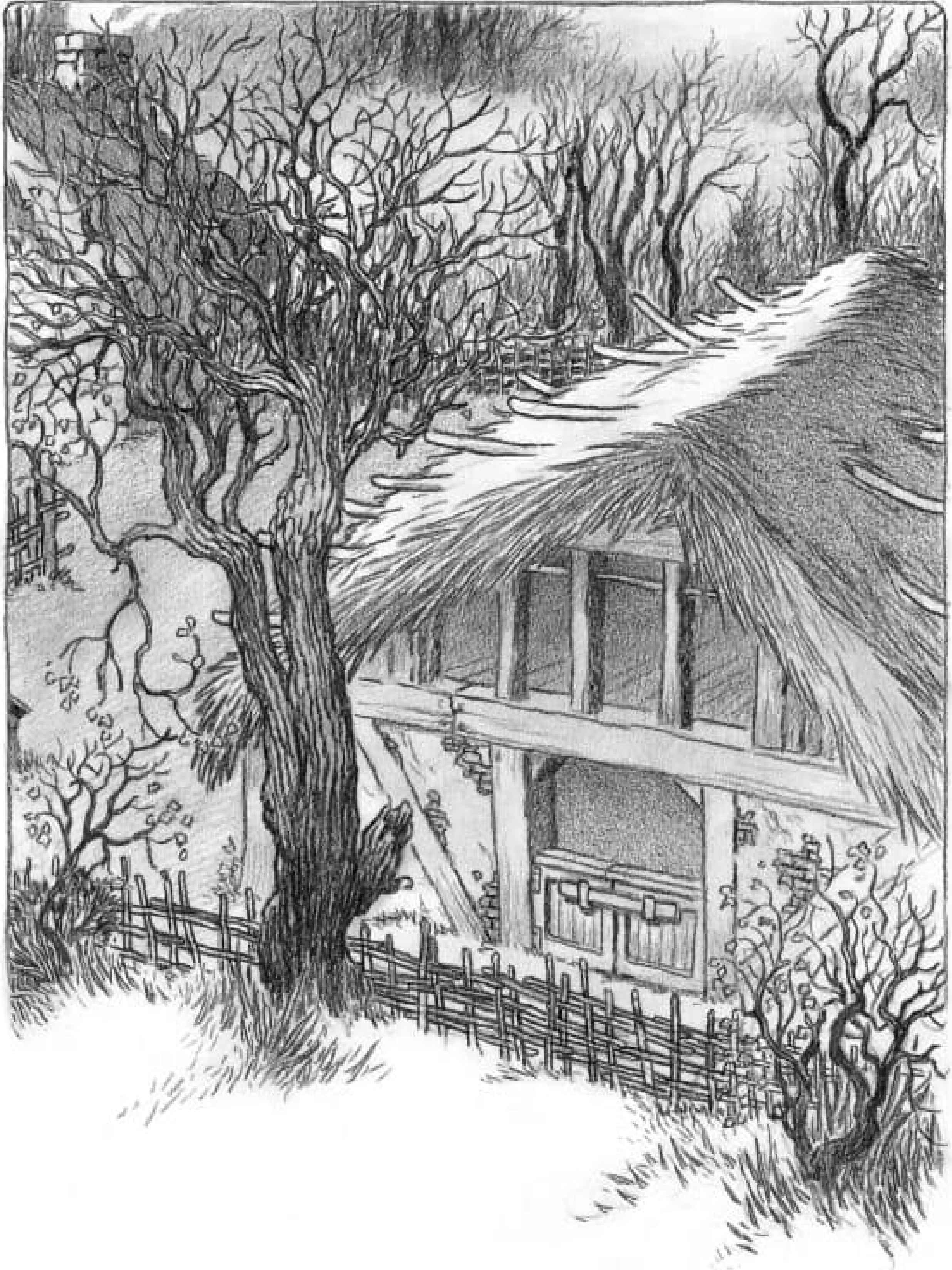
He said nothing. She could see the warmth coming into him, untying him.

“Put your feet up to the fire,” she said abruptly. “I have some old shoes of my husband’s.” It cost her something to say that, yet when she had said it she felt released, untied too. What was she keeping Bren’s shoes for, anyhow? They were too small for Berry and too big for her. She’d given away his clothes, but kept the shoes, she didn’t know what for. For this fellow, it would seem. Things came round if you could wait for them, she thought. “I’ll set ’em out for you,” she said. “Yours are perished.”

He glanced at her. His dark eyes were large, deep, opaque like a horse’s eyes, unreadable.

“He’s dead,” she said, “two years. The marsh fever. You have to watch out for that, here. The water. I live with my brother. He’s in the village, at the tavern. We keep a dairy. I make cheese. Our herd’s been all right,” and she made the sign to avert evil. “I keep ’em close in. Out on the ranges, the murrain’s very bad. Maybe the cold weather’ll put an end to it.”





"More likely to kill the beasts that sicken with it," the man said. He sounded a bit sleepy.

"I'm called Gift," she said. "My brother's Berry."

"Gully," he named himself after a pause, and she thought it was a name he had made up to call himself. It did not fit him. Nothing about him fit together, made a whole. Yet she felt no distrust of him. She was easy with him. He meant no harm to her. She thought there was kindness in him, the way he spoke of the animals. He would have a way with them, she thought. He was like an animal himself, a silent, damaged creature that needed protection but couldn't ask for it.

"Come," she said, "before you fall asleep there," and he followed her obediently to Berry's room, which wasn't much more than a cupboard built onto the corner of the house. Her room was behind the chimney. Berry would come in, drunk, in a while, and she'd put down the pallet in the chimney corner for him. Let the traveler have a good bed for a night. Maybe he'd leave a copper or two with her when he went on. There was a terrible shortage of coppers in her household these days.

He woke, as he always did, in his room in the Great House. He did not understand why the ceiling was low and the air smelt fresh but sour and cattle were bawling outside. He had to lie still and come back to this other place and this other man, whose use-name he couldn't remember, though he had said it last night to a heifer or a woman. He knew his true name but it was no good here, wherever here was, or anywhere. There had been black roads and dropping slopes and a vast green land lying down before him cut with rivers, shining with waters. A cold wind blowing. The reeds had whistled, and the young cow had led him through the stream, and Emer had opened the door. He had known her name as soon as he saw her. But he must use some other name. He must not call her by her name. He must remember what name he had told her to call him. He must not be Irioth, though he was Irioth. Maybe in time he would be another man. No; that was wrong; he must be this man. This man's legs ached and his feet hurt. But it was a good bed, a feather bed, warm, and he need not get out of it yet. He drowsed a while, drifting away from Irioth.

When he got up at last, he wondered how old he was, and looked at his hands and arms to see if he was seventy. He still looked forty, though he felt seventy and moved like it, wincing. He got his clothes on, foul as they were from days and days of travel. There was a pair of shoes under the chair, worn but good, strong shoes, and a pair of knit wool stockings to go with them. He put the stockings on his battered feet and limped into the kitchen. Emer stood at the big sink, straining

something heavy in a cloth.

"Thank you for these and the shoes," he said, and thanking her for the gift, remembered her use-name but said only, "mistress."

"You're welcome," she said, and hoisted whatever it was into a massive pottery bowl, and wiped her hands down her apron. He knew nothing at all about women. He had not lived where women were since he was ten years old. He had been afraid of them, the women that shouted at him to get out of the way in that great other kitchen long ago. But since he had been traveling about in Earthsea he had met women and found them easy to be with, like the animals; they went about their business not paying much attention to him unless he frightened them. He tried not to do that. He had no wish or reason to frighten them. They were not men.

"Would you like some fresh curds? It makes a good breakfast." She was eyeing him, but not for long, and not meeting his eyes. Like an animal, like a cat, she was, sizing him up but not challenging. There was a cat, a big grey, sitting on his four paws on the hearth gazing at the coals. Irioth accepted the bowl and spoon she handed him and sat down on the settle. The cat jumped up beside him and purred.

"Look at that," said the woman. "He's not friendly with most folk."

"It's the curds."

"He knows a curer, maybe."

It was peaceful here with the woman and the cat. He had come to a good house.

"It's cold out," she said. "Ice on the trough this morning. Will you be going on, this day?"

There was a pause. He forgot that he had to answer in words. "I'd stay if I might," he said. "I'd stay here."

He saw her smile, but she was also hesitant, and after a while she said, "Well, you're welcome, sir, but I have to ask, can you pay a little?"

"Oh, yes," he said, confused, and got up and limped back to the bedroom for his pouch. He brought her a piece of money, a little Enladian crownpiece of gold.

"Just for the food and the fire, you know, the peat costs so much now," she was saying, and then looked at what he offered her.

"Oh, sir," she said, and he knew he had done wrong.

"There's nobody in the village could change that," she said. She looked up into his face for a moment. "The whole village together couldn't change that!" she said, and laughed. It was all right, then, though the word "change" rang and rang in his head.

"It hasn't been changed," he said, but he knew that was not what she meant.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “If I stayed a month, if I stayed the winter, would that use it up? I should have a place to stay, while I work with the beasts.”

“Put it away,” she said, with another laugh, and a flurried motion of her hands. “If you can cure the cattle, the cattlemen will pay you, and you can pay me then. Call that surety, if you like. But put it away, sir! It makes me dizzy to look at it.—Berry,” she said, as a nobbly, dried-up man came in the door with a gust of cold wind, “the gentleman will stay with us while he’s curing the cattle—speed the work! He’s given us surety of payment. So you’ll sleep in the chimney corner, and him in the room. This is my brother Berry, sir.”

Berry ducked his head and muttered. His eyes were dull. It seemed to Irioth that the man had been poisoned. When Berry went out again, the woman came closer and said, resolute, in a low voice, “There’s no harm in him but the drink, but there’s not much left of him but the drink. It’s eaten up most of his mind, and most of what we have. So, do you see, put up your money where he won’t see it, if you don’t mind, sir. He won’t come looking for it. But if he saw it, he’d take it. He often doesn’t know what he’s doing, do you see.”

“Yes,” Irioth said. “I understand. You are a kind woman.” She was talking about him, about his not knowing what he was doing. She was forgiving him. “A kind sister,” he said. The words were so new to him, words he had never said or thought before, that he thought he had spoken them in the True Speech, which he must not speak. But she only shrugged, with a frowning smile.

“Times I could shake his fool head off,” she said, and went back to her work.

He had not known how tired he was until he came to haven. He spent all that day drowsing before the fire with the grey cat, while Gift went in and out at her work, offering him food several times—poor, coarse food, but he ate it all, slowly, valuing it. Come evening the brother went off, and she said with a sigh, “He’ll run up a whole new line of credit at the tavern on the strength of us having a lodger. Not that it’s your fault.”

“Oh, yes,” Irioth said. “It was my fault.” But she forgave; and the grey cat was pressed up against his thigh, dreaming. The cat’s dreams came into his mind, in the low fields where he spoke with the animals, the dusky places. The cat leapt there, and then there was milk, and the deep soft thrilling. There was no fault, only the great innocence. No need for words. They would not find him here. He was not here to find. There was no need to speak any name. There was nobody but her, and the cat dreaming, and the fire flickering. He had come over the dead mountain on black roads, but here the streams ran slow among the pastures.

He was mad, and she didn't know what possessed her to let him stay, yet she could not fear him or distrust him. What did it matter if he was mad? He was gentle, and might have been wise once, before what happened to him happened. And he wasn't so mad as all that. Mad in patches, mad at moments. Nothing in him was whole, not even his madness. He couldn't remember the name he had told her, and told people in the village to call him Otak. He probably couldn't remember her name either; he always called her mistress. But maybe that was his courtesy. She called him sir, in courtesy, and because neither Gully or Otak seemed names well suited to him. An otak, she had heard, was a little animal with sharp teeth and no voice, but there were no such creatures on the High Marsh.

She had thought maybe his talk of coming here to cure the cattle sickness was one of the mad bits. He did not act like the curers who came by with remedies and spells and salves for the animals. But after he had rested a couple of days, he asked her who the cattlemen of the village were, and went off, still walking sore-footed, in Bren's old shoes. It made her heart turn in her, seeing that.

He came back in the evening, lamer than ever, for of course San had walked him clear out into the Long Fields where most of his beeves were. Nobody had horses but Alder, and they were for his cowboys. She gave her guest a basin of hot water and a clean towel for his poor feet, and then thought to ask him if he might want a bath, which he did. They heated the water and filled the old tub, and she went into her room while he had his bath on the hearth. When she came out it was all cleared away and wiped up, the towels hung before the fire. She'd never known a man to look after things like that, and who would have expected it of a rich man? Wouldn't he have servants, where he came from? But he was no more trouble than the cat. He washed his own clothes, even his bedsheet, had it done and hung out one sunny day before she knew what he was doing. "You needn't do that, sir, I'll do your things with mine," she said.

"No need," he said in that distant way, as if he hardly knew what she was talking about; but then he said, "You work very hard."

"Who doesn't? I like the cheese making. There's an interest to it. And I'm strong. All I fear is getting old, when I can't lift the buckets and the molds." She showed him her round, muscular arm, making a fist and smiling. "Pretty good for fifty years old!" she said. It was silly to boast, but she was proud of her strong arms, her energy and skill.

"Speed the work," he said gravely.

He had a way with her cows that was wonderful. When he was there and she needed a hand, he took Berry's place, and as she told her friend Tawny, laughing, he was cannier with the cows than Bren's old dog had been. "He talks to 'em, and I'll swear they consider what he says. And that heifer follows him about like a puppy." Whatever he was doing out on the ranges with the beeves, the cattlemen were coming to think well of him. Of course they would grab at any promise of help. Half Sans herd was dead. Alder would not say how many head he had lost. The bodies of cattle were everywhere. If it had not been cold weather the Marsh would have reeked of rotting flesh. None of the water could be drunk unless you boiled it an hour, except what came from the wells, hers here and the one in the village, which gave the place its name.

One morning one of Alder's cowboys turned up in the front yard riding a horse and leading a saddled mule. "Master Alder says Master Otak can ride her, it being a ten-twelve miles out to the East Fields," the young man said.

Her guest came out of the house. It was a bright, misty morning, the marshes hidden by gleaming vapors. Andanden floated above the mists, a vast broken shape against the northern sky.

The curer said nothing to the cowboy but went straight to the mule, or hinny, rather, being out of San's big jenny by Alder's white horse. She was a whitey roan, young, with a pretty face. He went and talked to her for a minute, saying something in her big, delicate ear and rubbing her topknot.

"He does that," the cowboy said to Gift. "Talks at 'em." He was amused, disdainful. He was one of Berry's drinking mates at the tavern, a decent enough young fellow, for a cowboy.

"Is he curing the cattle?" she asked.

"Well, he can't lift the murrain all at once. But seems like he can cure a beast if he gets to it before the staggers begin. And those not struck yet, he says he can keep it off 'em. So the master's sending him all about the range to do what can be done. It's too late for many."

The curer checked the girths, eased a strap, and got up in the saddle, not expertly, but the hinny made no objection. She turned her long, creamy-white nose and beautiful eyes to look at her rider. He smiled. Gift had never seen him smile.

"Shall we go?" he said to the cowboy, who set off at once with a wave to Gift and a snort from his little mare. The curer followed. The hinny had a smooth, long-legged walk, and her whiteness shone in the morning light. Gift thought it was like seeing a prince ride off, like something out of a tale, the mounted figures that

walked through bright mist across the vague dun of the winter fields, and faded into the light, and were gone.

It was hard work out in the pastures. “Who doesn’t do hard work?” Emer had asked, showing her round, strong arms, her hard, red hands. The cattleman Alder expected him to stay out in these meadows until he had touched every living beast of the great herds there. Alder had sent two cowboys along. They made a camp of sorts, with a groundcloth and a half tent. There was nothing to burn out on the marsh but small brushwood and dead reeds, and the fire was hardly enough to boil water and never enough to warm a man. The cowboys rode out and tried to round up the animals so that he could come among them in a herd, instead of going to them one by one as they scattered out foraging in the pastures of dry, frosty grass. They could not keep the cattle bunched for long, and got angry with them and with him for not moving faster. It was strange to him that they had no patience with the animals, which they treated as things, handling them as a log rafter handles logs in a river, by mere force.

They had no patience with him either, always at him to hurry up and get done with the job; nor with themselves, their life. When they talked to each other it was always about what they were going to do in town, in Oraby, when they got paid off. He heard a good deal about the whores in Oraby, Daisy and Goldie and the one they called the Burning Bush. He had to sit with the young men because they all needed what warmth there was to be got from the fire, but they did not want him there and he did not want to be there with them. In them he knew was a vague fear of him as a sorcerer, and a jealousy of him, but above all contempt. He was old, other, not one of them. Fear and jealousy he knew and shrank from, and contempt he remembered. He was glad he was not one of them, that they did not want to talk to him. He was afraid of doing wrong to them.

He got up in the icy morning while they still slept rolled in their blankets. He knew where the cattle were nearby, and went to them. The sickness was very familiar to him now. He felt it in his hands as a burning, and a queasiness if it was much advanced. Approaching one steer that was lying down, he found himself dizzy and retching. He came no closer, but said words that might ease the dying, and went on.

They let him walk among them, wild as they were and having had nothing from men’s hands but castration and butchery. He had a pleasure in their trust in him, a pride in it. He should not, but he did. If he wanted to touch one of the great beasts

he had only to stand and speak to it a little while in the language of those who do not speak. “Ulla,” he said, naming them. “Ellu. Ellua.” They stood, big, indifferent; sometimes one looked at him for a long time. Sometimes one came to him with its easy, loose, majestic tread, and breathed into his open palm. All those that came to him he could cure. He laid his hands on them, on the stiff-haired, hot flanks and neck, and sent the healing into his hands with the words of power spoken over and over. After a while the beast would give a shake, or toss its head a bit, or step on. And he would drop his hands and stand there, drained and blank, for a while. Then there would be another one, big, curious, shyly bold, muddy-coated, with the sickness in it like a prickling, a tingling, a hotness in his hands, a dizziness. “Ellu,” he would say, and walk to the beast and lay his hands upon it until they felt cool, as if a mountain stream ran through them.

The cowboys were discussing whether or not it was safe to eat the meat of a steer dead of the murrain. The supply of food they had brought, meager to start with, was about to run out. Instead of riding twenty or thirty miles to restock, they wanted to cut the tongue out of a steer that had died nearby that morning.

He had forced them to boil any water they used. Now he said, “If you eat that meat, in a year you’ll begin to get dizzy. You’ll end with the blind staggers and die as they do.”

They cursed and sneered, but believed him. He had no idea if what he said was true. It had seemed true as he said it. Perhaps he wanted to spite them. Perhaps he wanted to get rid of them.

“Ride back,” he said. “Leave me here. There’s enough food for one man for three or four days more. The hinny will bring me back.”

They needed no persuasion. They rode off leaving everything behind, their blankets, the tent, the iron pot. “How do we get all that back to the village?” he asked the hinny. She looked after the two ponies and said what hinnies say. “Aaawww!” she said. She would miss the ponies.

“We have to finish the work here,” he told her, and she looked at him mildly. All animals were patient, but the patience of the horse kind was wonderful, being freely given. Dogs were loyal, but there was more of obedience in it. Dogs were hierarchs, dividing the world into lords and commoners. Horses were all lords. They agreed to collude. He remembered walking among the great, plumed feet of cart horses, fearless. The comfort of their breath on his head. A long time ago. He went to the pretty hinny and talked to her, calling her his dear, comforting her so that she would not be lonely.

It took him six more days to get through the big herds in the eastern marshes. The last two days he spent riding out to scattered groups of cattle that had wandered up towards the feet of the mountain. Many of them were not infected yet, and he could protect them. The hinny carried him bareback and made the going easy. But there was nothing left for him to eat. When he rode back to the village he was light-headed and weak-kneed. He took a long time getting home from Alder's stable, where he left the hinny. Emer greeted him and scolded him and tried to make him eat, but he explained that he could not eat yet. "As I stayed there in the sickness, in the sick fields, I felt sick. After a while I'll be able to eat again," he explained.

"You're crazy," she said, very angry. It was a sweet anger. Why could not more anger be sweet?

"At least have a bath!" she said.

He knew what he smelled like, and thanked her.

"What's Alder paying you for all this?" she demanded while the water was heating. She was still indignant, speaking more bluntly even than usual.

"I don't know," he said.

She stopped and stared at him.

"You didn't set a price?"

"Set a price?" he flashed out. Then he remembered who he was not, and spoke humbly. "No. I didn't."

"Of all the innocence," Gift said, hissing the word. "He'll skin you." She dumped a kettleful of steaming water into the bath. "He has ivory," she said. "Tell him ivory it has to be. Out there ten days starving in the cold to cure his beasts! San's got nothing but copper, but Alder can pay you in ivory. I'm sorry if I'm meddling in your business. Sir." She flung out the door with two buckets, going to the pump. She would not use the stream water for anything at all, these days. She was wise, and kind. Why had he lived so long among those who were not kind?

"We'll have to see," said Alder, the next day, "if my beasts are cured. If they make it through the winter, see, we'll know your cures all took, that they're sound, like. Not that I doubt it, but fair's fair, right? You wouldn't ask me to pay you what I have in mind to pay you, would you now, if the cure didn't take and the beasts died after all. Avert the chance! But I wouldn't ask you to wait all that time unpaid, neither. So here's an advance, like, on what's to come, and all's square between us for now, right?"

The coppers weren't decently in a bag, even. Irioth had to hold out his hand,

and the cattleman laid out six copper pennies in it, one by one. "Now then! That's fair and square!" he said, expansive. "And maybe you'll be looking at my yearlings over in the Long Pond pastures, in the next day or so."

"No," Irioth said. "San's herd was going down fast when I left. I'm needed there."

"Oh, no, you're not, Master Otak. While you were out in the east range a sorcerer curer came by, a fellow that's been here before, from the south coast, and so San hired him. You work for me and you'll be paid well. Better than copper, maybe, if the beasts fare well!"

Irioth did not say yes, or no, or thanks, but went off unspeaking. The cattleman looked after him and spat. "Avert," he said.

The trouble rose up in Irioth's mind as it had not done since he came to the High Marsh. He struggled against it. A man of power had come to heal the cattle, another man of power. But a sorcerer, Alder had said. Not a wizard, not a mage. Only a curer, a cattle healer. I do not need to fear him. I do not need to fear his power. I do not need his power. I must see him, to be sure, to be certain. If he does what I do here there is no harm. We can work together. If I do what he does here. If he uses only sorcery and means no harm. As I do.

He walked down the straggling street of Purewells to San's house, which was about midway, opposite the tavern. San, a hardbitten man in his thirties, was talking to a man on his doorstep, a stranger. When they saw Irioth they looked uneasy. San went into his house and the stranger followed.

Irioth came up onto the doorstep. He did not go in, but spoke in the open door. "Master San, it's about the cattle you have there between the rivers. I can go to them today." He did not know why he said this. It was not what he had meant to say.

"Ah," San said, coming to the door, and hemmed a bit. "No need, Master Otak. This here is Master Sunbright, come up to deal with the murrain. He's cured beasts for me before, the hoof rot and all. Being as how you have all one man can do with Alder's beeves, you see . . ."

The sorcerer came out from behind San. His name was Ayeth. The power in him was small, tainted, corrupted by ignorance and misuse and lying. But the jealousy in him was like a stinging fire. "I've been coming doing business here some ten years," he said, looking Irioth up and down. "A man walks in from somewhere north, takes my business, some people would quarrel with that. A quarrel of sorcerers is a bad thing. If you're a sorcerer, a man of power, that is. I

am. As the good people here well know."

Irioth tried to say he did not want a quarrel. He tried to say that there was work for two. He tried to say he would not take the man's work from him. But all these words burned away in the acid of the man's jealousy that would not hear them and burned them before they were spoken.

Ayeth's stare grew more insolent as he watched Irioth stammer. He began to say something to San, but Irioth spoke.

"You have—" he said—"you have to go. Back." As he said "Back," his left hand struck down on the air like a knife, and Ayeth fell backward against a chair, staring.

He was only a little sorcerer, a cheating healer with a few sorry spells. Or so he seemed. What if he was cheating, hiding his power, a rival hiding his power? A jealous rival. He must be stopped, he must be bound, named, called. Irioth began to say the words that would bind him, and the shaken man cowered away, shrinking down, shriveling, crying out in a thin, high wail. It is wrong, wrong, I am doing the wrong, I am the ill, Irioth thought. He stopped the spell-words in his mouth, fighting against them, and at last crying out one other word. Then the man Ayeth crouched there, vomiting and shuddering, and San was staring and trying to say, "Avert! Avert!" And no harm was done. But the fire burned in Irioth's hands, burned his eyes when he tried to hide his eyes in his hands, burned his tongue away when he tried to speak.

For a long time nobody would touch him. He had fallen down in a fit in San's doorway. He lay there now like a dead man. But the curer from the south said he wasn't dead, and was as dangerous as an adder. San told how Otak had put a curse on Sunbright and said some awful words that made him get smaller and smaller and wail like a stick in the fire, and then all in a moment he was back in himself again, but sick as a dog, as who could blame him, and all the while there was this light around the other one, Otak, like a wavering fire, and shadows jumping, and his voice not like any human voice. A terrible thing.

Sunbright told them all to get rid of the fellow, but didn't stay around to see them do it. He went back down the south road as soon as he'd gulped a pint of beer at the tavern, telling them there was no room for two sorcerers in one village and he'd be back, maybe, when that man, or whatever he was, had gone.

Nobody would touch him. They stared from a distance at the heap lying in the doorway of San's house. San's wife wept aloud up and down the street. "Bad cess! Bad cess!" she cried. "Oh, my babe will be born dead, I know it!"

Berry went and fetched his sister, after he had heard Sunbright's tale at the tavern, and San's version of it, and several other versions already current. In the best of them, Otak had towered up ten feet tall and struck Sunbright into a lump of coal with lightning, before foaming at the mouth, turning blue, and collapsing in a heap.

Gift hurried to the village. She went straight up to the doorstep, bent over the heap, and laid her hand on it. Everybody gasped and muttered, "Avert! Avert!" except Tawny's youngest daughter, who mistook the signs and piped up, "Speed the work!"

The heap moved, and roused up slowly. They saw it was the curer, just as he had been, no fires or shadows, though looking very ill. "Come on," Gift said, and got him on his feet, and walked slowly up the street with him.

The villagers shook their heads. Gift was a brave woman, but there was such a thing as being too brave. Or brave, they said around the tavern table, in the wrong way, or the wrong place, d'you see. Nobody should ought to meddle with sorcery that ain't born to it. Nor with sorcerers. You forget that. They seem the same as other folk. But they ain't like other folk. Seems there's no harm in a curer. Heal the foot rot, clear a caked udder. That's all fine. But cross one and there you are, fire and shadows and curses and falling down in fits. Uncanny. Always was uncanny, that one. Where'd he come from, anyhow? Answer me that.

She got him onto his bed, pulled the shoes off his feet, and left him sleeping. Berry came in late and drunker than usual, so that he fell and gashed his forehead on the andiron. Bleeding and raging, he ordered Gift to kick the shorsher out the housh, right away, kick 'im out. Then he vomited into the ashes and fell asleep on the hearth. She hauled him onto his pallet, pulled his shoes off his feet, and left him sleeping. She went to look at the other one. He looked feverish, and she put her hand on his forehead. He opened his eyes, looking straight into hers without expression. "Emer," he said, and closed his eyes again.

She backed away from him, terrified.

In her bed, in the dark, she lay and thought: He knew the wizard who named me. Or I said my name. Maybe I said it out loud in my sleep. Or somebody told him. But nobody knows it. Nobody ever knew my name but the wizard, and my mother. And they're dead, they're dead . . . I said it in my sleep . . .

But she knew better.

She stood with the little oil lamp in her hand, and the light of it shone red between her fingers and golden on her face. He said her name. She gave him sleep.

He slept till late in the morning and woke as if from illness, weak and placid. She was unable to be afraid of him. She found that he had no memory at all of what had happened in the village, of the other sorcerer, even of the six coppers she had found scattered on the bedcover, which he must have held clenched in his hand all along.

"No doubt that's what Alder gave you," she said. "The flint!"

"I said I'd see to his beasts at . . . at the pasture between the rivers, was it?" he said, getting anxious, the hunted look coming back into him, and he got up from the settle.

"Sit down," she said. He sat down, but he sat fretting.

"How can you cure when you're sick?" she said.

"How else?" he said.

But he quieted down again presently, stroking the grey cat.

Her brother came in. "Come on out," he said to her as soon as he saw the curer dozing on the settle. She stepped outside with him.

"Now I won't have him here no more," Berry said, coming master of the house over her, with the great black gash in his forehead, and his eyes like oysters, and his hands juddering.

"Where'll you go?" she said.

"It's him has to go."

"It's my house. Bren's house. He stays. Go or stay, it's up to you."

"It's up to me too if he stays or goes, and he goes. You haven't got all the sayso. All the people say he ought to go. He's not canny."

"Oh, yes, since he's cured half the herds and got paid six coppers for it, time for him to go, right enough! I'll have him here as long as I choose, and that's the end of it."

"They won't buy our milk and cheese," Berry whined.

"Who says that?"

"San's wife. All the women."

"Then I'll carry the cheeses to Oraby," she said, "and sell 'em there. In the name of honor, brother, go wash out that cut, and change your shirt. You stink of the pothouse." And she went back into the house. "Oh, dear," she said, and burst into tears.

“What’s the matter, Emer?” said the curer, turning his thin face and strange eyes to her.

“Oh, it’s no good, I know it’s no good. Nothing’s any good with a drunkard,” she said. She wiped her eyes with her apron. “Was that what broke you,” she said, “the drink?”

“No,” he said, taking no offense, perhaps not understanding.

“Of course it wasn’t. I beg your pardon,” she said.

“Maybe he drinks to try to be another man,” he said. “To alter, to change . . .”

“He drinks because he drinks,” she said. “With some, that’s all it is. I’ll be in the dairy, now. I’ll lock the house door. There’s . . . there’s been strangers about. You rest yourself. It’s bitter out.” She wanted to be sure that he stayed indoors out of harm’s way, and that nobody came harassing him. Later on she would go into the village, have a word with some of the sensible people, and put a stop to this rubbishy talk, if she could.

When she did so, Alder’s wife Tawny and several other people agreed with her that a squabble between sorcerers over work was nothing new and nothing to take on about. But San and his wife and the tavern crew wouldn’t let it rest, it being the only thing of interest to talk about for the rest of the winter, except the cattle dying. “Besides,” Tawny said, “my man’s never averse to paying copper where he thought he might have to pay ivory.”

“Are the cattle he touched keeping afoot, then?”

“So far as we can see, they are. And no new sickenings.”

“He’s a true sorcerer, Tawny,” Gift said, very earnest. “I know it.”

“That’s the trouble, love,” said Tawny. “And you know it! This is no place for a man like that. Whoever he is is none of our business, but why did he come here, is what you have to ask.”

“To cure the beasts,” Gift said.

Sunbright had not been gone three days when a new stranger appeared in town: a man riding up the south road on a good horse and asking at the tavern for lodging. They sent him to San’s house, but San’s wife screeched when she heard there was a stranger at the door, crying that if San let another witch-man in the door her baby would be born dead twice over. Her screaming could be heard for several houses up and down the street, and a crowd, that is, ten or eleven people, gathered

between San's house and the tavern.

"Well, that won't do," said the stranger pleasantly. "I can't be bringing on a birth untimely. Is there maybe a room above the tavern?"

"Send him on out to the dairy," said one of Alder's cowboys. "Gift's taking whatever comes." There was some sniggering and shushing.

"Back that way," said the taverner.

"Thanks," said the traveler, and led his horse along the way they pointed.

"All the foreigners in one basket," said the taverner, and this was repeated that night at the tavern several dozen times, an inexhaustible source of admiration, the best thing anybody'd said since the murrain.

Gift was in the dairy, having finished the evening milking. She was straining the milk and setting out the pans. "Mistress," said a voice at the door, and she thought it was the curer and said, "Just a minute while I finish this," and then turning saw a stranger and nearly dropped the pan. "Oh, you startled me!" she said. "What can I do for you, then?"

"I'm looking for a bed for the night."

"No, I'm sorry, there's my lodger, and my brother, and me. Maybe San, in the village—"

"They sent me here. They said, 'All the foreigners in one basket.'" The stranger was in his thirties, with a blunt face and a pleasant look, dressed plain, though the cob that stood behind him was a good horse. "Put me up in the cow barn, mistress, it'll do fine. It's my horse needs a good bed; he's tired. I'll sleep in the barn and be off in the morning. Cows are a pleasure to sleep with on a cold night. I'll be glad to pay you, mistress, if two coppers would suit, and my name's Hawk."

"I'm Gift," she said, a bit flustered, but liking the fellow. "All right, then, Master Hawk. Put your horse up and see to him. There's the pump, there's plenty of hay. Come on in the house after. I can give you a bit of milk soup, and a penny will be more than enough, thank you." She didn't feel like calling him sir, as she always did the curer. This one had nothing of that lordly way about him. She hadn't seen a king when she first saw him, as with the other one.

When she finished in the dairy and went to the house, the new fellow, Hawk, was squatting on the hearth, skillfully making up the fire. The curer was in his room asleep. She looked in, and closed the door.

"He's not too well," she said, speaking low. "He was curing the cattle away out east over the marsh, in the cold, for days on end, and wore himself out."

As she went about her work in the kitchen, Hawk lent her a hand now and then in the most natural way, so that she began to wonder if men from foreign parts were all so much handier about the house than the men of the Marsh. He was easy to talk with, and she told him about the curer, since there was nothing much to say about herself.

"They'll use a sorcerer and then ill-mouth him for his usefulness," she said. "It's not just."

"But he scared 'em, somehow, did he?"

"I guess he did. Another curer came up this way, a fellow that's been by here before. Doesn't amount to much that I can see. He did no good to my cow with the caked bag, two years ago. And his balm's just pig fat, I'd swear. Well, so, he says to Otak, you're taking my business. And maybe Otak says the same back. And they lose their tempers, and they did some black spells, maybe. I guess Otak did. But he did no harm to the man at all, but fell down in a swoon himself. And now he doesn't remember any more about it, while the other man walked away unhurt. And they say every beast he touched is standing yet, and hale. Ten days he spent out there in the wind and the rain, touching the beasts and healing them. And you know what the cattleman gave him? Six pennies! Can you wonder he was a little rageous? But I don't say . . ." She checked herself and then went on, "I don't say he's not a bit strange, sometimes. The way witches and sorcerers are, I guess. Maybe they have to be, dealing with such powers and evils as they do. But he is a true man, and kind."

"Mistress," said Hawk, "may I tell you a story?"

"Oh, are you a teller? Oh, why didn't you say so to begin with! Is that what you are then? I wondered, it being winter and all, and you being on the roads. But with that horse, I thought you must be a merchant. Can you tell me a story? It would be the joy of my life, and the longer the better! But drink your soup first, and let me sit down to hear . . ."

"I'm not truly a teller, mistress," he said with his pleasant smile, "but I do have a story for you." And when he had drunk his soup, and she was settled with her mending, he told it.

"In the Inmost Sea, on the Isle of the Wise, on Roke Island, where all magery is taught, there are nine Masters," he began.

She closed her eyes in bliss and listened.

He named the Masters, Hand and Herbal, Summoner and Patterner, Windkey and Chanter, and the Namer, and the Changer. "The Changer's and the

Summoner's are very perilous arts," he said. "Changing, or transformation, you maybe know of, mistress. Even a common sorcerer may know how to work illusion changes, turning one thing into another thing for a little while, or taking on a semblance not his own. Have you seen that?"

"Heard of it," she whispered.

"And sometimes witches and sorcerers will say that they've summoned the dead to speak through them. Maybe a child the parents are grieving for. In the witch's hut, in the darkness, they hear it cry, or laugh . . ."

She nodded.

"Those are spells of illusion only, of seeming. But there are true changes, and true summonings. And these may be true temptations to the wizard! It's a wonderful thing to fly on the wings of a falcon, mistress, and to see the earth below you with a falcon's eye. And summoning, which is naming truly, is a great power. To know the true name is to have power, as you know, mistress. And the summoner's art goes straight to that. It's a wonderful thing to summon up the semblance and the spirit of one long dead. To see the beauty of Elfarran in the orchards of Soléa, as Morred saw it when the world was young . . ."

His voice had become very soft, very dark.

"Well, to my story. Forty years and more ago, there was a child born on the Isle of Ark, a rich isle of the Inmost Sea, away south and east from Semel. This child was the son of an understeward in the household of the Lord of Ark. Not a poor man's son, but not a child of much account. And the parents died young. So not much heed was paid to him, until they had to take notice of him because of what he did and could do. He was an uncanny brat, as they say. He had powers. He could light a fire or douse it with a word. He could make pots and pans fly through the air. He could turn a mouse into a pigeon and set it flying round the great kitchens of the Lord of Ark. And if he was crossed, or frightened, then he did harm. He turned a kettle of boiling water over a cook who had mistreated him."

"Mercy," whispered Gift. She had not sewn a stitch since he began.

"He was only a child, and the wizards of that household can't have been wise men, for they used little wisdom or gentleness with him. Maybe they were afraid of him. They bound his hands and gagged his mouth to keep him from making spells. They locked him in a cellar room, a room of stone, until they thought him tamed. Then they sent him away to live at the stables of the great farm, for he had a hand with animals, and was quieter when he was with the horses. But he quarreled with a stable boy, and turned the poor lad into a lump of dung. When the wizards had

got the stable boy back into his own shape, they tied up the child again, and gagged his mouth, and put him on a ship for Roke. They thought maybe the Masters there could tame him."

"Poor child," she murmured.

"Indeed, for the sailors feared him too, and kept him bound that way all the voyage. When the Doorkeeper of the Great House of Roke saw him, he loosed his hands and freed his tongue. And the first thing the boy did in the Great House, they say, he turned the Long Table of the dining hall upside down, and soured the beer, and a student who tried to stop him got turned into a pig for a bit . . . But the boy had met his match in the Masters.

"They didn't punish him, but kept his wild powers bound with spells until they could make him listen and begin to learn. It took them a long time. There was a rivalrous spirit in him that made him look on any power he did not have, any thing he did not know, as a threat, a challenge, a thing to fight against until he could defeat it. There are many boys like that. I was one. But I was lucky. I learned my lesson young.

"Well, this boy did learn at last to tame his anger and control his power. And a very great power it was. Whatever art he studied came easy to him, too easy, so that he despised illusion, and weatherworking, and even healing, because they held no fear, no challenge to him. He saw no virtue in himself for his mastery of them. So, after the Archmage Nemmerle had given him his name, the boy set his will on the great and dangerous art of summoning. And he studied with the Master of that art for a long time.

"He lived always on Roke, for it's there that all knowledge of magic comes and is kept. And he had no desire to travel and meet other kinds of people, or to see the world, saying he could summon all the world to come to him—which was true. Maybe that's where the danger of that art lies.

"Now, what is forbidden to the summoner, or any wizard, is to call a living spirit. We can call to them, yes. We can send to them a voice or a presentment, a seeming, of ourself. But we do not summon them, in spirit or in flesh, to come to us. Only the dead may we summon. Only the shadows. You can see why this must be. To summon a living man is to have entire power over him, body and mind. No one, no matter how strong or wise or great, can rightly own and use another.

"But the spirit of rivalry worked in the boy as he grew to be a man. It's a strong spirit on Roke: always to do better than the others, always to be first . . . The art becomes a contest, a game. The end becomes a means to an end less than itself . . .

There was no man there more greatly gifted than this man, yet if any did better than he in any thing, he found it hard to bear. It frightened him, it galled him.

"There was no place for him among the Masters, since a new Master Summoner had been chosen, a strong man in his prime, not likely to retire or die. Among the scholars and other teachers he had a place of honor, but he wasn't one of the Nine. He'd been passed over. Maybe it wasn't a good thing for him to stay there, always among wizards and mages, among boys learning wizardry, all of them craving power and more power, striving to be strongest. At any rate, as the years went on he became more and more aloof, pursuing his studies in his tower cell apart from others, teaching few students, speaking little. The Summoner would send gifted students to him, but many of the boys there scarcely knew of him. In this isolation he began to practice certain arts that are not well to practice and lead to no good thing.

"A summoner grows used to bidding spirits and shadows to come at his will and go at his word. Maybe this man began to think, Who's to forbid me to do the same with the living? Why have I the power if I cannot use it? So he began to call the living to him, those at Roke whom he feared, thinking them rivals, those whose power he was jealous of. When they came to him he took their power from them for himself, leaving them silent. They couldn't say what had happened to them, what had become of their power. They didn't know.

"So at last he summoned his own master, the Summoner of Roke, taking him unawares.

"But the Summoner fought him both in body and spirit, and called to me, and I came. Together we fought against the will that would destroy us."

Night had come. Gift's lamp had flickered out. Only the red glow of the fire shone on Hawk's face. It was not the face she had thought it. It was worn, and hard, and scarred all down one side. The hawk's face, she thought. She held still, listening.

"This is not a teller's tale, mistress. This is not a story you will ever hear anyone else tell.

"I was new at the business of being Archmage then. And younger than the man we fought, and maybe not afraid enough of him. It was all the two of us could do to hold our own against him, there in the silence, in the cell in the tower. Nobody else knew what was going on. We fought. A long time we fought. And then it was over. He broke. Like a stick breaking. He was broken. But he fled away. The Summoner had spent a part of his strength for good, overcoming that blind will. And I didn't

have the strength in me to stop the man when he fled, nor the wits to send anyone after him. And not a shred of power left in me to follow him with. So he got away from Roke. Clean gone.

"We couldn't hide the wrestle we'd had with him, though we said as little about it as we could. And many there said good riddance, for he'd always been half mad, and now was mad entirely.

"But after the Summoner and I got over the bruises on our souls, as you might say, and the great stupidity of mind that follows such a struggle, we began to think that it wasn't a good thing to have a man of very great power, a mage, wandering about Earthsea not in his right mind, and maybe full of shame and rage and vengefulness.

"We could find no trace of him. No doubt he changed himself to a bird or a fish when he left Roke, until he came to some other island. And a wizard can hide himself from all finding-spells. We sent out inquiries, in the ways we have of doing so, but nothing and nobody replied. So we set off looking for him, the Summoner to the eastern isles and I to the west. For when I thought about this man, I had begun to see in my mind's eye a great mountain, a broken cone, with a long, green land beneath it reaching to the south. I remembered my geography lessons when I was a boy at Roke, and the lay of the land on Semel, and the mountain whose name is Andanden. So I came to the High Marsh. I think I came the right way."

There was a silence. The fire whispered.

"Should I speak to him?" Gift asked in a steady voice.

"No need," said the man like a falcon. "I will." And he said, "Irioth."

She looked at the door of the bedroom. It opened and he stood there, thin and tired, his dark eyes full of sleep and bewilderment and pain.

"Ged," he said. He bowed his head. After a while he looked up and asked, "Will you take my name from me?"

"Why should I do that?"

"It means only hurt. Hate, pride, greed."

"I'll take those names from you, Irioth, but not your own."

"I didn't understand," Irioth said, "about the others. That they are other. We are all other. We must be. I was wrong."

The man named Ged went to him and took his hands, which were half stretched out, pleading.

"You went wrong. You've come back. But you're tired, Irioth, and the way's hard when you go alone. Come home with me."

Irioth's head drooped as if in utter weariness. All tension and passion had gone out of his body. But he looked up, not at Ged but at Gift, silent in the hearth corner.

"I have work here," he said.

Ged too looked at her.

"He does," she said. "He heals the cattle."

"They show me what I should do," Irioth said, "and who I am. They know my name. But they never say it."

After a while Ged gently drew the older man to him and held him in his arms. He said something quietly to him and let him go. Irioth drew a deep breath.

"I'm no good there, you see, Ged," he said. "I am, here. If they'll let me do the work." He looked again at Gift, and Ged did also. She looked at them both.

"What say you, Emer?" asked the one like a falcon.

"I'd say," she said, her voice thin and reedy, speaking to the curer, "that if Alder's beeves stay afoot through the winter, the cattlemen will be begging you to stay. Though they may not love you."

"Nobody loves a sorcerer," said the Archmage. "Well, Irioth! Did I come all this way for you in the dead of winter, and must go back alone?"

"Tell them—tell them I was wrong," Irioth said. "Tell them I did wrong. Tell Thorion—" He halted, confused.

"I'll tell him that the changes in a man's life may be beyond all the arts we know, and all our wisdom," said the Archmage. He looked at Emer again. "May he stay here, mistress? Is that your wish as well as his?"

"He's ten times the use and company to me my brother is," she said. "And a kind true man, as I told you. Sir."

"Very well, then. Irioth, my dear companion, teacher, rival, friend, farewell. Emer, brave woman, my honor and thanks to you. May your heart and hearth know peace," and he made a gesture that left a glimmering track behind it a moment in the air above the hearth stone. "Now I'm off to the cow barn," he said, and he was.

The door closed. It was silent except for the whisper of the fire.

"Come to the fire," she said. Irioth came and sat down on the settle.

"Was that the Archmage? Truly?"

He nodded.

"The Archmage of the world," she said. "In my cow barn. He should have my bed—"

“He won’t,” said Irioth.

She knew he was right.

“Your name is beautiful, Irioth,” she said after a while. “I never knew my husband’s true name. Nor he mine. I won’t speak yours again. But I like to know it, since you know mine.”

“Your name is beautiful, Emer,” he said. “I will speak it when you tell me to.”

Dragonfly

I. Iria

Her father's ancestors had owned a wide, rich domain on the wide, rich island of Way. Claiming no title or court privilege in the days of the kings, through all the dark years after Maharion fell they held their land and people with firm hands, putting their gains back into the land, upholding some sort of justice, and fighting off petty tyrants. As order and peace returned to the Archipelago under the sway of the wise men of Roke, for a while yet the family and their farms and villages prospered. That prosperity and the beauty of the meadows and upland pastures and oak-crowned hills made the domain a byword, so that people said "as fat as a cow of Iria," or "as lucky as an Irian." The masters and many tenants of the domain added its name to their own, calling themselves Irian. But though the farmers and shepherds went on from season to season and year to year and generation to generation as steady and regenerative as the oaks, the family that owned the land altered and declined with time and chance.

A quarrel between brothers over their inheritance divided them. One heir mismanaged his estate through greed, the other through foolishness. One had a daughter who married a merchant and tried to run her estate from the city, the other had a son whose sons quarreled again, redividing the divided land. By the time the girl called Dragonfly was born, the domain of Iria, though still one of the loveliest regions of hill and field and meadow in all Earthsea, was a battleground of feuds and litigations. Farmlands went to weeds, farmsteads went unroofed, milking sheds stood unused, and shepherds followed their flocks over the mountain to better pastures. The old house that had been the center of the domain was half in ruins on its hill among the oaks.

Its owner was one of four men who called themselves Master of Iria. The other three called him Master of Old Iria. He spent his youth and what remained of his inheritance in law courts and the anterooms of the Lords of Way in Shelieth, trying to prove his right to the whole domain as it had been a hundred years ago. He came

back unsuccessful and embittered and spent his age drinking the hard red wine from his last vineyard and walking his boundaries with a troop of ill-treated, underfed dogs to keep interlopers off his land.

He had married while he was in Shelieth, a woman no one at Iria knew anything about, for she came from some other island, it was said, somewhere in the west; and she never came to Iria, for she died in childbirth there in the city.

When he came home he had a three-year-old daughter with him. He turned her over to the housekeeper and forgot about her. When he was drunk sometimes he remembered her. If he could find her, he made her stand by his chair or sit on his knees and listen to all the wrongs that had been done to him and to the house of Iria. He cursed and cried and drank and made her drink too, pledging to honor her inheritance and be true to Iria. She swallowed the mouthful of wine, but she hated the curses and pledges and tears, and the slobbered caresses that followed them. She would escape, as soon as she could, if she could, and go down to the dogs and horses and cattle. She swore to them that she would be loyal to her mother, whom nobody knew or honored or was true to, except herself.

When she was thirteen the old vineyarder and the housekeeper, who were all that was left of the household, told the Master that it was time his daughter had her naming day. They asked if they should send for the sorcerer over at Westpool, or would their own village witch do. The Master of Iria fell into a screaming rage. "A village witch? A hex-hag to give Irian's daughter her true name? Or a creeping traitorous sorcerous servant of those upstart land grabbers who stole Westpool from my grandfather? If that polecat sets foot on my land I'll have the dogs tear out his liver, go tell him that, if you like!" And so on. Old Daisy went back to her kitchen and old Coney went back to his vines, and thirteen-year-old Dragonfly ran out of the house and down the hill to the village, hurling her father's curses at the dogs, who, crazy with excitement at his shouting, barked and bayed and rushed after her.

"Get back, you black-hearted bitch!" she yelled. "Home, you crawling traitor!" And the dogs fell silent and went sidling back to the house with their tails down.

Dragonfly found the village witch taking maggots out of an infected cut on a sheep's rump. The witch's use-name was Rose, like a great many women of Way and other islands of the Hardic Archipelago. People who have a secret name that holds their power the way a diamond holds light may well like their public name to be ordinary, common, like other people's names.

Rose was muttering a rote spell, but it was her hands and her little short sharp

knife that did most of the work. The ewe bore the digging knife patiently, her opaque, amber, slotted eyes gazing into silence; only she stamped her small left front foot now and then, and sighed.

Dragonfly peered close at Rose's work. Rose brought out a maggot, dropped it, spat on it, and probed again. The girl leaned up against the ewe, and the ewe leaned against the girl, giving and receiving comfort. Rose extracted, dropped, and spat on the last maggot, and said, "Just hand me that bucket now." She bathed the sore with salt water. The ewe sighed deeply and suddenly walked out of the yard, heading for home. She had had enough of medicine. "Bucky!" Rose shouted. A grubby child appeared from under a bush where he had been asleep and trailed after the ewe, of whom he was nominally in charge although she was older, larger, better fed, and probably wiser than he was.

"They said you should give me my name," said Dragonfly. "Father fell to raging. So that's that."

The witch said nothing. She knew the girl was right. Once the Master of Iria said he would or would not allow a thing, he never changed his mind, priding himself on his intransigence, since in his view only weak men said a thing and then unsaid it.

"Why can't I give myself my own true name?" Dragonfly asked, while Rose washed the knife and her hands in the salt water.

"Can't be done."

"Why not? Why does it have to be a witch or a sorcerer? What do you *do*?"

"Well," Rose said, and dumped out the salt water on the bare dirt of the small front yard of her house, which, like most witches' houses, stood somewhat apart from the village. "Well," she said, straightening up and looking about vaguely as if for an answer, or a ewe, or a towel. "You have to know something about the power, see," she said at last, and looked at Dragonfly with one eye. Her other eye looked a little off to the side. Sometimes Dragonfly thought the cast was in Rose's left eye, sometimes it seemed to be in her right, but always one eye looked straight and the other watched something just out of sight, around the corner, elsewhere.

"Which power?"

"The one," Rose said. As suddenly as the ewe had walked off, she went into her house. Dragonfly followed her, but only to the door. Nobody entered a witch's house uninvited.

"You said I had it," the girl said into the reeking gloom of the one-roomed hut.

"I said you have a strength in you, a great one," the witch said from the

darkness. “And you know it too. What you are to do I don’t know, nor do you. That’s to find. But there’s no such power as to name yourself.”

“Why not? What’s more yourself than your own true name?”

A long silence.

The witch emerged with a soapstone drop spindle and a ball of greasy wool. She sat down on the bench beside her door and set the spindle turning. She had spun a yard of grey-brown yarn before she answered.

“My name’s myself. True. But what’s a name, then? It’s what another calls me. If there was no other, only me, what would I want a name for?”

“But,” said Dragonfly and stopped, caught by the argument. After a while she said, “So a name has to be a gift?”

Rose nodded.

“Give me my name, Rose,” the girl said.

“Your dad says not.”

“I say to.”

“He’s the master here.”

“He can keep me poor and stupid and worthless, but he can’t keep me nameless!”

The witch sighed, like the ewe, uneasy and constrained.

“Tonight,” Dragonfly said. “At our spring, under Iria Hill. What he doesn’t know won’t hurt him.” Her voice was half coaxing, half savage.

“You ought to have your proper nameday, your feast and dancing, like any young ’un,” the witch said. “It’s at daybreak a name should be given. And then there ought to be music and feasting and all. A party. Not sneaking about at night and no one knowing . . .”

“I’ll know. How do you know what name to say, Rose? Does the water tell you?”

The witch shook her iron-grey head once. “I can’t tell you.” Her “can’t” did not mean “won’t.” Dragonfly waited. “It’s the power, like I said. It comes just so.” Rose stopped her spinning and looked up with one eye at a cloud in the west; the other looked a little northward of the sky. “You’re there in the water, together, you and the child. You take away the child-name. People may go on using that name for a use-name, but it’s not her name, nor ever was. So now she’s not a child, and she has no name. So then you wait. In the water there. You open your mind up, like. Like opening the doors of a house to the wind. So it comes. Your tongue speaks it, the name. Your breath makes it. You give it to that child, the breath, the name. You

can't think of it. You let it come to you. It must come through you and the water to her it belongs to. That's the power, the way it works. It's all like that. It's not a thing you do. You have to know how to let it do. That's all the mastery."

"Mages can do more than that," the girl said after a while.

"Nobody can do more than that," said Rose.

Dragonfly rolled her head round on her neck, stretching till the vertebrae cracked, restlessly stretching out her long arms and legs. "Will you?" she said.

After some time, Rose nodded once.

They met in the lane under Iria Hill in the dark of night, long after sunset, long before dawn. Rose made a dim glow of werelight so that they could find their way through the marshy ground around the spring without falling in a sinkhole among the reeds. In the cold darkness under a few stars and the black curve of the hill, they stripped and waded into the shallow water, their feet sinking deep in velvet mud. The witch touched the girl's hand, saying, "I take your name, child. You are no child. You have no name."

It was utterly still.

In a whisper the witch said, "Woman, be named. You are Irian."

For a moment longer they held still; then the night wind blew across their naked shoulders, and shivering, they waded out, dried themselves as well as they could, struggled barefoot and wretched through the sharp-edged reeds and tangling roots, and found their way back to the lane. And there Dragonfly spoke in a ragged, raging whisper: "How could you name me that!"

The witch said nothing.

"It isn't right. It isn't my true name! I thought my name would make me be me. But this makes it worse. You got it wrong. You're only a witch. You did it wrong. It's *his* name. He can have it. He's so proud of it, his stupid domain, his stupid grandfather. I don't want it. I won't have it. It isn't me. I still don't know who I am. I'm not Irian!" She fell silent abruptly, having spoken the name.

The witch still said nothing. They walked along in the darkness side by side. At last, in a placating, frightened voice, Rose said, "It came so . . ."

"If you ever tell it to anyone I'll kill you," Dragonfly said.

At that, the witch stopped walking. She hissed in her throat like a cat. "*Tell* anyone?"

Dragonfly stopped too. She said after a moment, "I'm sorry. But I feel like—I feel like you betrayed me."

"I spoke your true name. It's not what I thought it would be. And I don't feel

easy about it. As if I'd left something unfinished. But it is your name. If it betrays you, then that's the truth of it." Rose hesitated and then spoke less angrily, more coldly: "If you want the power to betray me, Irian, I'll give you that. My name is Etaudis."

The wind had come up again. They were both shivering, their teeth chattering. They stood face to face in the black lane, hardly able to see where the other was. Dragonfly put out her groping hand and met the witch's hand. They put their arms round each other in a fierce, long embrace. Then they hurried on, the witch to her hut near the village, the heiress of Iria up the hill to her ruinous house, where all the dogs, who had let her go without much fuss, received her back with a clamor and racket of barking that woke everybody for a half mile round except the master, sodden drunk by his cold hearth.

II. Ivory

The master of Iria of Westpool, Birch, didn't own the old house, but he did own the central and richest lands of the old domain. His father, more interested in vines and orchards than in quarrels with his relatives, had left Birch a thriving property. Birch hired men to manage the farms and wineries and cooperage and cartage and all, while he enjoyed his wealth. He married the timid daughter of the younger brother of the Lord of Wayfirth, and took infinite pleasure in thinking that his daughters were of noble blood.

The fashion of the time among the nobility was to have a wizard in their service, a genuine wizard with a staff and a grey cloak, trained on the Isle of the Wise; and so the Master of Iria of Westpool got himself a wizard from Roke. He was surprised how easy it was to get one, if you paid the price.

The young man, called Ivory, did not actually have his staff and cloak yet; he explained that he was to be made wizard when he went back to Roke. The Masters had sent him out in the world to gain experience, for all the classes in the school cannot give a man the experience he needs to be a wizard. Birch looked a little dubious at this, and Ivory reassured him that his training on Roke had equipped him with every kind of magic that could be needed in Iria of Westpool on Way. To prove it, he made it seem that a herd of deer ran through the dining hall, followed by a flight of swans, who marvelously soared in through the south wall and out through the north wall; and lastly a fountain in a silver basin sprang up in the center of the table, and when the master and his family cautiously imitated their wizard and filled their cups from it and tasted it, it was a sweet golden wine. "Wine of the Andrades," said the young man with a modest, complacent smile. By then the wife and daughters were entirely won over. And Birch thought the young man was worth his fee, although his own silent preference was for the dry red Fanian of his own vineyards, which got you drunk if you drank enough, while this yellow stuff was just honey water.

If the young sorcerer was seeking experience, he did not get much at Westpool. Whenever Birch had guests from Kembermouth or from neighboring domains, the herd of deer, the swans, and the fountain of golden wine made their appearance.

He also worked up some very pretty fireworks for warm spring evenings. But if the managers of the orchards and vineyards came to the master to ask if his wizard might put a spell of increase on the pears this year or maybe charm the black rot off the Fanian vines on the south hill, Birch said, "A wizard of Roke doesn't lower himself to such stuff. Go tell the village sorcerer to earn his keep!" And when the youngest daughter came down with a wasting cough, Birch's wife dared not trouble the wise young man about it, but sent humbly to Rose of Old Iria, asking her to come in by the back door and maybe make a poultice or sing a chant to bring the girl back to health.

Ivory never noticed that the girl was ailing, nor the pear trees, nor the vines. He kept himself to himself, as a man of craft and learning should. He spent his days riding about the countryside on the pretty black mare that his employer had given him for his use when he made it clear that he had not come from Roke to trudge about on foot in the mud and dust of country byways.

On his rides he sometimes passed an old house on a hill among great oaks. Once he turned off the village lane up the hill, but a pack of scrawny, evil-mouthed dogs came pelting and bellowing down at him. The mare was afraid of dogs and liable to buck and bolt, so after that he kept his distance. But he had an eye for beauty, and liked to look at the old house dreaming away in the dappled light of the early summer afternoons.

He asked Birch about the place. "That's Iria," Birch said—"Old Iria, I mean to say. I own that house by rights. But after a century of feuds and fights over it, my granddad let the place go to settle the quarrel. Though the master there would still be quarreling with me if he didn't keep too drunk to talk. Haven't seen the old man for years. He had a daughter, I think."

"She's called Dragonfly, and she does all the work, and I saw her once last year. She's tall, and as beautiful as a flowering tree," said the youngest daughter, Rose, who was busy crowding a lifetime of keen observation into the fourteen years that were all she was going to have for it. She broke off, coughing. Her mother shot an anguished, yearning glance at the wizard. Surely he would hear that cough, this time? He smiled at young Rose, and the mother's heart lifted. Surely he wouldn't smile so if Rose's cough was anything serious?

"Nothing to do with us, that lot at the old place," Birch said, displeased. The tactful Ivory asked no more. But he wanted to see the girl as beautiful as a flowering tree. He rode past Old Iria regularly. He tried stopping in the village at the foot of the hill to ask questions, but there was nowhere to stop and nobody would answer

questions. A walleyed witch took one look at him and scuttled into her hut. If he went up to the house he would have to face the pack of hellhounds and probably a drunk old man. But it was worth the chance, he thought; he was bored out of his wits with the dull life at Westpool, and was never slow to take a risk. He rode up the hill till the dogs were yelling around him in a frenzy snapping at the mare's legs. She plunged and lashed out her hoofs at them, and he kept her from bolting only by a staying-spell and all the strength in his arms. The dogs were leaping and snapping at his own legs now, and he was about to let the mare have her head when somebody came among the dogs shouting curses and beating them back with a strap. When he got the lathered, gasping mare to stand still, he saw the girl as beautiful as a flowering tree. She was very tall, very sweaty, with big hands and feet and mouth and nose and eyes, and a head of wild dusty hair. She was yelling, "Down! Back to the house, you carrion, you vile sons of bitches!" to the whining, cowering dogs.

Ivory clapped his hand to his right leg. A dog's tooth had ripped his breeches at the calf, and a trickle of blood came through.

"Is she hurt?" the woman said. "Oh, the traitorous vermin!" She was stroking down the mare's right foreleg. Her hands came away covered with blood-streaked horse sweat. "There, there," she said. "The brave girl, the brave heart." The mare put her head down and shivered all over with relief. "What did you keep her standing there in the middle of the dogs for?" the woman demanded furiously. She was kneeling at the horse's leg, looking up at Ivory. He was looking down at her from horseback, yet he felt short; he felt small.

She did not wait for an answer. "I'll walk her up," she said, standing, and put out her hand for the reins. Ivory saw that he was supposed to dismount. He did so, asking, "Is it very bad?" and peering at the horse's leg, seeing only bright, bloody foam.

"Come on then, my love," the young woman said, not to him. The mare followed her trustfully. They set off up the rough path round the hillside to an old stone and brick stableyard, empty of horses, inhabited only by nesting swallows that swooped about over the roofs calling their quick gossip.

"Keep her quiet," said the young woman, and left him holding the mare's reins in this deserted place. She returned after some time lugging a heavy bucket, and set to sponging off the mare's leg. "Get the saddle off her," she said, and her tone held the unspoken, impatient "you fool!" Ivory obeyed, half annoyed by this crude giantess and half intrigued. She did not put him in mind of a flowering tree at all,

but she was in fact beautiful, in a large, fierce way. The mare submitted to her absolutely. When she said, "Move your foot!" the mare moved her foot. The woman wiped her down all over, put the saddle blanket back on her, and made sure she was standing in the sun. "She'll be all right," she said. "There's a gash, but if you'll wash it with warm salt water four or five times a day, it'll heal clean. I'm sorry." She said the last honestly, though grudgingly, as if she still wondered how he could have let his mare stand there to be assaulted, and she looked straight at him for the first time. Her eyes were clear orange-brown, like dark topaz or amber. They were strange eyes, right on a level with his own.

"I'm sorry too," he said, trying to speak carelessly, lightly.

"She's Irian of Westpool's mare. You're the wizard, then?"

He bowed. "Ivory, of Havnor Great Port, at your service. May I—"

She interrupted. "I thought you were from Roke."

"I am," he said, his composure regained.

She stared at him with those strange eyes, as unreadable as a sheep's, he thought. Then she burst out: "You lived there? You studied there? Do you know the Archmage?"

"Yes," he said with a smile. Then he winced and stooped to press his hand against his shin for a moment.

"Are you hurt too?"

"It's nothing," he said. In fact, rather to his annoyance, the cut had stopped bleeding.

The woman's gaze returned to his face.

"What is it—what is it like—on Roke?"

Ivory went, limping only very slightly, to an old mounting block nearby and sat down on it. He stretched his leg, nursing the torn place, and looked up at the woman. "It would take a long time to tell you what Roke is like," he said. "But it would be my pleasure."

"The man's a wizard, or nearly," said Rose the witch, "a Roke wizard! You must not ask him questions!" She was more than scandalized, she was frightened.

"He doesn't mind," Dragonfly reassured her. "Only he hardly ever really answers."

"Of course not!"

"Why of course not?"

"Because he's a wizard! Because you're a woman, with no art, no knowledge, no

learning!"

"You could have taught me! You never would!"

Rose dismissed all she had taught or could teach with a flick of the fingers.

"Well, so I have to learn from him," said Dragonfly.

"Wizards don't teach women. You're besotted."

"You and Broom trade spells."

"Broom's a village sorcerer. This man is a wise man. He learned the High Arts at the Great House on Roke!"

"He told me what it's like," Dragonfly said. "You walk up through the town, Thwil Town. There's a door opening on the street, but it's shut. It looks like an ordinary door."

The witch listened, unable to resist the lure of secrets revealed and the contagion of passionate desire.

"And a man comes when you knock, an ordinary looking man. And he gives you a test. You have to say a certain word, a password, before he'll let you in. If you don't know it, you can never go in. But if he lets you in, then from inside you see that the door is entirely different—it's made out of horn, with a tree carved on it, and the frame is made out of a tooth, one tooth of a dragon that lived long, long before Erreth-Akbe, before Morred, before there were people in Earthsea. There were only dragons, to begin with. They found the tooth on Mount Onn, in Havnor, at the center of the world. And the leaves of the tree are carved so thin that the light shines through them, but the door's so strong that if the Doorkeeper shuts it no spell could ever open it. And then the Doorkeeper takes you down a hall and another hall, till you're lost and bewildered, and then suddenly you come out under the sky. In the Court of the Fountain, in the very deepest inside of the Great House. And that's where the Archmage would be, if he was there . . ."

"Go on," the witch murmured.

"That's all he really told me, yet," said Dragonfly, coming back to the mild, overcast spring day and the infinite familiarity of the village lane, Rose's front yard, her own seven milch ewes grazing on Iria Hill, the bronze crowns of the oaks. "He's very careful how he talks about the Masters."

Rose nodded.

"But he told me about some of the students."

"No harm in that, I suppose."

"I don't know," Dragonfly said. "To hear about the Great House is wonderful, but I thought the people there would be—I don't know. Of course they're mostly

just boys when they go there. But I thought they'd be . . ." She gazed off at the sheep on the hill, her face troubled. "Some of them are really bad and stupid," she said in a low voice. "They get into the school because they're rich. And they study there just to get richer. Or to get power."

"Well, of course they do," said Rose, "that's what they're there for!"

"But power—like you told me about—that isn't the same as making people do what you want, or pay you—"

"Isn't it?"

"No!"

"If a word can heal, a word can wound," the witch said. "If a hand can kill, a hand can cure. It's a poor cart that goes only one direction."

"But on Roke, they learn to use power well, not for harm, not for gain."

"Everything's for gain some way, I'd say. People have to live. But what do I know? I make my living doing what I know how to do. But I don't meddle with the great arts, the perilous crafts, like summoning the dead," and Rose made the hand sign to avert the danger spoken of.

"Everything's perilous," Dragonfly said, gazing now through the sheep, the hill, the trees, into still depths, a colorless, vast emptiness like the clear sky before sunrise.

Rose watched her. She knew she did not know who Irian was or what she might be. A big, strong, awkward, ignorant, innocent, angry woman, yes. But ever since Irian was a child Rose had seen something more in her, something beyond what she was. And when Irian looked away from the world like that, she seemed to enter that place or time or being beyond herself, utterly beyond Rose's knowledge. Then Rose feared her, and feared for her.

"You take care," the witch said, grim. "Everything's perilous, right enough, and meddling with wizards most of all."

Through love, respect, and trust, Dragonfly would never disregard a warning from Rose; but she was unable to see Ivory as perilous. She didn't understand him, but the idea of fearing him, him personally, was not one she could keep in mind. She tried to be respectful, but it was impossible. She thought he was clever and quite handsome, but she didn't think much about him, except for what he could tell her. He knew what she wanted to know and little by little he told it to her, and then it was not really what she had wanted to know, but she wanted to know more. He was patient with her, and she was grateful to him for his patience, knowing he was much quicker than she. Sometimes he smiled at her ignorance, but he never

sneered at it or reproved it. Like the witch, he liked to answer a question with a question; but the answers to Rose's questions were always something she'd always known, while the answers to his questions were things she had never imagined and found startling, unwelcome, even painful, altering her beliefs.

Day by day, as they talked in the old stableyard of Iria, where they had fallen into the habit of meeting, she asked him and he told her more, though reluctantly, always partially; he shielded his Masters, she thought, trying to defend the bright image of Roke, until one day he gave in to her insistence and spoke freely at last.

"There are good men there," he said. "Great and wise the Archmage certainly was. But he's gone. And the Masters . . . Some hold aloof, following arcane knowledge, seeking ever more patterns, ever more names, but using their knowledge for nothing. Others hide their ambition under the grey cloak of wisdom. Roke is no longer where power is in Earthsea. That's the Court in Havnor, now. Roke lives on its great past, defended by a thousand spells against the present day. And inside those spell-walls, what is there? Quarreling ambitions, fear of anything new, fear of young men who challenge the power of the old. And at the center, nothing. An empty courtyard. The Archmage will never return."

"How do you know?" she whispered.

He looked stern. "The dragon bore him away."

"You saw it? You saw that?" She clenched her hands, imagining that flight, not even hearing his reply.

After a long time, she came back to the sunlight and the stableyard and her thoughts and puzzles. "But even if he's gone," she said, "surely some of the Masters are truly wise?"

When he looked up and spoke it was with reluctance, with a hint of a melancholy smile. "All the mystery and wisdom of the Masters, when it's out in the daylight, doesn't amount to so much, you know. Tricks of the trade—wonderful illusions. But people don't want to know that. They want the illusions, the mysteries. Who can blame them? There's so little in life that's beautiful or worthy."

As if to illustrate what he was saying, he had picked up a bit of brick from the broken pavement, and tossed it up in the air, and as he spoke it fluttered about their heads on delicate blue wings, a butterfly. He put out his finger and the butterfly lighted on it. He shook his finger and the butterfly fell to the ground, a fragment of brick.

"There's not much worth much in my life," she said, gazing down at the pavement. "All I know how to do is run the farm, and try to stand up and speak

truth. But if I thought it was all tricks and lies even on Roke, I'd hate those men for fooling me, fooling us all. It can't be lies. Not all of it. The Archmage did go into the labyrinth among the Hoary Men and come back with the Ring of Peace. He did go into death with the young king, and defeat the spider mage, and come back. We know that on the word of the King himself. Even here, the harpers came to sing that song, and a teller came to tell it."

Ivory nodded. "But the Archmage lost all his power in the land of death. Maybe all magery was weakened then."

"Rose's spells work as well as ever," she said stoutly.

Ivory smiled. He said nothing, but she saw how petty the doings of a village witch appeared to him, who had seen great deeds and powers. She sighed and spoke from her heart—"Oh, if only I wasn't a woman!"

He smiled again. "You're a beautiful woman," he said, but plainly, not in the flattering way he had used with her at first, before she showed him she hated it. "Why would you be a man?"

"So I could go to Roke! And see, and learn! Why, why is it only men can go there?"

"So it was ordained by the first Archmage, centuries ago," said Ivory. "But . . . I too have wondered."

"You have?"

"Often. Seeing only boys and men, day after day, in the Great House and all the precincts of the school. Knowing that the townswomen are spell-bound from so much as setting foot on the fields about Roke Knoll. Once in years, perhaps, some great lady is allowed to come briefly into the outer courts . . . Why is it so? Are all women incapable of understanding? Or is it that the Masters fear them, fear to be corrupted—No, but fear that to admit women might change the rule they cling to—the purity of that rule—"

"Women can live chaste as well as men can," Dragonfly said bluntly. She knew she was blunt and coarse where he was delicate and subtle, but she did not know any other way to be.

"Of course," he said, his smile growing brilliant. "But witches aren't always chaste, are they? . . . Maybe that's what the Masters are afraid of. Maybe celibacy isn't as necessary as the Rule of Roke teaches. Maybe it's not a way of keeping the power pure, but of keeping the power to themselves. Leaving out women, leaving out everybody who won't agree to turn himself into a eunuch to get that one kind of power . . . Who knows? A shemage! Now that would change everything, all the

rules!"

She could see his mind dance ahead of hers, taking up and playing with ideas, transforming them as he had transformed brick into butterfly. She could not dance with him, she could not play with him, but she watched him in wonder.

"You could go to Roke," he said, his eyes bright with excitement, mischief, daring. Meeting her almost pleading, incredulous silence, he insisted—"You could. A woman you are, but there are ways to change your seeming. You have the heart, the courage, the will of a man. You could enter the Great House. I know it."

"And what would I do there?"

"What all the students do. Live alone in a stone cell and learn to be wise! It might not be what you dream it to be, but that, too, you'd learn."

"I couldn't. They'd know. I couldn't even get in. There's the Doorkeeper, you said. I don't know the word to say to him."

"The password, yes. But I can teach it to you."

"You can? Is it allowed?"

"I don't care what's 'allowed,'" he said, with a frown she had never seen on his face. "The Archmage himself said, *Rules are made to be broken*. Injustice makes the rules, and courage breaks them. I have the courage, if you do!"

She looked at him. She could not speak. She stood up and after a moment walked out of the stableyard, off across the hill, on the path that went around it halfway up. One of the dogs, her favorite, a big, ugly, heavy-headed hound, followed her. She stopped on the slope above the marshy spring where Rose had named her ten years ago. She stood there. The dog sat down beside her and looked up at her face. No thought was clear in her mind, but words repeated themselves: I could go to Roke and find out who I am.

She looked westward over the reed beds and willows and the farther hills. The whole western sky was empty, clear. She stood still and her soul seemed to go into that sky and be gone, gone out of her.

There was a little noise, the soft clip-clop of the black mare's hoofs, coming along the lane. Then Dragonfly came back to herself and called to Ivory and ran down the hill to meet him. "I will go," she said.

He had not planned or intended any such adventure, but crazy as it was, it suited him better the more he thought about it. The prospect of spending the long grey winter at Westpool sank his spirits like a stone. There was nothing here for him except the girl Dragonfly, who had come to fill his thoughts. Her massive, innocent

strength had defeated him absolutely so far, but he did what she pleased in order to have her do at last what he pleased, and the game, he thought, was worth playing. If she ran away with him, the game was as good as won. As for the joke of it, the notion of actually getting her into the school on Roke disguised as a man, there was little chance of pulling it off, but it pleased him as a gesture of disrespect to all the piety and pomposity of the Masters and their toadies. And if somehow it succeeded, if he could actually get a woman through that door, even for a moment, what a sweet revenge it would be!

Money was a problem. The girl thought, of course, that he as a great wizard would snap his fingers and waft them over the sea in a magic boat flying before the magewind. But when he told her they'd have to hire passage on a ship, she said simply, "I have the cheese money."

He treasured her rustic sayings of that kind. Sometimes she frightened him, and he resented it. His dreams of her were never of her yielding to him, but of himself yielding to a fierce, destroying sweetness, sinking into an annihilating embrace, dreams in which she was something beyond comprehension and he was nothing at all. He woke from those dreams shaken and shamed. In daylight, when he saw her big, dirty hands, when she talked like a yokel, a simpleton, he regained his superiority. He only wished there were someone to repeat her sayings to, one of his old friends in the Great Port who would find them amusing. "I have the cheese money," he repeated to himself, riding back to Westpool, and laughed. "I do indeed," he said aloud. The black mare flicked her ear.

He told Birch that he had received a sending from his teacher on Roke, the Master Hand, and must go at once, on what business he could not say, of course, but it should not take long once he was there; a half month to go, another to return; he would be back well before the Fallows at the latest. He must ask Master Birch to provide him an advance on his salary to pay for ship passage and lodging, since a wizard of Roke should not take advantage of people's willingness to give him whatever he needed, but pay his way like an ordinary man. As Birch agreed with this, he had to give Ivory a purse for his journey, the first real money he had had in his pocket for years: ten ivory counters carved with the Otter of Shelieth on one side and the Rune of Peace on the other in honor of King Lebannen. "Hello, little namesakes," he told them when he was alone with them. "You and the cheese money will get along nicely."

He told Dragonfly very little of his plans, largely because he made few, trusting to chance and his own wits, which seldom let him down if he was given a fair

chance to use them. The girl asked almost no questions. "Will I go as a man all the way?" was one.

"Yes," he said, "but only disguised. I won't put a semblance spell on you till we're on Roke Island."

"I thought it would be a spell of change," she said.

"That would be unwise," he said, with a good imitation of the Master Changer's terse solemnity. "If need be, I'll do it, of course. But you'll find wizards very sparing of the great spells. For good reason."

"The Equilibrium," she said, accepting all he said in its simplest sense, as always.

"And perhaps because such arts have not the power they once had," he said. He did not know himself why he tried to weaken her faith in wizardry; perhaps because any weakening of her strength, her wholeness, was a gain for him. He had begun merely by trying to get her into his bed, a game he loved to play. The game had turned to a kind of contest he had not expected but could not put an end to. He was determined now not to win her, but to defeat her. He could not let her defeat him. He must prove to her and himself that his dreams were meaningless.

Quite early on, impatient with wooing her massive physical indifference, he had worked up a charm, a sorcerer's seduction spell of which he was contemptuous even as he made it, though he knew it was effective. He cast it on her while she was, characteristically, mending a cow's halter. The result had not been the melting eagerness it had produced in girls he had used it on in Havnor and Thwil. Dragonfly had gradually become silent and sullen. She ceased asking her endless questions about Roke and did not answer when he spoke. When he very tentatively approached her, taking her hand, she struck him away with a blow to the head that left him dizzy. He saw her stand up and stride out of the stable-yard without a word, the ugly hound she favored trotting after her. The hound looked back at him with a grin.

She took the path to the old house. When his ears stopped ringing he stole after her, hoping the charm was working and that this was only her particularly uncouth way of leading him at last to her bed. Nearing the house, he heard crockery breaking. The father, the drunkard, came wobbling out looking scared and confused, followed by Dragonfly's loud, harsh voice—"Out of the house, you drunken, crawling traitor! You foul, shameless lecher!"

"She took my cup away," the Master of Iria said to the stranger, whining like a puppy, while his dogs yammered around him. "She broke it."

Ivory departed. He did not return for two days. On the third day he rode experimentally past Old Iria, and she came striding down to meet him. "I'm sorry, Ivory," she said, looking up at him with her smoky orange eyes. "I don't know what came over me the other day. I was angry. But not at you. I beg your pardon."

He forgave her gracefully. He did not try a love charm on her again.

Soon, he thought now, he would not need one. He would have real power over her. He had finally seen how to get it. She had given it into his hands. Her strength and her willpower were tremendous, but fortunately she was stupid, and he was not.

Birch was sending a carter down to Kembermouth with six barrels of ten-year-old Fanian ordered by the wine merchant there. He was glad to send his wizard along as bodyguard, for the wine was valuable, and though the young king was putting things to rights as fast as he could, there were still gangs of robbers on the roads. So Ivory left Westpool on the big wagon pulled by four big cart horses, jolting slowly along, his legs dangling. Down by Jackass Hill an uncouth figure rose up from the wayside and asked the carter for a lift. "I don't know you," the carter said, lifting his whip to warn the stranger off, but Ivory came round the wagon and said, "Let the lad ride, my good man. He'll do no harm while I'm with you."

"Keep an eye on him then, master," said the carter.

"I will," said Ivory, with a wink at Dragonfly. She, well disguised in dirt and a farmhand's old smock and leggings and a loathsome felt hat, did not wink back. She played her part even while they sat side by side dangling their legs over the tailgate, with six great halftuns of wine jolting between them and the drowsy carter, and the drowsy summer hills and fields slipping slowly, slowly past. Ivory tried to tease her, but she only shook her head. Maybe she was scared by this wild scheme, now she was embarked on it. There was no telling. She was solemnly, heavily silent. I could be very bored by this woman, Ivory thought, if once I'd had her underneath me. That thought stirred him almost unbearably, but when he looked back at her, his desire died away before her massive, actual presence.

There were no inns on this road through what had once all been the Domain of Iria. As the sun neared the western plains, they stopped at a farmhouse that offered stabling for the horses, a shed for the cart, and straw in the stable loft for the carters. The loft was dark and stuffy and the straw musty. Ivory felt no lust at all, though Dragonfly lay not three feet from him. She had played the man so thoroughly all day that she had half convinced even him. Maybe she'll fool the old men after all! he thought. He grinned at the thought, and slept.

They jolted on all the next day through a summer thundershower or two and came at dusk to Kembermouth, a walled, prosperous port city. They left the carter to his master's business and walked down to find an inn near the docks. Dragonfly looked about at the sights of the city in a silence that might have been awe or disapproval or mere stolidity. "This is a nice little town," Ivory said, "but the only city in the world is Havnor."

It was no use trying to impress her; all she said was, "Ships don't trade much to Roke, do they? Will it take a long time to find one to take us, do you think?"

"Not if I carry a staff," he said.

She stopped looking about and strode along in thought for a while. She was beautiful in movement, bold and graceful, her head carried high.

"You mean they'll oblige a wizard? But you aren't a wizard."

"That's a formality. We senior sorcerers may carry a staff when we're on Roke's business. Which I am."

"Taking *me* there?"

"Bringing them a student—yes. A student of great gifts!"

She asked no more questions. She never argued; it was one of her virtues.

That night, over supper at the waterfront inn, she asked with unusual timidity in her voice, "Do I have great gifts?"

"In my judgment, you do," he said.

She pondered—conversation with her was often a slow business—and said, "Rose always said I had power, but she didn't know what kind. And I . . . I know I do, but I don't know what it is."

"You're going to Roke to find out," he said, raising his glass to her. After a moment she raised hers and smiled at him, a smile so tender and radiant that he said spontaneously, "And may what you find be all you seek!"

"If I do, it will be thanks to you," she said. In that moment he loved her for her true heart, and would have foresworn any thought of her but as his companion in a bold adventure, a gallant joke.

They had to share a room at the crowded inn with two other travelers, but Ivory's thoughts were perfectly chaste, though he laughed at himself a little for it.

Next morning he picked a sprig of an herb from the kitchen garden of the inn and spelled it into the semblance of a fine staff, copper-shod and his own height exactly. "What is the wood?" Dragonfly asked, fascinated, when she saw it, and when he answered with a laugh, "Rosemary," she laughed too.

They set off along the wharves, asking for a ship bound south that might take a

wizard and his prentice to the Isle of the Wise, and soon enough they found a heavy trader bound for Wathort, whose master would carry the wizard for goodwill and the prentice for half price. Even half price was half the cheese money; but they would have the luxury of a cabin, for *Sea Otter* was a decked, two-masted ship.

As they were talking with her master a wagon drew up on the dock and began to unload six familiar halftun barrels. “That’s ours,” Ivory said, and the ship’s master said, “Bound for Hort Town,” and Dragonfly said softly, “From Iria.”

She glanced back at the land then. It was the only time he ever saw her look back.

The ship’s weatherworker came aboard just before they sailed, no Roke wizard but a weatherbeaten fellow in a worn sea cloak. Ivory flourished his staff a little in greeting him. The sorcerer looked him up and down and said, “One man works weather on this ship. If it’s not me, I’m off.”

“I’m a mere passenger, Master Bagman. I gladly leave the winds in your hands.”

The sorcerer looked at Dragonfly, who stood straight as a tree and said nothing.

“Good,” he said, and that was the last word he spoke to Ivory.

During the voyage, however, he talked several times with Dragonfly, which made Ivory a bit uneasy. Her ignorance and trustfulness could endanger her and therefore him. What did she and the bagman talk about? he asked, and she answered, “What is to become of us.”

He stared.

“Of all of us. Of Way and Felkway, and Havnor, and Wathort, and Roke. All the people of the islands. He says that when King Lebannen was to be crowned, last autumn, he sent to Gont for the old Archmage to come crown him, and he wouldn’t come. And there was no new Archmage. So the King put on his crown himself. And some say that’s wrong, and he doesn’t rightly hold the throne. But others say the King himself is the new Archmage. But he isn’t a wizard, only a king. So others say the dark years will come again, when there was no rule of justice, and wizardry was used for evil ends.”

After a pause Ivory said, “That old weatherworker says all this?”

“It’s common talk, I think,” said Dragonfly, with her grave simplicity.

The weatherworker knew his trade, at least. *Sea Otter* sped south; they met summer squalls and choppy seas, but never a storm or a troublesome wind. They put off and took on cargo at ports on the north shore of O, at Ilien, Leng, Kamery, and O Port, and then headed west to carry the passengers to Roke. And facing the west Ivory felt a little hollow at the pit of his stomach, for he knew all too well how

Roke was guarded. He knew neither he nor the weatherworker could do anything at all to turn the Roke wind if it blew against them. And if it did, Dragonfly would ask why? why did it blow against them?

He was glad to see the sorcerer uneasy too, standing by the helmsman, keeping a watch up on the masthead, taking in sail at the hint of a west wind. But the wind held steady from the north. A thunder squall came pelting on that wind, and Ivory went down to the cabin, but Dragonfly stayed up on deck. She was afraid of the water, she had told him. She could not swim; she said, "Drowning must be a horrible thing—Not to breathe the air—" She had shuddered at the thought. It was the only fear she had ever shown of anything. But she disliked the low, cramped cabin, and had stayed on deck every day and slept there on the warm nights. Ivory had not tried to coax her into the cabin. He knew now that coaxing was no good. To have her he must master her; and that he would do, if only they could come to Roke.

He came up on deck again. It was clearing, and as the sun set, the clouds broke all across the west, showing a golden sky behind the high dark curve of a hill.

Ivory looked at that hill with a kind of longing hatred.

"That's Roke Knoll, lad," the weatherworker said to Dragonfly, who stood beside him at the rail. "We're coming into Thwil Bay now. Where there's no wind but the wind they want."

By the time they were well into the bay and had let down the anchor it was dark, and Ivory said to the ship's master, "I'll go ashore in the morning."

Down in their tiny cabin Dragonfly sat waiting for him, solemn as ever but her eyes blazing with excitement. "We'll go ashore in the morning," he repeated to her, and she nodded, acceptant.

She said, "Do I look all right?"

He sat down on his narrow bunk and looked at her sitting on her narrow bunk; they could not face each other directly, as there was no room for their knees. At O Port she had bought herself a decent shirt and breeches, at his suggestion, so as to look a more probable candidate for the school. Her face was windburnt and scrubbed clean. Her hair was braided and the braid clubbed, like Ivory's. She had got her hands clean too, and they lay flat on her thighs, long strong hands, like a man's.

"You don't look like a man," he said. Her face fell. "Not to me. You'll never look like a man to me. But don't worry. You will to them."

She nodded, with an anxious face.

“The first test is the great test, Dragonfly,” he said. Every night as he lay alone in this cabin he had planned this conversation. “To enter the Great House. To go through that door.”

“I’ve been thinking about it,” she said, hurried and earnest. “Couldn’t I just tell them who I am? With you there to vouch for me—to say even if I am a woman, I have some gift—and I’d promise to take the vow and make the spell of celibacy, and live apart if they wanted me to—”

He was shaking his head all through her speech. “No, no, no, no. Hopeless. Useless. Fatal!”

“Even if you—”

“Even if I argued for you. They won’t listen. The Rule of Roke forbids women to be taught any high art, any word of the Language of the Making. It’s always been so. They will not listen. So they must be shown! And we’ll show them, you and I. We’ll teach them. You must have courage, Dragonfly. You must not weaken, and not think ‘Oh, if I just beg them to let me in, they can’t refuse me.’ They can, and will. And if you reveal yourself, they will punish you. And me.” He put a ponderous emphasis on the last word, and inwardly murmured, “Avert.”

She gazed at him from her unreadable eyes, and finally asked, “What must I do?”

“Do you trust me, Dragonfly?”

“Yes.”

“Will you trust me entirely, wholly—knowing that the risk I take for you is greater even than your risk in this venture?”

“Yes.”

“Then you must tell me the word you will speak to the Doorkeeper.”

She stared. “But I thought you’d tell it to me—the password.”

“The password he will ask you for is your true name.”

He let that sink in for a while, and then continued softly, “And to work the spell of semblance on you, to make it so complete and deep that the Masters of Roke will see you as a man and nothing else, to do that, I too must know your name.” He paused again. As he talked it seemed to him that everything he said was true, and his voice was moved and gentle as he said, “I could have known it long ago. But I chose not to use those arts. I wanted you to trust me enough to tell me your name yourself.”

She was looking down at her hands, clasped now on her knees. In the faint reddish glow of the cabin lantern her lashes cast very delicate, long shadows on her

cheeks. She looked up, straight at him. “My name is Irian,” she said.

He smiled. She did not smile.

He said nothing. In fact he was at a loss. If he had known it would be this easy, he could have had her name and with it the power to make her do whatever he wanted, days ago, weeks ago, with a mere pretense at this crazy scheme—without giving up his salary and his precarious respectability, without this sea voyage, without having to go all the way to Roke for it! For he saw the whole plan now was folly. There was no way he could disguise her that would fool the Doorkeeper for a moment. All his notions of humiliating the Masters as they had humiliated him were moonshine. Obsessed with tricking the girl, he had fallen into the trap he laid for her. Bitterly he recognised that he was always believing his own lies, caught in nets he had elaborately woven. Having once made a fool of himself on Roke, he had come back to do it all over again. A great, desolate anger swelled up in him. There was no good, no good in anything.

“What’s wrong?” she asked. The gentleness of her deep, husky voice unmanned him, and he hid his face in his hands, fighting against the shame of tears.

She put her hand on his knee. It was the first time she had ever touched him. He endured it, the warmth and weight of her touch that he had wasted so much time wanting.

He wanted to hurt her, to shock her out of her terrible, ignorant kindness, but what he said when he finally spoke was “I only wanted to make love to you.”

“You did?”

“Did you think I was one of their eunuchs? That I’d castrate myself with spells so I could be holy? Why do you think I don’t have a staff? Why do you think I’m not at the school? Did you believe everything I said?”

“Yes,” she said. “I’m sorry.” Her hand was still on his knee. She said, “We can make love if you want.”

He sat up, sat still.

“What are you?” he said to her at last.

“I don’t know. It’s why I wanted to come to Roke. To find out.”

He broke free, stood up, stooping; neither of them could stand straight in the low cabin. Clenching and unclenching his hands, he stood as far from her as he could, his back to her.

“You won’t find out. It’s all lies, shams. Old men playing games with words. I wouldn’t play their games, so I left. Do you know what I did?” He turned, showing his teeth in a rictus of triumph. “I got a girl, a town girl, to come to my room. My

cell. My little stone celibate cell. It had a window looking out on a back street. No spells—you can't make spells with all their magic going on. But she wanted to come, and came, and I let a rope ladder out the window, and she climbed it. And we were at it when the old men came in! I showed 'em! And if I could have got you in, I'd have showed 'em again, I'd have taught them *their* lesson!"

"Well, I'll try," she said.

He stared.

"Not for the same reasons as you," she said, "but I still want to. And we came all this way. And you know my name."

It was true. He knew her name: Irian. It was like a coal of fire, a burning ember in his mind. His thought could not hold it. His knowledge could not use it. His tongue could not say it.

She looked up at him, her sharp, strong face softened by the shadowy lantern light. "If it was only to make love you brought me here, Ivory," she said, "we can do that. If you still want to."

Wordless at first, he simply shook his head. After a while he was able to laugh. "I think we've gone on past . . . that possibility . . ."

She looked at him without regret, or reproach, or shame.

"Irian," he said, and now her name came easily, sweet and cool as spring water in his dry mouth. "Irian, here's what you must do to enter the Great House . . ."

III. Azver

He left her at the corner of the street, a narrow, dull, somehow sly-looking street that slanted up between featureless walls to a wooden door in a higher wall. He had put his spell on her, and she looked like a man, though she did not feel like one. She and Ivory took each other in their arms, because after all they had been friends, companions, and he had done all this for her. “Courage!” he said, and let her go. She walked up the street and stood before the door. She looked back then, but he was gone.

She knocked.

After a while she heard the latch rattle. The door opened. A middle-aged man stood there. “What can I do for you?” he said. He did not smile, but his voice was pleasant.

“You can let me into the Great House, sir.”

“Do you know the way in?” His almond-shaped eyes were attentive, yet seemed to look at her from miles or years away.

“This is the way in, sir.”

“Do you know whose name you must tell me before I let you in?

“My own, sir. It is Irian.”

“Is it?” he said.

That gave her pause. She stood silent. “It’s the name the witch Rose of my village on Way gave me, in the spring under Iria Hill,” she said at last, standing up and speaking truth.

The Doorkeeper looked at her for what seemed a long time. “Then it is your name,” he said. “But maybe not all your name. I think you have another.”

“I don’t know it, sir.”

After another long time she said, “Maybe I can learn it here, sir.”

The Doorkeeper bowed his head a little. A very faint smile made crescent curves in his cheeks. He stood aside. “Come in, daughter,” he said.

She stepped across the threshold of the Great House.

Ivory’s spell of semblance dropped away like a cobweb. She was and looked herself.

She followed the Doorkeeper down a stone passageway. Only at the end of it did she think to turn back to see the light shine through the thousand leaves of the tree carved in the high door in its bone-white frame.

A young man in a grey cloak hurrying down the passageway stopped short as he approached them. He stared at Irian; then with a brief nod he went on. She looked back at him. He was looking back at her.

A globe of misty, greenish fire drifted swiftly down the corridor at eye level, apparently pursuing the young man. The Doorkeeper waved his hand at it, and it avoided him. Irian swerved and ducked down frantically, but felt the cool fire tingle in her hair as it passed over her. The Doorkeeper glanced round, and now his smile was wider. Though he said nothing, she felt he was aware of her, concerned for her. She stood up and followed him.

He stopped before an oak door. Instead of knocking he sketched a little sign or rune on it with the top of his staff, a light staff of some greyish wood. The door opened as a resonant voice behind it said, "Come in!"

"Wait here a little, if you please, Irian," the Doorkeeper said, and went into the room, leaving the door wide open behind him. She could see bookshelves and books, a table piled with more books and ink pots and writings, two or three boys seated at the table, and the grey-haired, stocky man the Doorkeeper spoke to. She saw the man's face change, saw his eyes shift to her in a brief, startled gaze, saw him question the Doorkeeper, low-voiced, intense.

They both came to her. "The Master Changer of Roke: Irian of Way," said the Doorkeeper.

The Changer stared openly at her. He was not as tall as she was. He stared at the Doorkeeper, and then at her again.

"Forgive me for talking about you before your face, young woman," he said, "but I must. Master Doorkeeper, you know I'd never question your judgment, but the Rule is clear. I have to ask what moved you to break it and let her come in."

"She asked to," said the Doorkeeper.

"But—" The Changer paused.

"When did a woman last ask to enter the school?"

"They know the Rule doesn't allow them."

"Did you know that, Irian?" the Doorkeeper asked her, and she said, "Yes, sir."

"So what brought you here?" the Changer asked, stern, but not hiding his curiosity.

"Master Ivory said I could pass for a man. Though I thought I should say who I

was. I will be as celibate as anyone, sir."

Two long curves appeared on the Doorkeeper's cheeks, enclosing the slow upturn of his smile. The Changer's face remained stern, but he blinked, and after a little thought said, "I'm sure—yes—It was definitely the better plan to be honest. What Master did you speak of?"

"Ivory," said the Doorkeeper. "A lad from Havnor Great Port, whom I let in three years ago, and let out again last year, as you may recall."

"Ivory! That fellow that studied with the Hand?—Is he here?" the Changer demanded of Irian, wrathily. She stood straight and said nothing.

"Not in the school," the Doorkeeper said, smiling.

"He fooled you, young woman. Made a fool of you by trying to make fools of us."

"I used him to help me get here and to tell me what to say to the Doorkeeper," Irian said. "I'm not here to fool anybody, but to learn what I need to know."

"I've often wondered why I let that boy in," said the Doorkeeper. "Now I begin to understand."

At that the Changer looked at him, and after pondering said soberly, "Doorkeeper, what have you in mind?"

"I think Irian of Way may have come to us seeking not only what she needs to know, but also what we need to know." The Doorkeeper's tone was equally sober, and his smile was gone. "I think this may be a matter for talk among the nine of us."

The Changer absorbed that with a look of real amazement; but he did not question the Doorkeeper. He said only, "But not among the students."

The Doorkeeper shook his head, agreeing.

"She can lodge in the town," the Changer said, with some relief.

"While we talk behind her back?"

"You won't bring her into the Council Room?" the Changer said in disbelief.

"The Archmage brought the boy Arren there."

"But—But Arren was King Lebannen—"

"And who is Irian?"

The Changer stood silent, and then he said quietly, with respect, "My friend, what is it you think to do, to learn? What is she, that you ask this for her?"

"Who are we," said the Doorkeeper, "that we refuse her without knowing what she is?"

"A woman," said the Master Summoner.

Irian had waited some hours in the Doorkeeper's chamber, a low, light, bare room with a window seat at a small-paned window looking out on the kitchen gardens of the Great House—handsome, well-kept gardens, long rows and beds of vegetables, greens, and herbs, with berry canes and fruit trees beyond. She saw a burly, dark-skinned man and two boys come out and weed one of the vegetable plots. It eased her mind to watch their careful work. She wished she could help them at it. The waiting and the strangeness were very difficult. Once the Doorkeeper came in, bringing her a mug of water and a plate with cold meat and bread and scallions, and she ate because he told her to eat, but chewing and swallowing were hard work. The gardeners went away and there was nothing to watch out the window but the cabbages growing and the sparrows hopping, and now and then a hawk far up in the sky, and the wind moving softly in the tops of tall trees, on beyond the gardens.

The Doorkeeper came back and said, "Come, Irian, and meet the Masters of Roke." Her heart began to go at a cart-horse gallop. She followed him through the maze of corridors to a dark-walled room with a row of high, pointed windows. A group of men stood there. Every one of them turned to look at her as she came into the room.

"Irian of Way, my lords," said the Doorkeeper. They were all silent. He motioned her to come farther into the room. "The Master Changer you have met," he said to her. He named all the others, but she could not take in their names and masteries, except that the Master Herbal was the one she had supposed to be a gardener, and the youngest of them, a tall man with a stern, beautiful face that seemed carved out of dark stone, was the Master Summoner. It was he who spoke when the Doorkeeper was done. "A woman," he said.

The Doorkeeper nodded once, mild as ever.

"This is what you brought the Nine together for? This and no more?"

"This and no more," said the Doorkeeper.

"Dragons have been seen flying above the Inmost Sea. Roke has no archmage, and the islands no true-crowned king. There is real work to do," the Summoner said, and his voice too was like stone, cold and heavy. "When will we do it?"

There was an uncomfortable silence, as the Doorkeeper did not speak. At last a slight, bright-eyed man who wore a red tunic under his grey wizard's cloak said, "Do you bring this woman into the House as a student, Master Doorkeeper?"

"If I did, it would be up to you all to approve or disapprove," said he.

"Do you?" asked the man in the red tunic, smiling a little.

"Master Hand," said the Doorkeeper, "she asked to enter as a student, and I saw no reason to deny her."

"Every reason," said the Summoner.

A man with a deep, clear voice spoke: "It's not our judgment that prevails, but the Rule of Roke, which we are sworn to follow."

"I doubt the Doorkeeper would defy it lightly," said one whom Irian had not noticed till he spoke, though he was a big man, white-haired, rawboned, and crag-faced. Unlike the others, he looked at her as he spoke. "I am Kurremkarmerruk," he said to her. "As the Master Namer here, I make free with names, my own included. Who named you, Irian?"

"The witch Rose of our village, lord," she answered, standing straight, though her voice came out high-pitched and rough.

"Is she misnamed?" the Doorkeeper asked the Namer.

Kurremkarmerruk shook his head. "No. But . . ."

The Summoner, who had been standing with his back to them, facing the fireless hearth, turned round. "The names witches give each other are not our concern here," he said. "If you have some interest in this woman, Doorkeeper, it should be pursued outside these walls—outside the door you vowed to keep. She has no place here nor ever will. She can bring only confusion, dissension, and further weakness among us. I will speak no longer and say nothing else in her presence. The only answer to conscious error is silence."

"Silence is not enough, my lord," said one who had not spoken before. To Irian's eyes he was very strange-looking, having pale reddish skin, long pale hair, and narrow eyes the color of ice. His speech was also strange, stiff and somehow deformed. "Silence is the answer to everything, and to nothing," he said.

The Summoner lifted his noble, dark face and looked across the room at the pale man, but did not speak. Without a word or gesture he turned away again and left the room. As he walked slowly past Irian, she shrank back from him. It was as if a grave had opened, a winter grave, cold, wet, dark. Her breath stuck in her throat. She gasped a little for air. When she recovered herself, she saw the Changer and the pale man both watching her intently.

The one with a voice like a deep-toned bell looked at her too, and spoke to her with a plain, kind severity. "As I see it, the man who brought you here meant to do harm, but you do not. Yet being here, Irian, you do us and yourself harm. Everything not in its own place does harm. A note sung, however well sung, wrecks the tune it isn't part of. Women teach women. Witches learn their craft from

other witches and from sorcerers, not from wizards. What we teach here is in a language not for women's tongues. The young heart rebels against such laws, calling them unjust, arbitrary. But they are true laws, founded not on what we want, but on what is. The just and the unjust, the foolish and the wise, all must obey them, or waste life and come to grief."

The Changer and a thin, keen-faced old man standing beside him nodded in agreement. The Master Hand said, "Irian, I am sorry. Ivory was my pupil. If I taught him badly, I did worse in sending him away. I thought him insignificant, and so harmless. But he lied to you and beguiled you. You must not feel shame. The fault was his and mine."

"I am not ashamed," Irian said. She looked at them all. She felt that she should thank them for their courtesy but the words would not come. She nodded stiffly to them, turned round, and strode out of the room.

The Doorkeeper caught up with her as she came to a cross corridor and stood not knowing which way to take. "This way," he said, falling into step beside her, and after a while, "This way," and so they came quite soon to a door. It was not made of horn and ivory. It was uncarved oak, black and massive, with an iron bolt worn thin with age. "This is the garden door," the mage said, unbolting it. "Medra's Gate, they used to call it. I keep both doors." He opened it. The brightness of the day dazzled Irian's eyes. When she could see clearly she saw a path leading from the door through the gardens and the fields beyond them; on past the fields were the high trees, and the swell of Roke Knoll was off to the right. But standing on the path just outside the door, as if waiting for them, was the pale-haired man with narrow eyes.

"Patterner," said the Doorkeeper, not at all surprised.

"Where do you send this lady?" said the Patterner in his strange speech.

"Nowhere," said the Doorkeeper. "I let her out as I let her in, at her desire."

"Will you come with me?" the Patterner said to Irian.

She looked at him and at the Doorkeeper and said nothing.

"I don't live in this House. In any house," the Patterner said. "I live there. The Grove.—Ah," he said, turning suddenly. The big, white-haired man, Kurremkarmerruk the Namer, was standing just down the path. He had not been standing there until the other mage said "Ah." Irian stared from one to the other in blank bewilderment.

"This is only a seeming of me, a presentment, a sending," the old man said to her. "I don't live here either. Miles off." He gestured northward. "You might come

there when you're done with the Patterner here. I'd like to learn more about your name." He nodded to the other two mages and was not there. A bumblebee buzzed heavily through the air where he had been.

Irian looked down at the ground. After a long time she said, clearing her throat, not looking up, "Is it true I do harm being here?"

"I don't know," said the Doorkeeper.

"In the Grove is no harm," said the Patterner. "Come on. There is an old house, a hut. Old, dirty. You don't care, eh? Stay a while. You can see." And he set off down the path between the parsley and the bush beans. She looked at the Doorkeeper; he smiled a little. She followed the pale-haired man.

They walked a half mile or so. The round-topped knoll rose up full in the western sun on their right. Behind them the school sprawled grey and many-roofed on its lower hill. The grove of trees towered before them now. She saw oak and willow, chestnut and ash, and tall evergreens. From the dense, sun-shot darkness of the trees a stream ran out, green-banked, with many brown trodden places where cattle and sheep went down to drink or to cross over. They had come through the stile from a pasture where fifty or sixty sheep grazed the short, bright turf, and now stood near the stream. "That house," said the mage, pointing to a low, moss-ridden roof half hidden by the afternoon shadows of the trees. "Stay tonight. You will?"

He asked her to stay, he did not tell her to. All she could do was nod.

"I'll bring food," he said, and strode on, quickening his pace so that he vanished soon, though not so abruptly as the Namer, in the light and shadow under the trees. Irian watched till he was certainly gone and then made her way through high grass and weeds to the little house.

It looked very old. It had been rebuilt and rebuilt again, but not for a long time. Nor had anyone lived in it for a long time, from the still, lonesome air of it. Yet it had a pleasant air, as if those who had slept there slept peacefully. As for decrepit walls, mice, dust, cobwebs, and scant furniture, all that was quite homelike to Irian. She found a bald broom and swept out the mouse droppings. She unrolled her blanket on the plank bed. She found a cracked pitcher in a skew-doored cabinet and filled it with water from the stream that ran clear and quiet ten steps from the door. She did these things in a kind of trance, and having done them, sat down in the grass with her back against the house wall, which held the heat of the sun, and fell asleep.

When she woke, the Master Patterner was sitting nearby, and a basket was on

the grass between them.

"Hungry? Eat," he said.

"I'll eat later, sir. Thank you," said Irian.

"I am hungry now," said the mage. He took a hard-boiled egg from the basket, cracked, shelled, and ate it.

"They call this the Otter's House," he said. "Very old. As old as the Great House. Everything is old, here. We are old—the Masters."

"You're not very," Irian said. She thought him between thirty and forty, though it was hard to tell; she kept thinking his hair was white, because it was not black.

"But I came far. Miles can be years. I am Kargish, from Karego. You know?"

"The Hoary Men!" said Irian, staring openly at him. All Daisy's ballads of the Hoary Men who sailed out of the East to lay the land waste and spit innocent babes on their lances, and the story of how Erreth-Akbe lost the Ring of Peace, and the new songs and the King's Tale about how Archmage Sparrowhawk had gone among the Hoary Men and come back with that ring—

"Hoary?" said the Patterner.

"Frosty. White," she said, looking away, embarrassed.

"Ah." Presently he said, "The Master Summoner is not old." And she got a sidelong look from those narrow, ice-colored eyes.

She said nothing.

"I think you feared him."

She nodded.

When she said nothing, and some time had passed, he said, "In the shadow of these trees is no harm. Only truth."

"When he passed me," she said in a low voice, "I saw a grave."

"Ah," said the Patterner.

He had made a little heap of bits of eggshell on the ground by his knee. He arranged the white fragments into a curve, then closed it into a circle. "Yes," he said, studying his eggshells; then, scratching up the earth a bit, he neatly and delicately buried them. He dusted off his hands. Again his glance flicked to Irian and away.

"You have been a witch, Irian?"

"No."

"But you have some knowledge."

"No. I don't. Rose wouldn't teach me. She said she didn't dare. Because I had power but she didn't know what it was."

“Your Rose is a wise flower,” said the mage, unsmiling.

“But I know I have something to do. Something to be. That’s why I wanted to come here. To find out. On the Isle of the Wise.”

She was getting used to his strange face now and was able to read it. She thought that he looked sad. His way of speaking was harsh, quick, dry, peaceable. “The men of the Isle are not always wise, eh?” he said. “Maybe the Doorkeeper.” He looked at her now, not glancing but squarely, his eyes catching and holding hers. “But there. In the wood. Under the trees. There is the old wisdom. Never old. I can’t teach you. I can take you into the Grove.” After a minute he stood up. “Yes?”

“Yes,” she said uncertainly.

“The house is all right?”

“Yes—”

“Tomorrow,” he said, and strode off.

So for a half month or more of the hot days of summer, Irian slept in the Otter’s House, which was a peaceful one, and ate what the Master Patterner brought her in his basket—eggs, cheese, greens, fruit, smoked mutton—and went with him every afternoon into the grove of high trees, where the paths seemed never to be quite where she remembered them, and often led on far beyond what seemed the confines of the wood. They walked there in silence, and spoke seldom when they rested. The mage was a quiet man. Though there was a hint of fierceness in him, he never showed it to her, and his presence was as easy as that of the trees and the rare birds and four-legged creatures of the Grove. As he had said, he did not try to teach her. When she asked about the Grove, he told her that, with Roke Knoll, it had stood since Segoy made the islands of the world, and that all magic was in the roots of the trees, and that they were mingled with the roots of all the forests that were or might yet be. “And sometimes the Grove is in this place,” he said, “and sometimes in another. But it is always.”

She had never seen where he lived. He slept wherever he chose to, she imagined, in these warm summer nights. She asked him where the food they ate came from. What the school did not supply for itself, he said, the farmers round about provided, considering themselves well recompensed by the protections the Masters set on their flocks and fields and orchards. That made sense to her. On Way, the phrase “a wizard without his porridge” meant something unprecedented, unheard-of. But she was no wizard, and so, wanting to earn her porridge, she did her best to repair the Otter’s House, borrowing tools from a farmer and buying nails and plaster in Thwil Town, for she still had half the cheese money.

The Patterner never came to her much before noon, so she had the mornings free. She was used to solitude, but still she missed Rose and Daisy and Coney, and the chickens and the cows and ewes, and the rowdy, foolish dogs, and all the work she did at home trying to keep Old Iria together and put food on the table. So she worked away unhurriedly every morning till she saw the mage come out from the trees with his sunlight-colored hair shining in the sunlight.

Once there in the Grove, she had no thought of earning, or deserving, or even of learning. To be there was enough, was all.

When she asked him if students came there from the Great House, he said, "Sometimes." Another time he said, "My words are nothing. Hear the leaves." That was all he said that could be called teaching. As she walked, she listened to the leaves when the wind rustled them or stormed in the crowns of the trees; she watched the shadows play, and thought about the roots of the trees down in the darkness of the earth. She was utterly content to be there. Yet always, without discontent or urgency, she felt that she was waiting. And that silent expectancy was deepest and clearest when she came out of the shelter of the woods and saw the open sky.

Once, when they had gone a long way and the trees, dark evergreens she did not know, stood very high about them, she heard a call—a horn blowing, a cry?—remote, on the very edge of hearing. She stood still, listening towards the west. The mage walked on, turning only when he realised she had stopped.

"I heard—" she said, and could not say what she had heard.

He listened. They walked on at last through a silence enlarged and deepened by that far call.

She never went into the Grove without him, and it was many days before he left her alone within it. But one hot afternoon when they came to a glade among a stand of oaks, he said, "I will come back here, eh?" and walked off with his quick, silent step, lost almost at once in the dappled, shifting depths of the forest.

She had no wish to explore for herself. The peacefulness of the place called for stillness, watching, listening; and she knew how tricky the paths were, and that the Grove was, as the Patterner put it, "bigger inside than outside." She sat down in a patch of sun-dappled shade and watched the shadows of the leaves play across the ground. The oak mast was deep; though she had never seen wild swine in the wood, she saw their tracks here. For a moment she caught the scent of a fox. Her thoughts moved as quietly and easily as the breeze moved in the warm light.

Often her mind here seemed empty of thought, full of the forest itself, but this

day memories came to her, vivid. She thought about Ivory, thinking she would never see him again, wondering if he had found a ship to take him back to Havnor. He had told her he'd never go back to Westpool; the only place for him was the Great Port, the King's City, and for all he cared the island of Way could sink in the sea as deep as Soléa. But she thought with love of the roads and fields of Way. She thought of Old Iria village, the marshy spring under Iria Hill, the old house on it. She thought about Daisy singing ballads in the kitchen, winter evenings, beating out the time with her wooden clogs; and old Coney in the vineyards with his razor-edge knife, showing her how to prune the vine "right down to the life in it;" and Rose, her Etaudis, whispering charms to ease the pain in a child's broken arm. I have known wise people, she thought. Her mind flinched away from remembering her father, but the motion of the leaves and shadows drew it on. She saw him drunk, shouting. She felt his prying, tremulous hands on her. She saw him weeping, sick, shamed; and grief rose up through her body and dissolved, like an ache that melts away in a long stretch of the arms. He was less to her than the mother she had not known.

She stretched, feeling the ease of her body in the warmth, and her mind drifted back to Ivory. She had had no one in her life to desire. When the young wizard first came riding by so slim and arrogant, she wished she could want him; but she didn't and couldn't, and so she had thought him spell-protected. Rose had explained to her how wizards' spells worked "so that it never enters your head nor theirs, see, because it would take from their power, they say." But Ivory, poor Ivory, had been all too unprotected. If anybody was under a spell of chastity it must have been herself, for charming and handsome as he was she had never been able to feel a thing for him but liking, and her only lust had been to learn what he could teach her.

She considered herself, sitting in the deep silence of the Grove. No bird sang; the breeze was down; the leaves hung still. Am I ensorcelled? Am I a sterile thing, not whole, not a woman? she asked herself, looking at her strong bare arms, the soft swell of her breasts in the shadow under the throat of her shirt.

She looked up and saw the Hoary Man come out of a dark aisle of great oaks and come towards her across the glade.

He stopped in front of her. She felt herself blush, her face and throat burning, dizzy, her ears ringing. She sought words, anything to say, to turn his attention away from her, and could find nothing at all. He sat down near her. She looked down, as if studying the skeleton of a last-year's leaf by her hand.

What do I want? she asked herself, and the answer came not in words but throughout her whole body and soul: the fire, a greater fire than that, the flight, the flight burning—

She came back into herself, into the still air under the trees. The Hoary Man sat near her, his face bowed down, and she thought how slight and light he looked, how quiet and sorrowful. There was nothing to fear. There was no harm.

He looked over at her.

"Irian," he said, "do you hear the leaves?"

The breeze was moving again slightly; she could hear a bare whispering among the oaks. "A little," she said.

"Do you hear the words?"

"No."

She asked nothing and he said no more. Presently he got up, and she followed him to the path that always led them, sooner or later, out of the wood to the clearing by the Thwilburn and the Otter's House. When they came there, it was late afternoon. He went down to the stream and knelt to drink from it where it left the wood, above all the crossings. She did the same. Then sitting in the cool, long grass of the bank, he began to speak.

"My people, the Kargs, they worship gods. Twin gods, brothers. And the king there is also a god. But before the gods and after, always, are the streams. Caves, stones, hills. Trees. The earth. The darkness of the earth."

"The Old Powers," Irian said.

He nodded. "There, women know the Old Powers. Here too, witches. And the knowledge is bad—eh?"

When he added that little questioning "eh?" or "neh?" to the end of what had seemed a statement it always took her by surprise. She said nothing.

"Dark is bad," said the Patterner. "Eh?"

Irian drew a deep breath and looked at him eye to eye as they sat there. *"Only in dark the light,"* she said.

"Ah," he said. He looked away so that she could not see his expression.

"I should go," she said. "I can walk in the Grove, but not live there. It isn't my—my place. And the Master Chanter said I did harm by being here."

"We all do harm by being," said the Patterner.

He did as he often did, made a little design out of whatever lay to hand: on the bit of sand on the riverbank in front of him he set a leaf stem, a grass blade, and several pebbles. He studied them and rearranged them. "Now I must speak of

harm," he said.

After a long pause he went on. "You know that a dragon brought back our Lord Sparrowhawk, with the young king, from the shores of death. Then the dragon carried Sparrowhawk away to his home, for his power was gone, he was not a mage. So presently the Masters of Roke met to choose a new archmage, here, in the Grove, as always. But not as always.

"Before the dragon came, the Summoner too had returned from death, where he can go, where his art can take him. He had seen our lord and the young king there, in that country across the wall of stones. He said they would not come back. He said Lord Sparrowhawk had told him to come back to us, to life, to bear that word. So we grieved for our lord.

"But then came the dragon, Kalessin, bearing him living.

"The Summoner was among us when we stood on Roke Knoll and saw the Archmage kneel to King Lebannen. Then, as the dragon bore our friend away, the Summoner fell down.

"He lay as if dead, cold, his heart not beating, yet he breathed. The Herbal used all his art, but could not rouse him. 'He is dead,' he said. 'The breath will not leave him, but he is dead.' So we mourned him. Then, because there was dismay among us, and all my patterns spoke of change and danger, we met to choose a new warden of Roke, an archmage to guide us. And in our council we set the young king in the Summoner's place. To us it seemed right that he should sit among us. Only the Changer spoke against it at first, and then agreed.

"But we met, we sat, and we could not choose. We said this and said that, but no name was spoken. And then I . . ." He paused a while. "There came on me what my people call the *eduevanu*, the other breath. Words came to me and I spoke them. I said, *Hama Gondun!*—And Kurremkarmerruk told them this in Hardic: 'A woman on Gont.' But when I came back to my own wits, I could not tell them what that meant. And so we parted with no archmage chosen.

"The king left soon after, and the Master Windkey went with him. Before the king was to be crowned, they went to Gont and sought our lord Sparrowhawk, to find what that meant, 'a woman on Gont.' Eh? But they did not see him, only my countrywoman Tenar of the Ring. She said she was not the woman they sought. And they found no one, nothing. So Lebannen judged it to be a prophecy yet to be fulfilled. And in Havnor he set his crown on his own head.

"The Herbal, and I too, judged the Summoner dead. We thought the breath he breathed was left from some spell of his own art that we did not understand, like

the spell snakes know that keeps their heart beating long after they are dead. Though it seemed terrible to bury a breathing body, yet he was cold, and his blood did not run, and no soul was in him. That was more terrible. So we made ready to bury him. And then, as he lay beside his grave, his eyes opened. He moved, and spoke. He said, 'I have summoned myself again into life, to do what must be done.'"

The Patterner's voice had grown rougher. He suddenly brushed the little design of pebbles apart with the palm of his hand.

"So when the Windkey returned from the king's crowning, we were nine again. But divided. For the Summoner said we must meet again and choose an archmage. The king had had no place among us, he said. And 'a woman on Gont,' whoever she may be, has no place among the men on Roke. Eh? The Windkey, the Chanter, the Changer, the Hand, say he is right. And as King Lebannen is a man returned from death, fulfilling that prophecy, they say so will the archmage be a man returned from death."

"But—" Irian said, and stopped.

After a while the Patterner said, "That art, summoning, you know, is terrible. It is always danger. Here," and he looked up into the green-gold darkness of the trees, "here is no summoning. No bringing back across the wall. No wall."

His face was a warrior's face, but when he looked into the trees it was softened, yearning.

"So," he said, "now he makes you his reason for our meeting. But I will not go to the Great House. I will not be summoned."

"He won't come here?"

"I think he will not walk in the Grove. Nor on Roke Knoll. On the Knoll, what is, is so."

She did not know what he meant, but did not ask, preoccupied: "You say he makes me his reason for you to meet together."

"Yes. To send away one woman, it takes nine mages." He very seldom smiled, and when he did it was quick and fierce. "We are to meet to uphold the Rule of Roke. And so to choose an archmage."

"If I went away—" She saw him shake his head. "I could go to the Namer—"

"You are safer here."

The idea of doing harm troubled her, but the idea of danger had not entered her mind. She found it inconceivable. "I'll be all right," she said. "So the Namer, and you—and the Doorkeeper?—"

“—do not wish Thorion to be archmage. Also the Master Herbal, though he digs and says little.”

He saw Irian staring at him in amazement. “Thorion the Summoner speaks his true name,” he said. “He died, eh?”

She knew that King Lebannen used his true name openly. He too had returned from death. Yet that the Summoner should do so continued to shock and disturb her as she thought about it.

“And the . . . the students?”

“Divided also.”

She thought about the school, where she had been so briefly. From here, under the eaves of the Grove, she saw it as stone walls enclosing one kind of being and keeping out all others, like a pen, a cage. How could any of them keep their balance in a place like that?

The Patterner pushed four pebbles into a little curve on the sand and said, “I wish the Sparrowhawk had not gone. I wish I could read what the shadows write. But all I can hear the leaves say is Change, change . . . Everything will change but them.” He looked up into the trees again with that yearning look. The sun was setting. He stood up, bade her goodnight gently, and walked away, entering under the trees.

She sat on a while by the Thwilburn. She was troubled by what he had told her and by her thoughts and feelings in the Grove, and troubled that any thought or feeling could have troubled her there. She went to the house, set out her supper of smoked meat and bread and summer lettuce, and ate it without tasting it. She roamed restlessly back down the stream bank to the water. It was very still and warm in the late dusk, only the largest stars burning through a milky overcast. She slipped off her sandals and put her feet in the water. It was cool, but veins of sun warmth ran through it. She slid out of her clothes, the man’s breeches and shirt that were all she had, and slipped naked into the water, feeling the push and stir of the current all along her body. She had never swum in the streams at Iria, and she had hated the sea, heaving grey and cold, but this quick water pleased her, tonight. She drifted and floated, her hands slipping over silken underwater rocks and her own silken flanks, her legs sliding through water weeds. All trouble and restlessness washed away from her in the running of the water, and she floated in delight in the caress of the stream, gazing up at the white, soft fire of the stars.

A chill ran through her. The water ran cold. Gathering herself together, her limbs still soft and loose, she looked up and saw on the bank above her the black

figure of a man.

She stood straight up, naked, in the water.

"Get away!" she shouted. "Get away, you traitor, you foul lecher, or I'll cut the liver out of you!" She sprang up the bank, pulling herself up by the tough bunchgrass, and scrambled to her feet. No one was there. She stood afire, shaking with rage. She leapt back down the bank, found her clothes, and pulled them on, still swearing aloud—"You coward wizard! You traitorous son of a bitch!"

"Irian?"

"He was here!" she cried. "That foul heart, that Thorion!" She strode to meet the Patterner as he came into the starlight by the house. "I was bathing in the stream, and he stood there watching me!"

"A sending—only a seeming of him. It could not hurt you, Irian."

"A sending with eyes, a seeming with seeing! May he be—" She stopped, at a loss suddenly for the word. She felt sick. She shuddered, and swallowed the cold spittle that welled in her mouth.

The Patterner came forward and took her hands in his. His hands were warm, and she felt so mortally cold that she came close up against him for the warmth of his body. They stood so for a while, her face turned from him but their hands joined and their bodies pressed close. At last she broke free, straightening herself, pushing back her lank wet hair. "Thank you," she said. "I was cold."

"I know."

"I'm never cold," she said. "It was him."

"I tell you, Irian, he cannot come here, he cannot harm you here."

"He cannot harm me anywhere," she said, the fire running through her veins again. "If he tries to, I'll destroy him."

"Ah," said the Patterner.

She looked at him in the starlight, and said, "Tell me your name—Not your true name—Only a name I can call you. When I think of you."

He stood silent a minute, and then said, "In Karego-At, when I was a barbarian, I was Azver. In Hardic, that is a banner of war."

"Azver," she said. "Thank you."

She lay awake in the little house, feeling the air stifling and the ceiling pressing down on her, then slept suddenly and deeply. She woke as suddenly when the east was just getting light. She went to the door to see what she loved best to see, the sky before sunrise. Looking down from it she saw Azver the Patterner rolled up in

his grey cloak, sound asleep on the ground before her doorstep. She withdrew noiselessly into the house. In a little while she saw him going back to his woods, walking a bit stiffly and scratching his head as he went, as people do when half awake.

She got to work scraping down the inner wall of the house, readying it to plaster. Just as the first sunlight struck in the window, there was a knock at her open door. Outside was the man she had thought was a gardener, the Master Herbal, looking solid and stolid, like a brown ox, beside the gaunt, grim-faced old Namer.

She came to the door and muttered some kind of greeting. They daunted her, these Masters of Roke; and also their presence meant that the peaceful time was over, the days of walking in the silent summer forest with the Patterner. That had come to an end last night. She knew it, but she did not want to know it.

"The Patterner sent for us," said the Master Herbal. He looked uncomfortable. Noticing a clump of weeds under the window, he said, "That's velver. Somebody from Havnor planted it here. Didn't know there was any on the island." He examined it attentively, and put some seed pods into his pouch.

Irian was studying the Namer covertly but equally attentively, trying to see if she could tell if he was what he had called a sending or was there in flesh and blood. Nothing about him appeared insubstantial, but she thought he was not there, and when he stepped into the slanting sunlight and cast no shadow, she knew it.

"Is it a long way from where you live, sir?" she asked.

He nodded. "Left myself halfway," he said. He looked up; the Patterner was coming towards them, wide awake now.

He greeted them and asked, "The Doorkeeper will come?"

"Said he thought he'd better keep the doors," said the Herbal. He closed his many-pocketed pouch carefully and looked around at the others. "But I don't know if he can keep a lid on the ant hill."

"What's up?" said Kurremkarmerruk. "I've been reading about dragons. Not paying attention to ants. But all the boys I had studying at the Tower left."

"Summoned," said the Herbal, drily.

"So?" said the Namer, more drily.

"I can tell you only how it seems to me," the Herbal said, reluctant, uncomfortable.

"Do that," the old mage said.

The Herbal still hesitated. "This lady is not of our council," he said at last.

"She is of mine," said Azver.

"She came to this place at this time," the Namer said. "And to this place, at this time, no one comes by chance. All any of us knows is how it seems to us. There are names behind names, my Lord Healer."

The dark-eyed mage bowed his head at that, and said, "Very well," evidently with relief at accepting their judgment over his own. "Thorion has been much with the other Masters, and with the young men. Secret meetings, inner circles. Rumors, whispers. The younger students are frightened, and several have asked me or the Doorkeeper if they may go—leave Roke. And we'd let them go. But there's no ship in port, and none has come into Thwil Bay since the one that brought you, lady, and sailed again next day for Wathort. The Windkey keeps the Roke wind against all. If the king himself should come, he could not land on Roke."

"Until the wind changes, eh?" said the Patterner.

"Thorion says Lebannen is not truly king, since no archmage crowned him."

"Nonsense! Not history!" said the old Namer. "The first archmage came centuries after the last king. Roke ruled in the kings' stead."

"Ah," said the Patterner. "Hard for the housekeeper to give up the keys when the owner comes home. Eh?"

"The Ring of Peace is healed," said the Herbal, in his patient, troubled voice, "the prophecy is fulfilled, the son of Morred is crowned, and yet we have no peace. Where have we gone wrong? Why can we not find the balance?"

"What does Thorion intend?" asked the Namer.

"To bring Lebannen here," said the Herbal. "The young men talk of 'the true crown.' A second coronation, here. By the Archmage Thorion."

"Avert!" Irian blurted out, making the sign to prevent word from becoming deed. None of the men smiled, and the Herbal belatedly made the same gesture.

"How does he hold them all?" the Namer said. "Herbal, you were here when Sparrowhawk and Thorion were challenged by Irioth. His gift was as great as Thorion's, I think. He used it to use men, to control them wholly. Is that what Thorion does?"

"I don't know," the Herbal said. "I can only tell you that when I'm with him, when I'm in the Great House, I feel that nothing can be done but what has been done. That nothing will change. Nothing will grow. That no matter what cures I use, the sickness will end in death." He looked around at them all like a hurt ox. "And I think it is true. There is no way to regain the Equilibrium but by holding still. We have gone too far. For the Archmage and Lebannen to go bodily into

death, and return—it was not right. They broke a law that must not be broken. It was to restore the law that Thorion returned."

"What, to send them back into death?" the Namer said, and the Patterner, "Who is to say what is the law?"

"There is a wall," the Herbal said.

"That wall is not as deep-rooted as my trees," said the Patterner.

"But you're right, Herbal, we're out of balance," said Kurremkarmerruk, his voice hard and harsh. "When and where did we begin to go too far? What have we forgotten, turned our back on, overlooked?"

Irian looked from one to the other.

"When the balance is wrong, holding still is not good. It must get more wrong," said the Patterner. "Until—" He made a quick gesture of reversal with his open hands, down going up and up down.

"What's more wrong than to summon oneself back from death?" said the Namer.

"Thorion was the best of us all—a brave heart, a noble mind." The Herbal spoke almost in anger. "Sparrowhawk loved him. So did we all."

"Conscience caught him," said the Namer. "Conscience told him he alone could set things right. To do it, he denied his death. So he denies life."

"And who shall stand against him?" said the Patterner. "I can only hide in my woods."

"And I in my tower," said the Namer. "And you, Herbal, and the Doorkeeper, are in the trap, in the Great House. The walls we built to keep all evil out. Or in, as the case may be."

"We are four against him," said the Patterner.

"They are five against us," said the Herbal.

"Has it come to this," the Namer said, "that we stand at the edge of the forest Segoy planted and talk of how to destroy one another?"

"Yes," said the Patterner. "What goes too long unchanged destroys itself. The forest is forever because it dies and dies and so lives. I will not let this dead hand touch me. Or touch the king who brought us hope. A promise was made, made through me. I spoke it—'A woman on Gont.' I will not see that word forgotten."

"Then should we go to Gont?" said the Herbal, caught in Azver's passion. "Sparrow-hawk is there."

"Tenar of the Ring is there," said Azver.

"Maybe our hope is there," said the Namer.

They stood silent, uncertain, trying to cherish hope.

Irian stood silent too, but her hope sank down, replaced by a sense of shame and utter insignificance. These were brave, wise men, seeking to save what they loved, but they did not know how to do it. And she had no share in their wisdom, no part in their decisions. She drew away from them, and they did not notice. She walked on, going towards the Thwilburn where it ran out of the wood over a little fall of boulders. The water was bright in the morning sunlight and made a happy noise. She wanted to cry, but she had never been good at crying. She stood and watched the water, and her shame turned slowly into anger.

She came back towards the three men, and said, "Azver."

He turned to her, startled, and came forward a little.

"Why did you break your Rule for me? Was it fair to me, who can never be what you are?"

Azver frowned. "The Doorkeeper admitted you because you asked," he said. "I brought you to the Grove because the leaves of the trees spoke your name to me before you ever came here. *Irian*, they said, *Irian*. Why you came I don't know, but not by chance. The Summoner too knows that."

"Maybe I came to destroy him."

He looked at her and said nothing.

"Maybe I came to destroy Roke."

His pale eyes blazed then. "Try!"

A long shudder went through her as she stood facing him. She felt herself larger than he was, larger than she was, enormously larger. She could reach out one finger and destroy him. He stood there in his small, brave, brief humanity, his mortality, defenseless. She drew a long, long breath. She stepped back from him.

The sense of huge strength was draining out of her. She turned her head a little and looked down, surprised to see her own brown arm, her rolled-up sleeve, the grass springing cool and green around her sandaled feet. She looked back at the Patterner and he still seemed a fragile being. She pitied and honored him. She wanted to warn him of the peril he was in. But no words came to her at all. She turned round and went back to the stream bank by the little falls. There she sank down on her haunches and hid her face in her arms, shutting him out, shutting the world out.

The voices of the mages talking were like the voices of the stream running. The stream said its words and they said theirs, but none of them were the right words.

IV. Irian

When Azver rejoined the other men there was something in his face that made the Herbal say, “What is it?”

“I don’t know,” he answered. “Maybe we should not leave Roke.”

“Probably we can’t,” said the Herbal. “If the Windkey locks the winds against us . . .”

“I’m going back to where I am,” Kurremkarmerruk said abruptly. “I don’t like leaving myself about like an old shoe. I’ll be here with you this evening.” And he was gone.

“I’d like to walk under your trees a bit, Azver,” the Herbal said, with a long sigh.

“Go on, Deyala. I’ll stay here.” The Herbal went off. Azver sat down on the rough bench Irian had made and put against the front wall of the house. He looked upstream at her, crouching motionless on the bank. Sheep in the field between them and the Great House blatted softly. The morning sun was getting hot.

His father had named him Banner of War. He had come west, leaving all he knew behind him. He had learned his true name from the trees of the Immanent Grove, and become the Patterner of Roke. All this year the patterns of the shadows and the branches and the roots, all the silent language of his forest, had spoken of destruction, of transgression, of all things changed. Now it was upon them, he knew. It had come with her.

She was in his charge, in his care, he had known that when he saw her. Though she came to destroy Roke, as she had said, he must serve her. He did so willingly. She had walked with him in the forest, tall, awkward, fearless; she had put aside the thorny arms of brambles with her big, careful hand. Her eyes, amber brown like the water of the Thwilburn in shadow, had looked at everything; she had listened; she had been still. He wanted to protect her and knew he could not. He had given her a little warmth when she was cold. He had nothing else to give her. Where she must go she would go. She did not understand danger. She had no wisdom but her innocence, no armor but her anger. Who are you, Irian? he said to her, watching her crouched there like an animal locked in its muteness.

The Herbal came back from the woods and sat with him a while, not speaking.

In the middle of the day he went back to the Great House, agreeing to return with the Doorkeeper in the morning. They would ask all the other Masters to meet with them in the Grove. "But *he* won't come," Deyala said, and Azver nodded.

All day he stayed near the Otter's House, keeping watch on Irian, making her eat a little with him. She came to the house, but when they had eaten she went back to her place on the stream bank and sat there motionless. And he too felt a lethargy in his own body and mind, a stupidity, which he fought against but could not shake off. He thought of the Summoner's eyes, and then it was he that felt cold, cold through, though he was sitting in the full heat of the summer's day. We are ruled by the dead, he thought. The thought would not leave him.

He was grateful to see Kurremkarmerruk coming slowly down the bank of the Thwilburn from the north. The old man waded through the stream barefoot, holding his shoes in one hand and his tall staff in the other, snarling when he missed his footing on the rocks. He sat down on the near bank to dry his feet and put his shoes back on. "When I go back to the Tower," he said, "I'll ride. Hire a carter, buy a mule. I'm old, Azver."

"Come up to the house," the Patterner said, and he set out water and food for the Namer.

"Where's the girl?"

"Asleep." Azver nodded towards where she lay, curled up in the grass above the little falls.

The heat of the day was beginning to lessen and the shadows of the Grove lay across the grass, though the Otter's House was still in sunlight. Kurremkarmerruk sat on the bench with his back against the house wall, and Azver on the doorstep.

"We've come to the end of it," the old man said out of silence.

Azver nodded, in silence.

"What brought you here, Azver?" the Namer asked. "I've often thought of asking you. A long, long way to come. And you have no wizards in the Kargish lands."

"No. But we have the things wizardry is made of. Water, stones, trees, words . . ."

"But not the words of the Making."

"No. Nor dragons."

"Never?"

"Only in old tales from the farthest east, from the desert of Hur-at-Hur. Before the gods were. Before men were. Before men were men, they were dragons."

"Now that is interesting," said the old scholar, sitting up straighter. "I told you I've been reading about dragons. You know these rumors of them flying over the Inmost Sea as far east as Gont. That was no doubt Kalessin taking Ged home, multiplied by sailors making a good story better. But a boy here swore to me that his whole village had seen dragons flying, this spring, west of Mount Onn. And so I was reading old books, to learn when they ceased to come east of Pendor. And in an old Pelnish scroll, I came on your story, or something like it. That men and dragons were all one kind, but they quarreled. Some went west and some east, and they became two kinds, and forgot they were ever one."

"We went farthest east," Azver said. "But do you know what the leader of an army is, in my tongue?"

"Edran," said the Namer promptly, and laughed. "Drake. Dragon . . ."

After a while he said, "I could chase an etymology on the brink of doom . . . But I think, Azver, that that's where we are. We won't defeat him."

"He has the advantage," Azver said, very dry.

"He does. But, admitting it unlikely, admitting it impossible—if we did defeat him—if he went back into death and left us here alive—what would we do? What comes next?"

After a long time, Azver said, "I have no idea."

"Your leaves and shadows tell you nothing?"

"Change, change," said the Patterner. "Transformation."

He looked up suddenly. The sheep, who had been grouped near the stile, were scurrying off, and someone was coming along the path from the Great House.

"A group of young men," said the Herbal, breathless, as he came to them. "Thorion's army. Coming here. To take the girl. To send her away." He stood and drew breath. "The Doorkeeper was speaking with them when I left. I think—"

"Here he is," said Azver, and the Doorkeeper was there, his smooth, yellow-brown face tranquil as ever.

"I told them," he said, "that if they went out Medra's Gate this day, they'd never go back through it into a house they knew. Some of them were for turning back, then. But the Windkey and the Chanter urged them on. They'll be along soon."

They could hear men's voices in the fields east of the Grove.

Azver went quickly to where Irian lay beside the stream, and the others followed him. She roused up and got to her feet, looking dull and dazed. They were standing around her, a kind of guard, when the group of thirty or more men came past the little house and approached them. They were mostly older students; there

were five or six wizard's staffs among the crowd, and the Master Windkey led them. His thin, keen old face looked strained and weary, but he greeted the four mages courteously by their titles.

They greeted him, and Azver took the word—"Come into the Grove, Master Windkey," he said, "and we will wait there for the others of the Nine."

"First we must settle the matter that divides us," said the Windkey.

"That is a stony matter," said the Namer.

"The woman with you defies the Rule of Roke," the Windkey said. "She must leave. A boat is waiting at the dock to take her, and the wind, I can tell you, will stand fair for Way."

"I have no doubt of that, my lord," said Azver, "but I doubt she will go."

"My Lord Patterner, will you defy our Rule and our community, that has been one so long, upholding order against the forces of ruin? Will it be you, of all men, who break the pattern?"

"It is not glass, to break," Azver said. "It is breath, it is fire."

It cost him a great effort to speak.

"It does not know death," he said, but he spoke in his own language, and they did not understand him. He drew closer to Irian. He felt the warmth of her body. She stood staring, in that animal silence, as if she did not understand any of them.

"Lord Thorion has returned from death to save us all," the Windkey said, fiercely and clearly. "He will be Archmage. Under his rule Roke will be as it was. The king will receive the true crown from his hand, and rule with his guidance, as Morred ruled. No witches will defile sacred ground. No dragons will threaten the Inmost Sea. There will be order, safety, and peace."

None of the four mages with Irian answered him. In the silence, the men with him murmured, and a voice among them said, "Let us have the witch."

"No," Azver said, but could say nothing else. He held his staff of willow, but it was only wood in his hand.

Of the four of them, only the Doorkeeper moved and spoke. He took a step forward, looking from one young man to the next and the next. He said, "You trusted me, giving me your names. Will you trust me now?"

"My lord," said one of them with a fine, dark face and a wizard's oaken staff, "we do trust you, and therefore ask you to let the witch go, and peace return."

Irian stepped forward before the Doorkeeper could answer.

"I am not a witch," she said. Her voice sounded high, metallic, after the men's deep voices. "I have no art. No knowledge. I came to learn."

“We do not teach women here,” said the Windkey. “You know that.”

“I know nothing,” Irian said. She took another step forward, facing the mage directly. “Tell me who I am.”

“Learn your place, woman,” the mage said with cold passion.

“My place,” she said, slowly, the words dragging—“my place is on the hill. Where things are what they are. Tell the dead man I will meet him there.”

The Windkey stood silent. The group of men muttered, angry, and some of them moved forward. Azver came between her and them, her words releasing him from the paralysis of mind and body that had held him. “Tell Thorion we will meet him on Roke Knoll,” he said. “When he comes, we will be there. Now come with me,” he said to Irian.

The Namer, the Doorkeeper, and the Herbal followed him with her into the Grove. There was a path for them. But when some of the young men started after them, there was no path.

“Come back,” the Windkey said to the young men.

They turned back, uncertain. The low sun was still bright on the fields and the roofs of the Great House, but inside the wood it was all shadows.

“Witchery,” they said, “sacrilege, defilement.”

“Best come away,” said the Master Windkey, his face set and somber, his keen eyes troubled. He set off back to the school, and they straggled after him, arguing and debating in frustration and anger.

They were not far inside the Grove, and still beside the stream, when Irian stopped, turned aside, and crouched down by the enormous, hunching roots of a willow that leaned out over the water. The four mages stood on the path.

“She spoke with the other breath,” Azver said.

The Namer nodded.

“So we must follow her?” the Herbal asked.

This time the Doorkeeper nodded. He smiled faintly and said, “So it would seem.”

“Very well,” said the Herbal, with his patient, troubled look; and he went aside a little, and knelt to look at some small plant or fungus on the forest floor.

Time passed as always in the Grove, not passing at all it seemed, yet gone, the day gone quietly by in a few long breaths, a quivering of leaves, a bird singing far

off and another answering it from even farther. Irian stood up slowly. She did not speak, but looked down the path, and then walked down it. The four men followed her.

They came out into the calm, open evening air. The west still held some brightness as they crossed the Thwilburn and walked across the fields to Roke Knoll, which stood up before them in a high dark curve against the sky.

"They're coming," the Doorkeeper said. Men were coming through the gardens and up the path from the Great House, the five mages, many students. Leading them was Thorion the Summoner, tall in his grey cloak, carrying his tall staff of bone-white wood, about which a faint gleam of werelight hovered.

Where the two paths met and joined to wind up to the heights of the Knoll, Thorion stopped and stood waiting for them. Irian strode forward to face him.

"Irian of Way," the Summoner said in his deep, clear voice, "that there may be peace and order, and for the sake of the balance of all things, I bid you now leave this island. We cannot give you what you ask, and for that we ask your forgiveness. But if you seek to stay here you forfeit forgiveness, and must learn what follows on transgression."

She stood up, almost as tall as he, and as straight. She said nothing for a minute and then spoke out in a high, harsh voice. "Come up onto the hill, Thorion," she said.

She left him standing at the waymeet, on level ground, and walked up the hill path for a little way, a few strides. She turned and looked back down at him. "What keeps you from the hill?" she said.

The air was darkening around them. The west was only a dull red line, the eastern sky was shadowy above the sea.

The Summoner looked up at Irian. Slowly he raised his arms and the white staff in the invocation of a spell, speaking in the tongue that all the wizards and mages of Roke had learned, the language of their art, the Language of the Making: "Irian, by your name I summon you and bind you to obey me!"

She hesitated, seeming for a moment to yield, to come to him, and then cried out, "I am not only Irian!"

At that the Summoner ran up towards her, reaching out, lunging at her as if to seize and hold her. They were both on the hill now. She towered above him impossibly, fire breaking forth between them, a flare of red flame in the dusk air, a gleam of red-gold scales, of vast wings—then that was gone, and there was nothing there but the woman standing on the hill path and the tall man bowing down before

her, bowing slowly down to earth, and lying on it.

Of them all it was the Herbal, the healer, who was the first to move. He went up the path and knelt down by Thorion. "My lord," he said, "my friend."

Under the huddle of the grey cloak his hands found only a huddle of clothes and dry bones and a broken staff.

"This is better, Thorion," he said, but he was weeping.

The old Namer came forward and said to the woman on the hill, "Who are you?"

"I do not know my other name," she said. She spoke as he had spoken, as she had spoken to the Summoner, in the Language of the Making, the tongue the dragons speak.

She turned away and began to walk on up the hill.

"Irian," said Azver the Patterner, "will you come back to us?"

She halted and let him come up to her. "I will, if you call me," she said.

She reached out and touched his hand. He drew his breath sharply.

"Where will you go?" he said.

"To those who will give me my name. In fire, not water. My people."

"In the west," he said.

She said, "Beyond the west."

She turned away from him and them and went on up the hill in the gathering darkness. As she went farther from them they saw her, all of them, the great gold-mailed flanks, the spiked, coiling tail, the talons, the breath that was bright fire. On the crest of the knoll she paused a while, her long head turning to look slowly round the Isle of Roke, gazing longest at the Grove, only a blur of darkness in darkness now. Then with a rattle like the shaking of sheets of brass the wide, vaned wings opened and the dragon sprang up into the air, circled Roke Knoll once, and flew.

A curl of fire, a wisp of smoke drifted down through the dark air.

Azver the Patterner stood with his left hand holding his right hand, which her touch had burnt. He looked down at the men, who stood silent at the foot of the hill, staring after the dragon. "Well, my friends," he said, "what now?"

Only the Doorkeeper answered. He said, "I think we should go to our house, and open its doors."

Afterword

It would have simplified things for my publishers and me if the fifth book of Earthsea had been a novel, but it wasn't. Sometimes the elements of a book won't come together into a single story, being by nature disparate. They have to go different places, different ways—one back through the centuries, another to Havnor, maybe, another to Semel . . . I couldn't write the last Earthsea novel until I'd been to islands and times that I hadn't yet explored. Storytellers' stories, like scientific theories, are explorations, excursions into the tremendous gap between almost knowing and knowing. Bridges thrown out, as a spider throws herself on her first long anchoring thread, not certain where it will land her yet trusting it to do so.

I love no music better than the uncertain beginning of the last movement of Beethoven's last symphony, when he starts a theme and drops it, repeats a phrase and breaks off, leaves gaps, gropes, explores, till he bursts out with his frustration in words—"Oh, friends, this isn't right yet!"[†] And then it all begins to come together, and the bridge has crossed the void.

I wrote an introduction for *Tales from Earthsea* when it was published in 2001, which began this way:

> At the end of the fourth book of Earthsea, *Tehanu*, the story had arrived at what I felt to be *now*. And, just as in the now of the so-called real world, I didn't know what would happen next. I could guess, foretell, fear, hope, but I didn't know.
>
> Unable to continue Tehanu's story (because it hadn't happened yet) and foolishly assuming that the story of Ged and Tenar had reached its happily-ever-after, I gave the book a subtitle: "The Last Book of Earthsea."
>
> O foolish writer. *Now* moves. Even in storytime, dreamtime,

> once-upon-a time, *now* isn't *then*.
>
> Seven or eight years after *Tehanu* was published, I was asked to write a story set in Earthsea. A mere glimpse at the place told me that things had been happening there while I wasn't looking. It was high time to go back and find out what was going on *now*.

For the whole story of Earthsea to have weight and make sense in my own mind so that I could take it to its end, so that I could build the bridge to true closure, not only did I have to find out what was going on now, but I had to go back in time to find out what had gone wrong, and when, and how. Why had the wise teaching of the Balance been getting increasingly out of balance?

People who live immersed in the ceaseless present tense of electronic media may have no interest in the past, letting mythology replace history, as pre-literate peoples did. But as I grew up with the un-rearrangeable, implacable durability of print, my education gave me the sense of the past that perceives the present as only the bright restless surface of an ocean. So, paradoxical as it may seem, I didn't want a mythology of my mythical world, but the history of it—the facts of the fiction, its time depths. Which of course meant, yet more paradoxically, that I had to make it up. To grope, blunder, see if it worked. Oh, friends, this isn't right yet!

The "Description of Earthsea" at the end of the *Tales* is a summary sketch of that history as I worked it out while writing the stories.

The first novella, "The Finder," is the "prequel," the story behind the story of the first four books of Earthsea. Writing it really was like swinging out on a spider thread into the unknown. I had no clear idea where young Otter was going when he set out into his dark, misgoverned world. I knew only that he would come to Roke, and find, or found, the School there. By following him, I hoped to learn, for one thing, how it came to be that the wizards of Roke, as I first knew them, had renounced their sexuality and how much of their humanity they had renounced with it.

All the stories are explorations of such matters—unclarities, balances and imbalances, moral choices. "Darkrose and Diamond" again has to do with the question of wizardly celibacy, and also asks the question: If you could either do magic or make songs but not both, which might you choose, and why? In "The Bones of the Earth" I found out who Ogion was, who his teacher was, and how far magic could and could not go. "On the High Marsh" let me deal with what gets left

out when magic is understood purely as power. Power over whom, and to do what? Save the world from your enemies? Is that all? Is it enough? If power is responsibility, for whom are you responsible? In this story (as in T. H. White's *Sword in the Stone* and many other fantasies) the presence of animals disallows wholly human-centered conventions, hinting at a different, larger order of things.

The last novella, "Dragonfly," is the direct bridge between *Tehanu* and the final novel. Its final events follow after the end of *Tehanu* and come before *The Other Wind*. Everything I'd been learning about the relationship of people and dragons begins to come clear in this story, along with the understanding of what had gone wrong on Roke. I was beginning to hear the great final themes of the whole story of Earthsea. It was beginning to come right.

In the original foreword, I said,

> In the years since I began to write about Earthsea I've changed, of course, and so have the people who read the books. All times are changing times, but ours is one of massive, rapid moral and mental transformation. Archetypes turn into millstones, large simplicities get complicated, chaos becomes elegant, and what everybody knows is true turns out to be what some people used to think.
>
> It's unsettling. For all our delight in the impermanent, the entrancing flicker of electronics, we also long for the unalterable. We cherish the old stories for their changelessness. Arthur dreams eternally in Avalon. Bilbo can go "there and back again," and "there" is always the beloved familiar Shire. Don Quixote sets out forever to kill a windmill . . .

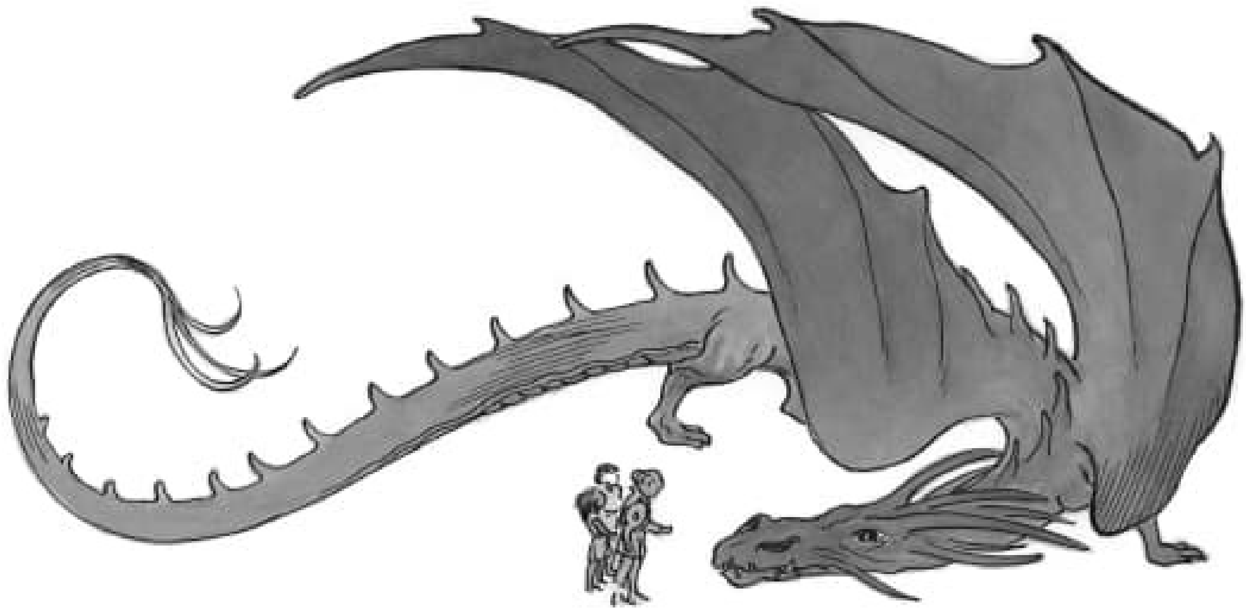
We may, I said, turn to fantasy seeking stability, ancient truths, immutable simplicities; but the realms of Once-upon-a-time are unstable, mutable, complex, and as much a part of human history and thought as the nations in our ever-changing atlases. And in daily life or in imagination, we don't live as our parents or ancestors did. "Enchantment alters with age, and with the age. We know a dozen different Arthurs now, all of them true. The Shire changed irrevocably even in Bilbo's lifetime. Don Quixote went riding out to Argentina and met Jorge Luis Borges there."

To this I add: As the virtual world of electronic communication becomes the

world many of us inhabit all the time, in turning to imaginative literature we may not be seeking mere reassurance nor be impelled by mere nostalgia. To enter with heart and mind into the world of the imagination may be to head deliberately and directly toward, or back toward, engagement with the real world. In one of T. S. Eliot's poems a bird sings, "Mankind cannot bear very much reality." I've always thought that bird was mistaken, or was talking only about some people. I find it amazing how much of the real world most of us can endure. Not only endure, but need, desire, crave. Reality is life. Where we suffocate is in the half-life of unreality, untruth, imitation, fakery, the almost-true that is not true. To be human is to live both within and beyond the narrow band of what-happens-now, in the vast regions of the past and the possible, the known and the imagined: our real world, our true Now.

† *"O Freunde! nicht diese Töne!"* means "Oh, friends, not these notes" or "not this music." "This isn't right yet" is free translation, from the heart.

The Other Wind



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Farther west than west
beyond the land
my people are dancing
on the other wind

—*The Song of the Woman of Kemay*

Chapter 1

Mending the Green Pitcher

Sails long and white as swan's wings carried the ship *Farflyer* through summer air down the bay from the Armed Cliffs toward Gont Port. She glided into the still water landward of the jetty, so sure and graceful a creature of the wind that a couple of townsmen fishing off the old quay cheered her in, waving to the crewmen and the one passenger standing in the prow.

He was a thin man with a thin pack and an old black cloak, probably a sorcerer or small tradesman, nobody important. The two fishermen watched the bustle on the dock and the ship's deck as she made ready to unload her cargo, and only glanced at the passenger with a bit of curiosity when as he left the ship one of the sailors made a gesture behind his back, thumb and first and last finger of the left hand all pointed at him: *May you never come back!*

He hesitated on the pier, shouldered his pack, and set off into the streets of Gont Port. They were busy streets, and he got at once into the Fish Market, abrawl with hawkers and hagglers, paving stones glittering with fish scales and brine. If he had a way, he soon lost it among the carts and stalls and crowds and the cold stares of dead fish.

A tall old woman turned from the stall where she had been insulting the freshness of the herring and the veracity of the fishwife. Seeing her glaring at him, the stranger said unwisely, "Would you have the kindness to tell me the way I should go for Re Albi?"

"Why, go drown yourself in pig slop for a start," said the tall woman and strode off, leaving the stranger wilted and dismayed. But the fishwife, seeing a chance to seize the high moral ground, blared out, "Re Albi is it? Re Albi you want, man? Speak up then! The Old Mage's house, that would be what you'd want at Re Albi. Yes it would. So you go out by the corner there, and up Elvers Lane there, see, till you reach the tower . . ."

Once he was out of the market, broad streets led him uphill and past the massive watchtower to a town gate. Two stone dragons large as life guarded it, teeth the length of his forearm, stone eyes glaring blindly out over the town and the bay. A lounging guard told him just turn left at the top of the road and he'd be in Re Albi. "And keep on through the village for the Old Mage's house," the guard said.

So he went trudging up the road, which was pretty steep, looking up as he went to the steeper slopes and far peak of Gont Mountain that overhung its island like a cloud.

It was a long road and a hot day. He soon had his black cloak off and went on bareheaded in his shirtsleeves, but he had not thought to find water or buy food in the town, or had been too shy to, maybe, for he was not a man familiar with cities or at ease with strangers.

After several long miles he caught up to a cart which he had seen far up the dusty way for a long time as a dark blot in a white blot of dust. It creaked and screaked along at the pace of a pair of small oxen that looked as old, wrinkled, and unhopeful as tortoises. He greeted the carter, who resembled the oxen. The carter said nothing, but blinked.

"Might there be a spring of water up the road?" the stranger asked.

The carter slowly shook his head. After a long time he said, "No." A while later he said, "There ain't."

They all plodded along. Discouraged, the stranger found it hard to go any faster than the oxen, about a mile an hour, maybe.

He became aware that the carter was wordlessly reaching something out to him: a big clay jug wrapped round with wicker. He took it, and finding it very heavy, drank his fill of the water, leaving it scarcely lighter when he passed it back with his thanks.

"Climb on," said the carter after a while.

"Thanks. I'll walk. How far might it be to Re Albi?"

The wheels creaked. The oxen heaved deep sighs, first one, then the other. Their dusty hides smelled sweet in the hot sunlight.

"Ten mile," the carter said. He thought, and said, "Or twelve." After a while he said, "No less."

"I'd better walk on, then," said the stranger.

Refreshed by the water, he was able to get ahead of the oxen, and they and the cart and the carter were a good way behind him when he heard the carter speak again. "Going to the Old Mage's house," he said. If it was a question, it seemed to

need no answer. The traveler walked on.

When he started up the road it had still lain in the vast shadow of the mountain, but when he turned left to the little village he took to be Re Albi, the sun was blazing in the western sky and under it the sea lay white as steel.

There were scattered small houses, a small dusty square, a fountain with one thin stream of water falling. He made for that, drank from his hands again and again, put his head under the stream, rubbed cool water through his hair and let it run down his arms, and sat for a while on the stone rim of the fountain, observed in attentive silence by two dirty little boys and a dirty little girl.

"He ain't the farrier," one of the boys said.

The traveler combed his wet hair back with his fingers.

"He'll be going to the Old Mage's house," said the girl, "stupid."

"Yerraghh!" said the boy, drawing his face into a horrible lopsided grimace by pulling at it with one hand while he clawed the air with the other.

"You watch it, Stony," said the other boy.

"Take you there," said the girl to the traveler.

"Thanks," he said, and stood up wearily.

"Got no staff, see," said one boy, and the other said, "Never said he did." Both watched with sullen eyes as the stranger followed the girl out of the village to a path that led north through rocky pastures that dropped down steep to the left.

The sun glared on the sea. His eyes dazzled, and the high horizon and the blowing wind made him dizzy. The child was a little hopping shadow ahead of him. He stopped.

"Come on," she said, but she too stopped. He came up to her on the path. "There," she said. He saw a wooden house near the cliff's edge, still some way ahead.

"I ain't afraid," the girl said. "I fetch their eggs lots of times for Stony's dad to carry to market. Once she gave me peaches. The old lady. Stony says I stole 'em but I never. Go on. She ain't there. Neither of 'em is."

She stood still, pointing to the house.

"Nobody's there?"

"The old man is. Old Hawk, he is."

The traveler went on. The child stood watching him till he went round the corner of the house.

Two goats stared down at the stranger from a steep fenced field. A scatter of hens

and half-grown chicks pecked and conversed softly in long grass under peach and plum trees. A man was standing on a short ladder against the trunk of one of the trees; his head was in the leaves, and the traveler could see only his bare brown legs.

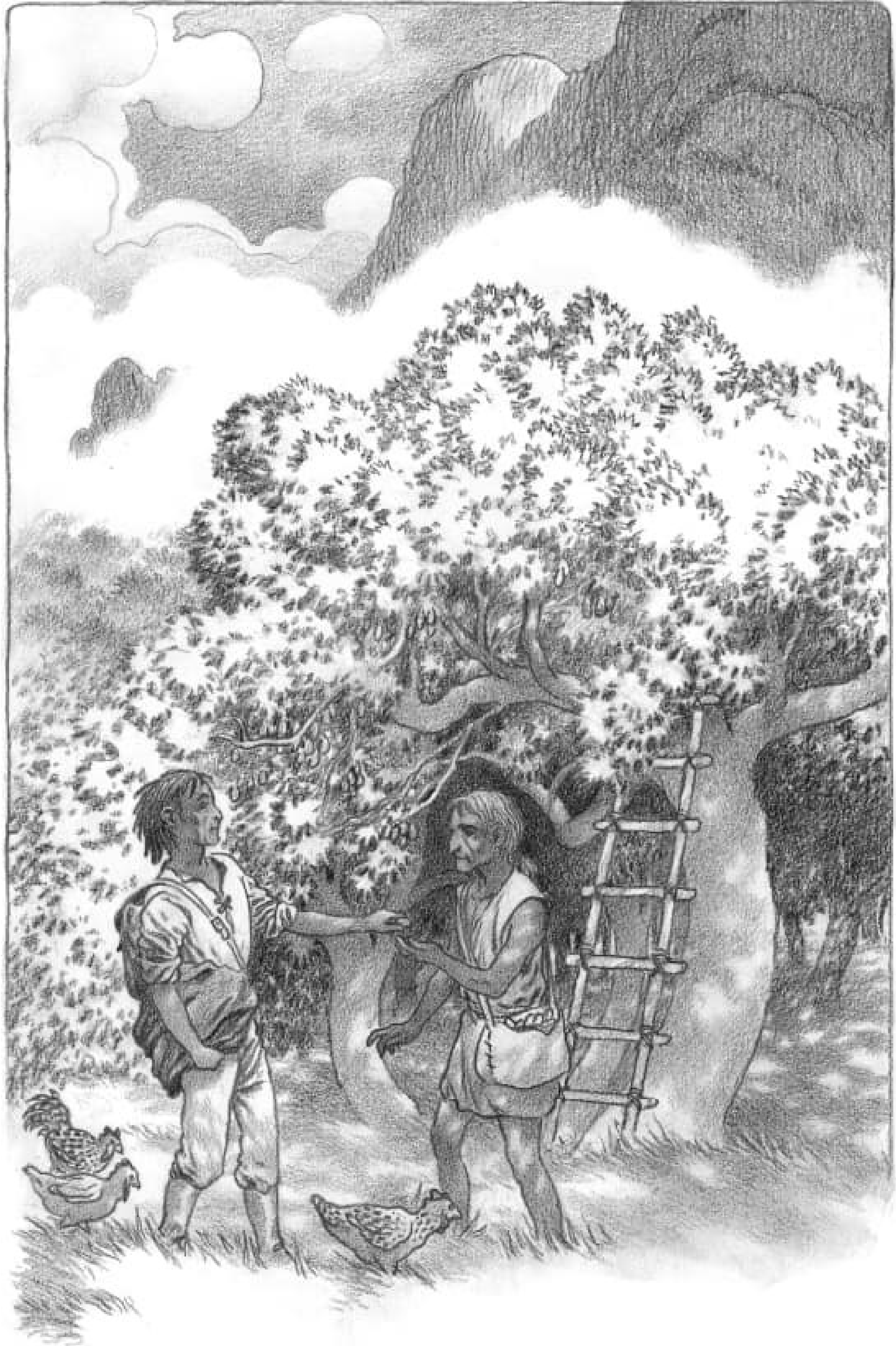
"Hello," the traveler said, and after a while said it again a bit louder.

The leaves shook and the man came briskly down the ladder. He carried a handful of plums, and when he got off the ladder he batted away a couple of bees drawn by the juice. He came forward, a short, straight-backed man, grey hair tied back from a handsome, timeworn face. He looked to be seventy or so. Old scars, four white seams, ran from his left cheekbone down to the jaw. His gaze was clear, direct, intense. "They're ripe," he said, "though they'll be even better tomorrow." He held out his handful of little yellow plums.

"Lord Sparrowhawk," the stranger said huskily. "Archmage."

The old man gave a curt nod of acknowledgment. "Come into the shade," he said.

The stranger followed him, and did what he was told: he sat down on a wooden bench in the shade of the gnarled tree nearest the house; he accepted the plums, now rinsed and served in a wicker basket; he ate one, then another, then a third. Questioned, he admitted that he had eaten nothing that day. He sat while the master of the house went into it, coming out presently with bread and cheese and half an onion. The guest ate the bread and cheese and onion and drank the cup of cold water his host brought him. The host ate plums to keep him company.



"You look tired. How far have you come?"

"From Roke."

The old man's expression was hard to read. He said only, "I wouldn't have guessed that."

"I'm from Taon, lord. I went from Taon to Roke. And there the Lord Patterner told me I should come here. To you."

"Why?"

It was a formidable gaze.

"Because you *walked across the dark land living* . . ." The stranger's husky voice died away.

The old man picked up the words: *"And came to the far shores of the day*. Yes. But that was spoken in prophecy of the coming of our King, Lebannen."

"You were with him, lord."

"I was. And he gained his kingdom there. But I left mine there. So don't call me by any title. Hawk, or Sparrowhawk, as you please. And how shall I call you?"

The man murmured his use-name: "Alder."

Food and drink and shade and sitting down had clearly eased him, but he still looked exhausted. He had a weary sadness in him; his face was full of it.

The old man had spoken to him with a hard edge in his voice, but that was gone when he said, "Let's put off talking for a bit. You've sailed near a thousand miles and walked fifteen uphill. And I've got to water the beans and the lettuce and all, since my wife and daughter left the garden in my charge. So rest a while. We can talk in the cool of the evening. Or the cool of the morning. There's seldom as much hurry as I used to think there was."

When he came back by half an hour later his guest was flat on his back asleep in the cool grass under the peach trees.

The man who had been Archmage of Earthsea stopped with a bucket in one hand and a hoe in the other and looked down at the sleeping stranger.

"Alder," he said under his breath. "What's the trouble you bring with you, Alder?"

It seemed to him that if he wanted to know the man's true name he would know it only by thinking, by putting his mind to it, as he might have done when he was a mage.

But he did not know it, and thinking would not give it to him, and he was not a mage.

He knew nothing about this Alder and must wait to be told. "Never trouble

trouble," he told himself, and went on to water the beans.

As soon as the sun's light was cut off by a low rock wall that ran along the top of the cliff near the house, the cool of the shadow roused the sleeper. He sat up with a shiver, then stood up, a bit stiff and bewildered, with grass seed in his hair. Seeing his host filling buckets at the well and lugging them to the garden, he went to help him.

"Three or four more ought to do it," said the ex-Archmage, doling out water to the roots of a row of young cabbages. The smell of wet dirt was pleasant in the dry, warm air. The westering light came golden and broken over the ground.

They sat on a long bench beside the house door to see the sun go down. Sparrowhawk had brought out a bottle and two squat, thick cups of greenish glass. "My wife's son's wine," he said. "From Oak Farm, in Middle Valley. A good year, seven years back." It was a flinty red wine that warmed Alder right through. The sun set in calm clarity. The wind was down. Birds in the orchard trees made a few closing remarks.

Alder had been amazed when he learned from the Master Patterner of Roke that the Archmage Sparrowhawk, that man of legend, who had brought the king home from the realm of death and then flown off on a dragon's back, was still alive. Alive, said the Patterner, and living on his home island, Gont. "I tell you what not many know," the Patterner had said, "for I think you need to know it. And I think you will keep his secret."

"But then he is still Archmage!" Alder had said, with a kind of joy: for it had been a puzzle and concern to all men of the art that the wise men of Roke Island, the school and center of magery in the Archipelago, had not in all the years of King Lebannen's rule named an Archmage to replace Sparrowhawk.

"No," the Patterner had said. "He is not a mage at all."

The Patterner had told him a little of how Sparrowhawk had lost his power, and why; and Alder had had time to ponder it all. But still, here, in the presence of this man who had spoken with dragons, and brought back the Ring of Erreth-Akbe, and crossed the kingdom of the dead, and ruled the Archipelago before the king, all those stories and songs were in his mind. Even as he saw him old, content with his garden, with no power in him or about him but that of a soul made by a long life of thought and action, he still saw a great mage. And so it troubled him considerably that Sparrowhawk had a wife.

A wife, a daughter, a stepson . . . Mages had no family. A common sorcerer like

Alder might marry or might not, but the men of true power were celibate. Alder could imagine this man riding a dragon, that was easy enough, but to think of him as a husband and father was another matter. He couldn't manage it. He tried. He asked, "Your—wife—She's with her son, then?"

Sparrowhawk came back from far away. His eyes had been on the western gulfs. "No," he said. "She's in Havnor. With the king."

After a while, coming all the way back, he added, "She went there with our daughter just after the Long Dance. Lebannen sent for them, to take counsel. Maybe on the same matter that brings you here to me. We'll see . . . But the truth is, I'm tired this evening, and not much disposed to weighing heavy matters. And you look tired too. So a bowl of soup, maybe, and another glass of wine, and sleep? And we'll talk in the morning."

"All with pleasure, lord," Alder said, "but for the sleep. That's what I fear."

It took the old man a while to register this, but then he said, "You fear to sleep?"

"Dreams."

"Ah." A keen glance from the dark eyes under eyebrows grown tangled and half grey. "You had a good nap there in the grass, I think."

"The sweetest sleep I've had since I left Roke Island. I'm grateful to you for that boon, lord. Maybe it will return tonight. But if not, I struggle with my dream, and cry out, and wake, and am a burden to anyone near me. I'll sleep outside, if you permit."

Sparrowhawk nodded. "It'll be a pleasant night," he said.

It was a pleasant night, cool, the sea wind mild from the south, the stars of summer whitening all the sky except where the broad, dark summit of the mountain loomed. Alder put down the pallet and sheepskin his host gave him, in the grass where he had slept before.

Sparrowhawk lay in the little western alcove of the house. He had slept there as a boy, when it was Ogion's house and he was Ogion's prentice in wizardry. Tehanu had slept there these last fifteen years, since she had been his daughter. With her and Tenar gone, when he lay in his and Tenar's bed in the dark back corner of the single room he felt his solitude, so he had taken to sleeping in the alcove. He liked the narrow cot built out from the thick house wall of timbers, right under the window. He slept well there. But this night he did not.

Before midnight, wakened by a cry, voices outside, he leapt up and went to the door. It was only Alder struggling with nightmare, amid sleepy protests from the henhouse. Alder shouted in the thick voice of dream and then woke, starting up in

panic and distress. He begged his host's pardon and said he would sit up a while under the stars. Sparrowhawk went back to bed. He was not wakened again by Alder, but he had a bad dream of his own.

He was standing by a wall of stone near the top of a long hillside of dry grey grass that ran down from dimness into the dark. He knew he had been there before, had stood there before, but he did not know when, or what place it was. Someone was standing on the other side of the wall, the downhill side, not far away. He could not see the face, only that it was a tall man, cloaked. He knew that he knew him. The man spoke to him, using his true name. He said, "You will soon be here, Ged."

Cold to the bone, he sat up, staring to see the space of the house about him, to draw its reality around him like a blanket. He looked out the window at the stars. The cold came into his heart then. They were not the stars of summer, beloved, familiar, the Cart, the Falcon, the Dancers, the Heart of the Swan. They were other stars, the small, still stars of the dry land, that never rise or set. He had known their names, once, when he knew the names of things.

"Avert!" he said aloud and made the gesture to turn away misfortune that he had learned when he was ten years old. His gaze went to the open doorway of the house, the corner behind the door, where he thought to see darkness taking shape, clotting together and rising up.

But his gesture, though it had no power, woke him. The shadows behind the door were only shadows. The stars out the window were the stars of Earthsea, paling in the first reflection of the dawn.

He sat holding his sheepskin up round his shoulders, watching those stars fade as they dropped west, watching the growing brightness, the colors of light, the play and change of coming day. There was a grief in him, he did not know why, a pain and yearning as for something dear and lost, forever lost. He was used to that; he had held much dear, and lost much; but this sadness was so great it did not seem to be his own. He felt a sadness at the very heart of things, a grief even in the coming of the light. It clung to him from his dream, and stayed with him when he got up.

He lit a little fire in the big hearth and went to the peach trees and the henhouse to gather breakfast. Alder came in from the path that ran north along the cliff top; he had gone for a walk at first light, he said. He looked jaded, and Sparrowhawk was struck again by the sadness in his face, which echoed the deep aftermood of his own dream.

They had a cup of the warmed barley gruel the country people of Gont drink, a

boiled egg, a peach; they ate by the hearth, for the morning air in the shadow of the mountain was too cold for sitting outdoors. Sparrowhawk looked after his livestock: fed the chickens, scattered grain for doves, let the goats into the pasture. When he came back they sat again on the bench in the dooryard. The sun was not over the mountain yet, but the air had grown dry and warm.

"Now tell me what brings you here, Alder. But since you came by Roke, tell me first if things are well in the Great House."

"I did not enter it, my lord."

"Ah." A neutral tone but a sharp glance.

"I was only in the Immanent Grove."

"Ah." A neutral tone, a neutral glance. "Is the Patterner well?"

"He told me, 'Carry my love and honor to my lord and say to him: I wish we walked in the Grove together as we used to do.'"

Sparrowhawk smiled a little sadly. After a while he said, "So. But he sent you to me with more to say than that, I think."

"I will try to be brief."

"Man, we have all day before us. And I like a story told from the beginning."

So Alder told him his story from the beginning.

He was a witch's son, born in the town of Elini on Taon, the Isle of the Harpers.

Taon is at the southern end of the Sea of Éa, not far from where Soléa lay before the sea whelmed it. That was the ancient heart of Earthsea. All those islands had states and cities, kings and wizards, when Havnor was a land of feuding tribesmen and Gont a wilderness ruled by bears. People born on Éa or Ebéa, Enlad or Taon, though they may be a ditchdigger's daughter or a witch's son, consider themselves to be descendants of the Elder Mages, sharing the lineage of the warriors who died in the dark years for Queen Elfarran. Therefore they often have a fine courtesy of manner, though sometimes an undue haughtiness, and a generous, uncalculating turn of mind and speech, a way of soaring above mere fact and prose, which those whose minds stay close to merchandise distrust. "Kites without strings," say the rich men of Havnor of such people. But they do not say it in the hearing of the king, Lebannen of the House of Enlad.

The best harps in Earthsea are made on Taon, and there are schools of music there, and many famous singers of the Lays and Deeds were born or learned their art there. Elini, however, is just a market town in the hills, with no music about it, Alder said; and his mother was a poor woman, though not, as he put it, hungry poor. She had a birthmark, a red stain from the right eyebrow and ear clear down

over her shoulder. Many women and men with such a blemish or difference about them become witches or sorcerers perforce, "marked for it," people say. Blackberry learned spells and could do the most ordinary kind of witchery; she had no real gift for it, but she had a way about her that was almost as good as the gift itself. She made a living, and trained her son as well as she could, and saved enough to prentice him to the sorcerer who gave him his true name.

Of his father Alder said nothing. He knew nothing. Blackberry had never spoken of him. Though seldom celibate, witches seldom kept company more than a night or two with any man, and it was a rare thing for a witch to marry a man. Far more often two of them lived their lives together, and that was called witch marriage or she-troth. A witch's child, then, had a mother or two mothers, but no father. That went without saying, and Sparrowhawk asked nothing on that score; but he asked about Alder's training.

The sorcerer Gannet had taught Alder the few words he knew of the True Speech, and some spells of finding and illusion, at which Alder had shown, he said, no talent at all. But Gannet took enough interest in the boy to discover his true gift. Alder was a mender. He could rejoin. He could make whole. A broken tool, a knife blade or an axle snapped, a pottery bowl shattered: he could bring the fragments back together without joint or seam or weakness. So his master sent him about seeking various spells of mending, which he found mostly among witches of the island, and he worked with them and by himself to learn to mend.

"That is a kind of healing," Sparrowhawk said. "No small gift, nor easy craft."

"It was a joy to me," Alder said, with a shadow of a smile in his face. "Working out the spells, and finding sometimes how to use one of the True Words in the work . . . To put back together a barrel that's dried, the staves all fallen in from the hoops—that's a real pleasure, seeing it build up again, and swell out in the right curve, and stand there on its bottom ready for the wine . . . There was a harper from Meoni, a great harper, oh, he played like a storm on the high hills, like a tempest on the sea. He was hard on the harp strings, twanging and pulling them in the passion of his art, so they'd break at the very height and flight of the music. And so he hired me to be there near him when he played, and when he broke a string I'd mend it quick as the note itself, and he'd play on."

Sparrowhawk nodded with the warmth of a fellow professional talking shop. "Have you mended glass?" he asked.

"I have, but it's a long, nasty job," Alder said, "with all the tiny little bits and speckles glass goes to."

"But a big hole in the heel of a stocking can be worse," Sparrowhawk said, and they discussed mending for a while longer, before Alder returned to his story.

He had become a mender, then, a sorcerer with a modest practice and a local reputation for his gift. When he was about thirty, he went to the principal city of the island, Meoni, with the harper, who was playing for a wedding there. A woman sought him out in their lodging, a young woman, not trained as a witch; but she had a gift, she said, the same as his, and wanted him to teach her. And indeed she had a greater gift than his. Though she knew not a word of the Old Speech, she could put a smashed jug back together or mend a frayed-out rope just with the movements of her hands and a wordless song she sang under her breath, and she had healed broken limbs of animals and people, which Alder had never dared try to do.

So rather than his teaching her, they put their skills together and taught each other more than either had ever known. She came back to Elini and lived with Alder's mother Blackberry, who taught her various useful appearances and effects and ways of impressing customers, if not much actual witch knowledge. Lily was her name; and Lily and Alder worked together there and in all the hill towns nearby, as their reputation grew.

"And I came to love her," Alder said. His voice had changed when he began to speak of her, losing its hesitancy, growing urgent and musical.

"Her hair was dark, but with a shining of red gold in it," he said.

There was no way he could hide his love from her, and she knew it and returned it. Whether she was a witch now or not, she said she did not care; she said the two of them were born to be together, in their work and in their life; she loved him and would be married to him.

So they were married, and lived in very great happiness for a year, and half a second year.

"Nothing was wrong at all until the time came for the child to be born," Alder said. "But it was late, and then very late. The mid-wives tried to bring on the birth with herbs and spells, but it was as if the child would not let her bear it. It would not be separated from her. It would not be born. And it was not born. It took her with it."

After a while he said, "We had great joy."

"I see that."

"And my sorrow was in that degree."

The old man nodded.

“I could bear it,” Alder said. “You know how it is. There was not much reason to be living that I could see, but I could bear it.”

“Yes.”

“But in the winter. Two months after her death. There was a dream came to me. She was in the dream.”

“Tell it.”

“I stood on a hillside. Along the top of the hill and running down the slope was a wall, low, like a boundary wall between sheep pastures. She was standing across the wall from me, below it. It was darker there.”

Sparrowhawk nodded once. His face had gone rock hard.

“She was calling to me. I heard her voice saying my name, and I went to her. I knew she was dead, I knew it in the dream, but I was glad to go. I couldn’t see her clear, and I went to her to see her, to be with her. And she reached out across the wall. It was no higher than my heart. I had thought she might have the child with her, but she did not. She was reaching her hands out to me, and so I reached out to her, and we took each other’s hands.”

“You touched?”

“I wanted to go to her, but I could not cross the wall. My legs would not move. I tried to draw her to me, and she wanted to come, it seemed as if she could, but the wall was there between us. We couldn’t get over it. So she leaned across to me and kissed my mouth and said my name. And she said, ‘Set me free!’

“I thought if I called her by her true name maybe I could free her, bring her across that wall, and I said, ‘Come with me, Mevre!’ But she said, ‘That’s not my name, Hara, that’s not my name any more.’ And she let go my hands, though I tried to hold her. She cried, ‘Set me free, Hara!’ But she was going down into the dark. It was all dark down that hillside below the wall. I called her name and her use-name and all the dear names I had had for her, but she went on away. So then I woke.”

Sparrowhawk gazed long and keenly at his visitor. “You gave me your name, Hara,” he said.

Alder looked a little stunned, and took a couple of long breaths, but he looked up with desolate courage. “Who could I better trust it with?” he said.

Sparrowhawk thanked him gravely. “I will try to deserve your trust,” he said. “Tell me, do you know what that place is—that wall?”

“I did not know it then. Now I know you have crossed it.”

“Yes. I’ve been on that hill. And crossed the wall, by the power and art I used to have. And I’ve gone down to the cities of the dead, and spoken to men I had known

living, and sometimes they answered me. But Hara, you are the first man I ever knew or heard of, among all the great mages in the lore of Roke or Paln or the Enlades, who ever touched, who ever kissed his love across that wall."

Alder sat with his head bowed and his hands clenched.

"Will you tell me: what was her touch like? Were her hands warm? Was she cold air and shadow, or like a living woman? Forgive my questions."

"I wish I could answer them, my lord. On Roke the Summoner asked the same. But I can't answer truly. My longing for her was so great, I wished so much—it could be I wished her to be as she was in life. But I don't know. In dream not all things are clear."

"In dream, no. But I never heard of any man coming to the wall in dream. It is a place a wizard may seek to come to, if he must, if he's learned the way and has the power. But without the knowledge and the power, only the dying can—"

And then he broke off, remembering his dream of the night before.

"I took it for a dream," Alder said. "It troubled me, but I cherished it. It was like a harrow on my heart's ground to think of it, and yet I held to that pain, held it close to me. I wanted it. I hoped to dream again."

"Did you?"

"Yes. I dreamed again."

He looked unseeing into the blue gulf of air and ocean west of where they sat. Low and faint across the tranquil sea lay the sunlit hills of Kameber. Behind them the sun was breaking bright over the mountain's northern shoulder.

"It was nine days after the first dream. I was in that same place, but high up on the hill. I saw the wall below me across the slope. And I ran down the hill, calling out her name, sure of seeing her. There was someone there. But when I came close, I saw it wasn't Lily. It was a man, and he was stooping at the wall, as if he was repairing it. I said to him, 'Where is she, where is Lily?' He didn't answer or look up. I saw what he was doing. He wasn't working to mend the wall but to unbuild it, prying with his fingers at a great stone. The stone never moved, and he said, 'Help me, Hara!' Then I saw that it was my teacher, Gannet, who named me. He has been dead these five years. He kept prying and straining at the stone with his fingers, and said my name again—'Help me, set me free.' And he stood up and reached out to me across the wall, as she had done, and caught my hand. But his hand burned, with fire or with cold, I don't know, but the touch of it burned me so that I pulled away, and the pain and fear of it woke me from the dream."

He held his hand out as he spoke, showing a darkness on the back and palm like

an old bruise.

"I've learned not to let them touch me," he said in a low voice.

Ged looked at Alder's mouth. There was a darkening across his lips too.

"Hara, you've been in mortal danger," he said, also softly.

"There is more."

Forcing his voice against silence, Alder went on with his story.

The next night when he slept again he found himself on that dim hill and saw the wall that dropped down from the hilltop across the slope. He went down towards it, hoping to find his wife there. "I didn't care if she couldn't cross it, if I couldn't, so long as I could see her and talk to her," he said. But if she was there he never saw her among all the others: for as he came closer to the wall he saw a crowd of shadowy people on the other side, some clear and some dim, some he seemed to know and others he did not know, and all of them reached out their hands to him as he approached and called him by his name: "Hara! Let us come with you! Hara, set us free!"

"It's a terrible thing to hear one's true name called by strangers," Alder said, "and it's a terrible thing to be called by the dead."

He tried to turn and climb back up the hill, away from the wall; but his legs had the awful weakness of dream and would not carry him. He fell to his knees to keep himself from being drawn down to the wall, and called out for help, though there was no one to help him; and so he woke in terror.

Since then, every night that he slept deeply, he found himself standing on the hill in the dry grey grass above the wall, and the dead would crowd thick and shadowy below it, pleading and crying to him, calling his name.

"I wake," he said, "and I'm in my own room. I'm not there, on that hillside. But I know they are. And I have to sleep. I try to wake often, and to sleep in daylight when I can, but I have to sleep at last. And then I am there, and they are there. And I can't go up the hill. If I move it's always downhill, towards the wall. Sometimes I can turn my back to them, but then I think I hear Lily among them, crying to me. And I turn to look for her. And they reach out to me."

He looked down at his hands gripping each other.

"What am I to do?" he said.

Sparrowhawk said nothing.

After a long time Alder said, "The harper I told you of was a good friend to me. After a while he saw there was something amiss, and when I told him that I couldn't sleep for fear of my dreams of the dead, he urged me and helped me to

take ship's passage to Éa, to speak to a grey wizard there." He meant a man trained in the School on Roke. "As soon as that wizard heard what my dreams were he said I must go to Roke."

"What is his name?"

"Beryl. He serves the Prince of Éa, who is Lord of the Isle of Taon."

The old man nodded.

"He had no help to give me, he said, but his word was as good as gold to the ship's master. So I went on the water again. That was a long journey, coasting clear round Havnor and down the Inmost Sea. I thought maybe being on the water, far from Taon, always farther, I might leave the dream behind me. The wizard on Éa called that place in my dream *the dry land*, and I thought maybe I'd be going away from it, going on the sea. But every night I was there on the hillside. And more than once in the night, as time went on. Twice, or three times, or every time my eyes close, I'm on the hill, and the wall below me, and the voices calling me. So I'm like a man crazy with the pain of a wound who can find peace only in sleep, but the sleep is my torment, with the pain and anguish of the wretched dead all crowding at the wall, and my fear of them."

The sailors soon began to shun him, he said, at night because he cried out and woke them with his miserable wakenings, and in daylight because they thought there was a curse on him or a gebbeth in him.

"And no relief for you on Roke?"

"In the Grove," Alder said, and his face changed entirely when he said the word.

Sparrowhawk's face had the same look for a moment.

"The Master Patterner took me there, under those trees, and I could sleep. Even at night I could sleep. In daylight, if the sun's on me—it was like that in the afternoon, yesterday, here—if the warmth of the sun's on me and the red of the sun shines through my eyelids, I don't fear to dream. But in the Grove there was no fear at all, and I could love the night again."

"Tell me how it was when you came to Roke."

Though hampered by weariness, anguish, and awe, Alder had the silver tongue of his island; and what he left out for fear of going on too long or telling the Archmage what he already knew, his listener could well imagine, remembering when he himself first came to the Isle of the Wise as a boy of fifteen.

When Alder left the ship at the docks at Thwil Town, one of the sailors had drawn the rune of the Closed Door on the top of the gangplank to prevent his ever coming back aboard. Alder noticed it, but he thought the sailor had good cause.

He felt himself illomened; he felt he bore darkness in him. That made him shyer than he would have been in any case in a strange town. And Thwil was a very strange town.

"The streets lead you awry," Sparrowhawk said.

"They do that, my lord!—I'm sorry, my tongue will obey my heart, and not you —"

"Never mind. I was used to it once. I can be Lord Goatherd again, if it eases your speech. Go on."

Misdirected by those he asked, or misunderstanding the directions, Alder wandered about the hilly little labyrinth of Thwil Town with the School always in sight and never able to get to it, until, having reached despair, he came to a plain door in a bare wall on a dull square. After staring at it a while he recognised the wall was the one he had been trying to get to. He knocked, and a man with a quiet face and quiet eyes opened the door.

Alder was ready to say that he had been sent by the wizard Beryl of Éa with a message for the Master Summoner, but he didn't have a chance to speak. The Doorkeeper gazed at him a moment and said mildly, "You cannot bring them into this house, friend."

Alder did not ask who it was he could not bring with him. He knew. He had slept scarcely at all the past nights, snatching fragments of sleep and waking in terror, dozing off in the daylight, seeing the dry grass sloping down through the sunlit deck of the ship, the wall of stones across the waves of the sea. And waking, the dream was in him, with him, around him, veiled, and he could hear, always, faintly, through all the noises of wind and sea, the voices that cried his name. He did not know if he was awake now or asleep. He was crazy with pain and fear and weariness.

"Keep them out," he said, "and let me in, for pity's sake let me in!

"Wait here," the man said, as gently as before. "There's a bench," pointing. And he closed the door.

Alder went and sat down on the stone bench. He remembered that, and he remembered some boys of fifteen or so looking curiously at him as they went by and entered that door, but what happened for some while after he could recall only in fragments.

The Doorkeeper came back with a young man with the staff and cloak of a Roke wizard. Then Alder was in a room, which he understood was in a lodging house. There the Master Summoner came and tried to talk with him. But Alder by then

was not able to talk. Between sleep and waking, between the sunlit room and the dim grey hill, between the Summoner's voice speaking to him and the voices calling him across the wall, he could not think and he could not move, in the living world. But in the dim world where the voices called, he thought it would be easy to walk on down those few steps to the wall and let the reaching hands take him and hold him. If he was one of them they would let him be, he thought.

Then, as he remembered, the sunlit room was altogether gone, and he was on the grey hill. But with him stood the Summoner of Roke: a big, broad, dark-skinned man, with a great staff of yew wood that shimmered in the dim place.

The voices had ceased calling. The people, the crowding figures at the wall, were gone. He could hear a distant rustle and a kind of sobbing as they went down into the darkness, went away.

The Summoner stepped to the wall and put his hands on it.

The stones had been loosened here and there. A few had fallen and lay on the dry grass. Alder felt that he should pick them up and replace them, mend the wall, but he did not.

The Summoner turned to him and asked, "Who brought you here?"

"My wife, Mevre."

"Summon her here."

Alder stood dumb. At last he opened his mouth, but it was not his wife's true name that he spoke but her use-name, the name he had called her in life. He said it aloud, "Lily . . ." The sound of it was not like a white flower, but like a pebble dropping on dust.

No sound. Stars shone small and steady in the black sky. Alder had never looked up at the sky in this place before. He did not recognise the stars.

"Mevre!" said the Summoner, and in his deep voice spoke some words in the Old Speech.

Alder felt the breath go out of him and could barely stand. But nothing stirred on the long slope that led down to formless dark.

Then there was some movement, something lighter, coming up the hill, coming slowly nearer. Alder shook with fear and yearning, and whispered, "Oh my dear love."

But the figure as it came closer was too small to be Lily. He saw it was a child of twelve or so, girl or boy he could not tell. It paid no heed to him or the Summoner and never looked across the wall, but settled down just under it. When Alder came closer and looked down he saw the child was prying and pulling at the stones,

trying to loosen one, then another.

The Summoner was whispering in the Old Speech. The child glanced up once indifferently and went on tugging at the stones with its thin fingers that seemed to have no strength in them.

This was so horrible to Alder that his head spun; he tried to turn away, and beyond that he could remember nothing till he woke in the sunny room, lying in bed, weak and sick and cold.

People looked after him: the aloof, smiling woman who kept the lodging house, and a brown-skinned, stocky old man who came with the Doorkeeper. Alder took him for a physician-sorcerer. Only after he had seen him with his staff of olive wood did he understand that he was the Herbal, the master of healing of the School on Roke.

His presence brought solace, and he was able to give Alder sleep. He brewed up a tea and had Alder drink it, and lighted some herb that burned slowly with a smell like the dark earth under pine woods, and sitting nearby began a long, soft chant. "But I must not sleep," Alder protested, feeling sleep coming into him like a great dark tide. The healer laid his warm hand on Alder's hand. Then peace came into Alder, and he slipped into sleep without fear. So long as the healer's hand was on his, or on his shoulder, it kept him from the dark hillside and the wall of stones.

He woke to eat a little, and soon the Master Herbal was there again with the tepid, insipid tea and the earth-smelling smoke and the dull untuneful chant and the touch of his hand; and Alder could have rest.

The healer had all his duties at the School, so could be there only some hours of the night. Alder got enough rest in three nights that he could eat and walk about the town a little in the day and think and talk coherently. On the fourth morning the three masters, the Herbal, the Doorkeeper, and the Summoner, came to his room.

Alder bowed to the Summoner with dread, almost distrust, in his heart. The Herbal was also a great mage, but his art was not altogether different from Alder's own craft, so they had a kind of understanding; and there was the great kindness of his hand. The Summoner, though, dealt not with bodily things but with the spirit, with the minds and wills of men, with ghosts, with meanings. His art was arcane, dangerous, full of risk and threat. And he had stood beside Alder there, not in the body, on the boundary, at the wall. With him the darkness and the fear returned.

None of the three mages said anything at first. If they had one thing in common, it was a great capacity for silence.

So Alder spoke, trying to say what was in his heart, for nothing less would do.

"If I did some wrong that brought me to that place, or brought my wife to me there, or the other souls, if I can mend or undo what I did, I will. But I don't know what it is I did."

"Or what you are," the Summoner said.

Alder was mute.

"Not many of us know who or what we are," said the Doorkeeper. "A glimpse is all we get."

"Tell us how you first went to the wall of stones," the Summoner said.

And Alder told them.

The mages listened in silence and said nothing for a while after he was done. Then the Summoner asked, "Have you thought what it means to cross that wall?"

"I know I could not come back."

"Only mages can cross the wall living, and only at utmost need. The Herbal may go with a sufferer all the way to that wall, but if the sick man crosses it, he does not follow."

The Summoner was so tall and broad-bodied and dark that, looking at him, Alder thought of a bear.

"My art of Summoning empowers us to call the dead back across the wall for a brief time, a moment, if there is need to do so. I myself question if any need could justify so great a breach in the law and balance of the world. I have never made that spell. Nor have I crossed the wall. The Archmage did, and the King with him, to heal the wound in the world the wizard called Cob made."

"And when the Archmage did not return, Thorion, who was our Summoner then, went down into the dry land to seek him," the Herbal said. "He came back, but changed."

"There is no need to speak of that," the big man said.

"Maybe there is," said the Herbal. "Maybe Alder needs to know it. Thorion trusted his strength too far, I think. He stayed there too long. He thought he could summon himself back into life, but what came back was only his skill, his power, his ambition—the will to live that gives no life. Yet we trusted him, because we had loved him. So he devoured us. Until Irian destroyed him."

Far from Roke, on the Isle of Gont, Alder's listener interrupted him—"What name was that?" Sparrowhawk asked.

"Irian, he said."

"Do you know that name?"

"No, my lord."

"Nor I." After a pause Sparrowhawk went on softly, as if unwillingly. "But I saw Thorion, there. In the dry land, where he had risked going to seek me. It grieved me to see him there. I said to him he might go back across the wall." His face went dark and grim. "That was ill spoken. All is spoken ill between the living and the dead. But I had loved him too."

They sat in silence. Sparrowhawk got up abruptly to stretch his arms and rub his thighs. They both moved about a bit. Alder got a drink of water from the well. Sparrowhawk fetched out a garden spade and the new handle to fit to it, and set to work smoothing the oaken shaft and tapering the end that would go in the socket.

He said, "Go on, Alder," and Alder went on with his story.

The two masters had been silent for a while after the Herbal spoke about Thorion. Alder got up the courage to ask them about a matter that had been much on his mind: how those who died came to the wall, and how the mages came there.

The Summoner answered promptly: "It is a spirit journey."

The old healer was more hesitant. "It's not in the body that we cross the wall, since the body of one who dies stays here. And if a mage goes there in vision, his sleeping body is still here, alive. And so we call that voyager . . . we call what makes that journey from the body, the soul, the spirit."

"But my wife took my hand," Alder said. He could not say again to them that she had kissed his mouth. "I felt her touch."

"So it seemed to you," the Summoner said.

"If they touched bodily, if a link was made," the Herbal said to the Summoner, "might that not be why the other dead can come to him, call to him, even touch him?"

"That is why he must resist them," said the Summoner, with a glance at Alder. His eyes were small, fiery.

Alder felt it as an accusation, and not a fair one. He said, "I try to resist them, my lord. I have tried. But there are so many of them—and she's with them—and they're suffering, crying out to me."

"They cannot suffer," the Summoner said. "Death ends all suffering."

"Maybe the shadow of pain is pain," said the Herbal. "There are mountains in that land, and they are called Pain."

The Doorkeeper had scarcely spoken until now. He said in his quiet, easy voice, "Alder is a mender, not a breaker. I don't think he can break that link."

"If he made it he can break it," the Summoner said.

"Did he make it?"

"I have no such art, my lord," Alder said, so frightened by what they were saying that he spoke angrily.

"Then I must go down among them," said the Summoner.

"No, my friend," said the Doorkeeper, and the old Herbal said, "You last of us all."

"But this is my art."

"And ours."

"Who then?"

The Doorkeeper said, "It seems Alder is our guide. Having come to us for help, maybe he can help us. Let us all go with him in his vision—to the wall, though not across it."

So that night, when late and fearfully Alder let sleep overcome him, and found himself on the grey hill, the others were with him: the Herbal, a warm presence in the chill; the Doorkeeper, elusive and silvery as starlight; and the massive Summoner, the bear, a dark strength.

This time they were standing not where the hill ran down into the dark, but on the near slope, looking up to the top. The wall in this place ran along the crest of the hill and was low, little more than knee height. Above it the sky with its few small stars was perfectly black.

Nothing moved.

It would be hard to walk uphill to the wall, Alder thought. Always before it had been below him.

But if he could go to it maybe Lily would be there, as she had been the first time. Maybe he could take her hand, and the mages would bring her back with him. Or he could step over the wall where it was so low and come to her.

He began to walk up the hill. It was easy, it was no trouble, he was almost there.

"Hara!"

The Summoner's deep voice called him back like a noose round his neck, a jerked leash. He stumbled, staggered forward one step more, almost at the wall, dropped to his knees and reached out to the stones. He was crying, "Save me!" but to whom? To the mages, or to the shadows beyond the wall?

Then hands were on his shoulders, living hands, strong and warm, and he was in his room, with the healer's hands indeed on his shoulders, and the werelight burning white around them. And there were four men in the room with him, not three.

The old Herbal sat down on the bed with him and soothed him a while, for he was shaking, shuddering, sobbing. "I can't do it," he kept saying, but still he did not know if he was talking to the mages or to the dead.

When the fear and pain began to lessen, he felt tired beyond bearing, and looked almost without interest at the man who had come into the room. His eyes were the color of ice, his hair and skin were white. A far Northerner, from Enwas or Bereswek, Alder thought him.

This man said to the mages, "What are you doing, my friends?"

"Taking risks, Azver," said the old Herbal.

"Trouble at the border, Patterner," said the Summoner.

Alder could feel the respect they had for this man, their relief that he was there, as they told him briefly what the trouble was.

"If he'll come with me, will you let him go?" the Patterner asked when they were done, and turning to Alder, "You need not fear your dreams in the Immanent Grove. And so we need not fear your dreams."

They all assented. The Patterner nodded and vanished. He was not there.

He had not been there; he had been a sending, a presentment. It was the first time Alder had seen the great powers of these masters made manifest, and it would have unnerved him if he had not been past amazement and fear.

He followed the Doorkeeper out into the night, through the streets, past the walls of the School, across fields under a high round hill, and along a stream singing its water music softly in the darkness of its banks. Ahead of them was a high wood, the trees crowned with grey starlight.

The Master Patterner came along the path to meet them, looking just as he had in the room. He and the Doorkeeper spoke for a minute, and then Alder followed the Patterner into the Grove.

"The trees are dark," Alder said to Sparrowhawk, "but it isn't dark under them. There is a light—a lightness there."

His listener nodded, smiling a little.

"As soon as I came there, I knew I could sleep. I felt as if I'd been asleep all along, in an evil dream, and now, here, I was truly awake: so I could truly sleep. There was a place he took me to, in among the roots of a huge tree, all soft with the fallen leaves of the tree, and he told me I could lie there. And I did, and I slept. I cannot tell you the sweetness of it."

The midday sun had grown strong; they went indoors, and the host set out bread

and cheese and a bit of dried meat. Alder looked round him as they ate. The house had only the one long room with its little western alcove, but it was large and darkly airy, strongly built, with wide boards and beams, a gleaming floor, a deep stone fireplace. "This is a noble house," Alder said.

"An old one. They call it the Old Mage's house. Not for me, nor for my master Aihal who lived here, but for his master Heleth, who with him stilled the great earthquake. It's a good house."

Alder slept a while again under the trees with the sun shining on him through the moving leaves. His host rested too, but not long; when Alder woke, there was a good-sized basket of the small golden plums under the tree, and Sparrowhawk was up in the goat pasture mending a fence. Alder went to help him, but the job was done. The goats, however, were long gone.

"Neither of 'em's in milk," Sparrowhawk grumbled as they returned to the house. "They've got nothing to do but find new ways through the fence. I keep them for exasperation . . . The first spell I ever learned was to call goats from wandering. My aunt taught me. It's no more use to me now than if I sang them a love song. I'd better go see if they've got into the widower's vegetables. You don't have the kind of sorcery to charm a goat to come, do you?"

The two brown nannies were indeed invading a cabbage patch on the outskirts of the village. Alder repeated the spell Sparrowhawk told him:

> *Noth hierth malk man,*
> *hiolk han merth han!*

The goats gazed at him with alert disdain and moved away a little. Shouting and a stick got them out of the cabbages onto the path, and there Sparrowhawk produced some plums from his pocket. Promising, offering, and cajoling, he slowly led the truants back into their pasture.

"They're odd creatures," he said, latching the gate. "You never know where you are with a goat."

Alder thought that he never knew where he was with his host, but did not say it.

When they were sitting in the shade again, Sparrowhawk said, "The Patterner isn't a Northerner, he's a Karg. Like my wife. He was a warrior of Karego-At. The only man I know of who ever came from those lands to Roke. The Kargs have no wizards. They distrust all sorcery. But they've kept more knowledge of the Old

Powers of the Earth than we have. This man, Azver, when he was young, he heard some tale of the Immanent Grove, and it came to him that the center of all the earth's powers must be there. So he left his gods and his native tongue behind him and made his way to Roke. He stood on our doorstep and said, 'Teach me to live in that forest!' And we taught him, till he began to teach us . . . So he became our Master Patterner. He's not a gentle man, but he is to be trusted."

"I never could fear him," Alder said. "It was easy to be with him. He'd take me far into the wood with him."

They were both silent, both thinking of the glades and aisles of that wood, the sunlight and starlight in its leaves.

"It is the heart of the world," Alder said.

Sparrowhawk looked up eastward at the slopes of Gont Mountain, dark with trees. "I'll go walking there," he said, "in the forest, come autumn."

After a while he said, "Tell me what counsel the Patterner had for you, and why he sent you here to me."

"He said, my lord, that you knew more of the . . . the dry land than any living man, and so maybe you would understand what it means that the souls there come to me as they do, begging me for freedom."

"Did he say how he thinks it came about?"

"Yes. He said that maybe my wife and I didn't know how to be parted, only how to be joined. That it was not my doing, but was maybe ours together, because we drew each to the other, like drops of quicksilver. But the Master Summoner didn't agree. He said that only a great power of magery could so transgress the order of the world. Because my old master Gannet also touched me across the wall, the Summoner said maybe it was a mage power in him which had been hidden or disguised in life, but now was revealed."

Sparrowhawk brooded a while. "When I lived on Roke," he said, "I might have seen it as the Summoner does. There I knew no power stronger than what we call magery. Not even the Old Powers of the Earth, I thought . . . If the Summoner you met is the man I think, he came as a boy to Roke. My old friend Vetch of Iffish sent him to study with us. And he never left. That's a difference between him and Azver the Patterner. Azver lived till he was grown as a warrior's son, a warrior himself, among men and women, in the thick of life. Matters that the walls of the School keep out, he knows in his flesh and blood. He knows that men and women love, make love, marry . . . Having lived these fifteen years outside the walls, I incline to think Azver might be on the better track. The bond between you and your wife is

stronger than the division between life and death."

Alder hesitated. "I've thought it might be so. But it seems . . . shameless to think it. We loved each other, more than I can say we loved each other, but was our love greater than any other before us? Was it greater than Morred's and Elfarran's?"

"Maybe not less."

"How can that be?"

Sparrowhawk looked at him as if saluting something, and answered him with a care that made Alder feel honored. "Well," he said slowly, "sometimes there's a passion that comes in its springtime to ill fate or death. And because it ends in its beauty, it's what the harpers sing of and the poets make stories of: the love that escapes the years. That was the love of the Young King and Elfarran. That was your love, Hara. It wasn't greater than Morred's, but was his greater than yours?"

Alder said nothing, pondering.

"There's no less or greater in an absolute thing," Sparrowhawk said. "All or nothing at all, the true lover says, and that's the truth of it. My love will never die, he says. He claims eternity. And rightly. How can it die when it's life itself? What do we know of eternity but the glimpse we get of it when we enter in that bond?"

He spoke softly but with fire and energy; then he leaned back, and after a minute said, with a half smile, "Every oaf of a farm boy sings that, every young girl that dreams of love knows it. But it's not a thing the Masters of Roke are familiar with. The Patterner maybe knew it early. I learned it late. Very late. Not quite too late." He looked at Alder, the fire still in his eyes, challenging. "You had that," he said.

"I did." Alder drew a deep breath. Presently he said, "Maybe they're there together, in the dark land. Morred and Elfarran."

"No," Sparrowhawk said with bleak certainty.

"But if the bond is true, what can break it?"

"There are no lovers there."

"Then what are they, what do they do, there in that land? You've been there, you crossed the wall. You walked and spoke with them. Tell me!"

"I will." But Sparrowhawk said nothing for a while. "I don't like to think about it," he said. He rubbed his head and scowled. "You saw . . . You've seen those stars. Little, mean stars, that never move. No moon. No sunrise . . . There are roads, if you go down the hill. Roads and cities. On the hill there's grass, dead grass, but farther down there's only dust and rocks. Nothing grows. Dark cities. The multitudes of the dead stand in the streets, or walk on the roads to no end. They don't speak. They don't touch. They never touch." His voice was low and

dry. “There Morred would pass Elfarran and never turn his head, and she wouldn’t look at him . . . There’s no rejoining there, Hara. No bond. The mother doesn’t hold her child, there.”

“But my wife came to me,” Alder said, “she called my name, she kissed my mouth!”

“Yes. And since your love wasn’t greater than any other mortal love, and since you and she aren’t mighty wizards whose power might change the laws of life and death, therefore, therefore something else is in this. Something is happening, is changing. Though it happens through you and to you, you are its instrument and not its cause.”

Sparrowhawk stood up and strode to the beginning of the path along the cliff and back to Alder; he was charged, almost quivering with tense energy, like a hawk about to stoop down on its prey.

“Did your wife not say to you, when you called her by her true name, *That is not my name any more—*?”

“Yes,” Alder whispered.

“But how is that? We who have true names keep them when we die, it’s our use-name that is forgotten . . . This is a mystery to the learned, I can tell you, but as well as we understand it, a true name is a word in the True Speech. That’s why only one with the gift can know a child’s name and give it. And the name binds the being —alive or dead. All the art of the Summoner lies in that . . . Yet when the master summoned your wife to come by her true name, she didn’t come to him. You called by her use-name, Lily, and she came to you. Did she come to you as to the one who knew her truly?”

He gazed at Alder keenly and yet as if he saw more than the man who sat with him. After a while he went on, “When my master Aihal died, my wife was here with him; and as he was dying he said to her, *It is changed, all changed*. He was looking across that wall. From which side I do not know.

“And since that time, indeed there have been changes—a king on Morred’s throne, and no Archmage of Roke. But more than that, much more. I saw a child summon the dragon Kalessin, the Eldest: and Kalessin came to her, calling her daughter, as I do. What does that mean? What does it mean that dragons have been seen above the islands of the west? The king sent to us, sent a ship to Gont Port, asking my daughter Tehanu to come and take counsel with him concerning dragons. People fear that the old covenant is broken, that the dragons will come to burn fields and cities as they did before Erreth-Akbe fought with Orm Embar. And

now, at the boundary of life and death, a soul refuses the bond of her name . . . I do not understand it. All I know is that it is changing. It is all changing."

There was no fear in his voice, only fierce exultation.

Alder could not share that. He had lost too much and was too worn out by his struggle against forces he could not control or comprehend. But his heart rose to that gallantry.

"May it change for the good, my lord," he said.

"Be it so," the old man said. "But change it must."

As the heat went out of the day, Sparrowhawk said he had to walk to the village. He carried the basket of plums with a basket of eggs nested in it.

Alder walked with him and they talked. When Alder understood that Sparrowhawk bartered fruit and eggs and the other produce of the little farm for barley and wheat flour, that the wood he burned was gathered patiently up in the forest, that his goats' not giving milk meant he must eke out last year's cheese, Alder was amazed: how could it be that the Archmage of Earthsea lived from hand to mouth? Did his own people not honor him?

When he went with him to the village, he saw women shut their doors when they saw the old man coming. The marketer who took his eggs and fruit tallied the count on his wooden tablet without a word, his face sullen and his eyes lowered. Sparrowhawk spoke to him pleasantly, "A good day to you then, Iddi," but got no answer.

"My lord," Alder asked as they walked home, "do they know who you are?"

"No," said the ex-Archmage, with a dry sidelong look. "And yes."

"But—" Alder did not know how to speak his indignation.

"They know I have no power of sorcery, but there's something uncanny about me. They know I live with a foreigner, a Kargish woman. They know the girl we call our daughter is something like a witch, but worse, because her face and hand were burnt away by fire, and because she herself burnt up the Lord of Re Albi, or pushed him off the cliff, or killed him with the evil eye—their stories vary. They honor the house we live in, though, because it was Aihal's and Heleth's house, and dead wizards are good wizards . . . You're a townsman, Alder, of an isle of Morred's kingdom. A village on Gont is another matter."

"But why do you stay here, lord? Surely the king would do you proper honor —"

"I want no honor," the old man said, with a violence that silenced Alder entirely.

They walked on. As they came to the house built at the cliff's edge he spoke again. "This is my eyrie," he said.

They had a glass of the red wine with supper, and another sitting out to watch the sun set. They did not talk much. Fear of the night, of the dream, was coming into Alder.

"I'm no healer," his host said, "but perhaps I can do what the Master Herbal did to let you sleep."

Alder looked his question.

"I've been thinking about it, and it seems to me maybe it was no spell at all that kept you away from that hillside, but just the touch of a living hand. If you like, we can try it."

Alder protested, but Sparrowhawk said, "I'm awake half most nights anyway." So the guest lay that night in the low bed in the back corner of the big room, and the host sat up beside him, watching the fire and dozing.

He watched Alder, too, and saw him fall asleep at last; and not long after that saw him start and shudder in his sleep. He put out his hand and laid it on Alder's shoulder as he lay half turned away. The sleeping man stirred a little, sighed, relaxed, and slept on.

It pleased Sparrowhawk that he could do this much. As good as a wizard, he told himself with mild sarcasm.

He was not sleepy; the tension was still in him. He thought about all Alder had told him, and what they had talked about in the afternoon. He saw Alder stand in the path by the cabbage patch saying the spell to call the goats, and the goats' haughty indifference to the powerless words. He remembered how he had used to speak the name of the sparrow-hawk, the marsh hawk, the grey eagle, calling them down from the sky to him in a rush of wings to grasp his arm with iron talons and glare at him, eye to wrathful, golden eye . . . None of that any more. He could boast, calling this house his eyrie, but he had no wings.

But Tehanu did. The dragon's wings were hers to fly on.

The fire had burned out. He pulled his sheepskin over him more closely, leaning his head back against the wall, still keeping his hand on Alder's inert, warm shoulder. He liked the man and was sorry for him.

He must remember to ask him to mend the green pitcher, tomorrow.

The grass next to the wall was short, dry, dead. No wind blew to make it move or rustle.

He roused up with a start, half rising from the chair, and after a moment of

bewilderment put his hand back on Alder's shoulder, grasping it a little, and whispered, "Hara! Come away, Hara." Alder shuddered, then relaxed. He sighed again, turned more onto his face and lay still.

Sparrowhawk sat with his hand on the sleeper's arm. How had he himself come there, to the wall of stones? He no longer had the power to go there. He had no way to find the way. As in the night before, Alder's dream or vision, Alder's voyaging soul had drawn him with it to the edge of the dark land.

He was wide awake now. He sat gazing at the greyish square of the west window, full of stars.

The grass under the wall . . . It did not grow farther down where the hill leveled out into the dim, dry land. He had said to Alder that down there was only dust, only rock. He saw that black dust, black rock. Dead stream beds where no water ever ran. No living thing. No bird, no field mouse cowering, no glitter and buzz of little insects, the creatures of the sun. Only the dead, with their empty eyes and silent faces.

But did birds not die?

A mouse, a gnat, a goat—a white-and-brown, clever-hoofed, yellow-eyed, shameless goat, Sippy who had been Tehanu's pet, and who had died last winter at a great age—where was Sippy?

Not in the dry land, the dark land. She was dead, but she was not there. She was where she belonged, in the dirt. In the dirt, in the light, in the wind, the leap of water from the rock, the yellow eye of the sun.

Then why, then why . . .

He watched Alder mend the pitcher. Fat-bellied and jade green, it had been a favorite of Tenar's; she had carried it all the way from Oak Farm, years ago. It had slipped from his hands the other day as he took it from the shelf. He had picked up the two big pieces of it and the little fragments with some notion of gluing them back together so it could sit out for looks, if never for use again. Every time he saw the pieces, which he had put into a basket, his clumsiness had outraged him.

Now, fascinated, he watched Alder's hands. Slender, strong, deft, unhurried, they cradled the shape of the pitcher, stroking and fitting and settling the pieces of pottery, urging and caressing, the thumbs coaxing and guiding the smaller fragments into place, reuniting them, reassuring them. While he worked he murmured a two-word, tuneless chant. They were words of the Old Speech. Ged knew and did not know their meaning. Alder's face was serene, all stress and

sorrow gone: a face so wholly absorbed in time and task that timeless calm shone through it.

His hands separated from the pitcher, opening out from it like the sheath of a flower opening. It stood on the oak table, whole.

He looked at it with quiet pleasure.

When Ged thanked him, he said, "It was no trouble at all. The breaks were very clean. It's a well-made piece, and good clay. It's the shoddy work that costs to mend."

"I had a thought how you might find sleep," Ged said.

Alder had waked at first light and had got up, so that his host could go to his bed and sleep sound till broad day; but clearly the arrangement would not do for long.

"Come along with me," the old man said, and they set off inland on a path that skirted the goats' pasture and wound between knolls, little, half-tended fields, and inlets of the forest. Gont was a wild-looking place to Alder, ragged and random, the shaggy mountain always frowning and looming above.

"It seemed to me," Sparrowhawk said as they walked, "if I could do as well as the Master Herbal did, keeping you from the hill of the wall only by putting my hand on you, that there might be others who could help you. If you have no objection to animals."

"Animals?"

"You see," Sparrowhawk began, but got no further, interrupted by a strange creature bounding down the path towards them. It was bundled in skirts and shawls, feathers stuck out in all directions from its head, and it wore high leather boots. "O Mastawk, O Mastawk!" it shouted.

"Hello, then, Heather. Gently now," said Sparrowhawk. The woman stopped, rocking her body, her head-feathers waving, a large grin on her face. "She knowed you was a-coming!" she bawled. "She made that hawk's beak with her fingers like this, see, she did, and she told me go, go, with her hand! She knowed you was a-coming!"

"And so I am."

"To see us?"

"To see you. Heather, this is Master Alder."

"Mastalder," she whispered, quieting suddenly as she included Alder in her consciousness. She shrank, drew into herself, looked down at her feet.

She had no leather boots on. Her bare legs were coated from the knee down with smooth, brown, drying mud. Her skirts were bunched, caught up into the

waistband.

"You've been frogging, have you, Heather?"

She nodded vacantly.

"I'll go tell Aunty," she said, beginning in a whisper and ending with a bellow, and bolted back the way she had come.

"She's a good soul," Sparrowhawk said. "She used to help my wife. She lives with our witch now and helps her. I don't think you'll object to entering a witch's house?"

"Never in the world, my lord."

"Many do. Nobles and common folk, wizards and sorcerers."

"Lily my wife was a witch."

Sparrowhawk bowed his head and walked in silence for a while. "How did she learn of her gift, Alder?"

"It was born in her. As a child she'd make a torn branch grow on the tree again, and other children brought her their broken toys to mend. But when her father saw her do that he would strike her hands. Her family were considerable persons in their town. Respectable persons," Alder said in his even, gentle voice. "They didn't want her consorting with witches. Since it would keep her from marriage with a respectable man. So she kept all her study to herself. And the witches of her town would have nothing to do with her, even when she sought to learn from them, for they were afraid of her father, you see. Then a rich man came to court her, for she was beautiful, as I told you, my lord. More beautiful than I could say. And her father told her she was to be married. She ran away that night. She lived by herself, wandering, for some years. A witch here and there took her in, but she kept herself by her skill."

"It's not a big island, Taon."

"Her father wouldn't seek her. He said no tinker witch was his daughter."

Again Sparrowhawk bowed his head. "So she heard of you, and came to you."

"But she taught me more than I could teach her," Alder said earnestly. "It was a great gift she had."

"I believe it."

They had come to a little house or big hut, set down in a dell, with witch hazel and broom in tangles about it, and a goat on the roof, and a flock of white-speckled black hens squawking away, and a lazy little sheepdog bitch standing up and thinking about barking and thinking better of it and waving her tail.

Sparrowhawk went to the low doorway, stooping to look in. "There you are,

Aunty!” he said. “I’ve brought you a visitor. Alder, a man of sorcery from the Isle of Taon. His craft is mending, and he’s a master, I can tell you, for I just watched him put back together Tenar’s green pitcher, you know the one, that I like a clumsy old fool dropped and broke to pieces the other day.”

He entered the hut, and Alder followed him. An old woman sat in a cushioned chair near the doorway where she could look out into the sunlight. Feathers stuck out of her wispy white hair. A speckled hen was settled in her lap. She smiled at Sparrowhawk with enchanting sweetness and nodded politely to the visitor. The hen woke, cackled, and departed.

“This is Moss,” said Sparrowhawk, “a witch of many skills, the greatest of which is kindness.”

So, Alder imagined, might the Archmage of Roke have introduced a great wizard to a great lady. He bowed. The old woman ducked her head and laughed a little.

She made a circling motion with her left hand, looking a query at Sparrowhawk.

“Tenar? Tehanu?” he said. “Still in Havnor with the king, so far as I know. They’ll be having a fine time there, seeing all the sights of the great city and the palaces.”

“I made us crowns,” Heather shouted, bouncing out of the odorous, dark jumble farther inside the house. “Like kings and queens. See?” She preened the chicken feathers that stuck out of her thick hair at all angles. Aunty Moss, becoming aware of her own peculiar headdress, batted in-effectively at the feathers with her left hand and grimaced.

“Crowns are heavy,” Sparrowhawk said. He gently plucked the feathers from the thin hair.

“Who’s the queen, Mastawk?” Heather cried. “Who’s the queen? Bannen’s the king, who’s the queen?”

“King Lebannen has no queen, Heather.”

“Why not? He ought to. Why not?”

“Maybe he’s looking for her.”

“He’ll marry Tehanu!” the woman shrieked, joyful. “He will!”

Alder saw Sparrowhawk’s face change, close, become rock.

He said only, “I doubt it.” He held the feathers he had taken from Moss’s hair and stroked them softly. “I’ve come to you for a favor, as always, Aunty Moss,” he said.

She reached her good hand out and took his hand with such tenderness that

Alder was moved to the heart.

"I want to borrow one of your puppies."

Moss began to look sad. Heather, gawking beside her, puzzled it over for a minute and then shouted, "The puppies! Aunty Moss, the puppies! But they're all gone!"

The old woman nodded, looking forlorn, caressing Sparrowhawk's brown hand.

"Somebody wanted them?"

"The biggest one got out and maybe it ran up in the forest and some creature killed it for it never came back and then old Ramballs, he came and said he needs sheepdogs and he'd take both and train them and Aunty gave them to him because they chased the new chicks Snowflakes hatched and ate out house and home, they did, besides."

"Well, Rambles may have a bit of a job training them," Sparrowhawk said with a half smile. "I'm glad he's got them but sorry they're gone, since I wanted to borrow one for a night or two. They slept on your bed, didn't they, Moss?"

She nodded, still sad. Then, brightening a little, she looked up with her head to one side and mewed.

Sparrowhawk blinked, but Heather understood. "Oh! The kittens!" she shouted. "Little Grey had four, and Old Black he killed one before we could stop him, but there's still two or three somewhere round here, they sleep with Aunty and Biddy most every night now the little dogs are gone. Kitty! kitty! kitty! where are you, kitty, kitty?" And after a good deal of commotion and scrambling and piercing mews in the dark interior, she reappeared with a grey kitten clutched squirming and squealing in her hand. "Here's one!" she shouted, and threw it at Sparrowhawk. He caught it awkwardly. It instantly bit him.

"There, there now," he told it. "Calm down." A tiny, rumbling growl emerged from it, and it tried to bite him again. Moss gestured, and he set the little creature down in her lap. She stroked it with her slow heavy hand. It flattened out at once, stretched, looked up at her, and purred.

"May I borrow it for a while?"

The old witch raised her hand from the kitten in a royal gesture that said clearly: It is yours and welcome.

"Master Alder here is having troublesome dreams, you see, and I thought maybe having an animal with him nights might help to ease the trouble."

Moss nodded gravely and, looking up at Alder, slipped her hand under the

kitten and lifted it towards him. Alder took it rather gingerly into his hands. It did not growl or bite. It scrambled up his arm and clung to his neck under his hair, which he wore loosely gathered at the nape.

As they walked back to the Old Mage's house, the kitten tucked inside Alder's shirt, Sparrowhawk explained. "Once, when I was new to the art, I was asked to heal a child with the redfever. I knew the boy was dying, but I couldn't bring myself to let him go. I tried to follow him. To bring him back. Across the wall of stones . . . And so, here in the body, I fell down by the bedside and lay like the dead myself. There was a witch there who guessed what the matter was, and she had me taken to my house and laid abed there. And in my house was an animal that had befriended me when I was a boy on Roke, a wild creature that came to me of its own will and stayed with me. An otak. Do you know them? I think there are none in the North."

Alder hesitated. He said, "I know of them only from the Deed that tells of how . . . how the mage came to the Court of the Terrenon in Osskil. And the otak tried to warn him of a gebbeth that walked with him. And he won free of the gebbeth, but the little animal was caught and slain."

Sparrowhawk walked on without speaking for twenty paces or so. "Yes," he said. "So. Well, my otak also saved my life when I was caught by my own folly on the wrong side of the wall, my body lying here and my soul astray there. The otak came to me and washed me, the way they wash themselves and their young, the way cats do, with a dry tongue, patiently, touching me and bringing me back with its touch, bringing me back into my body. And the gift the animal gave me was not only life but a knowledge as great as I ever learned on Roke . . . But you see, I forget all my learning.

"A knowledge, I say, but it's rather a mystery. What's the difference between us and the animals? Speech? All the animals have some way of speaking, saying *come* and *beware* and much else; but they can't tell stories, and they can't tell lies. While we can . . .

"But the dragons speak: they speak the True Speech, the language of the Making, in which there are no lies, in which to tell the story is to make it be! Yet we call the dragons animals . . .

"So maybe the difference isn't language. Maybe it's this: animals do neither good nor evil. They do as they must do. We may call what they do harmful or useful, but good and evil belong to us, who chose to choose what we do. The dragons are dangerous, yes. They can do harm, yes. But they're not evil. They're beneath our

morality, if you will, like any animal. Or beyond it. They have nothing to do with it.

"We must choose and choose again. The animals need only be and do. We're yoked, and they're free. So to be with an animal is to know a little freedom . . .

"Last night, I was thinking of how witches often have a companion, a familiar. My aunt had an old dog that never barked. She called him Gobefore. And the Archmage Nemmerle, when I first came to Roke Island, had a raven that went with him everywhere. And I thought of a young woman I knew once who wore a little dragon-lizard, a harekki, for her bracelet. And so at last I thought of my otak. Then I thought, if what Alder needs to keep him on this side of the wall is the warmth of a touch, why not an animal? Since they see life, not death. Maybe a dog or cat is as good as a Master of Roke . . ."

So it proved. The kitten, evidently happy to be away from the household of dogs and tomcats and roosters and the unpredictable Heather, tried hard to show that it was a reliable and diligent cat, patrolling the house for mice, riding on Alder's shoulder under his hair when permitted, and settling right down to sleep purring under his chin as soon as he lay down. Alder slept all night without any dream he remembered, and woke to find the kitten sitting on his chest, washing its ears with an air of quiet virtue.

When Sparrowhawk tried to determine its sex, however, it growled and struggled. "All right," he said, getting his hand out of danger quickly. "Have it your way. It's either a male or a female, Alder, I'm certain of that."

"I won't name it, in any case," Alder said. "They go out like candle flames, little cats. If you've named one you grieve more for it."

That day at Alder's suggestion they went fence mending, walking the goat-pasture fence, Sparrowhawk on the inside and Alder on the outside. Whenever one of them found a place where the palings showed the beginning of rot or the tie laths had been weakened, Alder would run his hands along the wood, thumbing and tugging and smoothing and strengthening, a half-articulate chant almost inaudible in his throat and chest, his face relaxed and intent.

Once Sparrowhawk, watching him, murmured, "And I used to take it all for granted!"

Alder, lost in his work, did not ask him what he meant.

"There," he said, "that'll hold." And they moved on, followed closely by the two inquisitive goats, who butted and pushed at the repaired sections of fence as if to test them.

“I’ve been thinking,” Sparrowhawk said, “that you might do well to go to Havnor.”

Alder looked at him in alarm. “Ah,” he said. “I thought maybe, if I have a way now to keep away from . . . that place . . . I could go home to Taon.” He was losing faith in what he said as he said it.

“You might, but I don’t think it would be wise.”

Alder said reluctantly, “It is a great deal to ask of a kitten, to defend a man against the armies of the dead.”

“It is.”

“But I—what should I do in Havnor?” And, with sudden hope, “Would you go with me?”

Sparrowhawk shook his head once. “I stay here.”

“The Lord Patterner . . .”

“Sent you to me. And I send you to those who should hear your tale and find out what it means . . . I tell you, Alder, I think in his heart the Patterner believes I am what I was. He believes I’m merely hiding here in the forests of Gont and will come forth when the need is greatest.” The old man looked down at his sweaty, patched clothes and dusty shoes, and laughed. “In all my glory,” he said.

“Beh,” said the brown goat behind him.

“But all the same, Alder, he was right to send you here, since she’d have been here, if she hadn’t gone to Havnor.”

“The Lady Tenar?”

“*Hama Gondun*. So the Patterner himself called her,” Sparrowhawk said, looking across the fence at Alder, his eyes unfathomable. “A woman on Gont. The Woman of Gont. Tehanu.”

Chapter 2

Palaces

When Alder came down to the docks, *Farflyer* was still there, taking on a cargo of timbers; but he knew he had worn out his welcome on that ship. He went to a small shabby coaster tied up next to her, the *Pretty Rose*.

Sparrowhawk had given him a letter of passage signed by the king and sealed with the Rune of Peace. "He sent it for me to use if I changed my mind," the old man had said with a snort. "It'll serve you." The ship's master, after getting his purser to read it for him, became quite deferential and apologised for the cramped quarters and the length of the voyage. *Pretty Rose* was going to Havnor, sure enough, but she was a coaster, trading small goods from port to port, and it might take her a month to work clear round the southeast coast of the Great Island to the King's City.

That was all right with him, Alder said. For if he dreaded the voyage, he feared its ending more.

New moon to half moon, the sea voyage was a time of peace for him. The grey kitten was a hardy traveler, busy mousing the ship all day but faithfully curling up under his chin or within hand's reach at night; and to his unceasing wonder, that little scrap of warm life kept him from the wall of stones and the voices calling him across it. Not wholly. Not so that he ever entirely forgot them. They were there, just through the veil of sleep in darkness, just through the brightness of the day. Sleeping out on deck those warm nights, he opened his eyes often to see that the stars moved, swinging to the rocking of the moored ship, following their courses through heaven to the west. He was still a haunted man. But for a half month of summer along the coasts of Kameber and Barnisk and the Great Island he could turn his back on his ghosts.

For days the kitten hunted a young rat nearly as big as it was. Seeing it proudly and laboriously hauling the carcass across the deck, one of the sailors called it Tug.

Alder accepted the name for it.

They sailed down the Ebavnor Straits and in through the portals of Havnor Bay. Across the sunlit water little by little the white towers of the city at the center of the world resolved out of the haze of distance. Alder stood at the prow as they came in and looking up saw on the pinnacle of the highest tower a flash of silver light, the Sword of Erreth-Akbe.

Now he wished he could stay aboard and sail on and not go ashore into the great city among great people with a letter for the king. He knew he was no fit messenger. Why had such a burden been laid on him? How could it be that a village sorcerer who knew nothing of high matters and deep arts was called on to make these journeys from land to land, from mage to monarch, from the living to the dead?

He had said something like that to Sparrowhawk. "It's all beyond me," he had said. The old man looked at him a while and then, calling him by his true name, said, "The world's vast and strange, Hara, but no vaster and no stranger than our minds are. Think of that sometimes."

Behind the city the sky darkened with a thunderstorm inland. The towers burned white against purple-black, and gulls soared like drifting sparks of fire above them.

Pretty Rose was moored, the gangplank run out. This time the sailors wished him well as he shouldered his pack. He picked up the covered poultry basket in which Tug crouched patiently, and went ashore.

The streets were many and crowded, but the way to the palace was plain, and he had no idea what to do except go there and say that he carried a letter for the king from the Archmage Sparrowhawk.

And that he did, many times.

From guard to guard, from official to official, from the broad outer steps of the palace to high anterooms, staircases with gilded banisters, inner offices with tapestried walls, across floors of tile and marble and oak, under ceilings coffered, beamed, vaulted, painted, he went repeating his talisman: "I come from Sparrowhawk who was the Archmage with a letter for the king." He would not give his letter up. A retinue, a crowd of suspicious, semi-civil, patronising, temporising, obstructive guards and ushers and officials kept gathering and thickening around him and followed and impeded his slow way into the palace.

Suddenly they were all gone. A door had opened. It closed behind him.

He stood alone in a quiet room. A wide window looked out over the roofs northwest-ward. The thundercloud had cleared and the broad grey summit of

Mount Onn hovered above far hills.

Another door opened. A man came in, dressed in black, about Alder's age, quick moving, with a fine, strong face as smooth as bronze. He came straight to Alder: "Master Alder, I am Lebannen."

He put out his right hand to touch Alder's hand, palm against palm, as the custom was in Éa and the Enlades. Alder responded automatically to the familiar gesture. Then he thought he ought to kneel, or bow at least, but the moment to do so seemed to have passed. He stood dumb.

"You came from my Lord Sparrowhawk? How is he? Is he well?"

"Yes, lord. He sends you—" Alder hurriedly groped inside his jacket for the letter, which he had intended to offer to the king kneeling, when they finally showed him to the throne room where the king would be sitting on his throne —"this letter, my lord."

The eyes watching him were alert, urbane, as implacably keen as Sparrowhawk's, but withholding even more of the mind within. As the king took the letter Alder offered him, his courtesy was perfect. "The bearer of any word from him has my heart's thanks and welcome. Will you forgive me?"

Alder finally managed a bow. The king walked over to the window to read the letter.

He read it twice at least, then refolded it. His face was as impassive as before. He went to the door and spoke to someone outside it, then turned back to Alder. "Please," he said, "sit down with me. They'll bring us something to eat. You've been all afternoon in the palace, I know. If the gate captain had had the wits to send me word, I could have spared you hours of climbing the walls and swimming the moats they set around me . . . Did you stay with my Lord Sparrowhawk? In his house on the cliff's edge?"

"Yes."

"I envy you. I've never been there. I haven't seen him since we parted on Roke, half my lifetime ago. He wouldn't let me come to him on Gont. He wouldn't come to my crowning." Lebannen smiled as if nothing he said was of any moment. "He gave me my kingdom," he said.

Sitting down, he nodded to Alder to take the chair facing him across a little table. Alder looked at the tabletop, inlaid with curling patterns of ivory and silver, leaves and blossoms of the rowan tree twined about slender swords.

"Did you have a good voyage?" the king asked, and made other small talk while they were served plates of cold meat and smoked trout and lettuces and cheese. He

set Alder a welcome example by eating with a good appetite; and he poured them wine, the palest topaz, in goblets of crystal. He raised his glass. "To my lord and dear friend," he said.

Alder murmured, "To him," and drank.

The king spoke about Taon, which he had visited a few years before—Alder remembered the excitement of the island when the king was in Meoni. And he spoke of some musicians from Taon who were in the city now, harpers and singers come to make music for the court; it might be Alder knew some of them; and indeed the names he said were familiar. He was very skilled at putting his guest at ease, and food and wine were a considerable help too.

When they were done eating, the king poured them another half glass of wine and said, "The letter concerns you, mostly. Did you know that?" His tone had not changed much from the small talk, and Alder was fuddled for a moment.

"No," he said.

"Do you have an idea what it deals with?"

"What I dream, maybe," Alder said, speaking low, looking down.

The king studied him for a moment. There was nothing offensive in his gaze, but he was more open in that scrutiny than most men would have been. Then he took up the letter and held it out to Alder.

"My lord, I read very little."

Lebannen was not surprised—some sorcerers could read, some could not—but he clearly and sharply regretted putting his guest at a disadvantage. The gold-bronze skin of his face went dusky red. He said, "I'm sorry, Alder. May I read you what he says?"

"Please, my lord," Alder said. The king's embarrassment made him, for a moment, feel the king's equal, and he spoke for the first time naturally and with warmth.

Lebannen scanned the salutation and some lines of the letter and then read aloud:

"'Alder of Taon who bears this to you is one called in dream and not by his own will to that land you and I crossed once together. He will tell you of suffering where suffering is past and change where no thing changes. We closed the door Cob opened. Now the wall itself maybe is to fall. He has been to Roke. Only Azver heard him. My Lord the King will hear and will act as wisdom instructs and need requires. Alder bears my lifelong honor and obedience to my Lord the King. Also my lifelong honor and regard to my lady Tenar. Also to my beloved daughter

Tehanu a spoken message from me.' And he signs it with the rune of the Talon." Lebannen looked up from the letter into Alder's eyes and held his gaze. "Tell me what it is you dream," he said.

So once more Alder told his story.

He told it briefly and not very well. Though he had been in awe of Sparrowhawk, the ex-Archmage looked and dressed and lived like an old villager or farmer, a man of Alder's own kind and standing, and that simplicity had defeated all superficial timidity. But however kind and courteous the king might be, he looked like the king, he behaved like the king, he was the king, and to Alder the distance was insuperable. He hurried through as best he could and stopped with relief.

Lebannen asked a few questions. Lily and then Gannet had each touched Alder once: never since? And Gannet's touch had burned?

Alder held out his hand. The marks were almost invisible under a month's tan.

"I think the people at the wall would touch me if I came close to them," he said.

"But you keep away from them?"

"I have done so."

"And they are not people you knew in life?"

"Sometimes I think I know one or another."

"But never your wife?"

"There are so many of them, my lord. Sometimes I think she's there. But I can't see her."

To talk about it brought it near, too near. He felt the fear welling up in him again. He thought the walls of the room might melt away and the evening sky and the floating mountain-crown vanish like a curtain brushed aside, to leave him standing where he was always standing, on a dark hill by a wall of stones.

"Alder."

He looked up, shaken, his head swimming. The room seemed bright, the king's face hard and vivid.

"You'll stay here in the palace?"

It was an invitation, but Alder could only nod, accepting it as an order.

"Good. I'll arrange for you to give the message you bear to Mistress Tehanu tomorrow. And I know the White Lady will wish to talk with you."

He bowed. Lebannen turned away.

"My lord—"

Lebannen turned.

"May I have my cat with me?"

Not a flicker of a smile, no mockery. "Of course."

"My lord, I am sorry to my heart to bring news that troubles you!"

"Any word from the man who sent you is a grace to me and to its bearer. And I'd rather get bad news from an honest man than lies from a flatterer," Lebannen said, and Alder, hearing the true accent of his home islands in the words, was a little cheered.

The king went out, and at once a man looked in the door Alder had entered by. "I will take you to your chamber, if you will follow me, sir," he said. He was dignified, elderly, and well dressed, and Alder followed him without any idea whether he was a nobleman or a servant, and therefore not daring to ask him about Tug. In the room before the room where he had met the king, the officials and guards and ushers had absolutely insisted that he leave his poultry basket with them. It had been eyed with suspicion and inspected with disapproval by ten or fifteen officials already. He had explained ten or fifteen times that he had the cat with him because he had nowhere in the city to leave it. The anteroom where he had been compelled to set it down was far behind him, he had not seen it there as they went through, he would never find it now, it was half a palace away, corridors, hallways, passages, doors . . .

His guide bowed and left him in a small, beautiful room, tapestried, carpeted, a chair with an embroidered seat, a window that looked out to the harbor, a table on which stood a bowl of summer fruit and a pitcher of water. And the poultry basket.

He opened it. Tug emerged in a leisurely manner indicating his familiarity with palaces. He stretched, sniffed Alder's fingers in greeting, and went about the room examining things. He discovered a curtained alcove with a bed in it and jumped up on the bed. A discreet knock at the door. A young man entered carrying a large, flat, heavy wooden box with no lid. He bowed to Alder, murmuring, "Sand, sir." He placed the box in the far corner of the alcove. He bowed again and left.

"Well," Alder said, sitting down on the bed. He was not in the habit of talking to the kitten. Their relationship was one of silent, trustful touch. But he had to talk to somebody. "I met the king today," he said.

The king had all too many people to talk to before he could sit down on his bed. Chief among them were the emissaries of the High King of the Kargs. They were

about to take their leave, having accomplished their mission to Havnor, to their own satisfaction if not at all to Lebannen's.

He had looked forward to the visit of these ambassadors as the culmination of years of patient overture, invitation, and negotiation. For the first ten years of his reign he had been able to accomplish nothing at all with the Kargs. The God-King in Awabath rejected his offers of treaties and trade and sent his envoys back unheard, declaring that gods do not parley with vile mortals, least of all with accursed sorcerers. But the God-King's proclamations of universal divine empire were not followed by the threatened fleets of a myriad ships bearing plumed warriors to overrun the godless West. Even the pirate raids that had plagued the eastern isles of the Archipelago for so long gradually ceased. The pirates had become contrabanders, seeking to trade whatever unlicensed goods they could smuggle out of Karego-At for Archipelagan iron and steel and bronze, for the Kargad Lands were poor in mines and metal.

It was from these illicit traders that news first came of the rise of the High King.

On Hur-at-Hur, the big, poor, easternmost island of the Kargad Lands, a warlord, Thol, claiming descent from Thoreg of Hupun and from the God Wuluah, had made himself High King of that land. Next he had conquered Atnini, and then, with a fleet and an invading army drawn from both Hur-at-Hur and Atnini, he had claimed dominion over the rich central island, Karego-At. While his warriors were fighting their way towards Awabath, the capital city, the people of the city rose up against the tyranny of the God-King. They slaughtered the high priests, drove the bureaucrats out of the temples, threw the gates wide, and welcomed King Thol to the throne of Thoreg with banners and dancing in the streets.

The God-King fled with a remnant of his guards and hierophants to the Place of the Tombs on Atuan. There in the desert, in his temple by the earthquake-shattered ruins of the shrine of the Nameless Ones, one of his priest-eunuchs cut the God-King's throat.

Thol proclaimed himself High King of the Four Kargad Lands. As soon as he got word of that, Lebannen sent ambassadors to greet his brother king and assure him of the friendly disposition of the Archipelago.

Five years of difficult and tiresome diplomacy had ensued. Thol was a violent man on a threatened throne. In the wreckage of the theocracy, all control in his realm was chancy, all authority questionable. Lesser kings constantly declared themselves and had to be bought or beaten into obedience to the High King.

Sectarians issued from shrines and caverns crying "Woe to the mighty!" and foretelling earthquake, tidal wave, plague upon the deicides. Ruling a troubled, divided empire, Thol could scarcely place any trust in the powerful and wealthy Archipelagans.

It meant nothing to him that their king talked about friendship, flourishing the Ring of Peace. Did not the Kargs have a claim to that ring? It had been made in ancient days in the West, but long ago, King Thoreg of Hupun had accepted it as a gift from the hero Erreth-Akbe, a sign of amity between the Kargad and Hardic lands. It had disappeared, and there had been war, not amity. But then the Hawk-Mage had found the ring and stolen it back, along with the Priestess of the Tombs of Atuan, and carried both off to Havnor. So much for the trustworthiness of the Archipelagans.

Through his envoys, Lebannen patiently and politely pointed out that the Ring of Peace had, to begin with, been Morred's gift to Elfarran, a cherished token of the Archipelago's most beloved king and queen. And a very sacred thing as well, for on it was the Bond rune, a mighty enchantment of blessing. Nearly four centuries ago, Erreth-Akbe had taken it to the Kargad Lands as a pledge of unbreakable peace. But the priests of Awabath had broken the pledge, and broken the Ring. Some forty years ago now, Sparrowhawk of Roke and Tenar of Atuan had healed the Ring. What, then, of the peace?

That had been the gist of his messages to King Thol.

And a month ago, just after the Long Dance of summer, a fleet of ships had come sailing straight down the Passage of Felkway, up the Ebavnor Straits, and in between the portals of Havnor Bay: long red ships with red sails, carrying plumed warriors, gorgeous-robed emissaries, and a few veiled women.

"Let the daughter of Thol the High King, who sits upon the Throne of Thoreg and whose ancestor was Wuluah, wear the Ring of Peace upon her arm, as Queen Elfarran of Soléa wore it, and this will be the sign of everlasting peace between the Western and the Eastern Isles."

That was the High King's message to Lebannen. It was written out in big Hardic runes on a scroll, but before handing it to King Lebannen, Thol's ambassador read it out loud, in public, at the reception of the emissaries at the court in Havnor, with the whole court there to do the Kargish envoys honor. Perhaps it was because the ambassador did not actually read Hardic, but spoke the words loudly and slowly from memory, that they had the tone of an ultimatum.

The princess said nothing. She stood among the ten handmaidens or slave girls

who had accompanied her to Havnor and the flock of court ladies who had been hastily assigned to look after her and do her honor. She was veiled, entirely veiled, as was, it appeared, the custom of well-born women in Hur-at-Hur. The veils, red with lines of gold embroidery, fell straight down from a flat-brimmed hat or headdress, so that the princess appeared to be a red column or pillar, cylindrical, featureless, motionless, silent.

"The High King Thol does us great honor," Lebannen said in his clear, quiet voice; and then he paused. The court and the emissaries waited. "You are welcome here, princess," he said to the veiled figure. It did not stir.

"Let the princess be lodged in the River House, and let all be as she desires," Lebannen said.

The River House was a beautiful small palace at the northern edge of the city, fitted into the old city wall, with terraces built out over the little River Serrenen. Queen Heru had built it, and it was often called the Queen's House. When Lebannen came to the throne he had had it repaired and refurnished, along with the Palace of Maharion, called the New Palace, in which he held court. He used the River House only for summer festivities and sometimes as a retreat for himself for a few days.

A little rustle now went through his courtiers. The Queen's House?

After urbanities among the Kargish emissaries, Lebannen left the audience room. He went to his dressing room, where he could be as alone as a king can be, with his old servant, Oak, whom he had known all his life.

He slapped the gilded scroll down on a table. "Cheese in a rat trap," he said. He was shaking. He whipped the dagger he always wore out of its sheath and stabbed it straight down through the High King's message. "A pig in a poke," he said. "A piece of goods. The Ring on her arm and the collar round my neck."

Oak stared at him in blank dismay. Prince Arren of Enlad had never lost his temper. When he was a child he might have wept for a moment, one bitter sob, but that was all. He was too well trained, too well disciplined to give way to anger. And as king, a king who had earned his realm by crossing the land of the dead, he could be stern, but always, Oak thought, too proud, too strong for anger.

"They will not use me!" Lebannen said, stabbing the dagger down again, his face so black and blind with fury that the old man drew back from him in real fear.

Lebannen saw him. He always saw the people around him.

He sheathed his dagger. He said in a steadier voice, "Oak, by my name, I will destroy Thol and his kingdom before I let him use me as a footstool to his throne."

Then he drew a long breath and sat down to let Oak lift the heavy, gold-weighted state robe from his shoulders.

Oak never breathed a word of this scene to anyone, but there was, of course, immediate and continuous speculation about the princess of the Kargs and what the king was going to do about her—or what, in fact, he had already done.

He had not said that he accepted the offer of the princess as his bride. For all agreed she had been offered to him as his bride; the language about Elfarran's Ring barely veiled the offer, or the bargain, or the threat. But he had not refused it, either. His response (endlessly analyzed) had been to say she was welcome, that all should be as she desired, and that she should live in the River House: the Queen's House. Surely that was significant? But on the other hand, why not in the New Palace? Why send her across the city?

Ever since Lebannen's coronation, ladies of noble houses and princesses of the old royal lineages of Enlad, Éa, and Shelieth had come to visit or to stay at the court. They had all been entertained most royally, and the king had danced at their weddings as, one by one, they settled for noblemen or wealthy commoners. It was well known that he liked the company of women and their counsel as well, that he would willingly flirt with a pretty girl and invite an intelligent woman to advise him, tease him, or console him. But no girl or woman had ever come near the rumor of a shadow of a chance of marrying him. And none had ever been lodged in the River House.

The king must have a queen, his advisors told him at regular intervals.

You really must marry, Arren, his mother had told him the last time he saw her alive.

The heir of Morred, will he have no heir? asked the common people.

To all of them he had said, in various words and ways: Give me time. I have the ruins of a kingdom to rebuild. Let me make a house worthy of a queen, a realm my child can rule. And because he was well loved and trusted, and still a young man, and for all his gravity a charming and persuasive one, he had escaped all the hopeful maidens. Until now.

What was under the stiff red veils? Who lived inside that unrevealing tent? The ladies assigned to the princess's entourage were besieged by questions. Was she pretty? Ugly? Was it true she was tall and thin, short and muscular, white as milk, pockmarked, one-eyed, yellow-haired, black-haired, forty-five years old, ten years old, a drooling cretin, a brilliant beauty?

Gradually the rumors began to run one way. She was young, though not a child;

hair neither yellow nor black; pretty enough, said some of the ladies; coarse, said others. Spoke not a word of Hardic, they all said, and would not learn. Hid among her women, and when forced to leave her room, hid in her red tent-veils. The king had paid her a visit of courtesy. She had not bowed to him, or spoken, or made any sign, but stood there, said old Lady Iyesa in exasperation, "like a brick chimney."

He spoke to her through men who had served as his envoys in the Kargad Lands and through the Karg ambassador, who spoke fairly good Hardic. Laboriously he transmitted his compliments and queries as to her wishes and desires. The translators spoke to her women, whose veils were shorter and somewhat less impenetrable. Her women gathered round the motionless red pillar and mumbled and buzzed and returned to the translators, and the translators informed the king that the princess was content and required nothing.

She had been there a half month when Tenar and Tehanu arrived from Gont. Lebannen had sent a ship and a message begging them to come, shortly before the Kargad fleet brought the princess, and for reasons that had nothing to do with her or King Thol. But the first time he was alone with Tenar, he burst out, "What am I going to do with her? What can I do?"

"Tell me about it," Tenar said, looking somewhat amazed.

Lebannen had spent only a brief time with Tenar, though they had written a few letters over the years; he was not yet used to her hair being grey, and she seemed smaller than he remembered her; but with her he felt immediately, as he had fifteen years earlier, that he could say anything and she would understand.

"For five years I've built up trade and tried to keep on good terms with Thol, because he's a warlord and I don't want my kingdom pinched, as it was in Maharion's reign, between dragons in the west and warlords in the east. And because I rule in the Sign of Peace. And it went well enough, till this. Till he sends this girl out of the blue, saying if you want peace, give her Elfarran's Ring. Your Ring, Tenar! Yours and Ged's!"

Tenar hesitated a while. "She is his daughter, after all."

"What's a daughter to a barbarian king? Goods. A bargaining piece to buy advantage with. You know that! You were born there!"

It was unlike him to speak so, and he heard it himself. He knelt down suddenly, catching her hand and putting it over his eyes in sign of contrition. "Tenar, I'm sorry. This disturbs me beyond all reason. I can't see what to do."

"Well, so long as you do nothing, you have some leeway . . . Maybe the princess has some opinion of her own?"

“How can she? Hidden in that red sack? She won’t talk, she won’t look out, she might as well be a tent pole.” He tried to laugh. His own uncontrollable resentment alarmed him and he tried to excuse it. “This came on just as I had troubling news from the west. It was for that that I asked you and Tehanu to come. Not to bother you with this foolishness.”

“It isn’t foolishness,” Tenar said, but he brushed the topic away, dismissed it, and began to talk about dragons.

Since the news from the west had been troubling indeed, he had succeeded in not thinking about the princess at all, most of the time. He was aware that it was not his habit to handle matters of state by ignoring them. Manipulated, one manipulates others. Several days after their conversation, he asked Tenar to visit the princess, to try to get her to talk. After all, he said, they spoke the same language.

“Probably,” Tenar said. “I never knew anybody from Hur-at-Hur. On Atuan, we called them barbarians.”

He was chastised. But of course she did what he asked. Presently she reported that she and the princess spoke the same language, or nearly the same, and that the princess had not known that there were any other languages. She had thought all the people here, the courtiers and ladies, were malicious lunatics, mocking her by chattering and yapping like animals without human speech. As well as Tenar could tell, she had grown up in the desert, in King Thol’s original domain on Hur-at-Hur, and had only been very briefly at the imperial court in Awabath before she was sent on to Havnor.

“She’s frightened,” Tenar said.

“So she hides in her tent. What does she think I am?”

“How could she know what you are?”

He scowled. “How old is she?”

“Young. But a woman.”

“I can’t marry her,” he said, with sudden resolution. “I’ll send her back.”

“A returned bride is a dishonored woman. If you send her back, Thol might kill her to keep the dishonor from his house. He’ll certainly consider that you intend to dishonor him.”

The look of fury came into his face again.

Tenar forestalled him. “Barbarian customs,” she said stiffly.

He strode up and down the room. “Very well. But I will not consider this girl as queen of the Kingdom of Morred. Can she be taught to speak Hardic? A few

words, at least? Is she unteachable? I'll tell Thol that a Hardic king can't marry a woman who doesn't speak the language of the realm. I don't care if he doesn't like it, he needs the slap. And it buys me time."

"And you'll ask her to learn Hardic?"

"How can I ask her anything if she takes it all for gibberish? What possible use is there in my going to her? I thought perhaps you'd speak to her, Tenar . . . You must see what an imposition this is, using this girl to make Thol appear my equal, using the Ring—the Ring you brought us—as a trap! I cannot even seem to condone it. I'm willing to temporise, to delay, in order to keep the peace. Nothing more. Even that much deceit is vile. Tell the girl what you think best. I will have nothing to do with her."

And he went out in a righteous wrath, which cooled slowly into an uneasy feeling much resembling shame.

When the Kargish emissaries announced they would be leaving soon, Lebannen prepared a carefully worded message for King Thol. He expressed his appreciation of the honor of the princess's presence in Havnor and the pleasure he and his court would have in introducing her to the manners, customs, and language of his kingdom. He said nothing at all about the Ring, about marrying her, or about not marrying her.

It was in the evening after his conversation with the dream-troubled sorcerer from Taon that he met for the last time with the Kargs and gave them his letter to the High King. He read it aloud first, as the ambassador had read aloud Thol's letter to him.

The ambassador listened complacently. "The High King will be pleased," he said.

All the time he was talking amenities to the emissaries and displaying the gifts he was sending to Thol, Lebannen puzzled over this easy acceptance of his evasiveness. His thoughts all came to one conclusion: He knows I'm stuck with her. To which his mind made a passionate silent answer: Never.

He inquired whether the ambassador would be going by the River House to bid his princess farewell. The ambassador looked at him blankly, as if he had been asked if he was going to say goodbye to a package he had delivered. Lebannen felt the anger rising in his heart again. He saw the ambassador's face change a little, taking on a wary, placating look. He smiled and wished the emissaries a fair wind to the Kargad Lands. He went out of the audience chamber and to his own room.

Rites and ceremony hedged most of his acts, and as king he must be in public

most of his life; but because he had come to a throne empty for centuries, a palace where there were no protocols, he had been able to have some things as he liked them. He had kept ceremony out of his bedroom. His nights were his own. He said good night to Oak, who would sleep in the anteroom, and shut the door. He sat down on his bed. He felt tired and angry and strangely desolate.

Around his neck he always wore a slight gold chain with a little pouch of cloth-of-gold on it. In the pouch was a pebble: a dull, black bit of rock, rough edged. He took it out and held it in his hand as he sat and thought.

He tried to turn his mind away from all this stupidity about the Kargish girl by thinking about the sorcerer Alder and his dreams. But all that came into his mind was a painful envy of Alder for having gone ashore on Gont, having talked with Ged, having stayed with him.

That was why he felt desolate. The man he called his lord, the man he had loved above all others, wouldn't let him come near, wouldn't come to him.

Did Ged believe that because he had lost his wizardly power, Lebannen must think less of him? must despise him?

Given the power that power had over the minds and hearts of men, it was not an implausible thought. But surely Ged knew him better, or at least thought better of him.

Was it that, having been truly Lebannen's lord and guide, Ged could not bear to be his subject? That might indeed be hard for the old man to bear: the blunt, irrevocable reversal of their status.

But Lebannen remembered very clearly how Ged had knelt to him, down on both knees, on Roke Knoll, in the shadow of the dragon and in the sight of the masters whose master Ged had been. He had stood up and kissed Lebannen, telling him to rule well, calling him *my lord and dear companion*.

"He gave me my kingdom," Lebannen had said to Alder. That had been the moment he gave it. Wholly, freely.

And that was why Ged wouldn't come to Havnor, wouldn't let Lebannen come to take counsel with him. He had handed over the power—wholly, freely. He would not even seem to meddle, to cast his shadow across Lebannen's light.

"He has done with doing," the Doorkeeper had said.

But Alder's story had moved Ged to send the man here, to Lebannen, asking him to act as need required.

It was indeed strange, Alder's story; and Ged's saying that maybe the wall itself was going to fall was stranger yet. What could it mean? And why should one man's

dreams bear so much weight?

He himself had dreamed of the outskirts of the dry land, long ago, when he and Ged the Archmage were traveling together, before they ever came to Selidor.

And on that westernmost of all the islands he had followed Ged into the dry land. Across the wall of stones. Down to dim cities where the shadows of the dead stood in doorways or walked without aim or purpose in streets lit only by the moveless stars. With Ged he had walked across all that country, a weary way to a dark valley of dust and stones at the foot of the mountains whose only name was Pain.

He opened his palm, looked down at the little black stone he held, closed his hand on it again.

From the valley of the dry river, having done what they came to do, they had climbed up into the mountains, because there was no turning back. They had gone up the road forbidden to the dead, climbing, clambering over rocks that scored and burned their hands, till Ged could go no farther. Lebannen had carried him as far as he could, then crawled on with him to the end of darkness, the hopeless cliff of night. And so had come back, with him, into the sunlight and the sound of the sea breaking on the shores of life.

It was a long time since he had thought so vividly of that terrible journey. But the bit of black stone from those mountains was always over his heart.

And it seemed to him now that the memory of that land, the darkness of it, the dust, was always in his mind just under the bright various play and movement of the days, although he always looked away from it. He looked away because he could not bear the knowledge that in the end that was where he would come again: come alone, uncompanioned, and forever. To stand empty-eyed, unspeaking, in the shadows of a shadow city. Never to see sunlight, or drink water, or touch a living hand.

He got up abruptly, shaking off these morbid thoughts. He closed the stone in its pouch, made ready for bed, put out the lamp, and lay down. At once he saw it again: the dim grey land of dust and rock. It rose up far ahead into black, sharp peaks, but here it sloped away, always downward, to the right, into utter darkness. "What lies that way?" he had asked Ged as they walked on and on. His companion had said he did not know, that maybe that way there was no end.

Lebannen sat up, angered and alarmed by the relentless drift of his thought. His eyes sought the window. It looked north. He liked the view from Havnor across the hills to the tall, grey-headed mountain Onn. Farther north, unseen, across all the

width of the Great Island and the Sea of Éa, was Enlad, his home.

Lying in bed he could see only the sky, a clear summer night sky, the Heart of the Swan riding high among lesser stars. His kingdom. The kingdom of light, of life, where the stars blossomed like white flowers in the east and drooped in their brightness to the west. He would not think of that other realm where the stars stayed still, where there was no power in a man's hand, and no right way to go because no way led anywhere.

Lying gazing at the stars, he turned his mind deliberately from those memories and from the thought of Ged. He thought of Tenar: the sound of her voice, the touch of her hand. Courtiers were ceremonious, cautious about how and when they touched the king. She was not. She laid her hand on his, laughing. She was bolder with him than his mother had been.

Rose, princess of the House of Enlad, had died of a fever two years ago, while he was on shipboard coming to make a royal visit to Berila on Enlad and the isles south of it. He had not known of her death till he came home to a city and a house in mourning.

His mother was there now in the dark country, the dry country. If he came there and passed her in the street she would not look at him. She would not speak to him.

He clenched his hands. He rearranged the cushions of his bed, tried to make himself easy, tried to set his mind away from there, to think of things that would keep him from going back there. To think of his mother living, her voice, her dark eyes under dark arched brows, her delicate hands.

Or to think of Tenar. He knew he had asked Tenar to come to Havnor not only to take counsel from her but because she was the mother that remained to him. He wanted that love, to give it and be given it. The ruthless love that makes no allowances, no conditions. Tenar's eyes were grey, not dark, but she looked right through him with a piercing tenderness undeceived by anything he said or did.

He knew he did well what he had been called to do. He knew he was good at playing king. But only with his mother and with Tenar had he ever known beyond any self-doubt what it was to be king.

Tenar had known him since he was a very young man, not yet crowned. She had loved him then and ever since, for his sake, for Ged's sake, and for her own. He was to her the son who never breaks your heart.

But she thought he might yet manage to, if he kept on being so rageful and

dishonest about this poor girl from Hur-at-Hur.

She attended the final audience of the emissaries from Awabath. Lebannen had asked her to be there, and she was glad to come. Finding Kargs at the court when she came there at the beginning of summer, she had expected them to shun her or at least to eye her askance: the renegade priestess who with the thieving Hawk Mage had stolen the Ring of Erreth-Akbe from the treasury of the Tombs of Atuan and traitorously fled with it to Havnor. It was her doing that the Archipelago had a king again. The Kargs might well hold it against her.

And Thol of Hur-at-Hur had restored the worship of the Twin Gods and the Nameless Ones, whose greatest temple Tenar had despoiled. Her treason had been not only political but religious.

Yet that was long ago, forty years and more, almost the stuff of legend; and statesmen remember things selectively. Thol's ambassador had begged the honor of an audience with her and had greeted her with elaborately pious respect, some of which she thought was real. He called her Lady Arha, the Eaten One, the One Ever Reborn. She had not been called by those names for years, and they sounded very strange to her. But it gave her a keen, rueful pleasure to hear her native tongue and to find she could still speak it.

So she came to bid the ambassador and his company goodbye. She asked him to assure the High King of the Kargs that his daughter was well, and she looked admiringly a last time at the tall, rawboned men with their pale, braided hair, their plumed headdresses, their court armor of silver mesh interwoven with feathers. When she lived in the Kargad Lands she had seen few men of her own race. Only women and eunuchs had lived at the Place of the Tombs.

After the ceremony she escaped into the gardens of the palace. The summer night was warm and restless, flowering shrubs of the gardens stirring in the night wind. The sounds of the city outside the palace walls were like the murmur of a quiet sea. A couple of young courtiers were walking entwined under the arbors; not to disturb them, Tenar walked among the fountains and the roses at the other end of the garden.

Lebannen had left the audience scowling again. What was wrong with him? So far as she knew, he had never before rebelled against the obligations of his position. Certainly he knew that a king must marry and has little real choice as to whom he marries. He knew that a king who does not obey his people is a tyrant. He knew his people wanted a queen, wanted heirs to the throne. But he had done nothing about it. Women of the court had been happy to gossip to Tenar about his, several

mistresses, none of whom had lost anything by being known as the king's lover. He had certainly managed all that quite well, but he couldn't expect to do so forever. Why was he so enraged by King Thol's offering him a perfectly appropriate solution?

Imperfectly appropriate, perhaps. The princess was something of a problem.

Tenar was going to have to try to teach the girl Hardic. And to find ladies willing to instruct her in the manners of the Archipelago and the etiquette of the court—something she certainly wasn't capable of herself. She had more sympathy with the princess's ignorance than with the courtiers' sophistication.

She resented Lebannen's failure or inability to take the girl's point of view. Couldn't he imagine what it was like for her? Brought up in the women's quarters of a warlord's fortress in a remote desert land, where she probably had never seen any man but her father and uncles and some priests; suddenly carried off from that changeless poverty and rigidity of life, by strangers, on a long and frightening sea voyage; abandoned among people whom she knew of only as irreligious and bloodthirsty monsters who dwelt on the far edge of the world, not truly human at all because they were wizards who could turn into animals and birds—And she was to marry one of them!

Tenar had been able to leave her own people and come to live among the monsters and wizards of the West because she had been with Ged, whom she loved and trusted. Even so it had not been easy; often her courage had failed. For all the welcome the people of Havnor had given her, the crowds and cheering and flowers and praise, the sweet names they called her, the White Lady, the Peace Bringer, Tenar of the Ring—for all that, she had cowered in her room in the palace those nights long ago, in misery because she was so lonely, and nobody spoke her language, and she didn't know any of the things they all knew. As soon as the rejoicings were over and the Ring was in its place she had begged Ged to take her away, and he had kept his promise, slipping away with her to Gont. There she had lived in the Old Mage's house as Ogion's ward and pupil, learning how to be an Archipelagan, till she saw the way she wanted to follow for herself as a woman grown.

She had been younger than this girl when she came to Havnor with the Ring. But she had not grown up powerless, as the princess had. Though her power as the One Priestess had been mostly ceremonial, nominal, she had taken real control of her fate when she broke with the grim ways of her upbringing and won freedom for her prisoner and herself. But the daughter of a warlord would have control over

only trivial things. When her father made himself king she would be called princess, she would be given richer clothing, more slaves, more eunuchs, more jewelry, until she herself was given in marriage; but she would have no say in any of it. All she ever saw of the world outside the women's quarters would be through window slits in thick walls, through layers of red veiling.

Tenar counted herself lucky not to have been born on so backward and barbaric an island as Hur-at-Hur, never to have worn the *feyag*. But she knew what it was to grow up in the grip of an iron tradition. It behooved her to do what she could to help the princess, so long as she was in Havnor. But she didn't intend to stay here long.

Strolling in the garden, watching the fountains glimmer in starlight, she thought about how and when she could go home.

She did not mind the formalities of court life or the knowledge that under the civility simmered a stew of ambitions, rivalries, passions, complicities, collusions. She had grown up with rituals and hypocrisy and hidden politics, and none of it frightened or worried her. She was simply homesick. She wanted to be back on Gont, with Ged, in their house.

She had come to Havnor because Lebannen sent for her and Tehanu, and Ged if he would come; but Ged wouldn't come, and Tehanu wouldn't come without her. That did frighten and worry her. Could her daughter not break free from her? It was Tehanu's counsel Lebannen needed, not hers. But her daughter clung to her, as ill at ease, as out of place in the court of Havnor as the girl from Hur-at-Hur was, and like her, silent, in hiding.

So Tenar must play nursemaid, tutor, and companion now to both of them, two scared girls who didn't know how to take hold of their power, while she wanted no power on earth except the freedom to go home where she belonged and help Ged with the garden.

She wished they could grow white roses like these, at home. Their scent was so sweet in the night air. But it was too windy on the Overfell, and the sun was too strong in summer. And probably the goats would eat the roses.

She went back indoors at last and made her way through the eastern wing to the suite of rooms she shared with Tehanu. Her daughter was asleep, for it was late. A flame no bigger than a pearl burned on the wick of a tiny alabaster lamp. The high rooms were soft, shadowy. She blew out the lamp, got into bed, and soon sank towards sleep.

She was walking along a narrow, high-vaulted corridor of stone. She carried the

alabaster lamp. Its faint oval of light died away into darkness in front of her and behind her. She came to the door of a room that opened off the corridor. Inside the room were people with the wings of birds. Some had the heads of birds, hawks and vultures. They stood or squatted motionless, not looking at her or at anything, with eyes encircled with white and red. Their wings were like huge black cloaks hanging down behind them. She knew they could not fly. They were so mournful, so hopeless, and the air in the room was so foul that she struggled to turn, to run away, but she could not move; and fighting that paralysis, she woke.

There were the warm shadows, the stars in the window, the scent of roses, the soft stir of the city, Tehanu's breathing as she slept.

Tenar sat up to shake off the remnants of the dream. It had been of the Painted Room in the Labyrinth of the Tombs, where she had first met Ged face to face, forty years ago. In the dream the paintings on the walls had come to life. Only it was not life. It was the endless, timeless unlife of those who died without rebirth: those accursed by the Nameless Ones: infidels, westerners, sorcerers.

After you died you were reborn. That was the sure knowledge in which she had been brought up. When as a child she was taken to the Tombs to be Arha, the Eaten One, they told her that she alone of all people had been and would be reborn as herself, life after life. Sometimes she had believed that, but not always, even when she was the priestess of the Tombs, and never since. But she knew what all the people of the Kargad Lands knew, that when they died they would return in a new body, the lamp that guttered out flickering up again that same instant elsewhere, in a woman's womb or the tiny egg of a minnow or a wind-borne seed of grass, coming back to be, forgetful of the old life, fresh for the new, life after life eternally.

Only those outcast by the earth itself, by the Old Powers, the dark sorcerers of the Hardic Lands, were not reborn. When they died—so said the Kargs—they did not rejoin the living world, but went to a dreary place of half being where, winged but flightless, neither bird nor human, they must endure without hope. How the priestess Kossil had relished telling her about the terrible fate of those boastful enemies of the God-King, their souls doomed to be cast out of the world of light forever!

But the afterlife Ged had told her of, where he said his people went, that changeless land of cold dust and shadow—was that any less dreary, any less terrible?

Unanswerable questions clamored in her mind: because she was no longer a

Karg, because she had betrayed the sacred place, must she go to that dry land when she died? Must Ged go there? Would they pass each other there, uncaring? That was not possible. But what if he must go there, and she be reborn, so that their parting must be eternal?

She would not think about all that. It was clear enough why she had dreamed of the Painted Room, all these years after she had left all that behind her. It had to do with seeing the ambassadors, speaking Kargish again, of course. But still she lay upset, unnerved by the dream. She did not want to go back to the nightmares of her youth. She wanted to be back in the house on the Overfell, lying by Ged, hearing Tehanu's breath while she slept. When he slept Ged lay still as a stone; but the fire had left some damage in Tehanu's throat so there was a little harshness always in her breathing, and Tenar had listened to that, listened for it, night after night, year after year. That was life, that was life returning, that dear sound, that slight harsh breath.

Listening to it, she slept again at last. If she dreamed it was only of gulfs of air and the colors of morning moving in the sky.

Alder woke very early. His little companion had been restless all night, and so had he. He was glad to get up and go to the window and sit sleepily watching light come into the sky over the harbor, fishing boats set out and the sails of ships loom from a low mist in the great bay, and listening to the hum and bustle of the city making ready for the day. About the time he began to wonder if he should venture into the bewilderment of the palace to find what he was supposed to do, there was a knock on his door. A man brought in a tray of fresh fruit and bread, a jug of milk, and a small bowl of meat for the kitten. "I will come to conduct you to the king's presence when the fifth hour is told," he informed Alder solemnly, and then rather less formally told him how to get down into the palace gardens if he wanted a walk.

Alder knew of course that there were six hours from midnight to noon and six hours from noon to midnight, but had never heard the hours told, and wondered what the man meant.

He learned, presently, that here in Havnor four trumpeters went out on the high balcony from which rose the highest tower of the palace, the one that was topped with the slender steel blade of the hero's sword, and at the fourth and fifth hours before noon, and at noon, and at the first, second, and third hours after noon they blew their trumpets one to the west, one to the north, one to the east, one to the south. So the courtiers of the palace and the merchants and shippers of the city

could arrange their doings and meet their appointments at the hour agreed. A boy he met walking in the gardens explained all this, a small, thin boy in a tunic that was too long for him. He explained that the trumpeters knew when to blow their trumpets because there were great sand clocks in the tower, as well as the Pendulum of Ath which hung down from high up in the tower and if set swinging just at the hour would cease to swing just as the next hour began. And he told Alder that the tunes the trumpeters played were all parts of the Lament for Erreth-Akbe that King Maharion wrote when he came back from Selidor, a different part for each hour, but only at noon did they play the whole tune through. And if you wanted to be somewhere at a certain hour, you should keep an eye on the balconies, because the trumpeters always came out a few minutes early, and if the sun was shining they held up their silver trumpets to flash and shine. The boy was called Rody and he had come with his father, the Lord of Metama on Ark, to stay a year in Havnor, and he went to school in the palace, and he was nine, and he missed his mother and his sister.

Alder was back in his room in time to meet his guide, less nervous than he might have been. The conversation with the child had reminded him that the sons of lords were children, that lords were men, and that it was not men he need fear.

His guide brought him through the palace corridors to a long, light room with windows all along one wall, looking out over Havnor's towers and fantastic bridges that arched over the canals and leapt from roof to roof and balcony to balcony across the streets. He half saw that panorama as he stood near the door, hesitant, not knowing if he should go forward to the group of people at the far end of the room.

The king saw him and came to him, greeted him kindly, led him to the others, and introduced them one by one.

There was a woman of fifty or so, small and very light-skinned, with greying hair and large grey eyes: Tenar, the king said smiling: Tenar of the Ring. She looked Alder in the eye and greeted him quietly.

There was a man of about the king's age, dressed in velvet and airy linens, with jewels on his belt and at his throat and a great ruby stud in his earlobe: Shipmaster Tosla, said the king. Tosla's face, dark as old oak wood, was keen and hard.

There was a middle-aged man, simply dressed, with a steady look that made Alder feel he could trust him: Prince Sege of the House of Havnor, said the king.

There was a man of forty or so who carried a wooden staff of his own height, by which Alder knew him as a wizard of the School on Roke. He had a rather worn

face, fine hands, an aloof but courteous manner. Master Onyx, said the king.

There was a woman whom Alder took for a servant because she was very plainly dressed and stayed outside the group, turned half away as if looking out the windows. He saw the beautiful fall of her black hair, heavy and glossy as falling water, as Lebannen led her forward. “Tehanu of Gont,” the king said, and his voice rang out like a challenge.

The woman looked straight at Alder for a moment. She was young; the left side of her face was smooth copper-rose, a dark bright eye under an arched eyebrow. The right side had been destroyed and was ridged, slabby scar, eyeless. Her right hand was like a raven’s curled claw.

She put out her hand to Alder, in the manner of the people of Éa and the Enlades, as the others had done, but it was her left hand she held out. He touched his hand to hers, palm to palm. Hers was hot, fever hot. She looked at him again, an amazing glance from that one eye, bright, frowning, fierce. Then she looked down again and stood back as if she wished not to be one of them, wished not to be there.

“Master Alder bears a message for you from your father the Hawk of Gont,” the king said, seeing the messenger stand wordless.

Tehanu did not lift her head. The glossy black hair almost hid the ruin of her face.

“My lady,” Alder said, dry-mouthed and husky-voiced, “he bade me ask you two questions.” He paused, only because he had to wet his lips and get his breath in a moment of panic that he had forgotten what he was to say; but the pause became a waiting silence.

Tehanu said, in a voice hoarser than his, “Ask them.”

“He said to ask first: *Who are those who go to the dry land?* And as I took my leave of him, he said, ‘Ask my daughter also: *Will a dragon cross the wall of stones?*’”

Tehanu nodded her head in acknowledgment and stepped back a little more, as if to carry her riddles away with her, away from them.

“The dry land,” the king said, “and the dragons . . .”

His alert gaze went from face to face.

“Come,” he said, “let’s sit and talk.”

“Perhaps we could talk down in the gardens?” said the little grey-eyed woman, Tenar. The king agreed at once. Alder heard Tenar say to him as they went, “She finds it hard to be indoors all day. She wants the sky.”

Gardeners brought chairs for them in the shade of a huge old willow beside one of the pools. Tehanu went to stand by the pool, gazing down into the green water where a few big silver carp swam lazily. Clearly she wanted to think over her father's message, not to talk, though she could hear what they said.

When the others were all settled, the king had Alder tell his story yet again. Their silence as they listened was compassionate, and he was able to speak without constraint or hurry. When he was done, they remained silent a while, and then the wizard Onyx asked him one question: "Did you dream last night?"

Alder said he had had no dream he could recall.

"I did," Onyx said. "I dreamed of the Summoner who was my teacher in the School on Roke. They say of him that he died twice: because he came back from that country across the wall."

"I dreamed of the spirits that are not reborn," Tenar said, very low.

Prince Sege said, "All night I thought I heard voices down in the city streets, voices I knew from my childhood, calling as they used to do. But when I listened, it was only watchmen or drunken sailors shouting."

"I never dream," said Tosla.

"I didn't dream of that country," the king said. "I remembered it. And couldn't cease remembering it."

He looked at the silent woman, Tehanu, but she only looked down into the pond and did not speak.

No one else spoke; and Alder could not stand it. "If I am a plague bringer, you must send me away!" he said.

The wizard Onyx spoke, not imperiously but with finality. "If Roke sent you to Gont, and Gont sent you to Havnor, Havnor is where you should be."

"Many heads make light thinking," said Tosla, sardonic.

Lebannen said, "Let's put dreams aside for a while. Our guest needs to know what we were concerned about before he came—why I begged Tenar and Tehanu to come, earlier this summer, and summoned Tosla from his voyaging to take counsel with us. Will you tell Alder of this matter, Tosla?"

The dark-faced man nodded. The ruby in his ear gleamed like a drop of blood.

"The matter is dragons," he said. "In the West Reach for some years now they've come to farms and villages on Ully and Usidero, flying low, seizing the roofs of houses with their talons, shaking them, terrifying the people. In the Toringates they've come twice now at harvest time and set the fields burning with their breath, and burnt haystacks and set the thatch of houses afire. They haven't

struck at people, but people have died in the fires. They haven't attacked the houses of the lords of those islands, seeking after treasure, the way they did in the Dark Years, but only the villages and the fields. The same word came from a merchantman who'd been southwest as far as Simly trading for grain: dragons had come and burnt the crop just as they were harvesting.

"Then, last winter in Semel, two dragons settled on the summit of the volcano, Mount Andanden."

"Ah," said Onyx, and at the king's inquiring glance: "The wizard Seppel of Paln tells me that mountain was a most sacred place to the dragons, where they came to drink fire from the earth in ancient days."

"Well, they're back," said Tosla. "And they come down harrying the herds and flocks that are the wealth of the people there, not hurting the beasts but frightening them so they break loose and run wild. The people say they're young dragons, black and thin, without much fire yet.

"And in Paln, there are dragons living now in the mountains of the north part of the island, wild country without farms. Hunters used to go there to hunt mountain sheep and catch falcons to tame, but they've been driven out by the dragons, and no one goes near the mountains now. Maybe your Pelnish wizard knows about them?"

Onyx nodded. "He says flights of them have been seen above the mountains like the flights of wild geese."

"Between Paln and Semel, and the Island of Havnor, is only the width of the Pelnish Sea," said Prince Sege.

Alder was thinking that it was less than a hundred miles from Semel to his own island, Taon.

"Tosla set out to the Dragons' Run in his ship the *Tern*," the king said.

"But got barely in sight of the easternmost of those isles before a swarm of the beasts came at me," Tosla said, with a hard grin.

"They harried me as they do the cattle and sheep, swooping down to singe my sails, till I ran back where I came from. But that's nothing new."

Onyx nodded again. "Nobody but a dragonlord has ever sailed the Dragons' Run."

"I have," the king said, and suddenly smiled a broad, boyish smile. "But I was with a dragonlord . . . Now that's a time I've been thinking about. When I was in the West Reach with the Archmage, seeking Cob the necromancer, we passed Jessage, which lies even farther out than Simly, and we saw burned fields there.

And in the Dragons' Run, we saw that they fought and killed one another like animals gone rabid."

After a time Prince Sege asked, "Could it be that some of those dragons did not recover from their madness in that evil time?"

"It's been fifteen years and more," Onyx said. "But dragons live very long. Maybe time passes differently for them."

Alder noticed that as the wizard spoke he glanced at Tehanu, standing apart from them by the pool.

"Yet only within the last year or two have they attacked people," said the prince.

"That they have not," Tosla said. "If a dragon wanted to destroy the people of a farm or village, who'd stop it? They've been after people's livelihood. Harvests, hayricks, farms, cattle. They're saying, *Begone—get out of the West!*"

"But why are they saying it with fire, with havoc?" the wizard demanded. "They can speak! They speak the Language of the Making. Morred and Erreth-Akbe talked with dragons. Our Archmage talked with them."

"Those we saw in the Dragons' Run," the king said, "had lost the power of speech. The breach Cob had made in the world was drawing their power from them, as it did from us. Only the great dragon Orm Embar came to us and spoke to the Archmage, telling him to go to Selidor . . ." He paused, his eyes far away. "And even from Orm Embar speech was taken, before he died." Again he looked away from them, a strange light in his face. "It was for us Orm Embar died. He opened the way for us into the dark land."

They were all silent for a while. Tenar's quiet voice broke the silence. "Once Sparrowhawk said to me—let me see if I can remember how he said it: that the dragon and the dragon's speech are one thing, one being. That a dragon does not learn the Old Speech, but *is* it."

"As a tern is flight. As a fish is swimming," Onyx said slowly. "Yes."

Tehanu was listening, standing motionless by the pool. They all looked at her now. The look on her mother's face was eager, urgent. Tehanu turned her head away.

"How do you make a dragon talk to you?" the king said. He said it lightly, as if it were a pleasantry, but it was followed by another silence. "Well," he said, "that's something I hope we can learn. Now, Master Onyx, while we're speaking of dragons, will you tell us your story of the girl who came to the School on Roke, for none but me has heard it yet."

"A girl in the School!" said Tosla, with a scoffing grin. "Things have changed

on Roke!"

"Indeed they have," the wizard said, with a long cool look at the sailor. "This was some eight years ago. She came from Way, disguised as a young man, wanting to study the art magic. Of course her poor disguise didn't fool the Doorkeeper. Yet he let her in, and he took her part. At that time, the School was headed by the Master Summoner—the man," and he hesitated a moment, "the man of whom I told you I dreamed last night."

"Tell us something of that man, if you will, Master Onyx," the king said. "That was Thorion, who returned from death?"

"Yes. When the Archmage had been long gone and no word came, we feared he was dead. So the Summoner used his arts to go see if indeed he had crossed the wall. He stayed long there, so the masters feared for him too. But at last he woke, and said that the Archmage was there among the dead, and would not return himself but had bade Thorion return to govern Roke. Yet before long the dragon bore the Archmage Sparrowhawk living to us, with my lord Lebannen . . . Then when the Archmage had departed again, the Summoner fell down and lay as if life had gone out of him. The Master Herbal, with all his art, believed him dead. Yet as we made ready to bury him, he moved, and spoke, saying he had come back to life to do what must be done. So, since we were not able to choose a new Archmage, Thorion the Summoner governed the School." He paused. "When the girl came, though the Doorkeeper had admitted her, Thorion would not have her within the walls. He would have nothing to do with her. But the Master Patterner took her to the Grove, and she lived there some while at the edge of the trees, and walked with him among them. He and the Doorkeeper, and the Herbal, and Kurremkarmerruk the Namer, believed that there was a reason she had come to Roke, that she was a messenger or an agent of some great event, even if she herself didn't know it; and so they protected her. The other masters followed Thorion, who said she brought only dissension and ruin and should be driven out. I was a student then. It was a sore trouble to us to know that our masters, masterless, were quarreling."

"And over a girl," said Tosla.

Onyx's look at him this time was extremely cold. "Quite," he said. After a minute he took up his story. "To be brief, then, when Thorion sent a group of us to compel her to leave the island, she challenged him to meet her that evening on Roke Knoll. He came, and summoned her by her name to obey him: 'Irian,' he called her. But she said, 'I am not only Irian,' and speaking, she changed. She became—she took the form of a dragon. She touched Thorion and his body fell to

dust. Then she climbed the hill, and watching her, we didn't know whether we saw a woman that burned like a fire, or a winged beast. But at the summit we saw her clearly, a dragon like a flame of red and gold. And she lifted up her wings and flew into the west."

His voice had grown soft and his face was full of the remembered awe. Nobody spoke.

The wizard cleared his throat. "Before she went up the hill the Namer asked her, 'Who are you?' She said she did not know her other name. The Patterner spoke to her, asking where she would go and whether she would come back. She said she was going beyond the west, to learn her name from her own people, but if he called her she would come."

In the silence, a hoarse, weak voice, like metal brushing on metal, spoke. Alder did not understand the words and yet they seemed familiar, as if he could almost remember what they meant.

Tehanu had come close to the wizard and was standing by him, bending to him, tense as a drawn bow. It was she who had spoken.

Startled and taken aback, the wizard stared up at her, got to his feet, backed off a step, and then controlling himself said, "Yes, those were her words: *My people, beyond the west*."

"Call her. Oh, call her," Tehanu whispered, reaching out both her hands to him. Again he drew back involuntarily.

Tenar stood up and murmured to her daughter, "What is it, what is it, Tehanu?"

Tehanu stared round at them all. Alder felt as if he were a wraith she saw through. "Call her here," she said. She looked at the king. "Can you call her?"

"I have no such power. Perhaps the Patterner of Roke—perhaps you yourself—"

Tehanu shook her head violently. "No, no, no, no," she whispered. "I am not like her. I have no wings."

Lebannen looked at Tenar as if for guidance. Tenar looked miserably at her daughter.

Tehanu turned round and faced the king. "I'm sorry," she said, stiffly, in her weak, harsh voice. "I have to be alone, sir. I will think about what my father said. I will try to answer what he asked. But I have to be alone, please."

Lebannen bowed to her and glanced at Tenar, who went at once to her daughter and put an arm about her; and they went away on the sunny path by the pools and fountains.

The four men sat down again and said nothing for a few minutes.

Lebannen said, “You were right, Onyx,” and to the others, “Master Onyx told me this tale of the woman-dragon Irian after I told him something about Tehanu. How as a child Tehanu summoned the dragon Kalessin to Gont, and spoke with the dragon in the Old Speech, and Kalessin called her daughter.”

“Sire, this is very strange, this is a strange time, when a dragon is a woman, and when an untaught girl speaks in the Language of the Making!” Onyx was deeply and obviously shaken, frightened. Alder saw that, and wondered why he himself felt no such fear. Probably, he thought, because he did not know enough to be afraid, or what to be afraid of.

“But there are old stories,” Tosla said. “Haven’t you heard them on Roke? Maybe your walls keep them out. They’re only tales simple people tell. Songs, even. There’s a sailors’ song, ‘The Lass of Belilo,’ that tells how a sailor left a pretty girl weeping in every port, until one of the pretty girls flew after his boat on wings of brass and snatched him out of it and ate him.”

Onyx looked at Tosla with disgust. But Lebannen smiled and said, “The Woman of Kemay . . . The Archmage’s old master, Aihal, called Ogion, told Tenar about her. She was an old village woman, and lived as such. She invited Ogion into her cottage and served him fish soup. But she said mankind and dragonkind had once been one. She herself was a dragon as well as a woman. And being a mage, Ogion saw her as a dragon.”

“As you saw Irian, Onyx,” said Lebannen.

Speaking stiffly and addressing himself to the king only, Onyx said, “After Irian left Roke, the Master Namer showed us passages in the most ancient lore-books which had always been obscure, but which could be understood to speak of beings both human and dragon. And of a quarrel or great division among them. But none of this is clear to our understanding.”

“I hoped that Tehanu might make it clear,” Lebannen said. His voice was even, so that Alder did not know whether he had given up or still held that hope.

A man was hurrying down the path to them, a grey-headed soldier of the king’s guards. Lebannen looked round, stood up, went to him. They conferred for a minute, low-voiced. The soldier strode off again; the king turned back to his companions. “Here is news,” he said, the ring of challenge in his voice again. “Over the west of Havnor there have been great flights of dragons. They have set forests afire, and a coaster’s crew say people fleeing down to South Port told them the town of Resbel is burning.”

That night the king's swiftest ship carried him and his party across the Bay of Havnor, running fast before the magewind Onyx raised. They came into the mouth of the Onneva River, under the shoulder of Mount Onn, at daybreak. With them eleven horses were disembarked, fine, strong, slender-legged creatures from the royal stables. Horses were rare on all the islands but Havnor and Semel. Tehanu knew donkeys well enough but had never seen a horse before. She had spent much of the night with them and their handlers, helping control and calm them. They were well-bred, mannerly horses but not used to sea voyages.

When it came time to mount them, there on the sands of the Onneva, Onyx was fairly daunted, and had to be coached and encouraged by the handlers, but Tehanu was up in the saddle as soon as the king. She put the reins in her crippled hand and did not use them, seeming to communicate with her mare by other means.

So the little caravan set off due west into the foothills of the Falierns, keeping up a good pace. It was the swiftest way to travel that Lebannen had at his disposal; to coast clear round South Havnor would take too long. They had the wizard Onyx with them to keep the weather favorable, clear the path of any obstacles, and defend them from any harm short of dragon fire. Against the dragons, if they encountered them, they had no defense at all, except perhaps Tehanu.

Taking counsel the evening before with his advisors and the officers of his guard, Lebannen had quickly concluded that there was no way to fight the dragons or protect the towns and fields from them: arrows were useless, shields were useless. Only the greatest mages had ever been able to defeat a dragon. He had no such mage in his service and knew of none now living, but he must defend his people as best he could, and he knew no way to do it but to try to parley with the dragons.

His majordomo had been shocked when he set off for the apartment where Tenar and Tehanu were: the king should send for those he wished to see, command them to come to him. "Not if he's going to beg from them," Lebannen said.

He told the startled maid who answered their door to ask if he might speak with the White Lady and the Woman of Gont. So they were known to the people of the palace and the city. That each bore her true name openly, as the king did, was so rare a matter, so defiant of rule and custom, of safety and propriety, that though people might know the name they were reluctant to say it and preferred to speak

around it.

He was admitted, and having told them briefly the news he had received, said, "Tehanu, it may be that you alone in my kingdom can help me. If you can call to these dragons as you called to Kalessin, if you have any power over them, if you can speak to them and ask why they war on my people, will you do so?"

The young woman shrank from his words, turning towards her mother.

But Tenar did not offer her any shelter. She stood unmoving. After a while she said, "Tehanu, long ago I told you: when a king speaks to you, you answer. You were a child then, and didn't answer. You're not a child now."

Tehanu took a step back from them both. Like a child, she hung her head. "I can't call to them," she said in her faint, harsh voice. "I don't know them."

"Can you call Kalessin?" Lebannen asked.

She shook her head. "Too far away," she whispered. "I don't know where."

"But you are Kalessin's daughter," Tenar said. "Can you not speak to these dragons?"

She said wretchedly, "I don't know."

Lebannen said, "If there is any chance, Tehanu, that they'll talk to you, that you can talk to them, I beg you to take that chance. For I can't fight them, and don't know their language, and how can I find what they want of us from creatures who can destroy me with a breath, with a look? Will you speak for me, for us?"

She was silent. Then, so faintly he could barely hear it, she said, "Yes."

"Then make ready to travel with me. We leave by the fourth hour of the evening. My people will bring you to the ship. I thank you. And I thank you, Tenar!" he said, taking her hand a moment, but no longer, for he had much to see to before he went.

When he came down to the wharf, late and hurrying, there was the slender hooded figure. The last horse to be led aboard was snorting and bracing its feet, refusing to go up the gangplank. Tehanu seemed to be conferring with the handler. Presently she took the horse's bridle and talked to it a little, and they went up the gangplank quietly together.

Ships are small, crowded houses; Lebannen heard two of the hostlers talking softly on the afterdeck towards midnight. "She has the true hand," one said, and the other, a younger voice, "Aye, she does, but she's horrible to look at, ain't she?" The first one said, "If a horse don't mind it, why should you?" and the other, "I don't know, but I do."

Now, as they rode from the Onneva sands into the foothills, where the way

widened, Tosla brought his horse up beside Lebannen's. "She's to be our interpreter, is she?" he asked.

"If she can."

"Well, she's braver than I'd have thought. If that happened to her the first time she talked with a dragon, it's likely to happen again."

"What do you mean?"

"She was half burnt to death."

"Not by a dragon."

"Who then?"

"The people she was born to."

"How was that?" Tosla asked with a grimace.

"Tramps, thieves. She was five or six years old. Whatever she did or they did, it ended in her being beaten unconscious and shoved into their campfire. Thinking, I suppose, she was dead or would die and it would be taken for an accident. They made off. Villagers found her, and Tenar took her in."

Tosla scratched his ear. "There's a pretty tale of human kindness. So she's no daughter of the old Archmage either? But then what do they mean saying she's a dragon's get?"

Lebannen had sailed with Tosla, had fought beside him years ago in the siege of Sorra, and knew him a brave, keen, coolheaded man. When Tosla's coarseness chafed him he blamed his own thin skin. "I don't know what they mean," he answered mildly. "All I know is, the dragon called her daughter."

"That Roke wizard of yours, that Onyx, is quick to say he's no use in this matter. But he can speak the Old Tongue, can't he?"

"Yes. He could wither you into ash with a few words of it. If he hasn't it's out of respect for me, not you, I think."

Tosla nodded. "I know that," he said.

They rode all that day at as quick a pace as the horses could keep, coming at nightfall to a little hill town where the horses could be fed and rested and the riders could sleep in variously uncomfortable beds. Those of them unused to riding now discovered they could barely walk. The people there had heard nothing about dragons, and were overwhelmed only by the terror and glory of a whole party of rich strangers riding in and wanting oats and beds and paying for them with silver and gold.

The riders set off again long before dawn. It was nearly a hundred miles from the sands of Onneva to Resbel. This second day would take them over the low pass of

the Faliern Mountains and down the western side. Yenay, one of Lebannen's most trusted officers, rode well ahead of the others; Tosla was rear guard; Lebannen led the main group. He was jogging along half asleep in the dull quiet before dawn when hoofbeats coming towards him woke him. Yenay had come riding back. Lebannen looked up where the man was pointing.

They had just emerged from woods on the crest of an open hillside and could see through the clear half light all the way to the pass. The mountains to either side of it massed black against the dull reddish glow of a cloudy dawn.

But they were looking west.

"That's nearer than Resbel," Yenay said. "Fifteen miles, maybe."

Tehanu's mare, though small, was the finest of the lot, and had a strong conviction that she should lead the others. If Tehanu didn't hold her back she would keep sidling and overtaking till she was ahead of the line. The mare came up at once when Lebannen reined in his big horse, and so Tehanu was beside him now, looking where he looked.

"The forest is burning," he said to her.

He could see only the scarred side of her face, so she seemed to gaze blindly; but she saw, and her claw hand that held the reins was trembling. The burned child fears the fire, he thought.

What cruel, cowardly folly had possessed him to tell this girl, "Come talk to the dragons, save my skin!" and bring her straight into the fire?

"We will turn back," he said.

Tehanu raised her good hand, pointing. "Look," she said. "Look!"

A spark from a bonfire, a burning cinder rising over the black line of the pass, an eagle of flame soaring, a dragon flying straight at them.

Tehanu stood up in her stirrups and let out a piercing, scraping cry, like a sea bird's or a hawk's scream, but it was a word, one word: *"Medeu!"*

The great creature drew nearer with terrible speed, its long, thin wings beating almost lazily; it had lost the reflection of fire and looked black or bronze-colored in the growing light.

"Mind your horses," Tehanu said in her cracked voice, and just then Lebannen's grey gelding saw the dragon and started violently, tossing its head and backing. He could control it, but behind him one of the other horses let out a neigh of terror, and he heard them trampling and the handlers' voices. The wizard Onyx came running up and stood beside Lebannen's horse. Mounted or afoot, they stood and watched the dragon come.

Again Tehanu cried out that word. The dragon veered in its flight, slowed, came on, stopped and hovered in the air about fifty feet from them.

"Medeu!" Tehanu called, and the answer came like an echo prolonged: *"Me-de-uuu!"*

"What does it mean?" Lebannen asked, bending to Onyx.

"Sister, brother," the wizard whispered.

Tehanu was off her horse, had tossed the reins to Yenay, was walking forward down the slight slope to where the dragon hovered, its long wings beating quick and short like a hovering hawk's. But these wings were fifty feet from tip to tip, and as they beat they made a sound like kettledrums or rattles of brass. As she came closer to it, a little curl of fire escaped from the dragon's long, long-toothed, open mouth.

She held up her hand. Not the slender brown hand but the burned one, the claw. The scarring of her arm and shoulder kept her from raising it fully. She could reach barely as high as her head.

The dragon sank a little in the air, lowered its head, and touched her hand with its lean, flared, scaled snout. Like a dog, an animal greeting and sniffing, Lebannen thought; like a falcon stooping to the wrist; like a king bowing to a queen.

Tehanu spoke, the dragon spoke, both briefly, in their cymbal-shiver voices. Another exchange, a pause; the dragon spoke at length. Onyx listened intently. One more exchange of words. A wisp of smoke from the dragon's nostrils; a stiff, imperious gesture of the woman's crippled, withered hand. She spoke clearly two words.

"Bring her," the wizard translated in a whisper.

The dragon beat its wings hard, lowered its long head, and hissed, spoke again, then sprang up into the air, high over Tehanu, turned, wheeled once, and set off like an arrow to the west.

"It called her Daughter of the Eldest," the wizard whispered, as Tehanu stood motionless, watching the dragon go.

She turned around, looking small and fragile in that great sweep of hill and forest in the grey dawn light. Lebannen swung off his horse and hurried forward to her. He thought to find her drained and terrified, he put out his hand to help her walk, but she smiled at him. Her face, half terrible half beautiful, shone with the red light of the unrisen sun.

"They won't strike again. They will wait in the mountains," she said.

Then indeed she looked around as if she did not know where she was, and when Lebannen took her arm she let him do so; but the fire and the smile lingered in her face, and she walked lightly.

While the hostlers held the horses, already grazing on the dew-wet grass, Onyx, Tosla, and Yenay came round her, though they kept a respectful distance. Onyx said, "My Lady Tehanu, I have never seen so brave an act."

"Nor I," Tosla said.

"I was afraid," Tehanu said, in her voice that carried no emotion. "But I called him brother, and he called me sister."

"I could not understand all you said," the wizard said. "I have no such knowledge of the Old Speech as you. Will you tell us what passed between you?"

She spoke slowly, her eyes on the west where the dragon had flown. The dull red of the distant fire was paling as the east grew bright. "I said, 'Why are you burning the king's island?' And he said, 'It is time we have our own lands again.' And I said, 'Did the Eldest bid you take them with fire?' Then he said that the Eldest, Kalessin, had gone with Orm Irian beyond the west to fly on the other wind. And he said the young dragons who remained here on the winds of the world say men are oath breakers who stole the dragons' lands. They tell one another that Kalessin will never return, and they will wait no longer, but will drive men out of all the western lands. But lately Orm Irian has returned, and is on Paln, he said. And I told him to ask her to come. And he said she would come to Kalessin's daughter."

Chapter 3

The Dragon Council

From the window of her room in the palace Tenar had watched the ship sail, carrying Lebannen and her daughter away into the night. She had not gone down to the wharf with Tehanu. It had been hard, very hard to refuse to come with her on this journey. Tehanu had begged, she who never asked for anything. She never cried, could not cry, but her breath had caught sobbing: "But I can't go, I *can't* go alone! Come with me, mother!"

"My love, my heart, if I could spare you this fear I would, don't you see I can't? I've done what I could do for you, my flame of fire, my star. The king is right—only you, you alone, can do this."

"But if you were just there, so I knew you were there—"

"I'm here, I'm always here. What could I do there but be a burden? You must travel fast, it will be a hard journey. I'd hold you back. And you might fear for me. You don't need me. I'm no use to you. You must learn that. You must go, Tehanu."

And she had turned away from her child and begun sorting out the clothing Tehanu should take, home clothes, not the fancy things they wore here in the palace: her stout shoes, her good cloak. If she wept while she did it, she did not let her daughter see it.

Tehanu stood as if bewildered, paralysed with fear. When Tenar gave her clothes to change into, she obeyed. When the king's lieutenant, Yenay, knocked and asked if he might conduct Mistress Tehanu down to the wharf, she stared at him like a dumb animal.

"Go now," Tenar said. She embraced her and laid her hand on the great scar that was half her face. "You are Kalessin's daughter as well as mine."

The girl held her very tightly for a long moment, let go, turned away without a word, and followed Yenay out the door.

Tenar stood feeling the chill of the night air where the heat of Tehanu's body and arms had been.

She went over to the window. Lights down on the dock, the coming and going of men, the hoof clatter of horses being led down the steep streets above the water. A tall ship was at the pier, a ship she knew, the *Dolphin*. She watched from the window and saw Tehanu on the dock. She saw her go aboard at last, leading a horse that had been balking, and saw Lebannen follow her. She saw the mooring lines cast off, the docile movement of the ship following the oared tug that towed her clear, the sudden fall and flowering of the white sails in the darkness. The light of the stern lantern trembled on the dark water, shrank slowly to a tiny drop of brightness, and was gone.

Tenar went about the room folding up the clothes Tehanu had worn, the silken shift and overskirt; she picked up the light sandals and held them to her cheek a while before she put them away.

She lay awake in the wide bed and saw before her mind's eye over and over again the same scene: a road, and Tehanu walking on it alone. And a knot, a net, a black writhing coiling mass descending from the sky, dragons swarming, fire licking and streaming from them at her, her hair burning, her clothes burning—No, Tenar said, no! it will not happen! She would force her mind away from that scene, until she saw it again, the road, and Tehanu walking on it alone, and the black, burning knot in the sky, coming closer.

When the first light began to turn the room grey she slept at last, exhausted. She dreamed that she was in the Old Mage's house on the Overfell, her house, and she was glad beyond all words to be there. She took the broom from behind the door to sweep the shining oaken floor, for Ged had let it get dusty. But there was a door at the back of the house that had not been there before. When she opened it she found a small, low room with stone walls painted white. Ged was crouching in the room, squatting with his arms on his knees and his hands hanging limp. His head was not a man's head but small, black, and beaked, a vulture's head. He said in a faint, hoarse voice, "Tenar, I have no wings." And when he said that, such anger and terror rose up in her that she woke, gasping, to see sunlight on the high wall of her palace room and hear the sweet clear trumpets telling the fourth hour of morning.

Breakfast was brought. She ate a little and talked with Berry, the elderly servant whom she had chosen from all the retinue of maids and ladies of honor Lebannen had offered her. Berry was an intelligent, competent woman, born in a village in

inland Havnor, with whom Tenar got on better than with most of the ladies of the court. They were civil and respectful, but they didn't know what to do with her, how to talk to a woman who was half Kargish priestess, half farmwife from Gont. She saw that it was easier for them to be kind to Tehanu in her fierce timidity. They could be sorry for her. They could not be sorry for Tenar.

Berry, however, could be and was, and she gave Tenar considerable comfort that morning. "The king will bring her back safe and sound," she said. "Why, do you think he'd take the girl into a danger he couldn't get her out of? Never! Not him!" It was false comfort, but Berry so passionately believed it to be true that Tenar had to agree with her, which was a little solace in itself.

She needed something to do, for Tehanu's absence was everywhere. She resolved to go talk to the Kargish princess, to see if the girl was willing to learn a word of Hardic, or at least to tell Tenar her name.

In the Kargad Lands people did not have a true name that they kept secret, as the speakers of Hardic did. Like use-names here, Kargish names often had some meaning—Rose, Alder, Honor, Hope; or they were traditional, often the name of an ancestor. People spoke them openly and were proud of the antiquity of a name passed down from generation to generation. She had been taken too young from her parents to know why they had called her Tenar, but thought it might be for a grandmother or great-grandmother. That name had been taken from her when she was recognised as Arha, the Nameless One reborn, and she had forgotten it till Ged gave it back to her. To her, as to him, it was her true name; but it was not a word of the Old Speech; it gave no one any power over her, and she had never concealed it.

She was puzzled now why the princess did so. Her bondwomen called her only Princess, or Lady, or Mistress; the ambassadors had talked about her as the High Princess, Daughter of Thol, Lady of Hur-at-Hur, and so on. If all the poor girl had was titles, it was time she had a name.

Tenar knew it was not fitting for a guest of the king to go alone through the streets of Havnor, and she knew Berry had duties in the palace, so she asked for a servant to accompany her. She was provided with a charming footman, or footboy, for he was only about fifteen, who looked after her at the street crossings as if she were a doddering crone. She liked walking in the city. She had already found and admitted to herself, going to the River House, that it was easier without Tehanu beside her. People would look at Tehanu and look away, and Tehanu walked in stiff, suffering pride, hating their looks and their looking away, and Tenar suffered with her, maybe more than she herself did.

Now she was able to loiter and watch the street shows, the market booths, the various faces and clothing from all over the Archipelago, to go out of the direct way to let her foot-boy show her a street where the painted bridges from rooftop to rooftop made a kind of airy vaulted ceiling high above them, from which red-flowering vines looped down in festoons, and people put birdcages out the windows on gilt poles among the flowers, so that it all seemed a garden in the middle of the air. "Oh, I wish Tehanu could see this," she thought. But she could not think of Tehanu, of where she might be.

The River House, like the New Palace, dated from the reign of Queen Heru, five centuries ago. It had been in ruins when Lebannen came to the throne; he had rebuilt it with much care, and it was a lovely, peaceful place, sparsely furnished, with dark, polished, uncarpeted floors. Ranks of narrow door-windows slid aside to open up the whole side of a room to a view of the willows and the river, and one could walk out onto deep wooden balconies built over the water. Court ladies had told Tenar that it had been the place the king liked best to slip away to for a night of solitude or a night with a lover, which lent even more significance, they hinted, to his housing the princess there. Her own suspicion was that he had not wanted the princess under the same roof with him and had simply named the only other possible place for her, but maybe the court ladies were right.

Guards in their fine harness recognised and let her pass, footmen announced her and went off with her footboy to crack nuts and gossip, which seemed to be the principal occupation of footmen, and ladies-in-waiting came to greet her, grateful for any new face and gasping for more news of the king's expedition against the dragons. Having run the whole gamut she was admitted at last to the apartments of the princess.

On her two previous visits she had been kept waiting some while in an anteroom, and then the veiled bondwomen had brought her into an inner room, the only dim room in the whole airy house, where the princess had stood in her round-brimmed hat with the red veil hanging down all round it to the floor, looking permanently fixed there, built in, exactly as if she were a brick chimney, as Lady Iyesa had said.

This time it was different. As soon as she came into the anteroom there was shrieking within and the sound of people running in various directions. The princess burst through the door and with a wild cry flung her arms around Tenar. Tenar was small, and the princess, a tall, vigorous young woman full of emotion, knocked her right off her feet, but held her up in strong arms. "Oh Lady Arha,

Lady Arha, save me, save me!" she was crying.

"Princess! What's wrong?"

The princess was in tears of terror or relief or both at once, and all Tenar could understand of her laments and pleas was a babble of dragons and sacrifice.

"There are no dragons near Havnor," she said sternly, disengaging herself from the girl, "and nobody is being sacrificed. What is all this about? What have you been told?"

"The women said the dragons were coming and they'd sacrifice a king's daughter and not a goat because they're sorcerers and I was afraid." The princess wiped her face, clenched her hands, and began trying to master the panic she had been in. It had been real, ungovernable terror, and Tenar was sorry for her. She did not let her pity show. The girl needed to learn to hold on to her dignity.

"Your women are ignorant and don't know enough Hardic to understand what people tell them. And you don't know any Hardic at all. If you did you'd know there's nothing to be afraid of. Do you see the people of the house here rushing about weeping and screaming?"

The princess stared at her. She wore no hat, no veils, and only a light shift-dress, for it was a hot day. It was the first time Tenar had seen her except as a dim form through the red veiling. Though the princess's eyes were swollen with tears and her face blotched, she was magnificent: tawny-haired, tawny-eyed, with round arms and full breasts and slender waist, a woman in her first full beauty and strength.

"But none of those people is going to be sacrificed," she said finally.

"Nobody is going to be sacrificed."

"Then why are the dragons coming?"

Tenar drew a deep breath. "Princess," she said, "there are a great many things we need to talk about. If you'll look at me as your friend—"

"I do," the princess said. She stepped forward and took Tenar's right arm in a very strong grasp. "You are my friend, I have no other friend, I will shed my blood for you."

Ridiculous as it was, Tenar knew it was true.

She returned the girl's grip as well as she could and said, "You are my friend. Tell me your name."

The princess's eyes got big. There was a little snot and blubber still on her upper lip. Her lower lip trembled. She said, with a deep breath, "Seserakh."

"Seserakh: my name is not Arha, but Tenar."

"Tenar," the girl said, and grasped her arm tighter.

"Now," Tenar said, trying to regain control of the situation, "I have walked a long way and I'm thirsty. Please let's sit down, and may I have some water to drink? And then we can talk."

"Yes," said the princess, and leapt out of the room like a hunting lioness. There were shouts and cries from the inner rooms, and more sounds of running. A bondwoman appeared, adjusting her veil shakily and gibbering something in such thick dialect Tenar could not understand her. "Speak in the accursed tongue!" shouted the princess from within, and the woman pitifully squeaked out in Hardic, "To sit? To drink? Lady?"

Two chairs had been set in the middle of the dark, stuffy room, facing each other. Seserakh stood beside one of them.

"I should like to sit outside, in the shade, over the water," Tenar said. "If it please you, princess."

The princess shouted, the women scuttled, the chairs were carried out onto the deep balcony. They sat down side by side.

"That's better," Tenar said. It was still strange to her to be speaking Kargish. She had no difficulty with it at all, but she felt as if she were not herself, were somebody else speaking, an actor enjoying her role.

"You *like* the water?" the princess asked. Her face had returned to its normal color, that of heavy cream, and her eyes, no longer swollen, were bluish gold, or blue with gold flecks.

"Yes. You don't?"

"I hate it. There was no water where I lived."

"A desert? I lived in a desert too. Until I was sixteen. Then I crossed the sea and came west. I love the water, the sea, the rivers."

"Oh, the sea," Seserakh said, shrinking and putting her head in her hands. "Oh I hate it, I hate it. I vomited my soul out. Over and over and over. Days and days and days. I never want to see the sea again." She shot a quick glance through the willow boughs at the quiet, shallow stream below them. "This river is all right," she said distrustfully.

A woman brought a tray with a pitcher and cups, and Tenar had a long drink of cool water.

"Princess," she said, "we have a great deal to talk about. First: the dragons are still a long way away, in the west. The king and my daughter have gone to talk with them."

“To *talk* with them?”

“Yes.” She had been going to say more, but she said, “Now please tell me about the dragons in Hur-at-Hur.”

Tenar had been told as a child in Atuan that there were dragons in Hur-at-Hur. Dragons in the mountains, brigands in the deserts. Hur-at-Hur was poor and far away and nothing good came from it but opals and turquoises and cedar logs.

Seserakh heaved a deep sigh. Tears came into her eyes. “It makes me cry to think about home,” she said, with such pure simplicity of feeling that tears came into Tenar’s eyes too. “Well, the dragons live up in the mountains. Two days, three days journey from Mesreth. It’s all rocks up there and nobody bothers the dragons and they don’t bother anybody. But once a year they come down, crawling down a certain way. It’s a path, all smooth dust, made by their bellies crawling along it every year since time began. It’s called the Dragons’ Way.” She saw that Tenar was listening with deep attention, and went on. “It’s taboo to cross the Dragons’ Way. You mustn’t set foot on it at all. You have to go clear round it, south of the Place of the Sacrifice. They start crawling down it late in spring. On the fourth day of the fifth month they’ve all arrived at the Place of the Sacrifice. None of them is ever late. And everybody from Mesreth and the villages is there waiting for them. And then, when they’ve all come down the Dragons’ Way, the priests begin the sacrifice. And that’s . . . Don’t you have the spring sacrifice, in Atuan?”

Tenar shook her head.

“Well, that’s why I got scared, you see, because it can be a human sacrifice. If things weren’t going well, they’d sacrifice a king’s daughter. Otherwise it would just be some ordinary girl. But they haven’t done even that for a long time. Not since I was little. Since my father defeated all the other kings. Since then, they’ve only sacrificed a she-goat and a ewe. And they catch the blood in bowls, and throw the fat into the sacred fire, and call to the dragons. And the dragons all come crawling up. They drink the blood and eat the fire.” She shut her eyes for a moment; so did Tenar. “Then they go back up into the mountains, and we go back to Mesreth.”

“How big are the dragons?”

Seserakh put her hands about a yard apart. “Sometimes bigger,” she said.

“And they can’t fly? Or speak?”

“Oh, no. Their wings are just little stubs. They make a kind of hissing. Animals can’t talk. But they’re sacred animals. They’re the sign of life, because fire is life,

and they eat fire and spit out fire. And they're sacred because they come to the spring sacrifice. Even if no people came, the dragons would come and gather at that place. We come there because the dragons do. The priests always tell all about that before the sacrifice."

Tenar absorbed this for a while. "The dragons here in the west," she said, "are large. Huge. And they can fly. They're animals, but they can speak. And they are sacred. And dangerous."

"Well," the princess said, "dragons may be animals, but they're more like us than the accursed-sorcerers are."

She said "accursed-sorcerers" all as one word and without any particular emphasis. Tenar remembered that phrase from her childhood. It meant the Dark Folk, the Hardic people of the Archipelago.

"Why is that?"

"Because the dragons are reborn! Like all the animals. Like us." Seserakh looked at Tenar with frank curiosity. "I thought since you were a priestess at the Most Sacred Place of the Tombs you'd know a lot more about all that than I do."

"But we had no dragons there," Tenar said. "I didn't learn anything about them at all. Please, my friend, tell me."

"Well, let me see if I can tell the story about it. It's a winter story. I guess it's all right to tell it in summer here. Everything here is all wrong anyway." She sighed. "Well, in the beginning, you know, in the first time, we were all the same, all the people and the animals, we did the same things. And then we learned how to die. And so we learned how to be reborn. Maybe as one kind of being, maybe another. But it doesn't matter so much because anyhow you'll die again and get reborn again and get to be everything sooner or later."

Tenar nodded. So far, the story was familiar to her.

"But the best things to get reborn as are people and dragons, because those are the sacred beings. So you try not to break the taboos, and you try to observe the Precepts, so you have a better chance to be a person again, or anyhow a dragon . . . If dragons here can talk and are so big, I can see why that would be a reward. Being one of ours never seemed like much to look forward to.

"But the story is about the accursed-sorcerers discovering the Vedurnan. That was a thing, I don't know what it was, that told some people that if they'd agree never to die and never be reborn, they could learn how to do sorcery. So they chose that, they chose the Vedurnan. And they went off into the west with it. And it turned them dark. And they live here. All these people here—they're the ones who

chose the Vedurnan. They live, and they can do their accursed sorceries, but they can't die. Only their bodies die. The rest of them stays in a dark place and never gets reborn. And they look like birds. But they can't fly."

"Yes," Tenar whispered.

"You didn't learn about that on Atuan?"

"No," Tenar said.

Her mind was recalling the story the Woman of Kemay told Ogion: in the beginning of time, mankind and the dragons had been one, but the dragons chose wildness and freedom, and mankind chose wealth and power. A choice, a separation. Was it the same story?

But the image in Tenar's heart was of Ged squatting in a stone room, his head small, black, beaked . . .

"The Vedurnan isn't that ring, is it, that they kept talking about, that I'm going to have to wear?"

Tenar tried to force her mind away from the Painted Room and from last night's dream to Seserakh's question.

"Ring?"

"Urthakby's ring."

"Erreth-Akbe. No. That ring is the Ring of Peace. And you'll wear it only if and when you're King Lebannen's queen. And you'll be a lucky woman to be that."

Seserakh's expression was curious. It was not sullen or cynical. It was hopeless, half humorous, patient, the expression of a woman decades older. "There is no luck about it, dear friend Tenar," she said. "I have to marry him. And so I will be lost."

"Why are you lost if you marry him?"

"If I marry him I have to give him my name. If he speaks my name, he steals my soul. That's what the accursed-sorcerers do. So they always hide their names. But if he steals my soul, I won't be able to die. I'll have to live forever without my body, a bird that can't fly, and never be reborn."

"That's why you hid your name?"

"I gave it to you, my friend."

"I honor the gift, my friend," Tenar said energetically. "But you can say your name to anybody you want, here. They can't steal your soul with it. Believe me, Seserakh. And you can trust him. He doesn't—he won't do you any harm."

The girl had caught her hesitation. "But he wishes he could," she said. "Tenar my friend, I know what I am, here. In that big city Awabath where my father is, I

was a stupid ignorant desert woman. A *feyagat*. The city women sniggered and poked each other whenever they saw me, the barefaced whores. And here it's worse. I can't understand anybody and they can't understand me, and everything, everything is different! I don't even know what the food is, it's sorcerer food, it makes me dizzy. I don't know what the taboos are, there aren't any priests to ask, only sorcerer women, all black and barefaced. And I saw the way he looked at me. You can see out of the *feyag*, you know! I saw his face. He's very handsome, he looks like a warrior, but he's a black sorcerer and he hates me. Don't say he doesn't, because I know he does. And I think when he learns my name he'll send my soul to that place forever."

After a while, gazing into the moving branches of the willows over the softly moving water, feeling sad and weary, Tenar said, "What you need to do, then, princess, is learn how to make him like you. What else can you do?"

Seserakh shrugged mournfully.

"It would help if you understood what he said."

"Bagabba-bagabba. They all sound like that."

"And we sound like that to them. Come on, princess, how can he like you if all *you* can say to *him* is bagabba-bagabba? Look," and she held up her hand, pointed to it with the other, and said the word first in Kargish, then in Hardic.

Seserakh repeated both words in a dutiful tone. After a few more body parts she suddenly grasped the potentialities of translation. She sat up straighter. "How do sorcerers say 'king'?"

"Agni. It's a word of the Old Speech. My husband told me that."

She realised as she spoke that it was foolish to bring up the existence of yet a third language at this point; but that was not what caught the princess's attention.

"You have a husband?" Seserakh stared at her with luminous, leonine eyes, and laughed aloud. "Oh, how wonderful! I thought you were a priestess! Oh please, my friend, tell me about him! Is he a warrior? Is he handsome? Do you love him?"

After the king went dragon hunting, Alder had no idea what to do; he felt utterly useless, unjustified in staying in the palace eating the king's food, guilty for the trouble he had brought with him. He could not sit all day in his room, so he went out into the streets, but the splendor and activity of the city were daunting to him, and having no money or purpose all he could do was walk till he was tired. He would come back to the Palace of Maharion wondering if the stern-faced guards would readmit him. The nearest he came to peace was in the palace gardens. He

hoped to meet Rody there again, but the child did not appear, and perhaps that was as well. Alder thought that he should not talk with people. The hands that reached to him from death would reach out to them.

On the third day after the king's departure he went down to walk among the garden pools. The day had been very hot; the evening was still and sultry. He brought Tug with him and let the little cat loose to stalk insects under the bushes, while he sat on a bench near the big willow and watched the silver-green glimmer of fat carp in the water. He felt lonely and discouraged; he felt his defense against the voices and the reaching hands was breaking down. What was the good of being here, after all? Why not go into the dream once and for all, go down that hill, be done with it? Nobody in the world would grieve for him, and his death would spare them this sickness he had brought with him. Surely they had enough to do fighting dragons. Maybe if he went there he would see Lily.

If he was dead they could not touch each other. The wizards said they would not even want to. They said the dead forgot what it was to be alive. But Lily had reached to him. At first, for a little while, maybe they would remember life long enough to look at each other, to see each other, even if they did not touch.

"Alder."

He looked up slowly at the woman who stood near him. The small grey woman, Tenar. He saw the concern in her face, but did not know why she was troubled. Then he remembered that her daughter, the burned girl, had gone with the king. Maybe there had been bad news. Maybe they were all dead.

"Are you ill, Alder?" she asked.

He shook his head. It was hard to talk. He understood now how easy it would be, in that other land, not to speak. Not to meet people's eyes. Not to be troubled.

She sat down on the bench beside him. "You look troubled," she said.

He made a vague gesture—it's all right, it's no matter.

"You were on Gont. With my husband Sparrowhawk. How was he? Was he looking after himself?"

"Yes," Alder said. He tried to answer more adequately. "He was the kindest of hosts."

"I'm glad to hear that," she said. "I worry about him. He keeps house as well as I do, but still, I didn't like leaving him alone . . . Please, would you tell me what he was doing while you were there?"

He told her that Sparrowhawk had picked the plums and taken them to sell, that the two of them had mended the fence, that Sparrowhawk had helped him sleep.

She listened intently, seriously, as if these small matters were as weighty as the strange events they had talked about here three days ago—the dead calling to a living man, a girl becoming a dragon, dragons setting fire to the islands of the west.

Indeed he did not know what weighed more heavily after all, the great strange things or the small common ones.

"I wish I could go home," the woman said.

"I could wish the same thing, but it would be in vain. I think I'll never go home again." He did not know why he said it, but heard himself say it and thought it was true.

She looked at him a minute with her quiet grey eyes and asked no question.

"I could wish my daughter would go home with me," she said, "but it would be in vain, too. I know she must go on. I don't know where."

"Will you tell me what gift it is that she has, what woman she is, that the king sent for her, and took her with him to meet the dragons?"

"Oh, if I knew what she is, I'd tell you," Tenar said, her voice full of grief and love and bitterness. "She's not my daughter born, as you may have guessed or known. She came to me a little child, saved from the fire, but only barely and not wholly saved . . . When Sparrowhawk came back to me she became his daughter too. And she kept both him and me from a cruel death, by summoning a dragon, Kalessin, called Eldest. And that dragon called her daughter. So she's the child of many and none, spared no pain yet spared from the fire. Who she is in truth I may never know. But I wish she were here now, safe with me!"

He wanted to reassure her, but his own heart was too low.

"Tell me a little more about your wife, Alder," she said.

"I cannot," he said at last into the silence that lay easily between them. "I would if I could, Lady Tenar. There's such a heaviness in me, and a dread and fear, tonight. I try to think of Lily, but there's only that dark desert going down and down, and I can't see her in it. All the memories I had of her, that were like water and breath to me, have gone into that dry place. I have nothing left."

"I am sorry," she whispered, and they sat again in silence. The dusk was deepening. It was windless, very warm. Lights in the palace shone through the carved window screens and the still, hanging foliage of the willows.

"Something is happening," Tenar said. "A great change in the world. Maybe nothing we knew will be left to us."

Alder looked up into the darkening sky. The towers of the palace stood clear against it, their pale marble and alabaster catching all the light left in the west. His

eyes sought the sword blade mounted at the point of the highest tower and he saw it, faint silver. “Look,” he said. At the sword’s point, like a diamond or a drop of water, shone a star. As they watched the star moved free of the sword, rising straight above it.

There was a commotion, in the palace or outside the walls; voices; a horn sounded, a sharp imperative call.

“They’ve come back,” Tenar said, and stood up. Excitement had come into the air, and Alder too stood up. Tenar hurried into the palace, from which the harbor could be seen. But before he took Tug back inside, Alder looked up again at the sword, now only a faint glimmer, and the star riding bright above it.

Dolphin came sailing up the harbor in that windless summer night, leaning forward, urgent, the magewind bellying out her sails. Nobody in the palace had looked for the king to return so soon, but nothing was out of order or unready when he came. The quay was instantly crowded with courtiers, off-duty soldiers, and townspeople ready to greet him, and song makers and harpers were waiting to hear how he had fought and defeated dragons so they could make ballads about it.

They were disappointed: the king and his party made straight for the palace, and the guards and sailors from the ship said only, “They went up into the country above Onneva Sands, and in two days they came back. The wizard sent out a message bird to us, for we were down at the Gates of the Bay by then, since we were going to meet them in South Port. We came back and there they were awaiting us at the river mouth, all unharmed. But we saw the smoke of forests afire over the South Falierns.”

Tenar was in the crowd on the quay, and Tehanu went straight to her. They embraced fiercely. But as they walked up the street among the lights and the rejoicing voices, Tenar was still thinking, “It has changed. She has changed. She’ll never come home.”

Lebannen walked among his guards. Charged with tension and energy, he was regal, warlike, radiant. “Erreth-Akbe,” people called out, seeing him, and “Son of Morred!” On the steps of the palace he turned and faced them all. He had a strong voice to use when he wanted it, and it rang out now silencing the tumult. “Listen, people of Havnor! The Woman of Gont has spoken for us with a chief among the dragons. They have pledged a truce. One of them will come to us. A dragon will come here, to the City of Havnor, to the Palace of Maharion. Not to destroy, but to parley. The time has come when men and dragons must meet and talk. So I tell

you: when the dragon comes, do not fear it, do not fight it, do not flee it, but welcome it in the Sign of Peace. Greet it as you would greet a great lord come in peace from afar. And have no fear. For we are well protected by the Sword of Erreth-Akbe, by the Ring of Elfarran, and by the Name of Morred. And by my own name I promise you, so long as I live I will defend this city and this realm!"

They listened in a breathless hush. A burst of cheers and shouts followed on his words as he turned and strode into the palace. "I thought it best to give them some warning," he said in his usual quiet voice to Tehanu, and she nodded. He spoke to her as to a comrade, and she behaved as such. Tenar and the courtiers nearby saw this.

He ordered that his full Council meet in the morning at the fourth hour, and then they all dispersed, but he kept Tenar with him a minute while Tehanu went on. "It's she who protects us," he said.

"Alone?"

"Don't fear for her. She is the dragon's daughter, the dragon's sister. She goes where we can't go. Don't fear for her, Tenar."

She bowed her head in acceptance. "I thank you for bringing her safe back to me," she said. "For a while."

They were apart from other people, in the corridor that led to the western apartments of the palace. Tenar looked up at the king and said, "I've been talking about dragons with the princess."

"The princess," he said blankly.

"She has a name. I can't tell it to you, since she believes you might use it to destroy her soul."

He scowled.

"In Hur-at-Hur there are dragons. Small, she says, and wingless, and they don't speak. But they're sacred. The sacred sign and pledge of death and rebirth. She reminded me that my people don't go where your people do when they die. That dry land Alder tells of, it's not where we go. The princess, and I, and the dragons."

Lebannen's face changed from wary reserve to intense attention. "Ged's questions to Tehanu," he said in a low voice. "Are these the answers?"

"I know only what the princess told me, or reminded me. I'll speak with Tehanu about these things tonight."

He frowned, pondering; then his face cleared. He stooped and kissed Tenar's cheek, bidding her good night. He strode off and she watched him go. He melted her heart, he dazzled her, but she was not blinded. "He's still afraid of the

princess," she thought.

The throne room was the oldest room in the Palace of Maharion. It had been the hall of Gemal Sea-Born, Prince of Ilien, who became king in Havnor and of whose lineage came Queen Heru and her son Maharion. The Havnorian Lay says:

> *A hundred warriors, a hundred women*
> *sat in the great hall of Gemal Sea-Born*
> *at the king's table, courtly in talk,*
> *handsome and generous gentry of Havnor,*
> *no warriors braver, no women more beautiful.*

Around this hall for over a century Gemal's heirs had built an ever larger palace, and lastly Heru and Maharion had raised above it the Tower of Alabaster, the Tower of the Queen, the Tower of the Sword.

These still stood; but though the people of Havnor had stoutly called it the New Palace all through the long centuries since Maharion's death, it was old and half in ruins when Lebannen came to the throne. He had rebuilt it almost entirely, and richly. The merchants of the Inner Isles, in their first joy at having a king and laws again to protect their trading, had set his revenue high and offered him yet more money for all such undertakings; for the first few years of his reign they had not even complained that taxation was destroying their business and would leave their children destitute. So he had been able to make the New Palace new again, and splendid. But the throne room, once the beamed ceiling was rebuilt, the stone walls replastered, the narrow, high-set windows reglazed, he left in its old starkness.

Through the brief false dynasties and the Dark Years of tyrants and usurpers and pirate lords, through all the insults of time and ambition, the throne of the kingdom had stood at the end of the long room: a wooden chair, high-backed, on a plain dais. It had once been sheathed in gold. That was long gone; the small golden nails had left rents in the wood where they had been torn out. Its silken cushions and hangings had been stolen or destroyed by moth and mouse and mold. Nothing showed it to be what it was but the place where it stood and a shallow carving on the back, a heron flying with a twig of rowan in its beak. That was the crest of the House of Enlad.

The kings of that house had come from Enlad to Havnor eight hundred years

ago. Where Morred's High Seat is, they said, the kingdom is.

Lebannen had it cleaned, the decayed wood repaired and replaced, oiled and burnished back to dark satin, but left it unpainted, ungilt, bare. Some of the rich people who came to admire their expensive palace complained about the throne room and the throne. "It looks like a barn," they said, and, "Is it Morred's High Seat or an old farmer's chair?"

To which some said the king had replied, "What is a kingdom without the barns that feed it and the farmers to grow the grain?" Others said he had replied, "Is my kingdom gauds of gilt and velvet or does it stand by the strength of wood and stone?" Still others said he had said nothing except that he liked it the way it was. And it being his royal buttocks that sat on the uncushioned throne, his critics did not get the last word on the matter.

Into that stern and high-beamed hall, on a cool morning of late summer sea fog, filed the King's Council: ninety-one men and women, a hundred if all had been there. All had been chosen by the king, some to represent the great noble and princely houses of the Inner Isles, pledged vassals of the Crown; some to speak for the interests of other islands and parts of the Archipelago; some because the king had found them or hoped to find them useful and trustworthy counselors of state. There were merchants, shippers, and factors of Havnor and the other great port cities of the Sea of Éa and the Inmost Sea, splendid in their conscious gravity and their dark robes of heavy silk. There were masters from the workers' guilds, flexible and canny bargainers, notable among them a pale-eyed, hard-handed woman, the chief of the miners of Osskil. There were Roke wizards like Onyx, with grey cloaks and wooden staffs. There was also a Pelnish wizard, called Master Seppel, who carried no staff and of whom people mostly steered clear, though he seemed mild enough. There were noblewomen, young and old, from the kingdom's fiefs and principalities, some in silks of Lorbanery and pearls from the Isles of Sand, and two Islandwomen, stout, plain, and dignified, one from Iffish and one from Korp, to speak for the people of the East Reach. There were some poets, some learned people from the old colleges of Éa and the Enlades, and several captains of soldiery or of the king's ships.

All these councillors the king had chosen. At the end of two or three years he would ask them to serve again or send them home with thanks and in honor, and replace them. All laws and taxations, all judgments brought before the throne, he discussed with them, taking their counsel. They would then vote on his proposal, and only with the consent of the majority was it enacted. There were those who

said the council was nothing but the king's pets and puppets, and so indeed it might have been. He mostly got his way if he argued for it. Often he expressed no opinion and let the council make the decision. Many councillors had found that if they had enough facts to support their opposition and made a good argument, they might sway the others and even persuade the king. So debates within the various divisions and special bodies of the council were often hotly contested, and even in full session the king had several times been opposed, argued with, and voted down. He was a good diplomat, but an indifferent politician.

He found his council served him well, and people of power had come to respect it. Common folk did not pay much attention to it. They centered their hopes and attention on the king's person. There were a thousand lays and ballads about the son of Morred, the prince who rode the dragon back from death to the shores of day, the hero of Sorra, wielder of the Sword of Serriadh, the Rowan Tree, the Tall Ash of Enlad, the well-loved king who ruled in the Sign of Peace. But it was hard going to make songs about councillors debating shipping taxes.

Unsung, then, they filed in and took their seats on the cushioned benches facing the uncushioned throne. They stood again as the king came in. With him came the Woman of Gont, whom most of them had seen before so that her appearance caused no stir, and a slight man in rusty black. "Looks like a village sorcerer," a merchant from Kamery said to a shipwright from Way, who answered, "No doubt," in a resigned, forgiving tone. The king was loved also by many of the councillors, or at least liked; he had after all put power in their hands, and even if they felt no obligation to be grateful to him, they respected his judgment.

The elderly Lady of Ebéa hurried in late, and Prince Sege, who presided over protocol, told the council to be seated. They all sat down. "Hear the king," Sege said, and they listened.

He told them, and for many it was the first real news of these matters, about the dragons' attacks on West Havnor, and how he had set out with the Woman of Gont, Tehanu, to parley with them.

He kept them in suspense while he spoke of the earlier attacks by dragons on the islands of the west, and told them briefly Onyx's tale of the girl who turned into a dragon on Roke Knoll, and reminded them that Tehanu was claimed as daughter by Tenar of the Ring, by the onetime Archmage of Roke, and by the dragon Kalessin, on whose back the king himself had been borne from Selidor.

Then finally he told them what had happened at the pass in the Faliern Mountains at dawn three days ago.

He ended by saying, “That dragon carried Tehanu’s message to Orm Irian in Paln, who then must make the long flight here, three hundred miles or more. But dragons are swifter than any ship even with the magewind. We may look for Orm Irian at any time.”

Prince Sege asked the first question, knowing the king would welcome it: “What do you hope to gain, my lord, by parley with a dragon?”

The answer was prompt: “More than we can ever gain by trying to fight it. It is a hard thing to say, but it is the truth: against the anger of these great creatures, if indeed they were to come against us in any number, we have no true defense. Our wise men tell us there is maybe one place that could stand against them, Roke Island. And on Roke there is maybe one man who could face the wrath of even a single dragon and not be destroyed. Therefore we must try to find out the cause of their anger and, by removing it, make peace with them.”

“They are animals,” said the old Lord of Felkway. “Men cannot reason with animals, make peace with them.”

“Have we not the Sword of Erreth-Akbe, who slew the Great Dragon?” cried a young councillor.

He was answered at once by another: “And who slew Erreth-Akbe?”

Debate in the council tended to be tumultuous, though Prince Sege kept strict rule, not letting anyone interrupt another or speak for more than one turn of the two-minute sand-glass. Babblers and droners were cut off by a crash of the prince’s silver-tripped staff and his call to the next speaker. So they talked and shouted back and forth at a fast pace, and all the things that had to be said and many things that did not need to be said were said, and refuted, and said again. Mostly they argued that they should go to war, fight the dragons, defeat them.

“A band of archers on one of the king’s warships could bring them down like ducks,” cried a hot-blooded merchant from Wathort.

“Are we to grovel before mindless beasts? Are there no heroes left among us?” demanded the imperious Lady of O-tokne.

To that, Onyx made a sharp reply: “Mindless? They speak the Language of the Making, in the knowledge of which our art and power lies. They are beasts as we are beasts. Men are animals that speak.”

A ship’s captain, an old, far-traveled man, said, “Then isn’t it you wizards who should be talking with them? Since you know their speech, and maybe share their powers? The king spoke of a young untaught girl who turned into a dragon. But mages can take that form at will. Couldn’t the Masters of Roke speak with the

dragons or fight with them, if need be, evenly matched?"

The wizard from Paln stood up. He was a short man with a soft voice. "To take the form is to be the being, captain," he said politely. "A mage can look like a dragon. But true Change is a risky art. Especially now. A small change in the midst of great changes is like a breath against the wind . . . But we have here among us one who need use no art, and yet can speak for us to dragons better than any man could do. If she will speak for us."

At that, Tehanu stood up from her bench at the foot of the dais. "I will," she said. And sat down again.

That brought a pause to the discussion for a minute, but soon they were all at it again.

The king listened and did not speak. He wanted to know the temper of his people.

The sweet silver trumpets high on the Tower of the Sword played all their tune four times, telling the sixth hour, noon. The king stood, and Prince Sege declared a recess until the first hour of the afternoon.

A lunch of fresh cheese and summer fruits and greens was set out in a room in Queen Heru's Tower. There Lebannen invited Tehanu and Tenar, Alder, Sege, and Onyx; and Onyx, with the king's permission, brought with him the Pelnish wizard Seppel. They sat and ate together, talking little and quietly. The windows looked over all the harbor and the north shoreline of the bay fading off into a bluish haze that might be either the remnants of the morning fog or smoke from the forest fires in the west of the island.

Alder remained bewildered at being included among the king's intimates and brought into his councils. What had he to do with dragons? He could neither fight with them nor talk with them. The idea of such mighty beings was great and strange to him. At moments the boasts and challenges of the councillors seemed to him like a yapping of dogs. He had seen a young dog once on a beach barking and barking at the ocean, rushing and snapping at the ebb wave, running back from the breaker with its wet tail between its legs.

But he was glad to be with Tenar, who put him at ease, and whom he liked for her kindness and courage, and he found now that he was also at ease with Tehanu.

Her disfigurement made it seem that she had two faces. He could not see them both at one time, only the one or the other. But he had got used to that and it did not disquiet him. His mother's face had been half masked by its wine-red birthmark. Tehanu's face reminded him of that.

She seemed less restless and troubled than she had been. She sat quietly, and a couple of times she spoke to Alder, sitting next to her, with a shy comradeliness. He felt that, like him, she was there not by choice but because she had forgone choice, driven to follow a way she did not understand. Maybe her way and his went together, for a while at least. The idea gave him courage. Knowing only that there was something he had to do, something begun that must be finished, he felt that whatever it might be, it would be better done with her than without her. Perhaps she was drawn to him out of the same loneliness.

But her conversation was not of such deep matters. "My father gave you a kitten," she said to him as they left the table. "Was it one of Aunty Moss's?"

He nodded, and she asked, "The grey one?"

"Yes."

"That was the best cat of the litter."

"She's getting fat, here."

Tehanu hesitated and then said timidly, "I think it's a he."

Alder found himself smiling. "He's a good companion. A sailor named him Tug."

"Tug," she said, and looked satisfied.

"Tehanu," the king said. He had sat down beside Tenar in the deep window seat. "I didn't call on you in council today to speak of the questions Lord Sparrowhawk asked you. It was not the time. Is it the place?"

Alder watched her. She considered before answering. She glanced once at her mother, who made no answering sign.

"I'd rather speak to you here," she said in her hoarse voice. "And maybe to the Princess of Hur-at-Hur."

After a brief pause the king said pleasantly, "Shall I send for her?"

"No, I can go see her. Afterward. I haven't much to say, really. My father asked, *Who goes to the dry land when they die?* And my mother and I talked about it. And we thought, people go there, but do the beasts? Do birds fly there? Are there trees, does the grass grow? Alder, you've seen it."

Taken by surprise, he could say only, "There . . . there's grass, on the hither side of the wall, but it seems dead. Beyond that I don't know."

Tehanu looked at the king. "You walked across that land, my lord."

"I saw no beast, or bird, or growing thing."

Alder spoke again: "Lord Sparrowhawk said: dust, rock."

"I think no beings go there at death but human beings," Tehanu said. "But not

all of them." Again she looked at her mother, and did not look away.

Tenar spoke. "The Kargish people are like the animals." Her voice was dry and let no feeling be heard. "They die to be reborn."

"That is superstition," Onyx said. "Forgive me, Lady Tenar, but you yourself —" He paused.

"I no longer believe," Tenar said, "that I am or was, as they told me, Arha forever reborn, a single soul reincarnated endlessly and so immortal. I do believe that when I die I will, like any mortal being, rejoin the greater being of the world. Like the grass, the trees, the animals. Men are only animals that speak, sir, as you said this morning."

"But we can speak the Language of the Making," the wizard protested. "By learning the words by which Segoy made the world, the very speech of life, we teach our souls to conquer death."

"That place where nothing is but dust and shadows, is that your conquest?" Her voice was not dry now, and her eyes flashed.

Onyx stood indignant but wordless.

The king intervened. "Lord Sparrowhawk asked a second question," he said. *"Can a dragon cross the wall of stones?"* He looked at Tehanu.

"It's answered in the first answer," she said, "if dragons are only animals that speak, and animals don't go there. Has a mage ever seen a dragon there? Or you, my lord?" She looked first at Onyx, then at Lebannen. Onyx pondered only a moment before he said, "No."

The king looked amazed. "How is it I never thought of that?" he said. "No, we saw none. I think there are no dragons there."

"My lord," Alder said, louder than he had ever said anything in the palace, "there is a dragon here." He was standing facing the window, and he pointed at it.

They all turned. In the sky above the Bay of Havnor they saw a dragon flying from the west. Its long, slow-beating, vaned wings shone red-gold. A curl of smoke drifted behind it for a moment in the hazy summer air.

"Now," the king said, "what room do I make ready for this guest?"

He spoke as if amused, bemused. But the instant he saw the dragon turn and come wheeling in towards the Tower of the Sword, he ran from the room and down the stairs, startling and outstripping the guards in the halls and at the doors, so that he came out first and alone on the terrace under the white tower.

The terrace was the roof of a banquet hall, a wide expanse of marble with a low balustrade, the Sword Tower rising directly over it and the Queen's Tower nearby.

The dragon had alighted on the pavement and was furling its wings with a loud metallic rattle as the king came out. Where it came down its talons had scratched grooves in the marble.

The long, gold-mailed head swung round. The dragon looked at the king.

The king looked down and did not meet its eyes. But he stood straight and spoke clearly. "Orm Irian, welcome. I am Lebannen."

"Agni Lebannen," said the great hissing voice, greeting him as Orm Embar had greeted him long ago, in the farthest west, before he was a king.

Behind him, Onyx and Tehanu had run out onto the terrace along with several guards. One guard had his sword out, and Lebannen saw, in a window of the Queen's Tower, another with drawn bow and notched arrow aimed at the dragon's breast. "Put down your weapons!" he shouted in a voice that made the towers ring, and the guard obeyed in such haste that he nearly dropped his sword, but the archer lowered his bow reluctantly, finding it hard to leave his lord defenseless.

"Medeu," Tehanu whispered, coming up beside Lebannen, her gaze unwavering on the dragon. The great creature's head swung round again and the immense amber eye in a socket of shining, wrinkled scales gazed back, unblinking.

The dragon spoke.

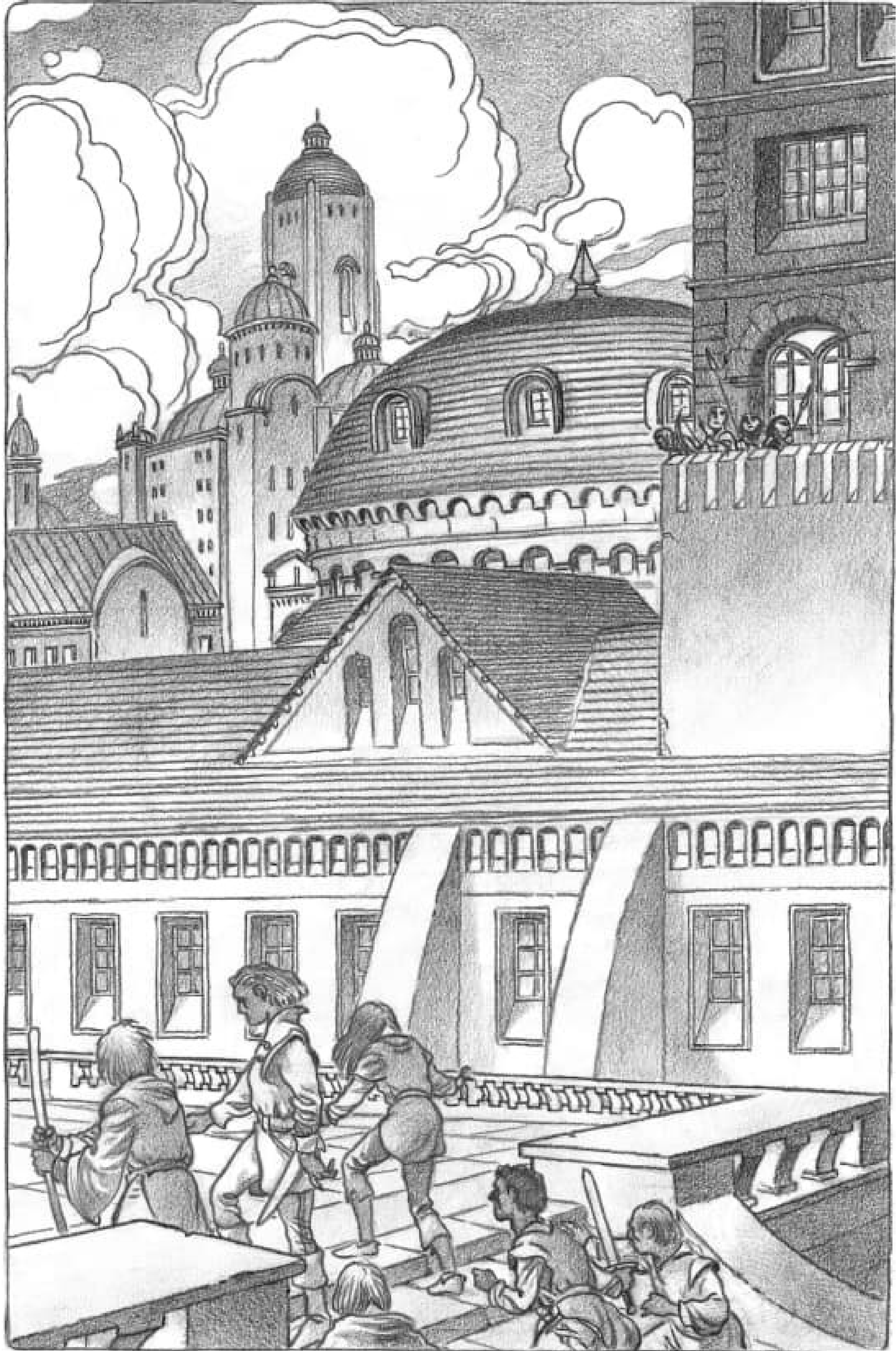
Onyx, understanding, murmured to the king what it said and what Tehanu replied. "Kalessin's daughter, my sister," it said. "You do not fly."

"I cannot change, sister," Tehanu said.

"Shall I?"

"For a while, if you will."

Then those on the terrace and in the windows of the towers saw the strangest thing they might ever see however long they lived in a world of sorceries and wonders. They saw the dragon, the huge creature whose scaled belly and thorny tail dragged and stretched half across the breadth of the terrace, and whose red-horned head reared up twice the height of the king—they saw it lower that big head, and tremble so that its wings rattled like cymbals, and not smoke but a mist breathed out of its deep nostrils, clouding its shape, so that it became cloudy like thin fog or worn glass; and then it was gone. The midday sun beat down on the scored, scarred, white pavement. There was no dragon. There was a woman. She stood some ten paces from Tehanu and the king. She stood where the heart of the dragon might have been.



She was young, tall, and strongly built, dark, dark-haired, wearing a farm woman's shift and trousers, barefoot. She stood motionless, as if bewildered. She looked down at her body. She lifted up her hand and looked at it. "The little thing!" she said, in the common speech, and she laughed. She looked at Tehanu. "It's like putting on the shoes I wore when I was five," she said.

The two women moved towards each other. With a certain stateliness, like that of armed warriors saluting or ships meeting at sea, they embraced. They held each other lightly, but for some moments. They drew apart, and both turned to face the king.

"Lady Irian," he said, and bowed.

She looked a little nonplussed and made a kind of country curtsey. When she looked up he saw her eyes were the color of amber. He looked instantly away.

"I'll do you no harm in this guise," she said, with a broad, white smile. "Your majesty," she added uncomfortably, trying to be polite.

He bowed again. It was he that was nonplussed now. He looked at Tehanu, and round at Tenar, who had come out onto the terrace with Alder. Nobody said anything.

Irian's eyes went to Onyx, standing in his grey cloak just behind the king, and her face lighted up again. "Sir," she said, "are you from Roke Island? Do you know the Lord Patterner?"

Onyx bowed or nodded. He too kept his eyes from hers.

"Is he well? Does he walk among his trees?"

Again the wizard bowed.

"And the Doorkeeper, and the Herbal, and Kurremkarmerruk? They befriended me, they stood by me. If you go back there, greet them with my love and honor, if you please."

"I will," the wizard said.

"My mother is here," Tehanu said softly to Irian. "Tenar of Atuan."

"Tenar of Gont," Lebannen said, with a certain ring to his voice.

Looking with open wonder at Tenar, Irian said, "It was you that brought the Rune Ring from the land of the Hoary Men, along with the Archmage?"

"It was," Tenar said, staring with equal frankness at Irian.

Above them on the balcony that encircled the Tower of the Sword near its summit there was movement: the trumpeters had come out to sound the hour, but at the moment all four of them were gathered on the south side overlooking the terrace, peering down to see the dragon. There were faces in every window of the

palace towers, and the thrum of voices down in the streets could be heard like a tide coming in.

"When they sound the first hour," Lebannen said, "the council will gather again. The councillors will have seen you come, my lady, or heard of your coming. So if it please you, I think it best that we go straight among them and let them behold you. And if you'll speak to them I promise you they'll listen."

"Very well," Irian said. For a moment there was a ponderous, reptilian impassivity in her. When she moved, that vanished, and she seemed only a tall young woman who stepped forward quite awkwardly, saying with a smile to Tehanu, "I feel as if I'll float up like a spark, there's no weight to me!"

The four trumpets up in the tower sounded to west, north, east, south in turn, one phrase of the lament a king five hundred years ago had made for the death of his friend.

For a moment the king now remembered the face of that man, Erreth-Akbe, as he stood on the beach of Selidor, dark-eyed, sorrowful, mortally wounded, among the bones of the dragon who had killed him. Lebannen felt it strange that he should think of such faraway things at such a moment; and yet it was not strange, for the living and the dead, men and dragons, all were drawing together to some event he could not see.

He paused until Irian and Tehanu came up to him. As he walked on into the palace with them he said, "Lady Irian, there are many things I would ask you, but what my people fear and what the council will desire to know is whether your people intend to make war on us, and why."

She nodded, a heavy, decisive nod. "I will tell them what I know."

When they came to the curtained doorway behind the dais, the throne room was all in confusion, an uproar of voices, so that the crash of Prince Sege's staff was barely heard at first. Then silence came suddenly on them and they all turned to see the king come in with the dragon.

Lebannen did not sit but stood before the throne, and Irian stood to his left.

"Hear the king," Sege said into that dead silence.

The king said, "Councillors! This is a day that will long be told and sung. Your sons' daughters and your daughters' sons will say, 'I am the grandchild of one who was of the Dragon Council!' So honor her whose presence honors us. Hear Orm Irian."

Some of those who were at the Dragon Council said afterwards that if they looked straight at her she seemed only a tall woman standing there, but if they

looked aside what they saw in the corner of their eye was a vast shimmer of smoky gold that dwarfed king and throne. And many of them, knowing a man must not look into a dragon's eye, did look aside; but they stole glimpses too. The women looked at her, some thinking her plain, some beautiful, some pitying her for having to go barefoot in the palace. And a few councillors, not having rightly understood, wondered who the woman was, and when the dragon would be coming.

All the time she spoke, that complete silence endured. Though her voice had the lightness of most women's voices, it filled the high hall easily. She spoke slowly and formally, as if she were translating in her mind from the older speech.

"My name was Irian, of the Domain of Old Iria on Way. I am Orm Irian now. Kalessin, the Eldest, calls me daughter. I am sister to Orm Embar, whom the king knew, and grandchild of Orm, who killed the king's companion Erreth-Akbe and was killed by him. I am here because my sister Tehanu called to me.

"When Orm Embar died on Selidor, destroying the mortal body of the wizard Cob, Kalessin came from beyond the west and brought the king and the great mage to Roke. Then returning to the Dragons' Run, the Eldest called the people of the west, whose speech had been taken from them by Cob, and who were still bewildered. Kalessin said to them, 'You let evil turn you into evil. You have been mad. You are sane again, but so long as the winds blow from the east you can never be what you were, free of both good and evil.'

"Kalessin said: 'Long ago we chose. We chose freedom. Men chose the yoke. We chose fire and the wind. They chose water and the earth. We chose the west, and they the east.'

"And Kalessin said: 'But always among us some envy them their wealth, and always among them some envy us our liberty. So it was that evil came into us and will come into us again, until we choose again, and forever, to be free. Soon I am going beyond the west to fly on the other wind. I will lead you there, or wait for you, if you will come.'

"Then some of the dragons said to Kalessin, 'Men in their envy of us long ago stole half our realm beyond the west from us and made walls of spells to keep us out of it. So now let us drive them into the farthest east, and take back the islands! Men and dragons cannot share the wind.'

"Then Kalessin said, 'Once we were one people. And in sign of that, in every generation of men, one or two are born who are dragons also. And in every generation of our people, longer than the quick lives of men, one of us is born who is also human. Of these one is now living in the Inner Isles. And there is one of

them living there now who is a dragon. These two are the messengers, the bringers of choice. There will be no more such born to us or to them. For the balance changes.'

"And Kalessin said to them: 'Choose. Come with me to fly on the far side of the world, on the other wind. Or stay and put on the yoke of good and evil. Or dwindle into dumb beasts.' And at the last Kalessin said: 'The last to make the choice will be Tehanu. After her there will be no choosing. There will be no way west. Only the forest will be, as it is always, at the center.'"

The people of the King's Council were still as stones, listening. Irian stood moveless, gazing as if through them, as she spoke.

"After some years had passed, Kalessin flew beyond the west. Some followed, some did not. When I came to join my people, I followed Kalessin. But I go there and come back, so long as the winds will bear me.

"The disposition of my people is jealous and irate. Those who stayed here on the winds of the world began to fly in bands or singly to the isles of men, saying again, 'They stole half our realm. Now we will take all the west of their realm, and drive them out of it, so they cannot bring their good and evil to us any more. We will not put our necks into their yoke.'

"But they did not try to kill the islanders, because they remembered being mad, when dragon killed dragon. They hate you, but they will not kill you unless you try to kill them.

"So one of these bands has come now to this island, Havnor, that we call the Cold Hill. The dragon who came before them and spoke to Tehanu is my brother Ammaud. They seek to drive you into the east, but Ammaud, like me, enacts the will of Kalessin, seeking to free my people from the yoke you wear. If he and I and the children of Kalessin can prevent harm to your people and ours, we will do so. But dragons have no king, and obey no one, and will fly where they will. For a while they will do as my brother and I ask in Kalessin's name. But not for long. And they fear nothing in the world, except your wizardries of death."

That last word rang heavily in the great hall in the silence that followed Irian's voice.

The king spoke, thanking Irian. He said, "You honor us with your truth-speaking. By my name, we will speak truth to you. I beg you to tell me, daughter of Kalessin who bore me to my kingdom, what it is you say the dragons fear? I thought they feared nothing in the world or out of it."

"We fear your spells of immortality," she said bluntly.

“Of immortality?” Lebannen hesitated. “I am no wizard. Master Onyx, speak for me, if the daughter of Kalessin will permit.”

Onyx stood up. Irian looked at him with cold, impartial eyes, and nodded.

“Lady Irian,” the wizard said, “we make no spells of immortality. Only the wizard Cob sought to make himself immortal, perverting our art to do so.” He spoke slowly and with evident care, searching his mind as he spoke. “Our Archmage, with my lord the king, and with the aid of Orm Embar, destroyed Cob and the evil he had done. And the Archmage gave all his power up to heal the world, restoring the Equilibrium. No other wizard in our lifetime has sought to—” He stopped short.

Irian looked straight at him. He looked down.

“The wizard I destroyed,” she said, “the Summoner of Roke, Thorion—what was it he sought?”

Onyx, stricken, said nothing.

“He came back from death,” she said. “But not living, as the Archmage and the king did. He was dead, but he came back across the wall by his arts—by your arts—you men of Roke! How are we to trust anything you say? You have unmade the balance of the world. Can you restore it?”

Onyx looked at the king. He was openly distressed. “My lord, I cannot think that this is the place to discuss such matters—before all men—until we know what we are talking about, and what we must do . . .”

“Roke keeps its secrets,” Irian said with calm scorn.

“But on Roke—” Tehanu said, not standing; her weak voice died away. Prince Sege and the king both looked at her and motioned her to speak.

She stood up. At first she kept the left side of her face to the councillors, all sitting motionless on their benches, like stones with eyes.

“On Roke is the Immanent Grove,” she said. “Isn’t that what Kalessin meant, sister, speaking of the forest that is at the center?” Turning to Irian, she showed the people watching her the whole ruin of her face; but she had forgotten them. “Maybe we need to go there,” she said. “To the center of things.”

Irian smiled. “I’ll go there,” she said.

They both looked at the king.

“Before I send you to Roke, or go with you,” he said slowly, “I must know what is at stake. Master Onyx, I’m sorry that matters so grave and chancy force us to debate our course so openly. But I trust my councillors to support me as I find and hold the course. What the council needs to know is that our islands need not fear

attack from the People of the West—that the truce, at least, holds."

"It holds," Irian said.

"Can you say how long?"

"A half year?" she offered, carelessly, as if she had said, "A day or two."

"We will hold the truce a half year, in hope of peace to follow. Am I right to say, Lady Irian, that to have peace with us, your people want to know that our wizards' meddling with the . . . laws of life and death will not endanger them?"

"Endanger all of us," Irian said. "Yes."

Lebannen considered this and then said, in his most royal, affable, urbane manner, "Then I believe I should come to Roke with you." He turned to the benches. "Councillors, with the truce declared, we must seek the peace. I'll go wherever I must on that quest, ruling as I do in the Sign of Elfarran's Ring. If you see any hindrance to this journey, speak here and now. For it may be that the balance of power within the Archipelago, as well as the Equilibrium of the whole, is in question. And if I go, I must go now. Autumn is near, and it's not a short voyage to Roke Island."

The stones with eyes sat there for a long minute, all staring, none speaking. Then Prince Sege said, "Go, my lord king, go with our hope and trust, and the magewind in your sails." There was a little murmur of assent from the councillors: Yes, yes, hear him.

Sege asked for further questions or debate; nobody spoke. He closed the session.

Leaving the throne room with him, Lebannen said, "Thank you, Sege," and the old prince said, "Between you and the dragon, Lebannen, what could the poor souls say?"

Chapter 4

Dolphin

Many matters had to be settled and arrangements made before the king could leave his capital; there was also the question of who should go with him to Roke. Irian and Tehanu, of course, and Tehanu wanted her mother with her. Onyx said that Alder should by all means go with them, and also the Pelnish wizard Seppel, for the Lore of Paln had much to do with these matters of crossing between life and death. The king chose Tosla to captain the *Dolphin*, as he had done before. Prince Sege would look after affairs of state in the king's absence, with a selected group of councillors, as he also had done before.

So it was all settled, or so Lebannen thought, until Tenar came to him two days before they were to sail and said, "You'll be talking of war and peace with the dragons, and of matters even beyond that, Irian says, matters that concern the balance of all things in Earthsea. The people of the Kargad Lands should hear these discussions and have a voice in them."

"You will be their representative."

"Not I. I am not a subject of the High King. The only person here who can represent his people is his daughter."

Lebannen took a step away from her, turned partly from her, and at last said in a voice stifled by the effort to speak without anger, "You know that she is completely unfitted for such a journey."

"I know nothing of the kind."

"She has no education."

"She's intelligent, practical, and courageous. She's aware of what her station requires of her. She hasn't been trained to rule, but then what can she learn boxed up there in the River House with her servants and some court ladies?"

"To speak the language, in the first place!"

"She's doing that. I'll interpret for her when she needs it."

After a brief pause Lebannen spoke carefully: "I understand your concern for her people. I will consider what can be done. But the princess has no place on this voyage."

"Tehanu and Irian both say she should come with us. Master Onyx says that, like Alder of Taon, her being sent here at this time cannot be an accident."

Lebannen walked farther away. His tone remained stiffly patient and polite: "I cannot permit it. Her ignorance and inexperience would make her a serious burden. And I can't put her at risk. Relationships with her father—"

"In her ignorance, as you call it, she showed us how to answer Ged's questions. You are as disrespectful of her as her father is. You speak of her as of a mindless thing." Tenar's face was pale with anger. "If you're afraid to put her at risk, ask her to take it herself."

Again there was a silence. Lebannen spoke with the same wooden calmness, not looking directly at her. "If you and Tehanu and Orm Irian believe this woman should come with us to Roke, and Onyx agrees with you, I accept your judgment, though I believe it is mistaken. Please tell her that if she wishes to come, she may do so."

"It is you who should tell her that."

He stood silent. Then he walked out of the room without a word.

He passed close by Tenar, and though he did not look at her he saw her clearly. She looked old and strained, and her hands trembled. He was sorry for her, ashamed of his rudeness to her, relieved that no one else had witnessed the scene; but these feelings were mere sparks in the huge darkness of his anger at her, at the princess, at everyone and everything that laid this false obligation, this grotesque duty on him. As he went out of the room he tugged open the collar of his shirt as if it were choking him.

His majordomo, a slow and steady man called Thoroughgood, was not expecting him to return so soon or through that door and jumped up, staring and startled. Lebannen returned his stare icily and said, "Send for the High Princess to attend me here in the afternoon."

"The High Princess?"

"Is there more than one of them? Are you unaware that the High King's daughter is our guest?"

Amazed, Thoroughgood stammered an apology, which Lebannen interrupted: "I shall go to the River House myself." And he strode on out, pursued, impeded, and gradually controlled by the majordomo's attempts to slow him down long

enough for a suitable retinue to be gathered, horses to be brought from the stables, the petitioners waiting for audience in the Long Room to be put off till afternoon, and so on. All his obligations, all his duties, all the trappery and trammel, rites and hypocrisies that made him king pulled at him, sucking and tugging him down like quicksand into suffocation.

When his horse was brought across the stable yard to him, he swung up into the saddle so abruptly that the horse caught his mood and backed and reared, driving back the hostlers and attendants. To see the circle widen out around him gave Lebannen a harsh satisfaction. He set the horse straight for the gateway without waiting for the men in his retinue to mount. He led them at a sharp trot through the streets of the city, far ahead of them, aware of the dilemma of the young officer who was supposed to precede him calling, "Way for the king!" but who had been left behind him and now did not dare ride past him.

It was near noon; the streets and squares of Havnor were hot and bright and mostly deserted. Hearing the clatter of hooves, people hurried to the doorways of little dark shops to stare and recognise and salute the king. Women sitting in their windows fanning themselves and gossiping across the way looked down and waved, and one of them threw a flower down at him. His horse's hooves rang on the bricks of a broad, sunbaked square that lay empty except for a curly tailed dog trotting away on three legs, unconcerned with royalty. Out of the square the king took a narrow passage that led to the paved way beside the Serrenen, and followed it in the shadow of the willows under the old city wall to River House.

The ride had changed his temper somewhat. The heat and silence and beauty of the city, the sense of multitudinous life behind walls and shutters, the smile of the woman who had tossed a flower, the petty satisfaction of keeping ahead of all his guardians and pomp makers, then finally the scent and coolness of the river ride and the shady courtyard of the house where he had known days and nights of peace and pleasure, all took him a little distance from his anger. He felt estranged from himself, no longer possessed but emptied.

The first riders of his retinue were just coming into the courtyard as he swung off his horse, which was glad to stand in the shade. He went into the house, dropping among dozing footmen like a stone into a glassy pond, causing quick-widening circles of dismay and panic. He said, "Tell the princess that I am here."

Lady Opal of the Old Demesne of Ilien, currently in charge of the princess's ladies-in-waiting, appeared promptly, greeted him graciously, offered him refreshment, behaved quite as if his visit were no surprise at all. This suavity half

placated, half irritated him. Endless hypocrisy! But what was Lady Opal to do—gawp like a stranded fish (as a very young lady-in-waiting was doing) because the king had finally and unexpectedly come to see the princess?

"I'm so sorry Mistress Tenar isn't here at present," she said. "It's so much easier to converse with the princess with her help. But the princess is making admirable progress in the language."

Lebannen had forgotten the problem of language. He accepted the cool drink offered him and said nothing. Lady Opal made small talk with the assistance of the other ladies, getting very little from the king. He had begun to realise that he would probably be expected to speak with the princess in the company of all her ladies, as was only proper. Whatever he had intended to say to her, it had become impossible to say anything. He was just about to get up and excuse himself, when a woman whose head and shoulders were hidden by a red circular veil appeared in the doorway, fell plop on her knees, and said, "Please? King? Princess? Please?"

"The princess will receive you in her chambers, sire," Lady Opal interpreted. She waved to a footman, who escorted him upstairs, along a hall, through an anteroom, through a large, dark room that seemed to be crammed absolutely full of women in red veils, and out onto a balcony over the river. There stood the figure he remembered: the immobile cylinder of red and gold.

The breeze from the water made the veils tremble and shimmer, so that the figure did not appear solid but delicate, moving, shivering, like the willow foliage. It seemed to shrink, to shorten. She was making her courtesy to him. He bowed to her. They both straightened up and stood in silence.

"Princess," Lebannen said, with a feeling of unreality, hearing his own voice, "I am here to ask you to come with us to Roke Island."

She said nothing. He saw the fine red veils part in an oval as she spread them with her hands. Long-fingered, golden-skinned hands, held apart to reveal her face in the red shadow. He could not see her features clearly. She was nearly as tall as he, and her eyes looked straight at him.

"My friend Tenar," she said, "say: king to see king, face and face. I say: yes. I will."

Half understanding, Lebannen bowed again. "You honor me, my lady."

"Yes," she said. "I honor you."

He hesitated. This was a different ground entirely. Her ground.

She stood there straight and still, the gold edging of her veils shivering, her eyes looking at him out of the shadow.

"Tenar, and Tehanu, and Orm Irian, agree that it would be well if the Princess of the Kargad Lands were with us on Roke Island. So I ask you to come with us."

"To come."

"To Roke Island."

"On ship," she said, and suddenly made a little moaning plaintive noise. Then she said, "I will. I will to come."

He did not know what to say. He said, "Thank you, my lady."

She nodded once, equal to equal.

He bowed. He left her as he had been taught to leave the presence of his father the prince at formal occasions in the court of Enlad, not turning his back but stepping backwards.

She stood facing him, still holding her veil parted till he reached the doorway. Then she dropped her hands, and the veils closed, and he heard her gasp and breathe out hard as if in release from an act of will sustained almost past endurance.

Courageous, Tenar had called her. He did not understand, but he knew that he had been in the presence of courage. All the anger that had filled him, brought him here, was gone, vanished. He had not been sucked down and suffocated, but brought up short in front of a rock, a high place in clear air, a truth.

He went out through the room full of murmuring, perfumed, veiled women who shrank back from him into the darkness. Downstairs, he chatted a little with Lady Opal and the others, and had a kind word for the gawping twelve-year-old lady-in-waiting. He spoke pleasantly to the men of his retinue waiting for him in the courtyard. He quietly mounted his tall grey horse. He rode quietly, thoughtfully, back to the Palace of Maharion.

Alder heard with fatalistic acceptance that he was to sail back to Roke. His waking life had become so strange to him, more dreamlike than his dreams, that he had little will to question or protest. If he was fated to sail from island to island the rest of his life, so be it; he knew there was no such thing as going home for him now. At least he would be in the company of the ladies Tenar and Tehanu, who put his heart at ease. And the wizard Onyx had also shown him kindness.

Alder was a shy man and Onyx a deeply reserved one, and there was all the difference of their knowledge and status to be bridged; but Onyx had come to him several times simply to talk as one man of the art to another, showing a respect for

Alder's opinion that puzzled his modesty. But Alder could not withhold his trust; and so when the time to depart was near at hand, he took to Onyx the question that had been worrying him.

"It's the little cat," he said with embarrassment. "I don't feel right about taking him. Keeping him cooped up so long. It's unnatural for a young creature. And I think, what would become of him . . ."

Onyx did not ask what he meant. He asked only, "He still helps you keep from the wall of stones?"

"Well, often he does."

Onyx pondered. "You need some protection, till we get to Roke. I have thought . . . Have you spoken with the wizard Seppel here?"

"The man from Paln," Alder said, with a slight unease in his voice.

Paln, the greatest island west of Havnor, had the reputation of being an uncanny place. The Pelnish spoke Hardic with a peculiar accent, using many words of their own. Their lords had in ancient times refused fealty to the kings of Enlad and Havnor. Their wizards did not go to Roke for their training. The Pelnish Lore, which called upon the Old Powers of the Earth, was widely believed to be dangerous if not sinister. Long ago the Grey Mage of Paln had brought ruin on his island by summoning the souls of the dead to advise him and his lords, and that tale was part of the education of every sorcerer: "The living should not take counsel of the dead." There had been more than one duel in wizardry between a man of Roke and a man of Paln; in one such combat two centuries ago a plague had been loosed on the people of Paln and Semel that had left half the towns and farmlands desolate. And fifteen years ago, when the wizard Cob had used the Pelnish Lore to cross between life and death, the Archmage Sparrowhawk had spent all his own power to defeat him and heal the evil he had done.

Alder, like almost everyone else at court and in the King's Council, had politely avoided the wizard Seppel.

"I've asked the king to bring him with us to Roke," said Onyx.

Alder blinked.

"They know more than we do about these matters," Onyx said. "Most of our art of Summoning comes from the Pelnish Lore. Thorion was a master of it . . . The Summoner of Roke now, Brand of Venway, won't use any part of his craft that draws from that lore. Misused, it has brought only harm. But it may be only our ignorance that's led us to use it wrongly. It goes back to very ancient times; there may be knowledge in it we've lost. Seppel is a wise man and mage. I think he

should be with us. And I think he might help you, if you can trust him."

"If he has your trust," Alder said, "he has mine."

When Alder spoke with the silver tongue of Taon, Onyx was likely to smile a little drily. "Your judgment's as good as mine, Alder, in this business," he said. "Or better. I hope you use it. But I'll take you to him."

So they went down into the city together. Seppel's lodging was in an old part of town near the shipyards, just off Boatwright Street; there was a little colony of Pelnish folk there, brought in to work in the king's yards, for they were great shipbuilders. The houses were ancient, crowded close, with the bridges between roof and roof that gave Havnor Great Port a second, airy web of streets high above its paved ones.

Seppel's rooms, up three flights of stairs, were dark and close in the heat of this late summer. He took them up one more steep flight onto the roof. It was joined to other roofs by a bridge on each side, so that there was a regular crossroads and thoroughfare across it. Awnings were set up by the low parapets, and the breeze from the harbor cooled the shaded air. There they sat on striped canvas mats in the corner that was Seppel's bit of the roof, and he gave them a cool, slightly bitter tea to drink.

He was a short man of about fifty, round-bodied, with small hands and feet, hair that was a little curly and unruly, and what was rare among men of the Archipelago, a beard, clipped short, on his dark cheeks and jaw. His manners were pleasant. He spoke in a clipped, singing accent, softly.

He and Onyx talked, and Alder listened for a good while to them. His mind drifted when they spoke about people and matters of which he knew nothing. He looked out over the roofs and awnings, the roof gardens and the arched and carven bridges, northward to Mount Onn, a great pale-grey dome above the hazy hills of summer. He came back to himself hearing the Pelnish wizard say, "It may be that even the Archmage could not wholly heal the wound in the world."

The wound in the world, Alder thought: yes. He looked more intently at Seppel, and Seppel glanced at him. For all the soft look of the man his eyes were sharp.

"Maybe it's not only our desire to live forever that has kept the wound open," Seppel said, "but the desire of the dead to die."

Again Alder heard the strange words and felt that he recognised them without understanding them. Again Seppel glanced at him as if seeking a response.

Alder said nothing, nor did Onyx speak. Seppel said at last, "When you stand at the bourne, Master Alder, what is it they ask of you?"

“To be free,” Alder replied, his voice only a whisper.

“Free,” Onyx murmured.

Silence again. Two girls and a boy ran past across the roofway, laughing and calling, “Down at the next!”—playing one of the endless games of chase children made with their city’s maze of streets and canals and stairs and bridges.

“Maybe it was a bad bargain from the beginning,” Seppel said, and when Onyx looked a question at him he said, *“Verw nadan.”*

Alder knew the words were in the Old Speech, but he did not know their meaning.

He looked at Onyx, whose face was very grave. Onyx said only, “Well, I hope we can come to the truth of these things, and soon.”

“On the hill where truth is,” Seppel said.

“I’m glad you’ll be with us there. Meanwhile, here is Alder summoned to the bourne night after night and seeking some reprieve. I said that you might know a way to help him.”

“And you would accept the touch of the wizardry of Paln?” Seppel asked Alder. His tone was softly ironic. His eyes were bright and hard as jet.

Alder’s lips were dry. “Master,” he said, “we say on my island, the man drowning doesn’t ask what the rope cost. If you can keep me from that place even for a night, you’ll have my heart’s thanks, little as that is worth in return for such a gift.”

Onyx looked at him with a slight, amused, unreproving smile.

Seppel did not smile at all. “Thanks are rare, in my trade,” he said. “I would do a good deal for them. I think I can help you, Master Alder. But I have to tell you the rope is a costly one.”

Alder bowed his head.

“You come to the bourne in dream, not by your own will, that is so?”

“So I believe.”

“Wisely said.” Seppel’s keen glance approved him. “Who knows his own will clearly? But if it is in dream you go there, I can keep you from that dream—for a while. And at a cost, as I said.”

Alder looked his question.

“Your power.”

Alder did not understand him at first. Then he said, “My gift, you mean? My art?”

Seppel nodded.

"I'm only a mender," Alder said after a little time. "It's not a great power to give up."

Onyx made as if to protest, but looked at Alder's face and said nothing.

"It is your living," Seppel said.

"It was my life, once. But that's gone."

"Maybe your gift will come back to you, when what must happen has happened. I cannot promise that. I will try to restore what I can of what I take from you. But we're all walking in the night, now, on ground we don't know. When the day comes we may know where we are, or we may not. Now, if I spare you your dream, at that price, will you thank me?"

"I will," Alder said. "What's the little good of my gift, against the great evil my ignorance could do? If you spare me the fear I live in now, the fear that I may do that evil, I'll thank you till the end of my life."

Seppel drew a deep breath. "I've always heard that the harps of Taon play true," he said. He looked at Onyx. "And Roke has no objection?" he asked, with a return to his mild ironic tone.

Onyx shook his head, but he now looked very grave.

"Then we will go to the cave at Aurun. Tonight if you like."

"Why there?" Onyx asked.

"Because it's not I but the Earth that will help Alder. Aurun is a sacred place, full of power. Although the people of Havnor have forgotten that, and use it only to defile it."

Onyx managed to have a private word with Alder before they followed Seppel downstairs. "You need not go through with this, Alder," he said. "I thought I trusted Seppel, but I don't know, now."

"I'll trust him," Alder said. He understood Onyx's doubts, but he had meant what he said, that he would do anything to be free of the fear of doing some dreadful wrong. Each time he had been drawn back in dream to that wall of stones, he felt that something was trying to come into the world through him, that it would do so if he listened to the dead calling to him, and each time he heard them, he was weaker and it was harder to resist their call.

The three men went a long way through the city streets in the heat of the late afternoon. They came out into the countryside south of the city, where rough ridgy hills ran down to the bay, a poor bit of country for this rich island: swampy lowland between the ridges, a little arable land on their rocky backs. The wall of the city here was very old, built of great unmortared rocks taken from the hills, and beyond

it were no suburbs and few farms.

They walked along a rough road that zigzagged up the first ridge and followed its crest eastward towards the higher hills. Up there, where they could see all the city lying in a golden haze northward, to their left, the road widened out into a maze of footpaths. Going straight forward they came suddenly to a great crack in the ground, a black gap twenty feet wide or more, right across their way.

It was as if the spine of rock had been cracked apart by a wrenching of the earth and had never healed again. The western sunlight streaming over the lips of the cave lighted the vertical rock faces a little way down, but below that was darkness.

There was a tannery in the valley under the ridge, south of it. The tanners had brought their wastes up here and dumped them into the crack, carelessly, so that all around it was a litter of rancid scraps of half-cured leather and a stink of rot and urine. There was another smell from the depths of the cave as they approached the sheer edge: a cold, sharp, earthy air that made Alder draw back.

"I grieve for this, I grieve for this!" the wizard of Paln said aloud, looking around at the rubbish and down at the roofs of the tannery with a strange expression. But he spoke to Alder after a while in his usual mild way: "This is the cave or cleft called Aurun, that we know from our most ancient maps in Paln, where it is also called the Lips of Paor. It used to speak to the people here, when they first came here from the west. A long time ago. Men have changed. But it is what it was then. Here you can lay down your burden, if that is what you want."

"What must I do?" Alder said.

Seppel led him to the south end of the great split in the ground, where it narrowed back together in fissured ridges of rock. He told him to lie facedown where he could gaze into the depth of darkness stretching down and down away from him. "Hold to the earth," he said. "That is all you must do. Even if it moves, hold to it."

Alder lay there staring down between the walls of stone. He felt rocks jabbing his chest and hip as he lay on them; he heard Seppel begin to chant in a high voice in words he knew were the Language of the Making; he felt the warmth of the sun across his shoulders, and smelled the carrion stink of the tannery. Then the breath of the cave blew up out of the depths with a hollow sharpness that took his own breath away and made his head spin. The darkness moved up towards him. The ground moved under him, rocked and shook, and he held on to it, hearing the high voice sing, breathing the breath of the earth. The darkness rose up and took him. He lost the sun.

When he came back, the sun was low in the west, a red ball in the haze over the western shores of the bay. He saw that. He saw Seppel sitting nearby on the ground, looking tired and forlorn, his black shadow long on the rocky ground among the long shadows of the rocks.

"There you are," Onyx said.

Alder realised that he was lying on his back, his head on Onyx's knees, a rock digging into his backbone. He sat up, dizzy, apologising.

They set off as soon as he could walk, for they had some miles to go and it was clear that neither he nor Seppel would be able to keep a fast pace. Full night had fallen when they came by Boatwright Street. Seppel bade them farewell, looking searchingly at Alder as they stood in the light from a tavern door nearby. "I did as you asked me," he said, with that same unhappy look.

"I thank you for it," Alder said, and put out his right hand to the wizard in the manner of the people of the Enlades. After a moment Seppel touched it with his hand; and so they parted.

Alder was so tired he could barely make his legs move. The sharp, strange taste of the air from the cave was still in his mouth and throat, making him feel light, light-headed, hollow. When at last they came to the palace, Onyx wanted to see him to his room, but Alder said he was well and only needed to rest.

He came into his room and Tug came dancing and tail-waving to greet him. "Ah, I don't need you now," Alder said, bending down to stroke the sleek grey back. Tears came into his eyes. It was only that he was very tired. He lay down on the bed, and the cat jumped up and curled up purring on his shoulder.

And he slept: black, blank sleep with no dream he could remember, no voice calling his name, no hill of dry grass, no dim wall of stones, nothing.

Walking in the gardens of the palace in the evening before they were to sail south, Tenar was heavyhearted and anxious. She did not want to be setting off to Roke, the Isle of the Wise, the Isle of the Wizards. (*Accursed-sorcerers*, a voice in her mind said in Kargish.) What had she to do there? What possible use could she be? She wanted to go home to Gont, to Ged. To her own house, her own work, her own dear man.

She had estranged Lebannen. She had lost him. He was polite, affable, and unforgiving.

How men feared women! she thought, walking among the late-flowering roses. Not as individuals, but women when they talked together, worked together, spoke

up for one another—then men saw plots, cabals, constraints, traps being laid.

Of course they were right. Women were likely, as women, to take the next generation's part, not this one's; they wove the links men saw as chains, the bonds men saw as bondage. She and Seserakh were indeed in league against him and ready to betray him, if he truly was nothing unless he was independent. If he was only air and fire, no weight of earth to him, no patient water . . .

But that was not Lebannen so much as Tehanu. Unearthly, her Therru, the winged soul that had come to stay with her a while and was soon, she knew, to leave her. From fire to fire.

And Irian, with whom Tehanu would go. What had that bright, fierce creature to do with an old house that needed sweeping, an old man who needed looking after? How could Irian understand such things? What was it to her, a dragon, that a man should undertake his duty, marry, have children, wear the yoke of earth?

Seeing herself alone and useless among beings of high, inhuman destiny, Tenar gave in altogether to homesickness. Homesickness not for Gont only. Why should she not be in league with Seserakh, who might be a princess as she herself had been a priestess, but who was not going to go flying off on fiery wings, being deeply and entirely a woman of the earth? And she spoke Tenar's own language! Tenar had dutifully tutored her in Hardic, had been delighted with her quickness to learn, and realised only now that the true delight had been just to speak Kargish with her, hearing and saying words that held in them all her lost childhood.

As she came to the walk that led to the fish ponds beneath the willows, she saw Alder. With him was a small boy. They were talking quietly, soberly. She was always glad to see Alder. She pitied him for the pain and fear he was in and honored his patience in bearing it. She liked his honest, handsome face, and his silver tongue. What was the harm in adding a grace note or two to ordinary speech? Ged had trusted him.

Pausing at a distance so as not to disturb the conversation, she saw him and the child kneel down on the path, looking into the bushes. Presently Alder's little grey cat emerged from under a bush. It paid no attention to them, but set off across the grass, paw by paw, belly low and eyes alight, hunting a moth.

"You can let him stay out all night, if you like," Alder said to the child. "He can't stray or come to harm here. He has a great taste for the open air. But this is like all Havnor to him, you see, these great gardens. Or you can give him his freedom in the mornings. And then, if you like, he can sleep with you."

"I would like that," the boy said, shyly decisive.

"Then he needs his box of sand in your room, you know. And a bowl of drinking water, never to go dry."

"And food."

"Yes, indeed; once a day. Not too much of it. He's a bit greedy. Inclined to think Segoy made the islands so that Tug could fill his belly."

"Does he catch fish in the pond?" The cat was now near one of the carp pools, sitting on the grass looking about; the moth had flown.

"He likes to watch them."

"I do too," the boy said. They got up and walked together towards the pools.

Tenar was moved to tenderness. There was an innocence to Alder, but it was a man's innocence, not childish. He should have had children of his own. He would have been a good father to them.

She thought of her own children, and of the little grandchildren—though Apple's eldest, Pippin, was it possible? Was Pippin about to be twelve? She would be named this year or next! Oh, it was time to go home. It was time to visit Middle Valley, take a nameday present to her grand-daughter and toys to the babies, make sure Spark in his restlessness wasn't overpruning the pear trees again, sit a while and talk with her kind daughter Apple . . . Apple's true name was Hayohe, the name Ogion had given her . . . The thought of Ogion came as always with a pang of love and longing. She saw the hearthplace of the house at Re Albi. She saw Ged sitting there at the hearth. She saw him turn his dark face to ask her a question. She answered it, aloud, in the gardens of the New Palace of Havnor hundreds of miles from that hearth: "As soon as I can!"

In the morning, the bright summer morning, they all went down from the palace to go aboard the *Dolphin*. The people of the City of Havnor made it a festival, swarming afoot in the streets and on the wharves, choking the canals with the little poled boats they called chips, dotting the great bay with sailboats and dinghies all flying bright flags; and flags and pennants flew from the towers of the great houses and the banner poles on bridges high and low. Passing among these cheerful crowds, Tenar thought of the day long ago she and Ged came sailing into Havnor, bringing home the Rune of Peace, Elfarran's Ring. That Ring had been on her arm, and she had held it up so the silver would flash in the sunlight and the people could see it, and they had cheered and held out their arms to her as if they all wanted to

embrace her. It made her smile to think of that. She was smiling as she went up the gangplank and bowed to Lebannen.

He greeted her with the traditional formality of a ship's master: "Mistress Tenar, be welcome aboard." She replied, moved by she knew not what impulse, "I thank you, son of Elfarran."

He looked at her for a moment, startled by that name. But Tehanu followed close after her, and he repeated the formal greeting: "Mistress Tehanu, be welcome aboard."

Tenar went on towards the prow of the ship, remembering a corner there near a capstan where a passenger could be out of the way of the hardworking sailors and yet see all that happened on the crowded deck and outside the ship too.

There was a commotion in the main street leading to the dock: the High Princess was arriving. Tenar saw with satisfaction that Lebannen, or perhaps his majordomo, had arranged for the princess's arrival to be fittingly magnificent. Mounted escorts opened a way through the crowds, their horses snorting and clattering in fine style. Tall red plumes, such as Kargish warriors wore on their helmets, waved from the top of the closed, gilt-bedizened carriage that had brought the princess across the city and on the headstalls of the four grey horses that drew it. A band of musicians waiting on the waterside struck up with trumpet, tambour, and tambourine. And the people, discovering that they had a princess to cheer and peer at, cheered loudly, and pressed as close as the horsemen and foot guards would allow them, gaping and full of praises and somewhat random greetings. "Hail the Queen of the Kargs!" some of them shouted, and others, "She ain't," and others, "Look at 'em all in red, fine as rubies, which one is her?" and others, "Long live the Princess!"

Tenar saw Seserakh—veiled of course from hat to foot, but unmistakable by her height and bearing—descend from the carriage and sail, stately as a ship herself, towards the gangplank. Two of her shorter-veiled attendants trotted close behind her, followed by Lady Opal of Ilien. Tenar's heart sank. Lebannen had decreed that no servants or followers were to be taken on this journey. It was not a cruise or pleasure trip, he had said sternly, and those aboard must have good reason to be aboard. Had Seserakh not understood that? Or did she so cling to her silly countrywomen that she meant to defy the king? That would be a most unfortunate beginning of the voyage.

But at the foot of the gangplank the gold-rippling red cylinder stopped and turned. It put forth hands, gold-skinned hands shining with gold rings. The

princess embraced her handmaidens, clearly bidding them farewell. She also embraced Lady Opal in the approved stately manner of royalty and nobility in public. Then Lady Opal herded the handmaidens back towards the carriage, while the princess turned again to the gangplank.

There was a pause. Tenar could see that featureless column of red and gold take a deep breath. It drew itself up taller.

It proceeded up the gangplank, slowly, for the tide had been rising and the angle was steep, but with an unhesitant dignity that kept the crowds ashore silent, fascinated, watching.

It attained the deck and stopped there, facing the king.

"High Princess of the Kargad Lands, be welcome aboard," Lebannen said in a ringing voice. At that the crowds burst out—"Hurrah for the Princess! Long live the Queen! Well walked, Reddy!"

Lebannen said something to the princess which the cheering made inaudible to others. The red column turned to the crowd on the waterside and bowed, stiff-backed but gracious.

Tehanu had waited for her near where the king stood, and now came forward and spoke to her and led her to the aft cabin of the ship, where the heavy, soft-flowing red and golden veils disappeared. The crowd cheered and called more wildly than ever. "Come back, Princess! Where's Reddy? Where's our lady? Where's the Queen?"

Tenar looked down the length of the ship at the king. Through her misgivings and heaviness of heart, unruly laughter welled up in her. She thought, Poor boy, what will you do now? They've fallen in love with her the first chance they got to see her, even though they can't see her . . . Oh, Lebannen, we're all in league against you!

Dolphin was a fair-sized ship, fitted out to carry a king in some state and comfort; but first and foremost she was made to sail, to fly with the wind, to take him where he needed to go as quickly as could be. Accommodations were cramped enough when it was only the crew and officers, the king and a few companions aboard. On this voyage to Roke, accommodations were jammed. The crew, to be sure, were in no more than usual discomfort, sleeping down in the three-foot-high kennel of the foreward hold; but the officers had to share one wretched black closet under the forecastle. As for the passengers, all four women were in what was normally the king's cabin, which ran the narrow width of the sterncastle of the ship, while the

cabin beneath it, usually occupied by the ship's master and one or two other officers, was shared by the king, the two wizards, the sorcerer, and Tosla. The probability of misery and bad temper was, Tenar thought, limitless. The first and most urgent probability, however, was that the High Princess was going to be sick.

They were sailing down the Great Bay with the mildest following wind, the water calm, the ship gliding along like a swan on a pond; but Seserakh cowered on her bunk, crying out in despair whenever she looked out through her veils and caught sight of the sunny, peaceful vista of unexcited water, the mild white wake of the ship, through the broad stern windows. "It will go up and down," she moaned in Kargish.

"It is not going up and down at all," Tenar said. "Use your head, princess!"

"It is my stomach not my head," Seserakh whimpered.

"Nobody could possibly be seasick in this weather. You are simply afraid."

"Mother," Tehanu protested, understanding the tone if not the words. "Don't scold her. It's miserable to be sick."

"She is not sick!" Tenar said. She was absolutely convinced of the truth of what she said. "Seserakh, you are not sick. You are afraid of being sick. Get hold of yourself. Come out on deck. Fresh air will make all the difference. Fresh air and courage."

"Oh my friend," Seserakh murmured in Hardic. "Make me courage!"

Tenar was a little taken aback. "You have to make it yourself, princess," she said. Then, relenting, "Come on, just try it out on deck for a minute. Tehanu, see if you can persuade her. Think what she'll suffer if we do meet some weather!"

Between them they got Seserakh to her feet and into her cylinder of red veiling, without which she could not of course appear before the eyes of men; they coaxed and wheedled her to creep out of the cabin, onto the bit of deck to the side of it, in the shade, where they could all sit in a row on the bone-white, impeccable decking and look out at the blue and shining sea.

Seserakh parted her veils enough that she could see straight in front of her; but she mostly looked at her lap, with an occasional, brief, terrified glance at the water, after which she shut her eyes and then looked down at her lap again.

Tenar and Tehanu talked a little, pointing out ships that passed, birds, an island. "It's lovely. I forgot how I like to sail!" Tenar said.

"I like it if I can forget the water," said Tehanu. "It's like flying."

"Ah, you dragons," Tenar said.

It was spoken lightly, but it was not lightly said. It was the first time she had ever

said anything of the kind to her adopted daughter. She was aware that Tehanu had turned her head to look at her with her seeing eye. Tenar's heart beat heavily. "Air and fire," she said.

Tehanu said nothing. But her hand, the brown slender hand, not the claw, reached out and took hold of Tenar's hand and held it tightly.

"I don't know what I am, mother," she whispered in her voice that was seldom more than a whisper.

"I do," Tenar said. And her heart beat heavier and harder than before.

"I'm not like Irian," Tehanu said. She was trying to comfort her mother, to reassure her, but there was longing in her voice, yearning jealousy, profound desire.

"Wait, wait and find out," her mother replied, finding it hard to speak. "You'll know what to do . . . what you are . . . when the time comes."

They were talking so softly that the princess could not hear what they said, if she could understand it. They had forgotten her. But she had caught the name Irian, and parting her veils with her long hands and turning to them, her eyes looking out bright from the warm red shadow, she asked, "Irian, she is?"

"Somewhere forward—up there—" Tenar waved at the rest of the ship.

"She makes herself courage. Ah?"

After a moment Tenar said, "She doesn't need to make it, I think. She's fearless."

"Ah," said the princess.

Her bright eyes were gazing out of shadow all the length of the ship, to the prow, where Irian stood beside Lebannen. The king was pointing ahead, gesturing, talking with animation. He laughed, and Irian, standing by him, as tall as he, laughed too.

"Barefaced," Seserakh muttered in Kargish. And then in Hardic, thoughtfully, almost inaudibly, "Fearless."

She closed her veils and sat featureless, unmoving.

The long shores of Havnor were blue behind them. Mount Onn floated faint and high in the north. The black basalt columns of the Isle of Omer towered off the ship's right side as she worked across the Ebavnor Straits towards the Inmost Sea. The sun was bright, the wind fresh, another fine day. All the women were sitting under the sailcloth awning the sailors had rigged for them beside the after cabin. Women brought good luck to a ship, and the sailors couldn't do enough for them

in the way of ingenious little comforts and amenities. Because wizards could bring good luck or, equally, bad luck to a ship, the sailors also treated the wizards very well; their awning was rigged in a corner of the quarterdeck, where they had a good view forward. The women had velvet cushions to sit on (provided by the king's forethought, or his majordomo's); the wizards had packets of sailcloth, which did very well.

Alder found himself treated as and considered to be one of the wizards. He could do nothing about it, though it embarrassed him lest Onyx and Seppel should think he was claiming equality with them, and it also troubled him because he was now not even a sorcerer. His gift was gone. He had no power at all. He knew it as surely as he would have known the loss of his sight, the paralysis of his hand. He could not have mended a broken pitcher now, unless with glue; and he would have done it badly, because he had never had to do it.

And beyond the craft he had lost was something else, something larger than the craft, that was gone. Its loss left him, as his wife's death had, in a blankness in which no joy, no new thing was or would ever be. Nothing could happen, nothing could change.

Not having known of this larger aspect of his gift till he lost it, he pondered on it, wondering about its nature. It was like knowing the way to go, he thought, like knowing the direction of home. Not a thing one could identify or even say much about, but a connection on which everything else depended. Without it he was desolate. He was useless.

But at least he did no harm. His dreams were fleeting, meaningless. They never took him to those dreary moorlands, the hill of dead grass, the wall. No voices called him to the dark.

He thought often of Sparrowhawk, wishing he could talk with him: the Archmage who had spent all his power, and having been great among the great, now lived his life out poor and disregarded. Yet the king longed to show him honor; so Sparrowhawk's poverty was by choice. Perhaps, Alder thought, riches or high estate would have been only shameful to a man who had lost his true wealth, his way.

Onyx clearly regretted having led Alder to make this trade or bargain. He had always been entirely civil to Alder, but he now treated him with regard and compunction, while his manner to the wizard of Paln had become a little distant. Alder himself felt no resentment towards Seppel and no distrust of his intentions. The Old Powers were the Old Powers. You used them at your risk. Seppel had

told him what he must pay, and he had paid it. He had not understood quite how much there was to pay; but that was not Seppel's fault. It was his own, for never having valued his gift at its true worth.

So he sat with the two wizards, thinking of himself as false coin to their gold, but listening to them with all his mind; for they trusted him and spoke freely, and their talk was an education he had never dreamed of as a sorcerer.

Sitting there in the bright pale shade of the canvas awning, they talked of a bargain, a greater bargain than the one he had made to stop his dreams. Onyx said more than once the words of the Old Speech Seppel had spoken on the rooftop: *Verw nadan*. As they talked, little by little Alder gathered that the meaning of those words was something like a choice, a division, making two things of one. Far, far back in time, before the Kings of Enlad, before the writing of Hardic, maybe before there was a Hardic tongue, when there was only the Language of the Making, it seemed that people had made some kind of choice, given up one great power or possession to gain another.

The wizards' talk of this was hard to follow, not so much because they hid anything but because they themselves were groping after things lost in the cloudy past, the time before memory. Words of the Old Speech came into their talk of necessity, and sometimes Onyx spoke entirely in that tongue. But Seppel would answer him in Hardic. Seppel was sparing with the words of the Making. Once he held up his hand to stop Onyx from going on, and at the Roke wizard's look of surprise and question, said mildly, "Spell-words act."

Alder's teacher Gannet, too, had called the words of the Old Speech spell-words. "Each is a deed of power," he had said. "True word makes truth be." Gannet had been stingy with the spell-words he knew, speaking them only at need, and when he wrote any rune but the common ones that were used to write Hardic, he erased it almost as he finished it. Most sorcerers were similarly careful, either to guard their knowledge for themselves or because they respected the power of the Language of the Making. Even Seppel, wizard as he was, with a far wider knowledge and understanding of those words, preferred not to use them in conversation, but to keep to ordinary language which, if it allowed lies and errors, also permitted uncertainty and retraction.

Perhaps that had been part of the great choice men made in ancient times: to give up the innate knowledge of the Old Speech, which they once shared with the dragons. Had they done so, Alder wondered, in order to have a language of their own, a language suited to mankind, in which they could lie, cheat, swindle, and

invent wonders that never had been and would never be?

The dragons spoke no speech but the Old Speech. Yet it was always said that dragons lied. Was it so? he wondered. If spell-words were true, how could even a dragon use them to lie?

Seppel and Onyx had come to one of the long, easy, thoughtful pauses in their conversation. Seeing that Onyx was, in fact, at least half asleep, Alder asked the Pelnish wizard softly, "Is it true that dragons can tell untruth in the true words?"

The Pelnishman smiled. "That—so we say on Paln—is the very question Ath asked Orm a thousand years ago, in the ruins of Ontuego. 'Can a dragon lie?' the mage asked. And Orm replied, 'No,' and then breathed on him, burning him to ashes . . . But are we to believe the story, since it was only Orm who could have told it?"

Infinite are the arguments of mages, Alder said to himself, but not aloud.

Onyx had gone definitely to sleep, his head tilted back against the bulkhead, his grave, tense face relaxed.

Seppel spoke, his voice even quieter than usual. "Alder, I hope you do not regret what we did at Aurun. I know our friend thinks I did not warn you clearly enough."

Alder said without hesitation, "I am content."

Seppel inclined his dark head.

Alder said presently, "I know that we try to keep the Equilibrium. But the Powers of the Earth keep their own account."

"And theirs is a justice that is hard for men to understand."

"That's it. I try to see why it was just that, my craft, I mean, that I must give up to free myself from that dream. What has the one to do with the other?"

Seppel did not answer for a while, and then it was with a question. "It was not by your craft that you came to the wall of stones?"

"Never," Alder said with certainty. "I had no more power to go there if I willed it than I had to prevent myself from going."

"So how did you come there?"

"My wife called me, and my heart went to her."

A longer pause. The wizard said, "Other men have lost beloved wives."

"So I said to my Lord Sparrowhawk. And he said: that's true, and yet the bond between true lovers is as close as we come to what endures forever."

"Across the wall of stones, no bond endures."

Alder looked at the wizard, the swarthy, soft, keen-eyed face. "Why is it so?" he

said.

"Death is the bond breaker."

"Then why do the dead not die?"

Seppel stared at him, taken aback.

"I'm sorry," Alder said. "I misspeak in my ignorance. What I mean is this: death breaks the bond of soul with body, and the body dies. It goes back to the earth. But the spirit must go to that dark place, and wear a semblance of the body, and endure there—for how long? Forever? In the dust and dusk there, without light, or love, or cheer at all? I cannot bear to think of Lily in that place. Why must she be there? Why can she not be—" his voice stumbled—"be free?"

"Because the wind does not blow there," Seppel said. His look was very strange, his voice harsh. "It was stopped from blowing, by the art of man."

He continued to stare at Alder but only gradually did he begin to see him. The expression in his eyes and face changed. He looked away, up the beautiful white curve of the foresail, full of the breath of the northwest wind. He glanced back at Alder. "You know as much as I do of this matter, my friend," he said with almost his usual softness. "But you know it in your body, your blood, in the pulse of your heart. And I know only words. Old words . . . So we had better get to Roke, where maybe the wise men will be able to tell us what we need to know. Or if they cannot, the dragons will, perhaps. Or maybe it will be you who shows us the way."

"That would be the blind man who led the seers to the cliff's edge, indeed!" Alder said with a laugh.

"Ah, but we're at the cliff's edge already, with our eyes shut," said the wizard of Paln.

Lebannen found the ship too small to contain the enormous restlessness that filled him. The women sat under their little awning and the wizards sat under theirs like ducks in a row, but he paced up and down, impatient with the narrow confines of the deck. He felt it was his impatience and not the wind that sent *Dolphin* running so fast to the south, but never fast enough. He wanted the journey over.

"Remember the fleet on the way to Wathort?" Tosla said, joining him while he stood near the steersman, studying the chart and the clear sea before them. "That was a grand sight. Thirty ships aline!"

"I wish it was Wathort we were bound for," Lebannen said.

"I never did like Roke," Tosla agreed. "Not an honest wind or current for twenty miles off that shore, but only wizards' brew. And the rocks north of it never

in the same place twice. And the town full of cheats and shape-shifters." He spat, competently, to leeward. "I'd rather meet old Gore and his slavers again!"

Lebannen nodded, but said nothing. That was often the pleasure of Tosla's company: he said what Lebannen felt it was better that he himself not say.

"Who was the dumb man, the mute," Tosla asked, "the one that killed Falcon on the wall?"

"Egre. Pirate turned slave taker."

"That's it. He knew you, there at Sorra. Went right for you. I always wondered how."

"Because he took me as a slave once."

It was not easy to surprise Tosla, but the seaman looked at him with his mouth open, evidently not believing him but not able to say so, and so with nothing to say. Lebannen enjoyed the effect for a minute and then took pity on him.

"When the Archmage took me hunting after Cob, we went south, first. A man in Hort Town betrayed us to the slave takers. They knocked the Archmage on the head, and I ran off thinking I could lead them away from him. But it was me they were after—I was salable. I woke up chained in a galley bound for Sowl. He rescued me before the next night passed. The irons fell off us all like bits of dead leaves. And he told Egre not to speak again until he found something worth saying . . . He came to that galley like a great light over the water . . . I never knew what he was till then."

Tosla mulled this over a while. "He unchained all the slaves? Why didn't the others kill Egre?"

"Maybe they took him on to Sowl and sold him," Lebannen said.

Tosla mulled a while longer. "So that's why you were so keen to do away with the slave trade."

"One reason."

"Doesn't improve the character, as a rule," Tosla observed. He studied the chart of the Inmost Sea tacked on the board to the steersman's left. "Island of Way," he remarked. "Where the dragon woman's from."

"You keep clear of her, I notice."

Tosla pursed his lips, though he did not whistle, being aboard ship. "You know that song I mentioned, about the Lass of Belilo? Well, I never thought of it as anything but a tale. Until I saw her."

"I doubt she'd eat you, Tosla."

"It would be a glorious death," the sailor said, rather sourly.

The king laughed.

"Don't push your own luck," said Tosla.

"No fear."

"You and she were talking there so free and easy. Like making yourself easy with a volcano, to my mind . . . But I'll tell you, I wouldn't mind seeing a bit more of that present the Kargs sent you. There's a sight worth seeing in there, to judge by the feet. But how do you get it out of the tent? The feet are grand, but I'd like a bit more ankle, to begin with."

Lebannen felt his face turn grim, and turned aside to keep Tosla from seeing it.

"If anybody gave me a package like that," Tosla said, staring out over the sea, "I'd open it."

Lebannen could not restrain a slight movement of impatience. Tosla saw it; he was quick. He grinned his wry grin and said no more.

The ship's master had come out on deck, and Lebannen engaged him in talk. "Looks a bit thick ahead?" he said, and the master nodded: "Thunder squalls to the south and west there. We'll be in them tonight."

The sea grew choppier as the afternoon drew on, the benign sunlight took on a brassy tinge, and gusts of wind blew from one quarter then another. Tenar had told Lebannen that the princess was afraid of the sea and of seasickness, and he glanced back once or twice at the aftercabin, expecting to see no red-veiled form among the ducks in a row. But it was Tenar and Tehanu who had gone in; the princess was still there, and Irian was sitting beside her. They were talking earnestly. What on earth did a dragon woman from Way have to talk about with a harem woman from Hur-at-Hur? What language had they in common? The question seemed so much in need of answering to Lebannen that he walked aft.

When he got there Irian looked up at him and smiled. She had a strong, open face, a broad smile; she went barefoot by choice, was careless about her dress, let the wind tangle her hair; altogether she seemed no more than a handsome, hothearted, intelligent, untaught countrywoman, till you saw her eyes. They were the color of smoky amber, and when she looked straight at Lebannen, as she was doing now, he could not meet them. He looked down.

He had made it clear that there was to be no courtly ceremony on the ship, no bows and courtesies, nobody was to leap up when he came near; but the princess had got to her feet. They were, as Tosla had observed, beautiful feet, not small, but high-arched, strong, and fine. He looked at them, the two slender feet on the white wood of the deck. He looked up from them and saw that the princess was doing as

she had done the last time he faced her: parting her veils so that he, though no one else, could see her face. He was a little staggered by the stern, almost tragic beauty of the face in that red shadow.

"Is—is everything all right, princess?" he asked, stammering, a thing he very seldom did.

She said, "My friend Tenar said, breathe wind."

"Yes," he said, rather at random.

"Is there anything your wizards could do for her, do you think, maybe?" said Irian, unfolding her long limbs and standing up too. She and the princess were both tall women.

Lebannen was trying to make out what color the princess's eyes were, since he was able to look at them. They were blue, he thought, but like blue opals they held other colors in them, or maybe it was the sunlight coming through the red of her veils.—"Do for her?"

"She wants very much not to be seasick. She had a terrible time of it coming from the Kargish places."

"I will not to fear," the princess said. She gazed straight at him as if challenging him to—what?

"Of course," he said, "of course. I'll ask Onyx. I'm sure there's something he can do." He made a sketchy bow to them both and went off hurriedly to find the wizard.

Onyx and Seppel conferred and then consulted Alder. A spell against seasickness was more in the province of sorcerers, menders, healers, than of learned and powerful wizards. Alder could not do anything himself at present, of course, but he might remember a charm . . .? He did not, having never dreamed of going to sea until his troubles began. Seppel confessed that he himself always got seasick in small boats or rough weather. Onyx finally went to the aftercabin and begged the princess's pardon: he himself had no skill to help her, and nothing to offer her but—apologetically—a charm or talisman one of the sailors hearing of her plight—the sailors heard everything—had pressed upon him to give her.

The princess's long-fingered hand emerged from the red and gold veils. The wizard placed in it a queer little black-and-white object: dried seaweed braided round a bird's breastbone. "A petrel, because they ride the storm," Onyx said, shamefaced.

The princess bowed her unseen head and murmured thanks in Kargish. The fetish disappeared within her veils. She withdrew to the cabin. Onyx, meeting the

king quite nearby, apologised to him. The ship was pitching energetically now in hard, erratic gusts on a choppy sea, and he said, "I could, you know, sire, say a word to the winds . . ."

Lebannen knew well that there were two schools of thought concerning weather-working: the old-fashioned one, that of the Bagmen who ordered the winds to serve their ships as shepherds order their dogs to run here and there, and the newfangled notion—a few centuries old at most—of the Roke School, that the magewind might be raised at real need, but it was best to let the world's winds blow. He knew that Onyx was a devout upholder of the way of Roke. "Use your own judgment, Onyx," he said. "If it seems we're in for a really bad night . . . But if it's no more than a few squalls . . ."

Onyx looked up at the masthead, where already a wisp or two of fallow fire had flickered in the cloud-darkened dusk. Thunder rumbled grandly in the blackness before them, all across the south. Behind them the last of the daylight fell wan, tremulous across the waves. "Very well," he said, rather dismally, and went below to the small and crowded cabin.

Lebannen stayed out of that cabin almost entirely, sleeping on deck when he slept at all. Tonight was not one for sleep for anybody on the *Dolphin*. It was not a single squall, but a chain of violent late-summer storms boiling up out of the southwest, and between the terrific commotion of the lightning-dazzled sea, the thunder crashes that seemed about to knock the ship apart, and the crazy storm gusts that kept her pitching and rolling and taking queer jumps, it was a long night and a loud one.

Onyx consulted Lebannen once: Should he say a word to the wind? Lebannen looked to the master, who shrugged. He and his crew were busy enough, but unconcerned. The ship was in no trouble. As for the womenfolk, they were reported to be sitting up in their cabin, gambling. Irian and the princess had come out on deck earlier, but it was hard to stay afoot at times and they had seen they were in the crew's way, so they had retired. The report that they were gambling came from the cook's boy, who had been sent to see if they wanted anything to eat. They had wanted whatever he could bring.

Lebannen found himself possessed by the same intense curiosity he had felt in the afternoon. There was no doubt the lamps were all alight in the stern cabin, for the glow of them streamed out golden on the foam and race of the ship's wake. About midnight, he went aft and knocked.

Irian opened the door. After the dazzle and blackness of the storm the lamplight

in the cabin seemed warm and steady, though the swinging lamps cast swinging shadows; and he was confusedly aware of colors, the soft, various colors of the women's clothes, their skin, brown or pale or gold, their hair, black or grey or tawny, their eyes—the princess's eyes staring at him, startled, as she snatched up a scarf or some cloth to hold before her face.

"Oh! We thought it was the cook's boy!" Irian said with a laugh.

Tehanu looked at him and said in her shy, comradely way, "Is there trouble?"

He realised that he was standing in the doorway staring at them like some speechless messenger of doom.

"No—None at all—Are you getting on all right? I'm sorry it's been so rough—"

"We don't hold you answerable for the weather," Tenar said. "Nobody could sleep, so the princess and I have been teaching the others Kargish gambling."

He saw five-sided ivory dice-sticks scattered over the table, probably Tosla's.

"We've been betting islands," Irian said. "But Tehanu and I are losing. The Kargs have already won Ark and Ilien."

The princess had lowered the scarf; she sat facing Lebannen resolutely, extremely tense, as a young swordsman might face him before a fencing match. In the warmth of the cabin they were all bare-armed and barefoot, but her consciousness of her uncovered face drew his consciousness as a magnet draws a pin.

"I'm sorry it's been so rough," he said again, idiotically, and closed the door. As he turned away he heard them all laughing.

He went to stand by the steersman. Looking into the gusty, rainy darkness lit by fitful, distant lightning, he could still see everything in the stern cabin, the black fall of Tehanu's hair, Tenar's affectionate, teasing smile, the dice on the table, the princess's round arms, honey-colored like the lamplight, her throat in the shadow of her hair, though he did not remember looking at her arms and throat but only at her face, at her eyes full of defiance, despair. What was the girl afraid of? Did she think he wanted to hurt her?

A star or two was shining out high in the south. He went to his crowded cabin, slung a hammock, for the bunks were full, and slept for a few hours. He woke before dawn, restless as ever, and went up on deck.

The day came as bright and calm as if no storm had ever been. Lebannen stood at the forward rail and saw the first sunlight strike across the water, and an old song came into his mind:

O my joy!
Before bright Éa was, before Segoy
Bade the islands be,
The morning wind blew on the sea.
O my joy, be free!

It was a fragment of a ballad or lullaby from his childhood. He could remember no more of it. The tune was sweet. He sang it softly and let the wind take the words from his lips.

Tenar emerged from the cabin and, seeing him, came to him. "Good morning, my dear lord," she said, and he greeted her fondly, with some memory that he had been angry at her but not knowing why he had been or how he could have been.

"Did you Kargs win Havnor last night?" he asked.

"No, you may keep Havnor. We went to bed. All the young ones are still there, lolling. Shall we—what is it? lift Roke today?"

"Raise Roke? No, not till early tomorrow. But before noon we should be in Thwil Harbor. If they let us come to the island."

"What do you mean?"

"Roke defends itself from unwelcome visitors."

"Oh: Ged told me about that. He was on a ship trying to sail back there, and they sent the wind against him, the Roke wind he called it."

"Against *him*?"

"It was a long time ago." She smiled with pleasure at his incredulity, his unwillingness that any affront should ever have been offered to Ged. "When he was a boy who had meddled with the darkness. That's what he said."

"When he was a man he still meddled with it."

"He doesn't now," Tenar said, serene.

"No, it's we who have to." His face had grown somber. "I wish I knew what we're meddling with. I am certain that things are drawing to some great chance or change—as Ogion foretold—as Ged told Alder. And I am certain that Roke is where we need to be to meet it. But beyond that, no certainty, nothing. I don't know what it is we face. When Ged took me into the dark land, we knew our enemy. When I took the fleet to Sorra, I knew what the evil was I wanted to undo. But now—Are the dragons our enemies or our allies? What has gone wrong? What is it we must do or undo? Will the Masters of Roke be able to tell us? Or will they

turn their wind against us?"

"Fearing—?"

"Fearing the dragon. The one they know. Or the one they don't know . . ."

Tenar's face was sober too, but gradually it broke into a smile. "What a ragbag you are bringing them, to be sure!" she said. "A sorcerer with nightmares, a wizard from Paln, two dragons, and two Kargs. The only respectable passengers on this ship are you and Onyx."

Lebannen could not laugh. "If only *he* were with us," he said.

Tenar put her hand on his arm. She started to speak and then did not.

He laid his hand over hers. They stood silent thus for some time, side by side, looking out at the dancing sea.

"The princess has something she wants to tell you before we come to Roke," Tenar said. "It's a story from Hur-at-Hur. Off there in their desert they remember things. I think this goes back before anything I ever heard except the story of the Woman of Kemay. It has to do with dragons . . . It would be kind of you to invite her, so that she doesn't have to ask."

Aware of the care and caution with which she spoke, he felt a moment of impatience, a flick of shame. He watched, far south across the sea, the course of a galley bound for Kamery or Way, the faint, tiny flash of the lifted sweeps. He said, "Of course. About noon?"

"Thank you."

About noon, he sent a young seaman to the stern cabin to request the princess to join the king on the foredeck. She emerged at once, and the ship being only about fifty feet long, he could observe her entire progress towards him: not a long walk, though perhaps for her it was a long one. For it was not a featureless red cylinder that approached him but a tall young woman. She wore soft white trousers, a long shirt of dull red, a gold circlet that held a very thin red veil over her face and head. The veil fluttered in the sea wind. The young sailor led her round the various obstacles and up and down the descents and ascents of the crowded, cumbered, narrow deck. She walked slowly and proudly. She was barefoot. Every eye in the ship was on her.

She arrived on the foredeck and stood still.

Lebannen bowed. "Your presence honors us, princess."

She performed a deep, straight-backed courtesy and said, "Thank you."

"You were not ill last night, I hope?"

She put her hand on the charm she wore on the cord round her neck, a small bone tied with black, showing it to him. *"Kerez akath akatharwa erevi,"* she said. He knew the word *akath* in Kargish meant sorcerer or sorcery.

There were eyes everywhere, eyes in hatchways, eyes up in the rigging, eyes that were like augurs, like gimlets.

"Come forward, if you will. We may see Roke Island soon," he said, though there was not the remotest chance of seeing a glimmer of Roke till dawn. With a hand under her elbow though not actually touching her, he guided her up the steep slant of the deck to the forepeak, where between a capstan, the slant of the bowsprit, and the port rail was a little triangle of decking that—when a sailor had scurried away with the cable he was mending—they had quite to themselves. They were as visible as ever to the rest of the ship, but they could turn their backs on it: as much privacy as royalty can hope for.

When they had gained this tiny haven, the princess turned to him and pushed back the veil from her face. He had intended to ask what he could do for her, but the question seemed both inadequate and irrelevant. He said nothing.

She said, "Lord King. In Hur-at-Hur I am *feyagat*. In Roke Island I am to be king's daughter of Kargad. To be this, I am not *feyagat*. I am bare face. If it please you."

After a moment he said, "Yes. Yes, princess. This is—this is well done."

"It please you?"

"Very much. Yes. I thank you, princess."

"Barrezú," she said, a regal acceptance of his thanks. Her dignity abashed him. Her face had been flaming red when she first put back the veil; there was no color in it now. But she stood straight and still, and gathered up her forces for another speech.

"Too," she said. "Also. My friend Tenar."

"Our friend Tenar," he said with a smile.

"Our friend Tenar. She says I am to tell King Lebannen of the Vedurnan."

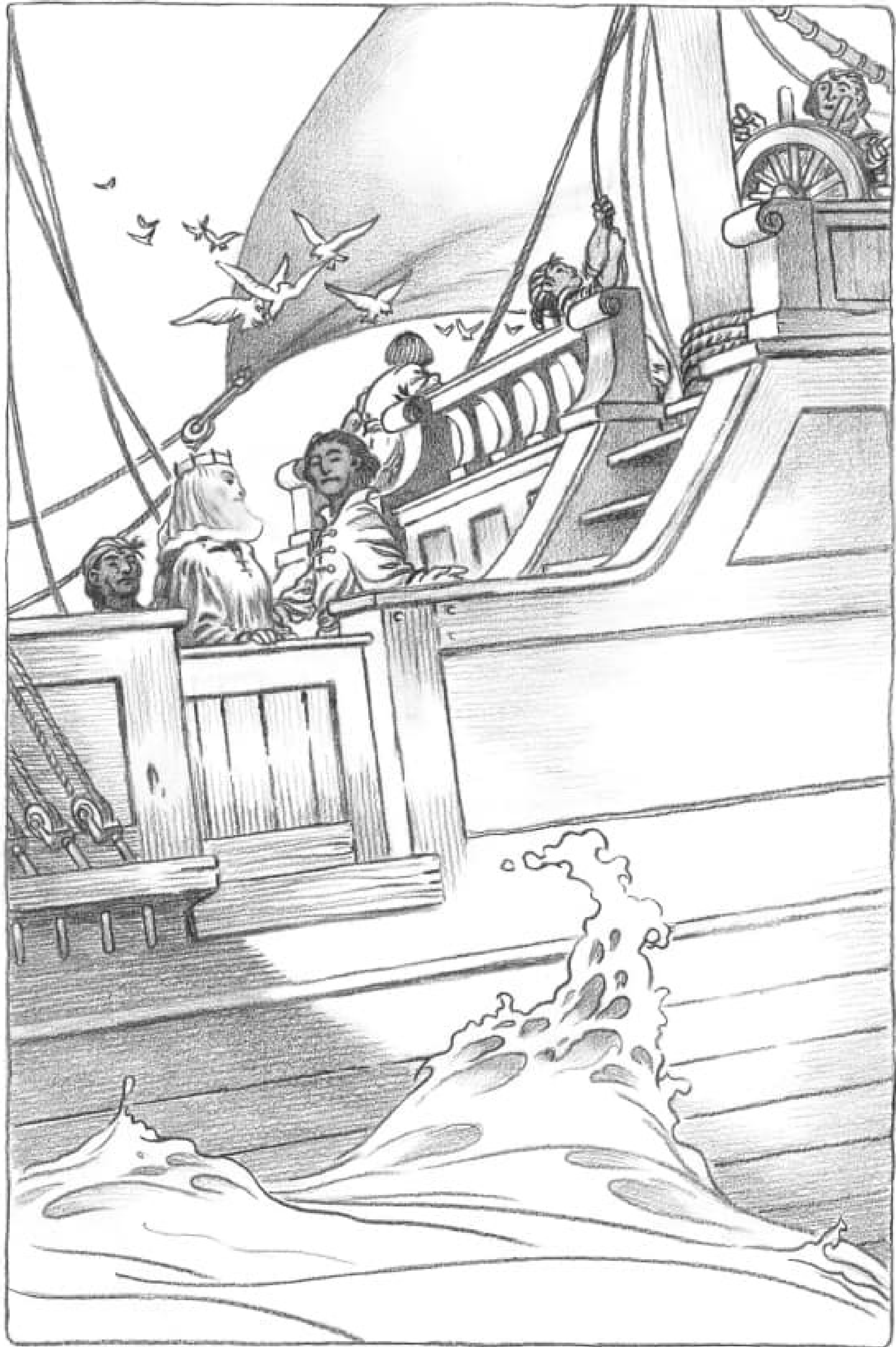
He repeated the word.

"Long ago long ago—Karg people, sorcery people, dragon people, hah? Yes?—All people one, all speak one—one—Oh! *Wuluah mekrevt!*"

"One language?"

"Hah! Yes! One language!" In her passionate attempt to speak Hardic, to tell him what she wanted to tell him, she was losing her self-consciousness; her face and eyes shone. "But then, dragon people say: Let go, let go all things. Fly!—But

we people, we say: No, keep. Keep all things. Dwell!—So we go apart, hah? dragon people and we people? So they make the Vedurnan. These to let go—these to keep. Yes? But to keep all things, we must to let go that language. That dragon people language.”



"The Old Speech?"

"Yes! So we people, we let go that Old Speech language, and keep all things. And dragon people let go all things, but keep that, keep that language. Hah? *Seyneha?* This is the Vedurnan." Her beautiful, large, long hands gestured eloquently and she watched his face with eager hope of understanding. "We go east, east, east. Dragon people go west, west. We dwell, they fly. Some dragon come east with us, but not keep the language, forget, and forget to fly. Like Karg people. Karg people speak Karg language, not dragon language. All keep the Vedurnan, east, west. *Seyneha?* But in—"

At a loss, she brought her hands together from her "east" and "west," and Lebannen said, "In the middle?"

"Hah, yes! In the middle!" She laughed with the pleasure of getting the word. "In the middle—you! Sorcery people! Hah? You, middle people, speak Hardic language but too, also, keep to speak Old Speech language. You *learn* it. Like I learn Hardic, hah? Learn to speak. Then, then—this is the bad. The bad thing. Then you say, in that sorcery language, in that Old Speech language, you say: *We will not to die*. And it is so. And the Vedurnan is broken."

Her eyes were like blue fire.

After a moment she asked, *"Seyneha?"*

"I'm not sure I understand."

"You keep life. You keep. Too long. You never to let go. But to die—" She threw her hands out in a great opening gesture as if she threw something away, into the air, across the water.

He shook his head regretfully.

"Ah," she said. She thought a minute, but no words came. Defeated, she moved her hands palms down in a graceful pantomime of relinquishment. "I must to learn more words," she said.

"Princess, the Master Patterner of Roke, the Master of the Grove—" He watched her for comprehension, and began again. "On Roke Island, there is a man, a great mage, who is a Karg. You can tell him what you have told me—in your own language."

She listened intently and nodded. She said, "The friend of Irian. I will in my heart to talk to this man." Her face was bright with the thought.

That touched Lebannen. He said, "I'm sorry you have been lonely here, princess."

She looked at him, alert and luminous, but did not reply.

"I hope, as time goes on—as you learn the language—"

"I learn quick," she said. He did not know if it was a statement or a prediction.

They were looking straight at each other.

She resumed her stately attitude and spoke formally, as she had at the beginning: "I thank you to listen, Lord King." She dipped her head and shielded her eyes in a formal sign of respect and made the deep knee-bend courtesy again, speaking some formula in Kargish.

"Please," he said, "tell me what you said."

She paused, hesitated, thought, and replied, "Your—your, ah—small kings?—sons! Sons, your sons, let them to be dragons and kings of dragons. Hah?" She smiled radiantly, let the veil fall over her face, backed away four steps, turned and departed, lithe and sure-footed down the length of the ship. Lebannen stood as if last night's lightning had struck him at last.

Chapter 5

Rejoining

The last night of the sea voyage was calm, warm, starless. *Dolphin* moved with a long, easy rocking over the smooth swells southward. It was easy to sleep, and the people slept, and sleeping dreamed.

Alder dreamed of a little animal that came in the dark and touched his hand. He could not see what it was, and when he reached out to it, it was gone, lost. Again he felt the small, velvet muzzle touch his hand. He half roused, and the dream slipped from him, but the piercing ache of loss was in his heart.

In the bunk below him, Seppel dreamed that he was in his own house in Ferao on Paln, reading an old lore-book from the Dark Time, content with his work; but he was interrupted. Someone wanted to see him. "It will only take a minute," he told himself, and went to speak to the caller. It was a woman; her hair was dark with a glint of red in it, her face was beautiful and full of trouble. "You must send him to me," she said. "You will send him to me, won't you?" He thought: I don't know who she means, but I must pretend I do, and he said, "That will not be easy, you know." At that the woman drew her hand back and he saw that she held a stone, a heavy stone. Startled, he thought she meant to throw it at him or strike him down with it, and recoiling from her, he woke in the darkness of the cabin. He lay listening to the breathing of the other sleepers and the whisper of the sea along the ship's side.

In his bunk on the other side of the small cabin, Onyx lay on his back gazing into the dark; he thought his eyes were open, he thought he was awake, but he thought that many small, thin cords had been tied around his arms and legs and hands and head, and that all these cords ran out into the darkness, over land and sea, over the curve of the world: and the cords were drawing him, tugging him, so that he and the ship he was in and all its passengers were being pulled gently, gently to the place where the sea dried up, where the ship would go aground silently on blind

sands. But he could not speak or do anything because the cords tied shut his jaws, his eyelids.

Lebannen had come down to the cabin to sleep for a while, wanting to be fresh at dawn when they might raise Roke Island. He slept quickly and deeply, and his dreams fleeted and changed: a high green hill above the sea—a woman who smiled and, lifting her hand, showed him she could make the sun rise—a claimant in his court of justice in Havnor from whom he learned to his horror and shame that half the people of the kingdom were starving to death in locked rooms beneath houses—a child who cried out to him, "Come to me!" but he could not find the child—As he slept, his right hand held the rock in the little amulet bag at his throat, clenched it tight.

In the deck cabin above these dreamers, the women dreamed. Seserakh walked up into the mountains, the beautiful dear desert mountains of her home. But she was walking on the forbidden way, the dragon path. Human feet must not walk that path, must not even cross it. The dust of it was smooth and warm under her bare soles, and though she knew she must not walk on it, she walked on, until she looked up and saw that the mountains were not those she knew, but were black, jagged precipices which she could never climb. Yet she must climb them.

Irian flew joyous on the storm wind, but the storm sent loops of lightning up over her wings, drawing her down and down towards the clouds, and as she was pulled nearer and nearer she saw they were not clouds but black rocks, a black and jagged mountain range. Her wings were tied to her sides by cords of lightning, and she fell.

Tehanu crawled through a tunnel deep underground. There was not enough air to breathe and the tunnel grew narrower as she crawled. She could not turn back. But the glimmering roots of trees, growing down through the dirt into the tunnel, gave her hand-holds sometimes by which she could pull herself on into the dark.

Tenar climbed up the steps of the Throne of the Nameless Ones in the sacred Place of Atuan. She was very small and the steps were very high, so that she could climb them only laboriously. But when she reached the fourth step she did not pause and turn around, as the priestesses had told her she must do. She went on. She climbed the next step, and the next, and the next, in dust so thick it had obliterated the steps and she must feel for the levels where no foot had ever trodden. She went hastily, because behind the empty throne Ged had left something or lost something, something of great importance to myriads of people, and she had to find it. Only she did not know what it was. "A stone, a stone," she

told herself. But behind the throne, when she crawled there at last, was only dust, owls' droppings and dust.

In the alcove of the Old Mage's house on the Overfell of Gont, Ged dreamed that he was Archmage. He was talking with his friend Thorion as they walked the corridor of runes towards the meeting room of the Masters of the School. "I had no power at all," he told Thorion earnestly, "for years and years." The Summoner smiled and said, "That was only a dream, you know." But Ged was troubled by the long black wings that trailed behind him through the corridor; he shrugged his shoulders, trying to lift the wings, but they dragged on the floor like empty sacks. "Do you have wings?" he asked Thorion, who said, "Oh, yes," complacently, showing him how his wings were tied tight against his back and legs by many small, thin cords. "I am well yoked," he said.

Among the trees of the Immanent Grove on Roke Island, Azver the Patterner slept as he often did in summer in an open glade near the eastern edge of the wood, where he could look up and see the stars through the leaves. There his sleep was light, transparent, his mind moving from thought to dream and back, guided by the movements of the stars and leaves as they changed places in their dance. But tonight there were no stars, and the leaves hung still. He looked up into the lightless sky and saw through the clouds. In the high black sky were stars: small, bright, and still. They did not move. He knew there would be no sunrise.—He sat up then, awake, gazing into the faint, soft light that always hung in the aisles of the trees. His heart beat slow and hard.

In the Great House the young men, sleeping, turned and cried out, dreaming that they must go fight an army on a plain of dust, but the warriors they must fight were old men, old women, weak, sick people, weeping children.

The Masters of Roke dreamed that a ship was sailing towards them over the sea, heavy laden, low in the water. One dreamed that the freight of the ship was black rocks. Another dreamed she carried burning fire. Another dreamed that her cargo was dreams.

The seven masters who slept in the Great House woke, one and then another, in their stone sleeping cells, made a little werelight, and got up. They found the Doorkeeper already afoot and waiting at the door. "The king will come," he said with a smile, "at daybreak."

"Roke Knoll," Tosla said, gazing forward at the far, faint, unmoving wave in the southwest above the twilit waves. Lebannen, standing beside him, said nothing.

The cloud cover had dispersed, and the sky arched its pure uncolored dome over the great circle of the waters.

The ship's master joined them. "A fair dawn," he said, whispering in the silence.

The east brightened slowly to yellow. Lebannen glanced aft. Two of the women were afoot, standing at the rail outside their cabin; tall women, barefoot, silent, gazing east.

The top of the round green hill caught the sunlight first. It was broad daylight when they sailed in between the headlands of Thwil Bay. Everyone aboard was on deck, watching. But still they spoke little and softly.

The wind died down within the harbor. It was so still the water reflected the little town that rose above the bay and the walls of the Great House that rose above the town. The ship glided on slower, still slower.

Lebannen glanced at the ship's master and at Onyx. The master nodded. The wizard moved his hands up and outward slowly in a spell and murmured a word.

The ship glided on softly, not slowing until she came alongside the longest of the docks. Then the master spoke, and the great sail was furled while men aboard tossed the lines to men on the dock, shouting, and the silence was broken.

There were people on the quay to welcome them, townsfolk gathering, and a group of young men from the School, among them a big, deep-chested, dark-skinned man who held a heavy staff that matched his own height. "Welcome to Roke, King of the Western Lands," he said, coming forward as the gangplank was run out and made fast. "And welcome to all your company."

The young men with him and all the townsfolk called out hail and greeting to the king, and Lebannen answered them merrily as he came down the gangplank. He greeted the Master Summoner, and they spoke a while.

Those watching could see that despite his words of welcome, the Master Summoner's frowning gaze went to the ship again and again, to the women who stood at the rail, and that his answers did not satisfy the king.

When Lebannen left him and came back up into the ship, Irian came forward to meet him. "Lord King," she said, "you may tell the masters that I don't want to enter their house—this time. I wouldn't enter it if they asked me."

Lebannen's face was extremely stern. "It is the Master Patterner who asks you to come to him, to the Grove," he said.

At that Irian laughed, radiant. "I knew he would," she said. "And Tehanu will come with me."

"And my mother," Tehanu whispered.

He looked at Tenar; she nodded.

"So be it," he said. "And the rest of us will be lodged in the Great House, unless any of us prefer another place."

"By your leave, my lord," Seppel said, "I too will ask the hospitality of the Master Patterner."

"Seppel, that's not necessary," Onyx said harshly. "Come with me to my house."

The Pelnish wizard made a little placating gesture. "No reflection on your friends, my friend," he said. "But I have longed all my life to walk in the Immanent Grove. And I would be easier there."

"It may be that the doors of the Great House are shut to me, as they were before," Alder said, hesitant; and now Onyx's sallow face was red with shame.

The princess's veiled head had turned from face to face as she eagerly listened, trying to understand what was said. Now she spoke: "Please, my Lord King, I will to be with my friend Tenar? My friend Tehanu? And Irian? And to speak to that Karg?"

Lebannen looked at them all, glanced back to the Master Summoner standing massively at the foot of the gangplank, and laughed. He spoke from the rail, in his clear, affable voice: "My people have been cooped up in ship's cabins, Summoner, and it would seem they long for grass underfoot and leaves above their heads. If we all beg the Patterner to take us in, and he agrees, will you forgive our seeming slight to the hospitality of the Great House for a time at least?"

After a pause the Summoner bowed stiffly.

A short, stocky man had come up beside him on the dock, and was looking up smiling at Lebannen. He lifted his staff of silvery wood.

"Sire," he said, "I took you about the Great House once, a long time ago, and told you lies about everything."

"Gamble!" said Lebannen. They met midway on the gangplank and embraced, and talking, went down onto the dock.

Onyx was the first to follow; he greeted the Summoner gravely and with ceremony, then turned to the man called Gamble. "Are you Windkey now?" he demanded, and when Gamble laughed and said yes, he also embraced him, saying, "A master well made!" Taking Gamble a little aside, he talked with him, eager and frowning.

Lebannen looked up to the ship to signal the others to come ashore, and as they came down one by one he introduced them to the two Masters of Roke, Brand the

Summoner and Gamble the Windkey.

On most islands of the Archipelago people did not touch palms in greeting as was the way of Enlad, but only bowed the head or held both palms open before the heart, as if in offering. When Irian and the Summoner met, neither bowed or made any gesture. They stood stiff with their hands at their sides.

The princess made her deep, straight-backed courtesy.

Tenar made the conventional gesture, and the Summoner returned it.

"The Woman of Gont, the daughter of the Archmage, Tehanu," Lebannen said. Tehanu dipped her head and made the conventional gesture. But the Master Summoner stared at her, gasped, and stepped back as if he had been struck.

"Mistress Tehanu," said Gamble quickly, coming forward between her and the Summoner, "we welcome you to Roke—for your father's sake, and your mother's, and your own. I hope your voyage was a pleasant one?"

She looked at him in confusion, and ducked, hiding her face, rather than bowed; but she managed to whisper some kind of answer.

Lebannen, his face a bronze mask of calm composure, said, "Yes, it was a good voyage, Gamble, though the end of it is still in doubt. Shall we walk up through the town, now, Tenar—Tehanu—Princess—Orm Irian?" He looked at each as he spoke, saying the last name with particular clarity.

He set off with Tenar, and the others followed. As Seserakh came down the gangplank, she resolutely swept back the red veils from her face.

Gamble walked with Onyx, Alder with Seppel. Tosla stayed with the ship. The last to leave the quay was Brand the Summoner, walking alone and heavily.

Tenar had asked Ged about the Grove more than once, liking to hear him describe it. "It seems like any grove of trees, when you see it first. Not very large. The fields come right up to it on the north and east, and there are hills to the south and usually to the west . . . It looks like nothing much. But it draws your eye. And sometimes, from up on Roke Knoll, you can see that it's a forest, going on and on. You try to make out where it ends, but you can't. It goes off into the west . . . And when you walk in it, it seems ordinary again, though the trees are mostly a kind that grows only there. Tall, with brown trunks, something like an oak, something like a chestnut."

"What are they called?"

Ged laughed. "*Arhada*, in the Old Speech. Trees . . . The trees of the Grove, in Hardic . . . Their leaves don't all turn in autumn, but some at every season, so the

foliage is always green with a gold light in it. Even on a dark day those trees seem to hold some sunlight. And in the night, it's never quite dark under them. There's a kind of glimmer in the leaves, like moonlight or starlight. Willows grow there, and oak, and fir, other kinds; but as you go deeper in, it's more and more only the trees of the Grove. And the roots of those go down deeper than the island. Some are huge trees, some slender, but you don't see many fallen, nor many saplings. They live a long, long time." His voice had grown soft, dreamy. "You can walk and walk in their shadow, in their light, and never come to the end of them."

"But is Roke so large an island?"

He looked at her peacefully, smiling. "The forests here on Gont Mountain are that forest," he said. "All forests are."

And now she saw the Grove. Following Lebannen, they had come up through the devious streets of Thwil Town, gathering a flock of townsfolk and children come out to see and greet their king. These cheerful followers dropped away little by little as the travelers left the town on a lane between hedges and farms, which petered out into a footpath past the high, round hill, Roke Knoll.

Ged had told her of the Knoll, too. There, he said, all magic is strong; there all things take their true nature. "There," he said, "our wizardry and the Old Powers of the Earth meet, and are one."

The wind blew in the high, half-dry grass on the hill. A donkey colt galloped off stiff-legged across a stubble field, flicking and flirting its tail. Cattle walked in slow procession along a fence that crossed a little stream. And there were trees ahead, dark trees, shadowy.

They followed Lebannen through a stile and over a footbridge to a sunlit meadow at the edge of the wood. A small, decrepit house stood near the stream. Irian broke from their group, ran across the grass to the house, and patted the door frame as one would pat and greet a beloved horse or dog after long absence. "Dear house!" she said. And turning to the others, smiling, "I lived here," she said, "when I was Dragonfly."

She looked round, searching the eaves of the wood, and then ran forward again. "Azver!" she called.

A man had come out of the shadow of the trees into the sunlight. His hair shone in it like silver gilt. He stood still as Irian ran to him. He lifted his hands to her, and she caught them in hers. "I won't burn you, I won't burn you this time," she was saying, laughing and crying, though without tears. "I'm keeping my fires out!"

They drew each other close and stood face to face, and he said to her, "Daughter

of Kalessin, welcome home.”

“My sister is with me, Azver,” she said.

He turned his face—a light-skinned, hard, Kargish face, Tenar saw—and looked straight at Tehanu. He came to her. He dropped on both his knees before her. *“Hama Gondun!”* he said, and again, “Daughter of Kalessin.”

Tehanu stood motionless for a moment. Slowly she put out her hand to him—her right hand, the burnt hand, the claw. He took it, bowed his head, and kissed it.

“My honor is that I was your prophet, Woman of Gont,” he said, with a kind of exulting tenderness.

Then, rising, he turned at last to Lebannen, made his bow, and said, “My king, be welcome.”

“It’s a joy to me to see you again, Patterner! But I bring a crowd into your solitude.”

“My solitude is crowded already,” said the Patterner. “A few live souls might keep the balance.”

His eyes, pale grey-blue-green, glanced round among them. He suddenly smiled, a smile of great warmth, surprising on his hard face. “But here are women of my own people,” he said in Kargish, and came to Tenar and Seserakh, who stood side by side.

“I am Tenar of Atuan—of Gont,” she said. “With me is the High Princess of the Kargad Lands.”

He made a proper bow. Seserakh made her stiff courtesy, but her words poured out, tumultuous, in Kargish—“Oh, Lord Priest, I’m glad you’re here! If it weren’t for my friend Tenar I would have gone mad, thinking nobody was left in the world that could talk like a human being except the idiot women they sent with me from Awabath—but I am learning to speak as they do—and I am learning courage, Tenar is my friend and teacher—But last night I broke taboo! I broke taboo! Oh, Lord Priest, please tell me what I must do to atone! I walked on the Dragons’ Way!”

“But you were aboard the ship, princess,” said Tenar (“I dreamed,” Seserakh said, impatient), “and the Lord Patterner is not a priest but an—a sorcerer—”

“Princess,” said Azver the Patterner, “I think we’re all walking on the Dragons’ Way. And all taboos may well be shaken or broken. Not only in dream. We’ll speak of this later, under the trees. Have no fear. But let me greet my friends, if you will?”

Seserakh nodded regally, and he turned away to greet Alder and Onyx.

The princess watched him. “He is a warrior,” she said to Tenar in Kargish, with satisfaction. “Not a priest. Priests have no friends.”

They all moved on slowly and came under the shadow of the trees.

Tenar looked up into the arcades and ogives of branches, the layers and galleries of leaves. She saw oaks and a big hemmen tree, but most were the trees of the Grove. Their oval leaves moved easily in the air, like the leaves of aspen and poplar; some had yellowed, and there was a dapple of gold and brown on the ground at their roots, but the foliage in the morning light was the green of summer, full of shadows and deep light.

The Patterner led them along a path among the trees. As they went, Tenar thought again about Ged, remembering his voice as he told her about this place. She felt nearer him than she had been since she and Tehanu left him in the dooryard of their house in the early summer and walked down to Gont Port to take the king's ship to Havnor. She knew Ged had lived here with the Patterner of long ago, and had walked here with Azver. She knew the Grove was to him the central and sacred place, the heart of peace. She felt that she might look up and see him at the end of one of the long, sun-dappled glades. And that notion eased her heart.

For her dream of the night before had troubled her, and when Seserakh burst out with her dream of breaking taboo, Tenar had been deeply startled. She too had broken taboo in her dream, transgressed. She had climbed the last three stairs of the Empty Throne, the forbidden steps. The Place of the Tombs on Atuan was long ago and far away, and maybe the earthquake had left no throne or steps there at all in the temple where her name had been taken from her: but the Old Powers of the Earth were there, and they were here. They were not changed or moved. They were the earthquake, and the earth. Their justice was not man's justice. As she had walked by the round hill, Roke Knoll, she knew she walked where all the powers met.

She had defied them, long ago, breaking free of the Tombs, stealing the treasure, fleeing here to the West. But they were here. Under her feet. In the roots of these trees, in the roots of the hill.

So, here in the center where earth's powers met, the human powers had also met together: a king, a princess, the masters of wizardry. And the dragons.

And a priestess-thief turned farmwife, and a village sorcerer with a broken heart. . .

She looked round at Alder. He was walking beside Tehanu. They were talking quietly. Tehanu talked more readily with him than with anyone, even Irian, and looked at ease when she was with him. It cheered Tenar to see them, and she walked on under the great trees, letting her awareness slip into a half trance of

green light and moving leaves. She was sorry when, after only a short way, the Patterner halted. She felt she could walk forever in the Grove.

They gathered in a grassy glade, open to the sky in the center where the branches did not reach to meet. A tributary of the Thwilburn ran across one side of it, willow and alder growing along its course. Not far from the stream was a low, lumpy house built of stone and sod, with a taller lean-to against its wall made of withies and mats of woven reed. "My winter palace, my summer palace," Azver said.

Both Onyx and Lebannen stared at these small structures in surprise, and Irian said, "I never knew you had a house at all!"

"I didn't," said the Patterner. "But bones get old."

With a little fetching and carrying from the ship, the house was soon furnished with bedding for the women, and the lean-to for the men. Boys ran back and forth to the eaves of the Grove with plentiful provisions from the kitchens of the Great House. And late in the afternoon, the Masters of Roke came at the invitation of the Patterner to meet with the king's party.

"Is this where they gather to choose the new Archmage?" Tenar asked Onyx, for Ged had told her of that secret glade.

Onyx shook his head. "I think not," he said. "The king would know, for he was there when they last met. But maybe only the Patterner could tell you. Because things change in this wood, you know. 'It is not always where it is.' Nor are the ways through it ever quite the same, I think."

"It should be frightening," she said, "but I can't seem to be afraid."

Onyx smiled. "So it is, here," he said.

She watched the masters come into the glade, led by the big, bearlike Summoner and Gamble the young weather-master. Onyx told her who the others were: the Changer, the Chanter, the Herbal, the Hand: all grey-haired, the Changer frail with age, using his wizard's staff as a walking stick. The Doorkeeper, smooth-faced and almond-eyed, seemed neither young nor old. The Namer, who came last, looked forty or so. His face was calm and closed. He presented himself to the king, naming himself Kurremkarmerruk.

At that Irian burst out, indignant, "But you are not!"

He looked at her and said evenly, "It is the Namer's name."

"Then my Kurremkarmerruk is dead?"

He nodded.

"Oh," she cried, "that's hard news to bear! He was my friend, when I had few

friends here!" She turned away and would not look at the Namer, angry and tearless in her grief. She had greeted the Master Herbal with affection, and the Doorkeeper, but she did not speak to the others.

Tenar saw that they watched Irian under their grey brows with uneasy looks.

From her they looked at Tehanu; and looked away again; and glanced back, sidelong. And Tenar began to wonder what they saw when they looked at Tehanu and Irian. For these were men who saw with wizard's eyes.

So she bade herself forgive the Summoner for his uncouth and unconcealed horror when he first saw Tehanu. Maybe it had not been horror. Maybe it had been awe.

When they were all made known to one another and were seated in a circle, with cushions and stump seats for those who needed them, the grass for carpet, and sky and leaves for ceiling, the Patterner said in his voice that still had some Kargish accent in it, "If it please him, my fellow masters, we will hear the king."

Lebannen stood up. As he spoke, Tenar watched him with irrepressible pride. He was so beautiful, so wise in his youth! She did not follow all his words at first, only the sense and passion of them.

He told the masters, briefly and clearly, all the matter that had brought him to Roke: the dragons and the dreams.

He ended, "It seemed to us that night by night all these things draw together, always more certainly, to some event, some end. It seemed to us that here, on this ground, with your knowledge and power aiding us, we might foresee and meet that event, not letting it overwhelm our understanding. The wisest of our mages have foretold: a great change is upon us. We must join together to learn what that change is, its causes, its course, and how we may hope to turn it from conflict and ruin to harmony and peace, in whose sign I rule."

Brand the Summoner stood to answer him. After some stately politenesses, with a special welcome to the High Princess, he said, "That the dreams of men, and more than their dreams, forewarn us of dire changes, all the masters and wizards of Roke agree. That there is a disturbance of the deepset boundaries between death and life—transgression of those boundaries, and the threat of worse—we confirm. But that these disturbances can be understood or controlled by any but the masters of the art magic, we doubt. And very deeply do we doubt that dragons, whose lives and death are wholly different from that of man, can ever be trusted to submit their wild wrath and jealousy to serve human good."

"Summoner," Lebannen said, before Irian could speak, "Orm Embar died for

me on Selidor. Kalessin bore me to my throne.—Here in this circle are three peoples: the Kargish, the Hardic, and the People of the West."

"They were all one people, once," said the Namer in his level, toneless voice.

"But they are not now," said the Summoner, each word heavy and separate. "Do not misunderstand me because I speak hard truth, my Lord King! I honor the truce you have sworn with the dragons. When the danger we are in is past, Roke will aid Havnor in seeking lasting peace with them. But the dragons have nothing to do with this crisis that is upon us. Nor have the eastern peoples, who foreswore their immortal souls when they forgot the Language of the Making."

"Es eyemra," said a soft, hissing voice: Tehanu, standing.

The Summoner stared at her.

"Our language," she repeated in Hardic, staring back at him.

Irian laughed. *"Es eyemra,"* she said.

"You are not immortal," Tenar said to the Summoner. She had had no intention of speaking. She did not stand up. The words broke from her like fire from struck rock. "We are! We die to rejoin the undying world. It was you who foreswore immortality."

Then they were all still. The Patterner had made a small movement of his hands, a gentle movement.

His face was preoccupied, untroubled, as he studied a design of a few twigs and leaves he had made on the grass where he sat, just in front of his crossed legs. He looked up, looked round at them all. "I think we will have to go there soon," he said.

After another silence, Lebannen asked, "Go where, my lord?"

"Into the dark," said the Patterner.

As Alder sat listening to them speak, slowly the voices grew faint, fading, and the warm late sunlight of late summer dimmed into darkness. Nothing was left but the trees: tall blind presences between the blind earth and the sky. The oldest living children of the earth. *O Segoy*, he said in his heart: *made and maker, let me come to you.*

The darkness went on and on, past the trees, past everything.

Against that emptiness he saw the hill, the high hill that had been on their right as they walked up out of the town. He saw the dust of the road, the stones of the path, that led past that hill.

He turned now aside from the path, leaving the others, and walked up the slope.

The grasses were tall. The spent flower cases of sparkweed nodded among them. He came on a narrow path and followed it up the steep hillside. Now I am myself, he said in his heart. Segoy, the world is beautiful. Let me come through it to you.

I can do again what I was meant to do, he thought as he walked. I can mend what was broken. I can rejoin.

He reached the top of the hill. Standing there in the sun and wind among the nodding grasses he saw on his right the fields, the roofs of the little town and the big house, the bright bay and the sea beyond it. If he turned he would see behind him in the west the trees of the endless forest, fading on and on into blue distances. Before him the hill slope was dim and grey, going down to the wall of stones and the darkness beyond the wall, and the crowding, calling shadows at the wall. *I will come*, he said to them. *I will come!*

Warmth fell across his shoulders and his hands. Wind stirred in the leaves above his head. Voices spoke, speaking, not calling, not crying out his name. The Patterner's eyes were watching him across the circle of grass. The Summoner too was watching him. He looked down, bewildered. He tried to listen. He gathered his mind and listened.

The king was speaking, using all his skill and strength to hold these fierce, willful men and women to one purpose. "Let me try to tell you, Masters of Roke, what I learned from the High Princess as we sailed here. Princess, may I speak for you?"

Unveiled, she gazed across the circle at him, and bowed grave permission.

"This is her tale, then: long ago, the human and the dragon peoples were one kind, speaking one language. But they sought different things, and so they agreed to part—to go different ways. That agreement was called the Vedurnan."

Onyx's head went up, and Seppel's bright dark eyes widened. *"Verw nadan,"* he whispered.

"The human beings went east, the dragons west. The humans gave up their knowledge of the Language of the Making, and in exchange received all skill and craft of hand, and ownership of all that hands can make. The dragons let go all such things. But they kept the Old Speech."

"And their wings," said Irian.

"And their wings," Lebannen said. He had caught Azver's eye. "Patterner, perhaps you can continue the story better than I?"

"The villagers of Gont and Hur-at-Hur remember what the wise men of Roke

and the priests of Karego forget," Azver said. "Yes, as a child I was told this tale, I think, or something like it. But the dragons had been forgotten in it. It told how the Dark Folk of the Archipelago broke their oath. We had all promised to forgo sorcery and the language of sorcery, speaking only our common tongue. We would name no names, and make no spells. We would trust to Segoy, to the powers of the Earth our mother, mother of the Warrior Gods. But the Dark Folk broke the covenant. They caught the Language of the Making in their craft, writing it in runes. They kept it, taught it, used it. They made spells with it, with the skill of their hands, with false tongues speaking the true words. So the Kargish people can never trust them. So says the tale."

Irian spoke: "Men fear death as dragons do not. Men want to own life, possess it, as if it were a jewel in a box. Those ancient mages craved everlasting life. They learned to use true names to keep men from dying. But those who cannot die can never be reborn."

"The name and the dragon are one," said Kurremkarmerruk the Namer. "We men lost our names at the *verw nadan*, but we learned how to regain them. Name is self. Why should death change that?"

He looked at the Summoner; but Brand sat heavy and grim, listening, not speaking.

"Say more of this, Namer, if you will," the king said.

"I say what I have half learned, half guessed, not from village tales but from the most ancient records in the Isolate Tower. A thousand years before the first kings of Enlad, there were men in Éa and Soléa, the first and greatest of the mages, the Rune Makers. It was they who learned to write the Language of the Making. They made the runes, which the dragons never learned. They taught us to give each soul its true name: which is its truth, its self. And with their power they granted to those who bear their true name life beyond the body's death."

"Life immortal," Seppel's soft voice took the word. He spoke smiling a little. "In a great land of rivers and mountains and beautiful cities, where there is no suffering or pain, and where the self endures, unchanged, unchanging, forever . . . That is the dream of the ancient Lore of Paln."

"Where," the Summoner said, "where is that land?"

"On the other wind," said Irian. "The west beyond the west." She looked round at them all, scornful, irate. "Do you think we dragons fly only on the winds of this world? Do you think our freedom, for which we gave up all possessions, is no greater than that of the mindless seagulls? That our realm is a few rocks at the edge

of your rich islands? You own the earth, you own the sea. But we are the fire of sunlight, we fly the wind! You wanted land to own. You wanted things to make and keep. And you have that. That was the division, the *verw nadan*. But you were not content with your share. You wanted not only your cares, but our freedom. You wanted the wind! And by the spells and wizardries of those oath-breakers, you stole half our realm from us, walled it away from life and light, so that you could live there forever. Thieves, traitors!"

"Sister," Tehanu said. "These are not the men who stole from us. They are those who pay the price."

A silence followed her harsh, whispering voice.

"What was the price?" said the Namer.

Tehanu looked at Irian. Irian hesitated, and then said in a much subdued voice, *"Greed puts out the sun*. These are Kalessin's words."

Azver the Patterner spoke. As he spoke, he looked into the aisles of the trees across the clearing, as if following the slight movements of the leaves. "The ancients saw that the dragons' realm was not of the body only. That they could fly . . . outside of time, it may be . . . And envying that freedom, they followed the dragons' way into the west beyond the west. There they claimed part of that realm as their own. A timeless realm, where the self might be forever. But not in the body, as the dragons were. Only in spirit could men be there . . . So they made a wall which no living body could cross, neither man nor dragon. For they feared the anger of the dragons. And their arts of naming laid a great net of spells upon all the western lands, so that when the people of the islands die, they would come to the west beyond the west and live there in the spirit forever.

"But as the wall was built and the spell laid, the wind ceased to blow, within the wall. The sea withdrew. The springs ceased to run. The mountains of sunrise became the mountains of the night. Those that died came to a dark land, a dry land."

"I have walked in that land," Lebannen said, low and unwillingly. "I do not fear death, but I fear it."

There was a silence among them.

"Cob, and Thorion," the Summoner said in his rough, reluctant voice, "they tried to break down that wall. To bring the dead back into life."

"Not into life, master," Seppel said. "Still, like the Rune Makers, they sought the bodiless, immortal self."

"Yet their spells disturbed that place," the Summoner said, brooding. "So the

dragons began to remember the ancient wrong . . . And so the souls of the dead come reaching now across the wall, yearning back to life."

Alder stood up. He said, "It is not life they yearn for. It is death. To be one with the earth again. To rejoin it."

They all looked at him, but he hardly knew it; his awareness was half with them, half in the dry land. The grass beneath his feet was green and sunlit, was dead and dim. The leaves of the trees trembled above him and the low stone wall lay only a little distance from him, down the dark hill. Of them all he saw only Tehanu; he could not see her clearly, but he knew her, standing between him and the wall. He spoke to her. "They built it, but they cannot unbuild it," he said. "Will you help me, Tehanu?"

"I will, Hara," she said.

A shadow rushed between them, a great dark bulky strength, hiding her, seizing him, holding him; he struggled, gasped for breath, could not draw breath, saw red fire in the darkness, and saw nothing more.

They met in the starlight at the edge of the glade, the king of the western lands and the Master of Roke, the two powers of Earthsea.

"Will he live?" the Summoner asked, and Lebannen answered, "The healer says he is in no danger now."

"I did wrong," said the Summoner. "I am sorry for it."

"Why did you summon him back?" the king asked, not reproving but wanting an answer.

After a long time the Summoner said, grimly, "Because I had the power to do it."

They paced along in silence down an open path among the great trees. It was very dark to either hand, but the starlight shone grey where they walked.

"I was wrong. But it is not right to want to die," the Summoner said. The burr of the East Reach was in his voice. He spoke low, almost pleadingly. "For the very old, the very ill, it may be. But life is given us. Surely it's wrong not to hold and treasure that great gift!"

"Death also is given us," said the king.

Alder lay on a pallet on the grass. He should lie out under the stars, the Patterner had said, and the old Master Herbal had agreed to that. He lay asleep, and Tehanu sat still beside him.

Tenar sat in the doorway of the low stone house and watched her. The great stars of late summer shone above the clearing: highest of them the star called Tehanu, the Swan's Heart, the linchpin of the sky.

Seserakh came quietly out of the house and sat down on the threshold beside her. She had taken off the circlet that held her veil, leaving her mass of tawny hair unbound.

"Oh my friend," she murmured, "what will happen to us? The dead are coming here. Do you feel them? Like the tide rising. Across that wall. I think nobody can stop them. All the dead people, from the graves of all the islands of the west, all the centuries . . ."

Tenar felt the beating, the calling, in her head and in her blood. She knew now, they all knew, what Alder had known. But she held to what she trusted, even if trust had become mere hope. She said, "They are only the dead, Seserakh. We built a false wall. It must be unbuilt. But there is a true one."

Tehanu got up and came softly over to them. She sat on the doorstep below them.

"He's all right, he's sleeping," she whispered.

"Were you there with him?" Tenar asked.

Tehanu nodded. "We were at the wall."

"What did the Summoner do?"

"Summoned him—brought him back by force."

"Into life."

"Into life."

"I don't know which I should fear more," Tenar said, "death or life. I wish I could be done with fear."

Seserakh's face, the wave of her warm hair, bent down to Tenar's shoulder for a moment in a light caress. "You are brave, brave," she murmured. "But oh! I fear the sea! and I fear death!"

Tehanu sat quietly. In the faint soft light that hung among the trees, Tenar could see how her daughter's slender hand lay crossed over her burnt and twisted hand.

"I think," Tehanu said in her soft, strange voice, "that when I die, I can breathe back the breath that made me live. I can give back to the world all that I didn't do. All that I might have been and couldn't be. All the choices I didn't make. All the things I lost and spent and wasted. I can give them back to the world. To the lives that haven't been lived yet. That will be my gift back to the world that gave me the life I did live, the love I loved, the breath I breathed."

She looked up at the stars and sighed. "Not for a long time yet," she whispered. Then she looked round at Tenar.

Seserakh stroked Tenar's hair gently, rose, and went silently into the house.

"Before long, I think, Mother . . ."

"I know."

"I don't want to leave you."

"You have to leave me."

"I know."

They sat on in the glimmering darkness of the Grove, silent.

"Look," Tehanu murmured. A shooting star crossed the sky, a quick, slow-fading trail of light.

Five wizards sat in starlight. "Look," one said, his hand following the trail of the shooting star.

"The soul of a dragon dying," said Azver the Patterner. "So they say in Karego-At."

"Do dragons die?" asked Onyx, musing. "Not as we do, I think."

"They don't live as we do. They move between the worlds. So says Orm Irian. From the world's wind to the other wind."

"As we sought to do," said Seppel. "And failed."

Gamble looked at him curiously. "Have you on Paln always known this tale, this lore we have learned today—of the parting of dragon and mankind, and the making of the dry land?"

"Not as we heard it today. I was taught that the *verw nadan* was the first great triumph of the art magic. And that the goal of wizardry was to triumph over time and live forever . . . Hence the evils the Pelnish Lore has done."

"At least you kept the Mother knowledge we despised," Onyx said. "As your people did, Azver."

"Well, you had the sense to build your Great House here," the Patterner said, smiling.

"But we built it wrong," Onyx said. "All we build, we build wrong."

"So we must knock it down," said Seppel.

"No," said Gamble. "We're not dragons. We do live in houses. We have to have some walls, at least."

"So long as the wind can blow through the windows," said Azver.

"And who will come in the doors?" asked the Doorkeeper in his mild voice.

There was a pause. A cricket trilled industriously somewhere across the glade, fell silent, trilled again.

"Dragons?" said Azver.

The Doorkeeper shook his head. "I think maybe the division that was begun, and then betrayed, will be completed at last," he said. "The dragons will go free, and leave us here to the choice we made."

"The knowledge of good and evil," said Onyx.

"The joy of making, shaping," said Seppel. "Our mastery."

"And our greed, our weakness, our fear," said Azver.

The cricket was answered by another, closer to the stream. The two trills pulsed, crossed, in and out of rhythm.

"What I fear," said Gamble, "so much that I fear to say it—is this: that when the dragons go, our mastery will go with them. Our art. Our magic."

The silence of the others showed that they feared what he did. But the Doorkeeper spoke at last, gently, but with some certainty. "No, I think not. They are the Making, yes. But we learned the Making. We made it ours. It can't be taken from us. To lose it we must forget it, throw it away."

"As my people did," said Azver.

"Yet your people remembered what the earth is, what life everlasting is," said Seppel. "While we forgot."

There was another long silence among them.

"I could reach my hand out to the wall," Gamble said in a very low voice, and Seppel said, "They are near, they are very near."

"How are we to know what we should do?" Onyx said.

Azver spoke into the silence that followed the question. "Once when my lord the Archmage was here with me in the Grove, he said to me he had spent his life learning how to choose to do what he had no choice but to do."

"I wish he were here now," said Onyx.

"He's done with doing," the Doorkeeper murmured, smiling.

"But we're not. We sit here talking on the edge of the precipice—we all know it." Onyx looked round at their starlit faces. "What do the dead want of us?"

"What do the dragons want of us?" said Gamble. "These women who are dragons, dragons who are women—why are they here? Can we trust them?"

"Have we a choice?" said the Doorkeeper.

"I think not," said the Patterner. An edge of hardness, a sword's edge, had come into his voice. "We can only follow."

"Follow the dragons?" Gamble asked.

Azver shook his head. "Alder."

"But he's no guide, Patterner!" said Gamble. "A village mender?"

Onyx said, "Alder has wisdom, but in his hands, not in his head. He follows his heart. Certainly he doesn't seek to lead us."

"Yet he was chosen from among us all."

"Who chose him?" Seppel asked softly.

The Patterner answered him: "The dead."

They sat silent. The crickets' trill had ceased. Two tall figures came towards them through the grass lit grey by starlight. "May Brand and I sit with you a while?" Lebannen said. "There is no sleep tonight."

On the doorstep of the house on the Overfell, Ged sat watching the stars above the sea. He had gone in to sleep an hour or more ago, but as he closed his eyes he saw the hillside and heard the voices rising like a wave. He got up at once and went outside, where he could see the stars move.

He was tired. His eyes would close, and then he would be there by the wall of stones, his heart cold with dread that he would be there forever, not knowing the way back. At last, impatient and sick of fear, he got up again, fetched a lantern from the house and lit it, and set off on the path to Moss's house. Moss might or might not be frightened; she lived pretty near the wall, these days. But Heather would be in a panic, and Moss would not be able to soothe her. And since whatever had to be done, it wasn't he who could do it this time, he could at least go comfort the poor halfwit. He could tell her it was only dreams.

It was hard going in the dark, the lantern throwing great shadows of small things across the path. He walked slower than he would have liked to walk, and stumbled sometimes.

He saw a light in the widower's house, late as it was. A child wailed, over in the village. *Mother, mother, why are the people crying? Who are the people crying, mother?* There was no sleep there, either. There was not much sleep anywhere in Earthsea, tonight, Ged thought. He grinned a little as he thought it; for he had always liked that pause, that fearful pause, the moment before things changed.

Alder woke. He lay on earth and felt its depth beneath him. Above him the bright stars burned, the stars of summer, moving between leaf and leaf with the wind's blowing, moving from east to west with the world's turning. He watched them a

while before he let them go.

Tehanu was waiting for him on the hill.

“What must we do, Hara?” she asked him.

“We have to mend the world,” he said. He smiled, because his heart had grown light at last. “We have to break the wall.”

“Can they help us?” she asked, for the dead were gathered waiting down in the darkness as countless as grass or sand or stars, silent now, a great, dim beach of souls.

“No,” he said, “but maybe others can.” He walked down the hill to the wall. It was little more than waist-high here. He put his hands on one of the stones of the coping row and tried to move it. It was fixed fast, or was heavier than a stone should be; he could not lift it, could not make it move at all.

Tehanu came beside him. “Help me,” he said. She put her hands on the stone, the human hand and the burnt claw, gripping it as well as she could, and gave a lifting tug as he did. The stone moved a little, then a little more. “Push it!” she said, and together they pushed it slowly out of place, grating hard on the rock beneath it, till it fell on the far side of the wall with a dull heavy thump.

The next stone was smaller; together they could lift it up out of its place. They let it drop into the dust on the near side.

A tremor ran through the ground under their feet then. Small chinking stones in the wall rattled. And with a long sigh, the multitudes of the dead came closer to the wall.

The Patterner stood up suddenly and stood listening. Leaves stormed all about the glade, the trees of the Grove bowed and trembled as if under a great wind, but there was no wind.

“Now it changes,” he said, and he walked away from them, into the darkness under the trees.

The Summoner, the Doorkeeper, and Seppel rose and followed him, quick and silent. Gamble and Onyx followed more slowly after them.

Lebannen stood up; he took a few steps after the others, hesitated, and hurried across the glade to the low house of stone and sod. “Irian,” he said, stooping to the dark doorway. “Irian, will you take me with you?”

She came out of the house; she was smiling, and there was a kind of fiery

brightness all about her. "Come then, come quick," she said, and took his hand. Her hand burned like a coal of fire as she lifted him into the other wind.

After a little time Seserakh came out of the house into the starlight, and after her came Tenar. They stood and looked about them. Nothing moved; the trees were still again.

"They are all gone," Seserakh whispered. "On the Dragons' Way."

She took a step forward, gazing into the dark.

"What are we to do, Tenar?"

"We are to keep the house," Tenar said.

"Oh!" Seserakh whispered, dropping to her knees. She had seen Lebannen lying near the doorway, stretched facedown in the grass. "He isn't dead—I think—Oh, my dear Lord King, don't go, don't die!"

"He's with them. Stay with him. Keep him warm. Keep the house, Seserakh," Tenar said. She went to where Alder lay, his unseeing eyes turned to the stars. She sat down by him, her hand on his. She waited.

Alder could scarcely move the great stone his hands were on, but the Summoner was beside him, stooping with his shoulder against it, and said, "Now!" Together they pushed it till it overbalanced and dropped down with that same heavy, final thump on the far side of the wall.

Others were there now with him and Tehanu, wrenching at the stones, casting them down beside the wall. Alder saw his own hands cast shadows for an instant from a red gleam. Orm Irian, as he had seen her first, a great dragon shape, had let out her fiery breath as she struggled to move a boulder from the lowest rank of stones, deepset in the earth. Her talons struck sparks and her thorned back arched, and the rock rolled ponderously free, breaching the wall entirely in that place.

There was a vast, soft cry among the shadows on the other side, like the sound of the sea on a hollow shore. Their darkness surged up against the wall. But Alder looked up and saw that it was no longer dark. Light moved in that sky where the stars had never moved, quick sparks of fire far in the dark west.

"Kalessin!"

That was Tehanu's voice. He looked at her. She was gazing upward, westward. She had no eye for earth.

She reached up her arms. Fire ran along her hands, her arms, into her hair, into her face and body, flamed up into great wings above her head, and lifted her into the air, a creature all fire, blazing, beautiful.

She cried out aloud, a clear, wordless cry. She flew high, headlong, fast, up into the sky where the light was growing and a white wind had erased the unmeaning stars.

From among the hosts of the dead a few here and there, like her, rose up flickering into dragons, and mounted on the wind.

Most came forward afoot. They were not pressing, not crying out now, but walking with unhurried certainty towards the fallen places in the wall: great multitudes of men and women, who as they came to the broken wall did not hesitate but stepped across it and were gone: a wisp of dust, a breath that shone an instant in the ever-brightening light.

Alder watched them. He still held in his hands, forgotten, a chinking stone he had wrenched from the wall to loosen a larger rock. He watched the dead go free. At last he saw her among them. He tossed the stone aside then and stepped forward. "Lily," he said. She saw him and smiled and held out her hand to him. He took her hand, and they crossed together into the sunlight.

Lebannen stood by the ruined wall and watched the dawn brighten in the east. There was an east now, where there had been no direction, no way to go. There was east and west, and light and motion. The very ground moved, shook, shivering like a great animal, so that the wall of stones beyond where they had broken it shuddered and slid into rubble. Fire broke from the far, black peaks of the mountains called Pain, the fire that burns in the heart of the world, the fire that feeds dragons.

He looked into the sky over those mountains and saw, as he and Ged had seen them once above the western sea, the dragons flying on the wind of morning.

Three came wheeling towards him where he stood among the others near the crest of the hill, above the ruined wall. Two he knew, Orm Irian and Kalessin. The third had bright mail, gold, with wings of gold. That one flew highest and did not stoop down to them. Orm Irian played about her in the air and they flew together, one chasing the other higher and higher, till all at once the highest rays of the rising sun struck Tehanu and she burned like her name, a great bright star.

Kalessin circled again, flew low, and alighted hugely amid the ruins of the wall.

"Agni Lebannen," said the dragon to the king.

"Eldest," the king said to the dragon.

"Aissadan verw nadannan," said the vast, hissing voice, like a sea of cymbals.

Beside Lebannen, Brand the Summoner of Roke stood planted solidly. He

repeated the dragon's words in the Speech of the Making, and then said them in Hardic: "What was divided is divided."

The Patterner stood near them, his hair bright in the brightening light. He said, "What was built is broken. What was broken is made whole."

Then he looked up yearning into the sky, at the gold dragon and the red-bronze one; but they had flown almost out of sight, wheeling now in vast gyres over the long, falling land, where empty shadow cities faded to nothing in the light of day.

"Eldest," he said, and the long head swung slowly back to him.

"Will she follow the way back through the forest, sometimes?" Azver asked in the speech of dragons.

Kalessin's long, fathomless, yellow eye regarded him. The enormous mouth seemed, like the mouths of lizards, closed upon a smile. It did not speak.

Then ponderously dragging its length along the wall so that stones still standing slid and fell grating beneath its iron belly, Kalessin writhed away from them, and with a rush and rattle of upraised wings pushed off from the hillside and flew low over the land towards the mountains, whose peaks now were bright with smoke and white steam, fire and sunlight.

"Come, friends," said Seppel in his soft voice. "It's not yet our time to go free."

Sunlight was in the sky above the crowns of the highest trees, but the glade still held the chill grey of dawn. Tenar sat with her hand on Alder's hand, her face bowed down. She looked at the cold dew beading a grass blade, how it hung in tiny, delicate drops along the blade, each drop reflecting all the world.

Someone spoke her name. She did not look up.

"He's gone," she said.

The Patterner knelt by her. He touched Alder's face with a gentle hand.

He knelt there silent a while. Then he said to Tenar in her language, "My lady, I saw Tehanu. She flies golden on the other wind."

Tenar glanced up at him. His face was white and worn, but there was a shadow of glory in his eyes.

She struggled and then said, speaking roughly and almost inaudibly, "Whole?"

He nodded.

She stroked Alder's hand, the mender's hand, fine, skillful. Tears came into her eyes.

"Let me be with him a while," she said, and she began to cry. She put her hands to her face and cried hard, bitterly, silently.

Azver went to the little group by the door of the house. Onyx and Gamble were near the Summoner, who stood, heavy and anxious, near the princess. She crouched beside Lebannen, her arms across him, protecting him, daring any wizard to touch him. Her eyes flashed. She held Lebannen's short steel dagger naked in her hand.

"I came back with him," Brand said to Azver. "I tried to stay with him. I wasn't sure of the way. She won't let me near him."

"Ganaí," Azver said, her title in Kargish, princess.

Her eyes flashed up to him. "Oh may Atwah-Wuluah be thanked and the Mother praised for ever!" she cried. "Lord Azver! Make these accursed-sorcerers go away. Kill them! They have killed my king." She held out the dagger to him by its slender steel blade.

"No, princess. He went with the dragon Irian. But this sorcerer brought him back to us. Let me see him," and he knelt and turned Lebannen's face a little to see it better, and laid his hands on his chest. "He's cold," he said. "It was a hard way back. Take him in your arms, princess. Keep him warm."

"I have tried to," she said, biting her lip. She flung down the dagger and bent to the unconscious man. "O poor king!" she said softly in Hardic, "dear king, poor king!"

Azver got up and said to the Summoner, "I think he will be all right, Brand. She is much more use than we are, now."

The Summoner put out his big hand and took hold of Azver's arm. "Steady now," he said.

"The Doorkeeper," Azver said, going whiter than before and looking around the glade.

"He came back with the Pelnishman," Brand said. "Sit down, Azver."

Azver obeyed him, sitting down on the log seat the old Changer had sat on in their circle the afternoon before. A thousand years ago it seemed. The old men had gone back to the School in the evening . . . And then the long night had begun, the night that brought the wall of stones so close that to sleep was to be there, and to be there was terror, so no one had slept. No one, maybe, in all Roke, in all the isles . . . Only Alder, who went to guide them . . . Azver found he was dozing and shivering.

Gamble tried to make him go inside the winter house, but Azver insisted that he

should be near the princess to interpret for her. And near Tenar, he thought without saying it, to protect her. To let her grieve. But Alder was done with grieving. He had passed his grief to her. To them all. His joy . . .

The Herbal came from the School and fussed about Azver, put a winter cloak over his shoulders. He sat on in a weary, feverish half doze, not heeding the others, dimly irritated by the presence of so many people in his sweet silent glade, watching the sunlight creep down among the leaves. His vigil was rewarded when the princess came to him, knelt before him looking with solicitous respect into his face, and said, "Lord Azver, the king would speak with you."

She helped him stand up, as if he were an old man. He did not mind. "Thank you, *gaínha*," he said.

"I am not queen," she said with a laugh.

"You will be," said the Patterner.

It was the strong tide of the full moon, and *Dolphin* had to wait for the slack to run between the Armed Cliffs. Tenar did not disembark in Gont Port till midmorning, and then there was the long walk uphill. It was near sunset when she came through Re Albi and took the cliff path to the house.

Ged was watering the cabbages, well grown by now.

He straightened up and looked at her coming to him, that hawk look, frowning. "Ah," he said.

"Oh my dear," she said. She hurried, the last few steps, as he came to her.

She was tired. She was very glad to sit with him with a glass of Spark's good red wine and watch the evening of early autumn flare into gold over all the western sea.

"How can I tell you everything?" she said.

"Tell it backward," he said.

"All right. I will. They wanted me to stay, but I said I wanted to go home. But there was a council meeting, the King's Council, you know, for the betrothal. There'll be a grand wedding and all, of course, but I don't think I have to go. Because that was truly when they married. With Elfarran's Ring. Our ring."

He looked at her and smiled, the broad, sweet smile that she thought, perhaps wrongly, perhaps rightly, nobody but her had ever seen on his face.

"Yes?" he said.

"Lebannen came and stood here, see, on my left, and then Seserakh came and stood here on my right. In front of Morred's throne. And I held up the Ring. The

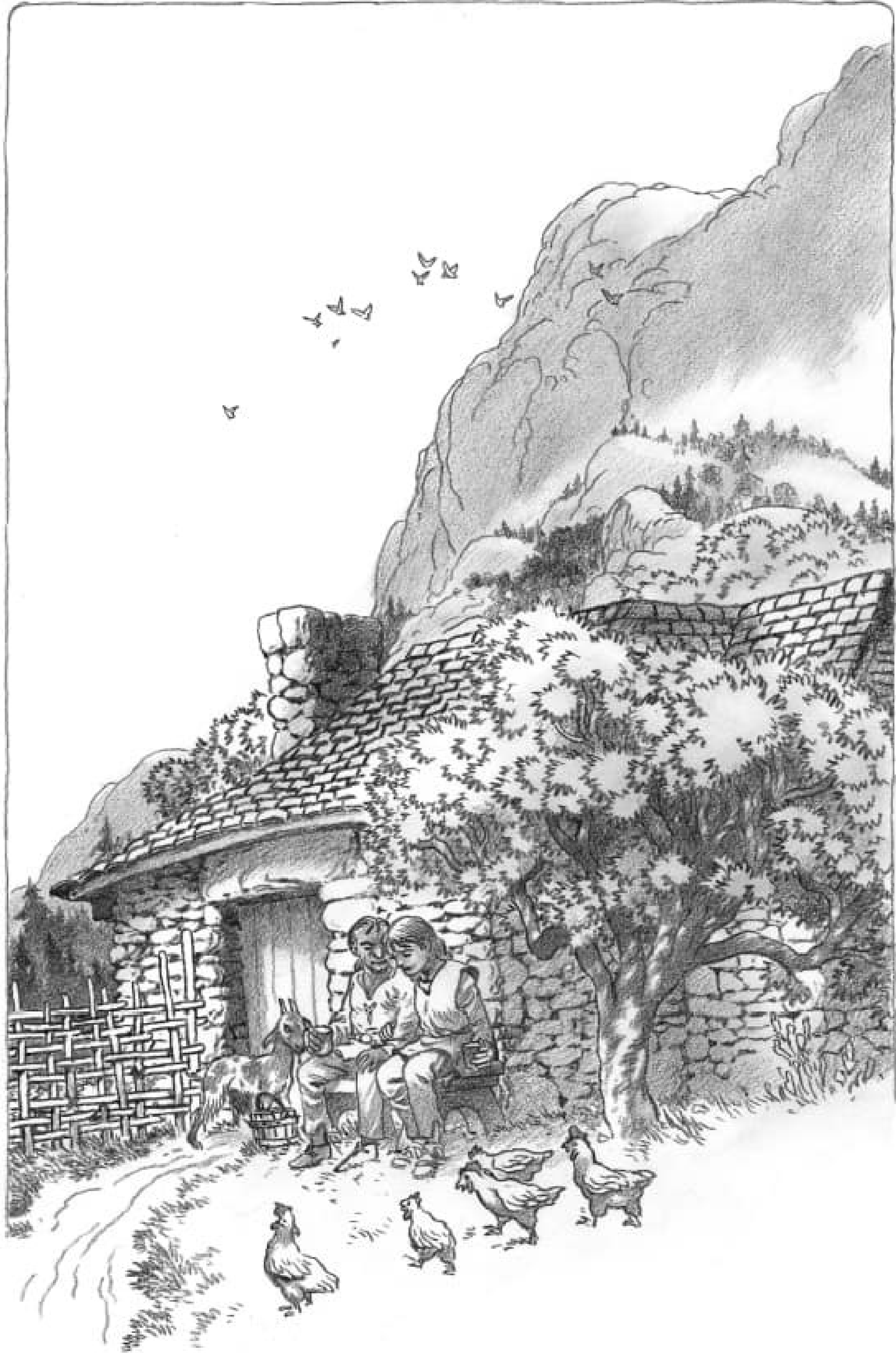
way I did when we brought it to Havnor, remember? in *Lookfar*, in the sunlight? Lebannen took it in his hands and kissed it and gave it back to me. And I put it on her arm, it just went over her hand—she's not a little woman, Seserakh—Oh, you should see her, Ged! What a beauty she is, what a lion! He's met his match.—And everybody shouted. And there were festivals and so on. And so I could get away."

"Go on."

"Backward?"

"Backward."

"Well. Before that was Roke."



"Roke's never simple."

"No."

They drank their red wine in silence.

"Tell me of the Patterner."

She smiled. "Seserakh calls him the Warrior. She says only a warrior would fall in love with a dragon."

"Who followed him to the dry land—that night?"

"He followed Alder."

"Ah," Ged said, with surprise and a certain satisfaction.

"So did others of the masters. And Lebannen, and Irian . . ."

"And Tehanu."

A silence.

"She went out of the house. When I came out she was gone." A long silence. "Azver saw her. In the sunrise. On the other wind."

A silence.

"They're all gone. There are no dragons left in Havnor or the western islands. Onyx said: as that shadow place and all the shadows in it rejoined the world of light, so they regained their true realm."

"We broke the world to make it whole," Ged said.

After a long time Tenar said in a soft, thin voice, "The Patterner believes Irian will come to the Grove if he calls to her."

Ged said nothing, till, after a while: "Look there, Tenar."

She looked where he was looking, into the dim gulf of air above the western sea.

"If she comes, she'll come from there," he said. "And if she doesn't come, she is there."

She nodded. "I know." Her eyes were full of tears. "Lebannen sang me a song, on the ship, when we were going back to Havnor." She could not sing; she whispered the words. *"O my joy, be free . . ."*

He looked away, up at the forests, at the mountain, the darkening heights.

"Tell me," she said, "tell me what you did while I was gone."

"Kept the house."

"Did you walk in the forest?"

"Not yet," he said.

Afterword

Here at last, for the first time, is Earthsea, in English, all together in the right order. I'm most grateful to all the publishers and editors involved for working together to bring to being this unified edition, where people can see at last that it all really is one story.

The six books of Earthsea were published over thirty-one years, by four different hardcover publishers, and in various paperback editions. It still gets called a trilogy here, though it hasn't been one since 1990, and in England one publisher calls it a quartet, and another reversed the order of the fifth and sixth books as if it didn't matter.

I think of the books not as a trilogy or a sextet, a series or a cycle, but simply as Earthsea. If we must have technicalities, and if fantasy must occur in threes, could we call it the Earthsea Trilogies, in the plural? That at least acknowledges the difference between the first three books and the last three.

By market definition, the first three are "young adult" novels, the last three aren't. YA, however, like most marketing categories, really defines nothing but books written specifically to fit it. YA stories have adolescent protagonists—so, is *Romeo and Juliet* a YA? Should *Huckleberry Finn* be read only by people Huck's age?—I wrote *A Wizard of Earthsea* to meet the publisher's request for a book for younger readers. And I gave the next two books a central character who is a genuine, authentic young adult: Ged is still only nineteen at the end of *A Wizard*, and Tenar and Arren are probably not even that old at the end of their books.

But in the *Tombs* Ged is at least thirty, and middle-aged in *Farthest Shore*. And with *Tehanu* I broke altogether from such constraints of category. I said to myself, *People who like fantasy read fantasy, no matter what age either the readers or the characters are*. Nine-year-olds read *The Lord of the Rings*, eighty-nine-year-olds reread *Alice in Wonderland*. I want to follow my characters out of adolescence into their whole lives, and I trust my readers to follow them with me.

So in *Tehanu* there are no adolescents at all. Therru is a little girl, Tenar a

middle-aged woman, Ged a middle-aged man. Then came the *Tales*, all about people of extremely various ages. Finally in *The Other Wind*, no principal character is under twenty except the Princess Seserakh, while Tenar is gray-haired, and Ged a man of seventy. I was writing my main characters through my own life and their lives, and they were long, rich lives. I am grateful to my readers for living those lives with them.

I am also grateful for having been able to write this book, or as I would prefer to put it, for the gift of this story. Such a gift is always a mystery to a writer. In some ways the story itself remains mysterious to me.

I can see now its theme coming together from elements of all the previous books, joining forces and playing out in a way I could never have foreseen when I started *A Wizard of Earthsea*. Even when I started *The Other Wind*, all I knew certainly was that the increasing imbalance in the practice of wizardry was caused by a profound error, made long ago; and that not only Cob in *The Farthest Shore* but Thorion of Roke embodied this misunderstanding of the uses of power, the desire for control, and the nature of death. This was my great theme. To find its resolution I had to play it through. I did so. I knew partly what I wanted it to say; not till it was said did I know fully.

I don't and won't attempt to explain what it says. I've been asked a thousand times to say what a story "means," and every time I've grown surer that so long as I've told the story rightly, finding its meaning, or a meaning, is rightly up to its readers.

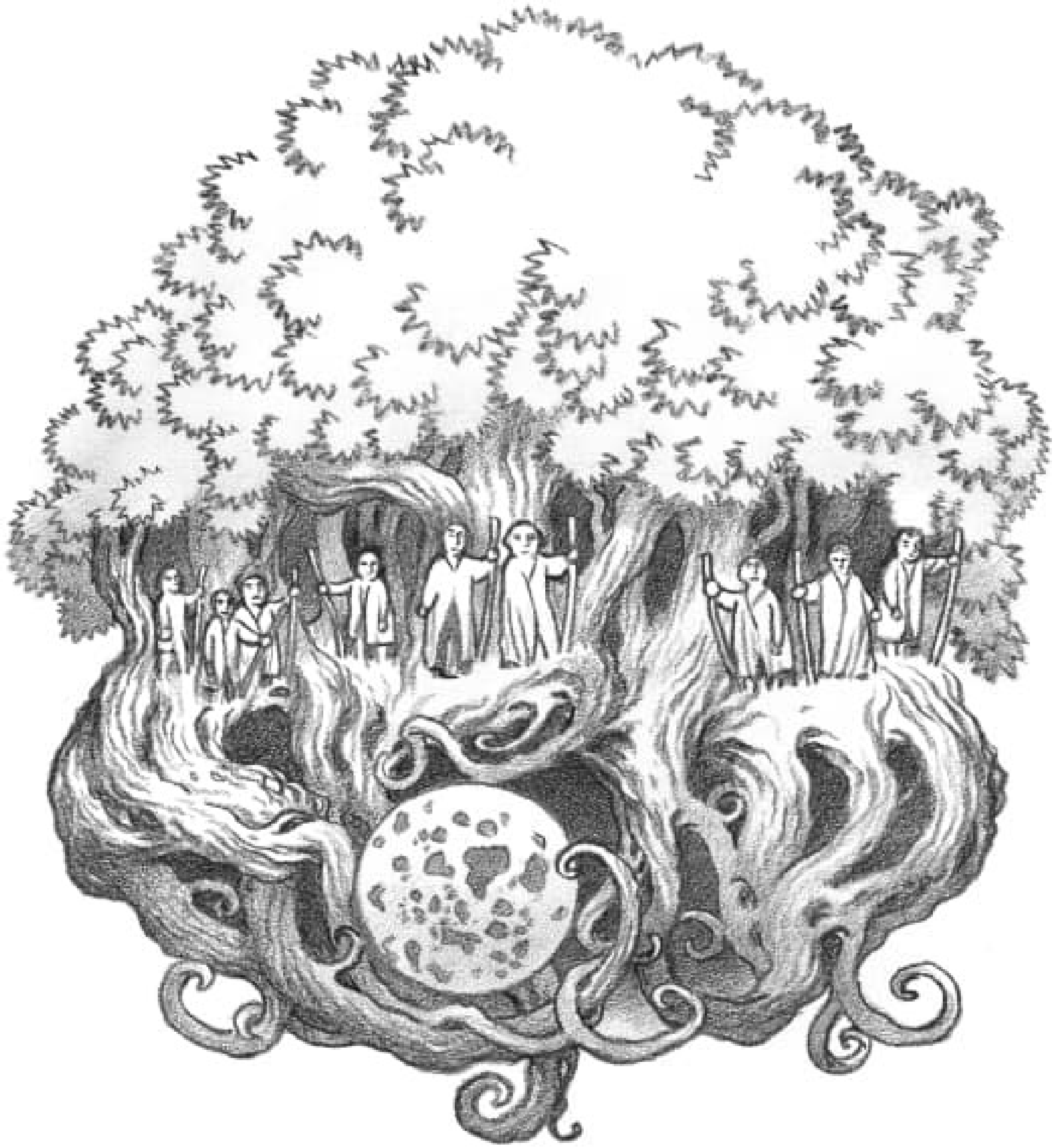
To take me through this end game, I needed not only my protagonists from the other books but new characters. Alder, Seppel, Seserakh, each came forward when their moment appeared—Alder, indeed, on the first page. The one who most surprised me was Seserakh. I was never sure what she was going to say or do next. I didn't even know what she looked like till she burst out of her red tent and hurled herself at Tenar. New winds were certainly blowing in Earthsea, and this one blew in very fresh from the east, to the king's consternation, and my delight.

Without her, without Ged, who sends Alder to Havnor, without each one of those who meet on Roke Island on that climactic night, none of them could come to the wall of stones that lies between life and death. They could not set the prisoners of false darkness free.

I have, believe me, learned never to call any book "the last." But I want to tell the kind people who write me asking for another Earthsea story that so far as I know, the story I had to tell ends here. With Tenar and Ged, on Gont.

It has come round to and past where it began so long ago. In that dark night on Roke and the great sunrise in the other world, it came where it was going all along —and yet it goes on past that, being not a closed circle but a spiral, like the orbit of our Earth. Lives end, lives go on, a story ends, others go on. I know the reign of King Lebannen and Queen Seserakh will be long remembered both in the Archipelago and the Kargad Lands. I think Roke will change, and maybe magic itself will change. I'm not sure if the dragons will ever return out of the west beyond the west, yet I know Tehanu will. I know where Ged goes next.

But the storyteller doesn't tell all she knows. When the story is over she falls silent. Then, after a while, perhaps she says, "But listen now! I have another tale to tell! Once upon a time, on the western shore of the world, lived people who could work strange spells . . ."



A Description of Earthsea

A Description of Earthsea

PEOPLES AND LANGUAGES

People

The Hardic Lands

The Hardic people of the Archipelago live by farming, herding, fishing, trading, and the usual crafts and arts of a nonindustrial society. Their population is stable and has never overcrowded the limited habitable land available to them. Famine is unknown and poverty seldom acute.

Small islands and villages are generally governed by a more or less democratic council or Parley, headed, or represented in dealings with other groups, by an elected Isleman or Islewoman. In the Reaches there is often no government other than the Isle Parley and the Town Parleys. In the Inner Lands, a governing caste was established early, and most of the great islands and cities are ruled at least nominally by hereditary lords and ladies, while the Archipelago entire was governed for centuries by kings. Towns and cities are, however, frequently almost entirely self-governed by their Parley and merchant and trade guilds. The great guilds, since their network covers all the Inner Lands, answer to no overlord or authority except the King in Havnor.

Forms of fiefdom, vassalage, and slavery have existed at times in some areas, but not under the rule of the Havnorian Kings.

The existence of magic as a recognised, effective power wielded by certain individuals, but not by all, shapes and influences all the institutions of the Hardic peoples, so that, much as ordinary life in the Archipelago seems to resemble that of nonindustrial peoples elsewhere, there are almost immeasurable differences. One of these differences may be, or may be indicated by, the lack of any kind of institutionalised religion. Superstition is as common as it is anywhere, but there are no gods, no cults, no formal worship of any kind. Ritual occurs only in traditional

offerings at the sites of the Old Powers, in the great, universally celebrated annual festivals such as Sunreturn and the Long Dance, in the speaking and singing of the traditional songs and epics at these festivals, and, perhaps, in the performance of spells of magic.

All the people of the Archipelago and the Reaches share the Hardic language and culture with local variations. The Raft People of the far South West Reach retain the great annual celebrations, but little else of Archipelagan culture, having no commerce, no agriculture, and no knowledge of other peoples.

Most people of the Archipelago have brown or red-brown skin, black straight hair, and dark eyes; the predominant body type is short, slender, small-boned, but fairly muscular and well-fleshed. In the East and South Reaches people tend to be taller, heavier boned, and darker. Many Southerners have very dark brown skin. Most Archipelagan men have little or no facial hair.

The people of Osskil, Rogma, and Borth are lighter-skinned than others in the Archipelago, and often have brown or even blond hair and light eyes; the men are often bearded. Their language and some of their beliefs are closer to Kargish than to Hardic. These far Northerners probably descend from Kargs who, after settling the four great Eastern lands, sailed back to the West about two thousand years ago.

The Kargad Lands

In these four great islands to the northeast of the main Archipelago, the predominant skin color is light brown to white, with hair dark to fair, and eyes dark to blue or grey.

Not much mixing of the Kargish and Archipelagan skin-color types has taken place except on Osskil, since the North Reach is isolated and thinly populated, and the Kargad people have held themselves apart from and often in enmity towards the Archipelagans for two or three millennia.

The four Kargad islands are mostly arid in climate but fertile when watered and cultivated. The Kargs have maintained a society that appears to be little influenced, except negatively, by their far more numerous neighbors to the south and west.

Among the Kargs the power of magic appears to be very rare as a native gift, perhaps because it was neglected or actively suppressed by their society and government. Except as an evil to be dreaded and shunned, magic plays no recognised part in their society. This inability or refusal to practice magic puts the Kargs at a disadvantage with the Archipelagans in almost every respect, which may

explain why they have generally held themselves aloof from trade or any kind of interchange, other than piratical raids and invasions of the nearer islands of the South Reach and around the Gontish Sea.

Dragons

Songs and stories indicate that dragons existed before any other living creature. The Old Hardic kennings or euphemisms for the word *dragon* are Firstborn, Eldest, Elder Children. (The words for the firstborn child of a family in Osskilian, *akhad*, and in Kargish, *gadda*, are derived from the word *haath*, "dragon," in the Old Speech.)

Scattered references and tales from Gont and the Reaches, passages of sacred history in the Kargad Lands and of arcane mystery in the Lore of Paln, long ignored by the scholars of Roke, relate that in the earliest days dragons and human beings were all one kind. Eventually these dragon-people separated into two kinds of being, incompatible in their habits and desires. Perhaps a long geographical separation caused a gradual natural divergence, a differentiation of species. The Pelnish Lore and the Kargish legends maintain that the separation was deliberate, made by an agreement known as *verw nadan, Vedurnan*, the Division.

These legends are best preserved in Hur-at-Hur, the easternmost of the Kargad Lands, where dragons have degenerated into animals without high intelligence. Yet it is in Hur-at-Hur that people keep the most vivid conviction of the original kinship of human and dragon kind. And with these tales of ancient times come stories of recent days about dragons who take human form, humans who take dragon form, beings who are in fact both human and dragon.

However the Division came about, from the beginning of historical time human beings have lived in the main Archipelago and the Kargad Lands east of it, while the dragons kept to the westernmost isles—and beyond. People have puzzled at their choosing the empty sea for their domain, since dragons are "creatures of wind and fire," who drown if plunged under the sea. But they have no need to touch down either on water or on earth; they live on the wing, aloft in air, sunlight, starlight. The only use a dragon has for the ground is some kind of rocky place where it can lay its eggs and rear the drakelets. The small, barren islets of the farthest West Reach suffice for this.

The Creation of Éa contains no clear references to an original unity and eventual

separation of dragons and humans, but this may be because the poem in its presumed original form, in the Language of the Making, dated back to a time before the separation. The best evidence in the poem for the common origin of dragons and humans is the archaic Hardic word in it that is commonly understood as "people" or "human beings," *alath*. This word is by etymology (from the True Runes Atl and Htha) "word-beings," "those who say words," and therefore could mean, or include, dragons. Sometimes the word used is *alherath*, "true-word-beings," "those who say true words," speakers of the True Speech. This could mean human wizards, or dragons, or both. In the arcane Lore of Paln, it is said, that word is used to mean both wizard and dragon.

Dragons are born knowing the True Speech, or, as Ged put it, "the dragon and the speech of the dragon are one." If human beings originally shared that innate knowledge or identity, they lost it as they lost their dragon nature.

Languages

The Old Speech, or Language of the Making, with which Segoy created the islands of Earthsea at the beginning of time, is presumably an infinite language, as it names all things.

This language is innate to dragons, not to humans, as said above. There are exceptions. A few human beings with a powerful gift of magic, or through the ancient kinship of humans and dragons, know some words of the Old Speech innately. But the very great majority of people must learn the Old Speech. Hardic practitioners of the art magic learn it from their teachers. Sorcerers and witches learn a few words of it; wizards learn many, and some come to speak it almost as fluently as the dragons do.

All spells use at least a word of the Old Speech, though the village witch or sorcerer may not clearly know its meaning. Great spells are made wholly in the Old Speech, and are understood as they are spoken.

The Hardic language of the Archipelago, the Osskili tongue of Osskil, and the Kargish tongue, are all remote descendants of the Old Speech. None of these languages serves for the making of spells of magic.

The people of the Archipelago speak Hardic. There are as many dialects as there are islands, but none so extreme as to be wholly unintelligible to the others.

Osskili, spoken in Osskil and two islands northwest of it, has more affinities to

Kargish than to Hardic. Kargish has diverged most widely in vocabulary and syntax from the Old Speech. Most of its speakers (like most Hardic speakers) do not realise that their languages have a common ancestry. Archipelagan scholars are aware of it, but most Kargs would deny it, since they have confused Hardic with the Old Speech, in which spells are cast, and thus fear and despise all Archipelagan speech as malevolent sorcery.

Writing

Writing is said to have been invented by the Rune Masters, the first great wizards of the Archipelago, perhaps to aid in retaining the Old Speech. The dragons have no writing.

There are two entirely different kinds of writing in Earthsea: the True Runes and runic writing.

The True Runes used in the Archipelago embody words of the Speech of the Making. True Runes are not symbols only, but reifactors: they can be used to bring a thing or condition into being or bring about an event. To write such a rune is to act. The power of the action varies with the circumstances. Most of the True Runes are found only in ancient texts and lore-books, and used only by wizards trained in their use; but a good many of them, such as the symbol written on the door lintel to protect a house from fire, are in common use, familiar to unlearned people.

Long after the invention of the True Runes, a related but non-magical runic writing was developed for the Hardic language. This writing does not affect reality any more than any writing does; that is to say, indirectly, but considerably.

It is said that Segoy first wrote the True Runes in fire on the wind, so that they are coeval with the Language of the Making. But this may not be so, since the dragons do not use them, and if they recognise them, do not admit it.

Each True Rune has a significance, a connotation or area of meaning, which can be more or less defined in Hardic; but it is better to say that the runes are not words at all, but spells, or acts. Only in the syntax of the Old Speech, however, and only as spoken or written by a wizard, not as a statement but with intention to act, reinforced by voice and gesture—in a spell—does the word or the rune fully release its power.

If written down, spells are written in the True Runes, sometimes with some

admixture of the Hardic runes. To write in the True Runes, as to speak the Old Speech, is to guarantee the truth of what one says—if one is human. Human beings cannot lie in that language. Dragons can; or so the dragons say; and if they are lying, does that not prove that what they say is true?

The spoken name of a True Rune may be the word it signifies in the Old Speech, or it may be one of the connotations of the rune translated into Hardic. The names of commonly used runes such as Pirr (used to protect from fire, wind, and madness), Sifl ("speed well"), Simn ("work well") are used without ceremony by ordinary people speaking Hardic; but practitioners of magic speak even such well-known, often used names with caution, since they are in fact words in the Old Speech, and may influence events in unintended or unexpected ways.

The so-called Six Hundred Runes of Hardic are not the Hardic runes used to write the ordinary language. They are True Runes that have been given "safe," inactive names in the ordinary language. Their true names in the Old Speech must be memorised in silence. The ambitious student of wizardry will go on to learn the "Further Runes," the "Runes of Éa," and many others. If the Old Speech is endless, so are the runes.

Ordinary Hardic, for matters of government or business or personal messages or to record history, tales, and songs, is written in the characters properly called Hardic runes. Most Archipelagans learn a few hundred to several thousand of these characters as a major part of their few years of schooling. Spoken or written, Hardic is useless for casting spells.

Literature and the Sources of History

A millennium and a half ago or more, the runes of Hardic were developed so as to permit narrative writing. From that time on, *The Creation of Éa, The Winter Carol*, the Deeds, the Lays, and the Songs, all of which began as sung or spoken texts, were written down and preserved as texts. They continue to exist in both forms. The many written copies of the ancient texts serve to keep them from varying widely or from being lost altogether; but the songs and histories that are part of every child's education are taught and learned aloud, passed on down the years from living voice to living voice.

Old Hardic differs in vocabulary and pronunciation from the current speech,

but the rote learning and regular speaking and hearing of the classics keeps the archaic language meaningful (and probably puts some brake on linguistic drift in daily speech), while the Hardic runes, like Chinese characters, can accommodate widely varying pronunciations and shifts of meaning.

Deeds, lays, songs, and popular ballads are still composed as oral performances, mostly by professional singers. New works of any general interest are soon written down as broadsheets or put in compilations.

Whether performed or read silently, all such poems and songs are consciously valued for their content, not for their literary qualities, which range from high to nil. Loose regular meter, alliteration, stylised phrasing, and structuring by repetition are the principal poetic devices. Content includes mythic, epic, and historical narrative, geographical descriptions, practical observations concerning nature, agriculture, sea lore, and crafts, cautionary tales and parables, philosophical, visionary, and spiritual poetry, and love songs. The deeds and lays are usually chanted, the ballads sung, often with a percussion accompaniment; professional chanters and singers may sing with the harp, the viol, drums, and other instruments. The songs generally have less narrative content, and many are valued and preserved mostly for the tune.

Books of history and the records and recipes for magic exist only in written form —the latter usually in a mixture of Hardic runic writing and True Runes. Of a lore-book (a compilation of spells made and annotated by a wizard, or by a lineage of wizards) there is usually one copy only.

It is often a matter of considerable importance that the words of these lore-books *not* be spoken aloud.

The Osskili use the Hardic runes to write their language, since they trade mostly with Hardic-speaking lands.

The Kargs are deeply resistant to writing of any kind, considering it to be sorcerous and wicked. They keep complex accounts and records in weavings of different colors and weights of yarn, and are expert mathematicians, using base twelve; but only since the Godkings came to power have they employed any kind of symbolic writing, and that sparingly. Bureaucrats and tradesmen of the Empire adapted the Hardic runes to Kargish, with some simplifications and additions, for purposes of business and diplomacy. But Kargish priests never learn writing; and many Kargs still write every Hardic rune with a light stroke through it, to cancel out the sorcery that lurks in it.

History

Note on dates: Many islands have their own local count of years. The most widely used dating system in the Archipelago, which stems from the Havnorian Tale, *makes the year Morred took the throne the first year of history. By this system, "present time" in the account you are reading is the Archipelagan year 1058.*

The Beginnings

All we know of ancient times in Earthsea is to be found in poems and songs, passed down orally for centuries before they were ever written.

The Creation of Éa, the oldest and most sacred poem, is at least two thousand years old in the Hardic language; its original version may have existed millennia before that. Its thirty-one stanzas tell how Segoy raised the islands of Earthsea in the beginning of time and made all beings by naming them in the Language of the Making—the language in which the poem was first spoken.

The ocean, however, is older than the islands; so say the songs.

> *Before bright Éa was, before Segoy*
> *bade the islands be,*
> *the wind of dawn blew on the sea . . .*

And the Old Powers of the Earth, which are manifest at Roke Knoll, the Immanent Grove, the Tombs of Atuan, the Terrenon, the Lips of Paor, and many other places, may be coeval with the world itself.

It may be that Segoy is or was one of the Old Powers of the Earth. It may be that Segoy is a name for the Earth itself. Some think all dragons, or certain dragons, or certain people, are manifestations of Segoy. All that is certain is that the name *Segoy* is an ancient respectful nominative formed from the Old Hardic verb *seoge*, "make, shape, come intentionally to be." From the same root comes the noun *esege*, "creative force, breath, poetry."

The Creation of Éa is the foundation of education in the Archipelago. By the age of six or seven, all children have heard the poem and most have begun to memorise it. An adult who doesn't know it by heart, so as to be able to speak or sing it with others and teach it to children, is considered grossly ignorant. It is taught in winter

and spring, and spoken and sung entire every year at the Long Dance, the celebration of the solstice of summer.

A quotation from it stands at the head of *A Wizard of Earthsea*:

Only in silence the word,
only in dark the light,
only in dying life:
bright the hawks flight
on the empty sky.

The beginning of the first stanza is quoted in *Tehanu*:

The making from the unmaking,
the ending from the beginning,
who shall know surely?
What we know is the doorway between them
that we enter departing.
Among all beings ever returning,
the eldest, the Doorkeeper, Segoy . . .

and the last line of the first stanza:

Then from the foam bright Éa broke.

History of the Archipelago

The Kings of Enlad

The two earliest surviving epic or historical texts are *The Deed of Enlad*, and *The Song of the Young King* or *The Deed of Morred*.

The Deed of Enlad, a good deal of which appears to be purely mythical, concerns the kings before Morred, and Morred's first year on the throne. The capital city of these rulers was Berila, on the island of Enlad.

The early kings and queens of Enlad, among whose names are Lar Ashal,

Dohun, Enashen, Timan, and Tagtar, gradually increased their sway till they proclaimed themselves rulers of Earthsea. Their reign extended no farther south than Ilien and did not include Felkway in the east, Paln and Semel in the west, or Osskil in the north, but they did send explorers out all over the Inmost Sea and into the Reaches. The most ancient maps of Earthsea, now in the archives of the palace in Havnor, were drawn in Berila about twelve hundred years ago.

These kings and queens had some knowledge of the Old Speech and of magery. Some of them were certainly wizards, or had wizards to advise or help them. But magic in *The Deed of Enlad* is an erratic force, not to be relied on. Morred was the first man, and the first king, to be called Mage.

Morred

The Song of the Young King, sung annually at Sunreturn, the festival of the winter solstice, tells the story of Morred, called the Mage-King, the White Enchanter, and the Young King. Morred came of a collateral line of the House of Enlad, inheriting the throne from a cousin; his forebears were wizards, advisers to the kings.

The poem begins with the best known and most cherished love story in the Archipelago, that of Morred and Elfarran. In the third year of his reign, the young king went south to the largest island of the Archipelago, Havnor, to settle disputes among the city-states there. Returning in his "oarless longship," he came to the island Soléa and there saw Elfarran, the Islewoman or Lady of Soléa, "in the orchards in the spring." He did not continue on to Enlad, but stayed with Elfarran. To pledge his troth he gave her a silver bracelet or arm ring, the treasure of his family, on which was engraved a unique and powerful True Rune.

Morred and Elfarran married, and the poem describes their reign as a brief golden age, the foundation and touchstone of ethic and governance thereafter.

Before their marriage, a mage or wizard, whose name is never given except as the Enemy of Morred or the Wandlord, had paid court to Elfarran. Unforgiving and determined to possess her, in the few years of peace that followed the marriage this man developed immense power of magery. After five years he came forth and announced, in the words of the poem,

> *If Elfarran be not my own, I will unsay Segoy's word,*
> *I will unmake the islands, the white waves*
> *will whelm all.*

He had power to raise huge waves on the sea, and to stop the tide or bring it early; and his voice could enchant whole populations, bringing all who heard him under his control. So he turned Morred's people against him. Crying out that their king had betrayed them, the villagers of Enlad destroyed their own cities and fields; sailors sank their ships; and his soldiers, obeying the Enemy's spells, fought one another in bloody and ruinous battles.

While Morred sought to free his people from these spells and to confront his enemy, Elfarran returned with their year-old child to her native island, Soléa, where her own powers would be strongest. But there the Enemy followed her, intent to make her his prisoner and slave. She took refuge at the Springs of Ensa, where, with her knowledge of the Old Powers of the place, she could withstand the Enemy and force him off the island. "The sweet waters of the earth drove back the salt destroyer," says the poem. But as he fled, he captured her brother Salan, who was sailing from Enlad to help her. Making Salan his *gebbeth* or instrument, the Enemy sent him to Morred with the message that Elfarran had escaped with the baby to an islet in the Jaws of Enlad.

Trusting the messenger, Morred entered the trap. He barely escaped with his life. The Enemy pursued him from the east to the west of Enlad in a trail of ruin. On the Plains of Enlad, meeting the companions who had stayed loyal to him, most of them sailors who had brought their ships to Enlad to aid him, Morred turned and gave battle. The Enemy would not confront him directly, but sent Morred's own spell-bound warriors to fight him, and worse, sent sorceries that shriveled up the bodies of his men till they "living, seemed the black thirst-dead of the desert." To spare his people, Morred withdrew.

As he left the battlefield it began to rain, and he saw his enemy's true name written in raindrops in the dust.

Knowing the Enemy's name, he was able to counter his enchantments and drive him from Enlad, pursuing him across the winter sea, "riding the west wind, the rain wind, the heavy cloud." Each had met his match, and in their final confrontation, somewhere in the Sea of Éa, both perished.

In the rage of his agony the Enemy raised up a great wave and sent it speeding to overwhelm the island of Soléa. Elfarran knew this, as she knew the moment of Morred's death. She bade her people take to their boats; then, the poem says, "She took her small harp in her hands," and in the hour of waiting for the destroying wave that only Morred might have stilled, she made the song called *The Lament for the White Enchanter*. The island was drowned beneath the sea, and Elfarran with

it. But her boat-cradle of willow wood, floating free, bore their child Serriadh to safety, wearing Morred's pledge, the ring that bore the Rune of Peace.

On maps of the Archipelago, the island Soléa is signified by a white space or a whirlpool.

After Morred, seven more kings and queens ruled from Enlad, and the realm increased steadily in size and prosperity.

The Kings of Havnor

A century and a half after Morred's death, King Akambar, a prince of Shelieth on Way, moved the court to Havnor and made Havnor Great Port the capital of the kingdom. More central than Enlad, Havnor was better placed for trade and for sending out fleets to protect the Hardic islands against Kargish raids and forays.

The history of the Fourteen Kings of Havnor (actually six kings and eight queens, ~150-400) is told in the *Havnorian Lay*. Tracing descent both through the male and the female lines, and intermarrying with various noble houses of the Archipelago, the royal house embraced five principalities: the House of Enlad, the oldest, tracing direct descent from Morred and Serriadh; the Houses of Shelieth, Éa, and Havnor; and lastly the House of Ilien. Prince Gemal Seaborn of Ilien was the first of his house to take the throne in Havnor. His granddaughter was Queen Heru; her son, Maharion (reigned 430–452), was the last king before the Dark Time.

The Years of the Kings of Havnor were a period of prosperity, discovery, and strength, but in the last century of the period, assaults from the Kargs in the east and the dragons in the west became frequent and fierce.

Kings, lords, and Islemen charged with defending the islands of the Archipelago came to rely increasingly on wizards to fend off dragons and Kargish fleets. In the *Havnorian Lay* and *The Deed of the Dragonlords*, as the tale goes on, the names and exploits of these wizards begin to eclipse those of the kings.

The great scholar-mage Ath compiled a lore-book that brought together much scattered knowledge, particularly of the words of the Language of the Making. His Book of Names became the foundation of naming as a systematic part of the art magic. Ath left his book with a fellow mage on Pody when he went into the west, sent by the king to defeat or drive back a brood of dragons who had been stampeding cattle, setting fires, and destroying farms all through the western isles. Somewhere west of Ensmer, Ath confronted the great dragon Orm. Accounts of

this meeting vary; but though after it the dragons ceased their hostilities for a while, it is certain that Orm survived it, and Ath did not. His book, lost for centuries, is now in the Isolate Tower on Roke.

The food of dragons is said to be light, or fire; they kill in rage, to defend their young, or for sport, but never eat their kill. Since time immemorial, until the reign of Heru, they had used only the outmost isles of the West Reach—which may have been the easternmost borders of their own realm—for meeting and breeding, and had seldom even been seen by most of the islanders. Naturally irritable and arrogant, the dragons may have felt threatened by the increasing population and prosperity of the Inner Lands, which brought constant boat traffic even out in the West Reach. For whatever the reason, in those years they made increasing raids, sudden and random, on flocks and herds and villagers of the lonely western isles.

A tale of the *Vedurnan* or Division, known in Hur-at-Hur, says:

Men chose the yoke,
dragons the wing.
Men to own,
dragons no thing.

That is, human beings chose to have possessions and dragons chose not to. But, as there are ascetics among humans, some dragons are greedy for shining things, gold, jewels; one was Yevaud, who sometimes came among people in human form, and who made the rich Isle of Pendor into a dragon nursery, until driven back into the west by Ged. But the marauding dragons of the *Lay* and the songs seem to have been moved not so much by greed as by anger, a sense of having been cheated, betrayed.

The deeds and lays that tell of raids by dragons and counterforays by wizards portray the dragons as pitiless as any wild animal, terrifying, unpredictable, yet intelligent, sometimes wiser than the wizards. Though they speak the True Speech, they are endlessly devious. Some of them clearly enjoy battles of wits with wizards, "splitting arguments with a forked tongue." Like human beings, all but the greatest of them conceal their true names. In the lay *Hasa's Voyage*, the dragons appear as formidable but feeling beings, whose anger at the invading human fleet is justified by their love of their own desolate domain. They address the hero:

Sail home to the houses of the sunrise, Hasa.
Leave to our wings the long winds of the west,
leave us the air-sea, the unknown, the utmost . . .

Maharion and Erreth-Akbe

Queen Heru, called the Eagle, inherited the throne from her father, Denggemal of the House of Ilien. Her consort Aiman was of the House of Morred. When she had ruled thirty years she gave the crown to their son Maharion.

Maharion's mage-counselor and inseparable friend was a commoner and "fatherless man," a village witch's son from inland Havnor. The most beloved hero of the Archipelago, his story is told in *The Deed of Erreth-Akbe*, which bards sing at the Long Dance of midsummer.

Erreth-Akbe's gifts in magic became apparent when he was still a boy. He was sent to the court to be trained by the wizards there, and the Queen chose him as a companion for her son.

Maharion and Erreth-Akbe became "heart's brothers." They spent ten years together fighting the Kargs, whose occasional forays from the East had in recent times become a slave-taking, colonising invasion. Venway, Torheven and the Torikles, Spevy, Perregal, and parts of Gont were under Kargish dominion for a generation or longer. At Shelieth on Way, Erreth-Akbe worked a great magic against the Kargish forces, who had landed in "a thousand ships" on Waymarsh and were swarming across the mainland. Using an invocation of the Old Powers called the Waterlore (perhaps the same that Elfarran had used on Soléa against the Enemy), he turned the waters of the Fountains of Shelieth—sacred springs and pools in the gardens of the Lords of Way—into a flood that swept the invaders back to the seacoast, where Maharion's army awaited them. No ship of the fleet returned to Karego-At.

Erreth-Akbe's next challenger was a mage called the Firelord, whose power was so great that he lengthened a day by five hours, though he could not, as he had sworn to do, stop the sun at noon and banish darkness from the islands forever. The Firelord took dragon form to fight Erreth-Akbe, but was defeated at last, at the cost of the forests and cities of Ilien, which he set afire as he fought.

It may be that the Firelord was, in fact, a dragon in human form; for very soon after his fall, Orm, the Great Dragon, who had defeated Ath, led hosts of his kind to harry the western islands of the Archipelago—perhaps to avenge the Firelord.

These fiery flights caused great terror, and hundreds of boats carried people fleeing from Paln and Semel to the Inner Islands; but the dragons were not doing as much damage as the Kargs, and Maharion judged the urgent danger lay in the east. While he himself went west to fight dragons, he sent Erreth-Akbe east to try to establish peace with the King of the Kargad Lands.

Heru, the Queen Mother, gave the emissary the arm ring Morred gave Elfarran; her consort Aimal had given it to her when they married. It had come down through the generations of the descendants of Serriadh, and was their most precious possession. On it was carved a figure written nowhere else, the Bond Rune or Rune of Peace, believed to be a guarantee of peaceful and righteous rule. "Let the Kargish king wear Morred's ring," the Queen Mother said. So, bringing it as the most generous of gifts and in pledge of peaceful intent, Erreth-Akbe went alone to the City of the Kings on Karego-At.

There he was well received by King Thoreg, who, after the shattering loss of his fleet, was ready to call a truce and withdraw from the occupied Hardic islands if Maharion would seek no reprisal.

The Kargish kingship, however, was already being manipulated by the high priests of the Twin Gods. Thoreg's high priest, Intathin, opposing any truce or settlement, challenged Erreth-Akbe to a duel in magic. Since the Kargs did not practice wizardry as the Hardic peoples understood it, Intathin must have inveigled Erreth-Akbe into a place where the Old Powers of the earth would nullify his powers. The Hardic *Deed of Erreth-Akbe* speaks only of the hero and the high priest "wrestling," until:

> *the weakness of the old darkness came into Erreth-Akbe's limbs,*
> *the silence of the mother darkness into his mind.*
> *Long he lay, forgetful of bright fame and brotherhood,*
> *long, and on his breast lay the rune-ring broken.*

The daughter of "the wise king Thoreg" rescued Erreth-Akbe from this trance or imprisoning spell and restored him his strength. He gave her the half of the Ring of Peace that remained to him. (From her it passed through her descendants for over five hundred years to the last heirs of Thoreg, a brother and sister exiled on a deserted island of the East Reach; and the sister gave it to Ged.) Intathin kept the other half of the broken Ring, and it "went into the dark"—that is, into the Great

Treasury of the Tombs of Atuan. (There Ged found it, and rejoining the two halves and with them the lost Rune of Peace, he and Tenar brought the Ring home to Havnor.)

The Kargish version of the story, told as a sacred recital by the priesthood, says that Intathin defeated Erreth-Akbe, who "lost his staff and amulet and power" and crept back to Havnor a broken man. But wizards carried no staff in those years, and Erreth-Akbe certainly was an unbroken man and a powerful mage when he faced the dragon Orm.

King Maharion sought peace and never found it. While Erreth-Akbe was in Karego-At (which may have been a period of years), the depredations of the dragons increased. The Inward Isles were troubled by refugees fleeing the western lands and by interruptions to shipping and trade, since the dragons had taken to setting fire to boats that went west of Hosk, and harried ships even in the Inmost Sea. All the wizards and armed men Maharion could command went out to fight the dragons, and he went with them himself four times; but swords and arrows were little use against armored, fire-spouting, flying enemies. Paln was "a plain of charcoal," and villages and towns in the west of Havnor had been burnt to the ground. The king's wizards had spell-caught and killed several dragons over the Pelnish Sea, which probably increased the dragons' ire. Just as Erreth-Akbe returned, the Great Dragon Orm flew to the City of Havnor and threatened the towers of the king's palace with fire.

Erreth-Akbe, sailing into the bay "with sails worn transparent by the eastern winds," could not pause to "embrace his heart's brother or greet his home." Taking dragon form himself, he flew to battle with Orm over Mount Onn. "Flame and fire in the midnight air" could be seen from the palace in Havnor. They flew north, Erreth-Akbe in pursuit. Over the sea near Taon, Orm turned again and this time wounded the mage so that he had to come down to earth and take his own form. He came, with the dragon now following him, to the Old Island, Éa, the first land Segoy raised from the sea. On that sacred and powerful soil, he and Orm met. Ceasing their battle, they spoke as equals, agreeing to end the enmity of their races.

Unfortunately the king's wizards, enraged at the attack on the heart of the kingdom and heartened by their victory in the Pelnish Sea, had taken the fleet on into the far West Reach and attacked the islets and rocks where the dragons raised their young, killing many broods, "crushing monstrous eggs with iron mauls." Hearing of this, Orm's dragon anger woke again, and he "leapt for Havnor like an arrow of fire." (Dragons are generally referred to both in Hardic and Kargish as

male, though in fact the gender of all dragons is a matter of conjecture, and in the case of the oldest and greatest ones, a mystery.)

Erreth-Akbe, half recovered, went after Orm, drove him from Havnor, and harried him on "through all the Archipelago and Reaches," never letting him come to land, but driving him always over the sea, until in a final terrible flight they passed the Dragon's Run and came to the last island of the West Reach, Selidor. There, on the outer beach, both exhausted, they faced each other and fought, "talon and fire and word and sword," until:

their blood ran mingled, making the sand red.
Their breath ceased. Their bodies by the loud sea
lay entangled. They entered death's land together.

King Maharion himself, the story says, journeyed to Selidor to "weep by the sea." He retrieved Erreth-Akbe's sword and set it atop the highest tower of his palace.

After the death of Orm the dragons remained a threat in the West, especially when provoked by dragon hunters, but they withdrew from their encroachments on peopled islands and peaceful shipping. Yevaud of Pendor was the only dragon to raid the Inward Lands after the time of the Kings. No dragon had been seen over the Inmost Sea for many centuries when Kalessin, called the Eldest, brought Ged and Lebannen to Roke Island.

Maharion died a few years after Erreth-Akbe, having seen no peace established, and much unrest and dissent within his kingdom. It was widely said that since the Ring of Peace was lost there could be no true king of Earthsea. Mortally wounded in battle against the rebel lord Gehis of the Havens, Maharion spoke a prophecy: *"He shall inherit my throne who has crossed the dark land living and come to the far shores of the day."*

The Dark Time, the Hand, and Roke School

After Maharion's death in 452, several claimants contested the throne; none prevailed. Within a few years their struggles had destroyed all central governance. The Archipelago became a battleground of hereditary feudal princes, governments of small islands and city-states, and piratic warlords, all trying to increase their

wealth and extend or defend their borders. Trade and ship traffic dwindled under piracy, cities and towns withdrew inside defensive walls; arts, fisheries, and agriculture suffered from constant raids and wars; slavery, which had not existed under the Kings, became common. Magic was the primary weapon in forays and battles. Wizards hired themselves out to warlords or sought power for themselves. Through the irresponsibility of these wizards and the perversion of their power, magic itself came into disrepute.

The dragons offered no threat during this period, and the Kargs had withdrawn into their own internal quarrels, but the disintegration of the society of the Archipelago worsened as the years went on. Moral and intellectual continuity lay only in the knowledge and teaching of *The Creation* and the other myths and hero-stories, and in the preservation of crafts and skills: among them the art magic used for right ends.

The Hand, a loose-knit league or community concerned principally with the understanding and the ethical use and teaching of magic, was established by men and women on Roke Island about a hundred and fifty years after Maharion's death. Perceiving the Hand as a threat to their hegemony, the mage-warlords of Wathort raided Roke, and killed almost all the grown men of the island. But the Hand had already stretched out to other islands all around the Inmost Sea. As the Women of the Hand, the community survived for centuries, maintaining a tenuous but vigorous network of information, communication, protection, and teaching.

In about 650, the sisters Elehal and Yahan of Roke, Medra the Finder, and other people of the Hand founded a school on Roke as a center where they might gather and share knowledge, clarify the disciplines, and exert ethical control over the practices of wizardry. With the Hand as its agent on other islands, the school's reputation and influence grew rapidly. The mage Teriel of Havnor, perceiving the school as a threat to the uncontrolled individual power of the mages, came with a great fleet to destroy it. He was destroyed, and his fleet scattered. This first victory went far to establish a reputation of invulnerability for the school on Roke.

Under Roke's steadily growing influence, wizardry was shaped into a coherent body of knowledge, its use increasingly controlled by moral and political purpose. Wizards trained at the school went to other islands of the Archipelago to work against warlords, pirates, and feuding nobles, preventing raids and forays, imposing penalties and settlements, enforcing boundaries, and protecting individuals, farms, towns, cities, and shipping, until social order was re-established. In the early years they were sent to enforce peace; increasingly they

were called on to maintain it. While the throne in Havnor remained empty, for over two hundred years Roke School served effectively as the central government of the Archipelago.

The power of the Archmage of Roke was in many respects that of a king. Ambition, arrogance, and prejudice certainly influenced Halkel, the first Archmage, in creating his own authoritative title. Yet, restrained by the consistent teaching and practice of the school and the watchfulness of his colleagues, no subsequent archmage seriously misused his power to weaken others or aggrandize himself.

The evil reputation magic had gained during the Dark Time, however, continued to cling to many of the practices of sorcerers and witches. Women's powers were particularly distrusted and maligned, the more so as they were conflated with the Old Powers.

Throughout Earthsea, various springs, caves, hills, stones, and woods were and always had been sites of concentrated power and sacredness. All were locally feared or venerated; some were known far and wide.

Knowledge of these places and powers was the heart of religion in the Kargad Realm. In the Archipelago, the lore of the Old Powers was still part of the profound, common basis of thought and reverence. On all the islands, the arts mostly practiced by witches, such as midwifery, healing, animal husbandry, dousing, mining and metallurgy, planting and growing spells, love spells, and so on, often invoked or drew upon the Old Powers. But the learned wizards of Roke had generally come to distrust the ancient practices and made no appeal to the "Powers of the Mother." Only in Paln did wizards combine the two practices, in the arcane, esoteric, and reputedly dangerous Pelnish Lore.

Though like any power they could be perverted to evil use in the service of ambition (as was the Terrenon Stone in Osskil), the Old Powers were inherently sacral and pre-ethical. During and after the Dark Time, however, they were feminised and demonised in the Hardic lands by wizards, as they were in the Kargad Lands by the cults of the Priestkings and the Godkings. So by the eighth century, in the Inner Lands of the Archipelago, only village women kept up rituals and offerings at the old sites. They were despised or abused for doing so. Wizards kept clear of such places. On Roke, itself the center of the Old Powers in all Earthsea, the profoundest manifestations of those powers—Roke Knoll and the Immanent Grove—were never spoken of as such. Only the Patterners, who lived all their lives in the Grove, served to link human arts and acts to the older sacredness

of the earth, reminding the wizards and mages that their power was not theirs, but lent to them.

History of the Kargad Lands

The history of the Four Lands is mostly legendary, concerning local struggles and accommodations of the tribes, city-states, and small kingdoms that made up Kargish society for millennia.

Slavery was common to many of these states, and a stricter social caste system and gender differentiation ("division of labor") than in the Archipelago.

Religion was a unifying element even among the most warlike tribes. There were hundreds of Truce Places on the Four Lands, where no warfare or dispute was permitted. Kargish religion was a domestic and community worship of the Old Powers, the chthonic or gaean forces manifest as spirits of place. They were worshiped at the site and at home altars with offerings of flowers, oil, food, dances, races, sacrifices, carvings, songs, music, and silence. Worship was both casual and ritual, private and communal. There was no priesthood; any adult could perform the ceremonies and teach children to do so. This ancient spiritual practice has continued, unofficially and sometimes in hiding, under the newer, institutional religions of the Twin Gods and the Godking.

Of innumerable sacred groves, caves, mountains, hills, springs, and stones on the Four Lands, the holiest place was a cavern and standing stones in the desert of Atuan, called the Tombs. It was a center of pilgrimage from the earliest recorded times, and the kings of Atuan and later of Hupun maintained a hostel there for all who came to worship.

Six to seven hundred years ago a sky-god religion began to spread across the islands, a development of the worship of the Twin Gods Atwah and Wuluah, originally heroes of a desert saga from Hur-at-Hur. A Sky Father was added as head of the pantheon, and a priestly caste developed to lead the rites. Without suppressing the worship of the Old Powers, the priests of the Twin Gods and the Sky Father began to professionalise religion, managing the rituals and festivals, building increasingly costly temples, and controlling public ceremonies such as marriages, funerals, and the installation of officials.

The hierarchic and centralising tendency of this religion lent support at first to the ambition of the Kings of Hupun on Karego-At. By force of arms and diplomatic maneuvering, the House of Hupun within a century or so conquered or absorbed

most of the other Kargad kingdoms, of which there had been more than two hundred.

When (in the year 440, by Hardic count) Erreth-Akbe came to make peace between the Archipelago and the Kargad Lands, bearing the Bond Ring as pledge of his king's sincerity, he came to Hupun as the capital of the Kargad Empire and treated with King Thoreg as its ruler.

But for some decades the kings of Hupun had been in conflict with the high priest and his followers in Awabath, the Holy City, fifty miles from Hupun. The priests of the Twin Gods were in the process of wresting power from the kings and making Awabath not only the religious but the political center of the country. Erreth-Akbe's visit seems to have coincided with the final shift of power from the kings to the priests. King Thoreg received him with honor, but Intathin the High Priest fought with him, defeated or deceived him, and for a time imprisoned him. The Ring that was to bond the two kingdoms was broken.

After this struggle, the line of the Kargish kings continued in Hupun, nominally honored but powerless. The Four Lands were governed from Awabath. The high priests of the Twin Gods became Priestkings.

In the year 840 of the Archipelagan count, one of the two Priestkings poisoned the other and declared himself to be the incarnation of the Sky Father, the Godking, to be worshiped in the flesh. Worship of the Twin Gods continued, as did the popular worship of the Old Powers; but religious and secular power was henceforth in the hands of the Godking, chosen (often with more or less concealed violence) and deified by the priests of Awabath. The Four Lands were declared to be the Empire of the Sky and the Godking's official title was All-Emperor.

The last heirs of the House of Hupun were a boy and girl, Ensar and Anthil. Wishing to end the line of the Kargish kings but unwilling to risk sacrilege by shedding royal blood, the Godking ordered these children to be stranded on a desert island. Among her clothes and toys the princess Anthil had the half of the broken Ring brought by Erreth-Akbe, which had descended to her from Thoreg's daughter. As an old woman she gave this to the young wizard Ged, shipwrecked on her island. Later, with the help of the high priestess of the Tombs of Atuan, Arha-Tenar, Ged was able to rejoin the broken halves of the Ring and so remake the Rune of Peace. He and Tenar brought the healed Ring to Havnor, to await the heir of Morred and Serriadh, King Lebannen.

Magic

Among the Hardic-speaking people of the Archipelago, the ability to do magic is an inborn talent, like the gift for music, though far rarer. Most people lack it entirely. In a few people, perhaps one in a hundred, it is a latent, cultivable talent. In a very few people it is manifest without training.

The gift for magic is empowered mainly by the use of the True Speech, the Language of the Making, in which the name of a thing is the thing.

This speech, innate to dragons, can be learned by human beings. Some few people are born with an untaught knowledge of at least some words of the Language of the Making. The teaching of it is the heart of the teaching of magic.

The true name of a person is a word in the True Speech. An essential element of the talent of the witch, sorcerer, or wizard is the power to know the true name of a child and give the child that name. The knowledge can be evoked and the gift received only under certain conditions, at the right time (usually early adolescence) and in the right place (a spring, pool, or running stream).

Since the name of the person is the person, in the most literal and absolute sense, anyone who knows it has real power, power of life and death, over the person. Often a true name is never known to anybody but the giver and to the owner, who both keep it secret all their life. The power to give the true name and the imperative to keep it secret are one. True names have been betrayed, but never by the name giver.

Some people of great innate and trained power are able to find out the true name of another, or even to have it come to them unsought. Since such knowledge can be betrayed or misused, it is immensely dangerous. Ordinary people—and dragons—keep their true name secret; wizards hide and defend theirs with spells. Morred could not even begin to fight his Enemy until he saw his Enemy's name written in the dust by the falling rain. Ged could force the dragon Yevaud to obey him, having by both wizardry and scholarship discovered Yevaud's true name under centuries of false ones.

Magic was a wild talent before the time of Morred, who as both king and mage established intellectual and moral discipline for the art magic, gathering wizards to work together at the court for the general good and to study the ethical bases and constraints of their practice. This harmony generally prevailed through the reign of Maharion. In the Dark Time, with no control over wizardly powers and

widespread misuse of them, magic came into general disrepute.

The School on Roke

The school was founded in about 650, as described above. The Nine Masters or master-teachers of Roke were originally:

Windkey, master of the spells controlling weather
Hand, master of all illusions
Herbal, master of the arts of healing
Changer, master of the spells that transform matter and bodies
Summoner, master of the spells that call the spirits of the living and the dead
Namer, master of the knowledge of the True Speech
Patterner, dweller in the Immanent Grove, master of meaning and intent
Finder, master of the spells of finding, binding, and returning
Doorkeeper, master of the entering and leaving of the Great House

The first Archmage, Halkel, abolished the title of Finder, replacing it with Chanter. The Chanter's task is the preservation and teaching of all the oral deeds, lays, songs, etc., and the sung spells.

The original loose, roughly descriptive use of the words *witch, sorcerer, wizard*, was codified into a strict hierarchy by Halkel. Under his rules:

Witchery was restricted to women. All magic practiced by women was called "base craft," even when it included practices otherwise called "high arts," such as healing, chanting, changing, etc. Witches were to learn only from one another or from sorcerers. They were forbidden to enter Roke School, and Halkel discouraged wizards from teaching women anything at all. He specifically forbade the teaching of any word of the True Speech to women, and though this proscription was widely ignored, it led in the long run to a profound, long-lasting loss of knowledge and power among the women who practiced magic.

Sorcery was practiced by men—its only real distinction from witchery. Sorcerers trained one another, and had some knowledge of the True Speech. Sorcery included both base crafts as defined by Halkel (finding, mending, dowsing, animal

healing, etc.) and some high arts (human healing, chanting, weatherworking). A student who showed a gift for sorcery and was sent to Roke for training would first study the high arts of sorcery, and if successful in them might pursue his training in the art magic, especially in naming, summoning, and patterning, and so become a wizard.

A *wizard*, as Halkel defined the term, was a man who received his staff from a teacher, himself a wizard, who had taken special responsibility for his training. It was usually the Archmage who gave a student his staff and made him wizard. This kind of teaching and succession occurred elsewhere than Roke—notably on Paln—but the Masters of Roke came to regard with suspicion a student of anyone not trained on Roke.

Mage remained an essentially undefined term: a wizard of great power.

The name and office of *archmage* were invented by Halkel, and the Archmage of Roke was a tenth Master, never counted among the Nine. A vital ethical and intellectual force, the archmage also exerted considerable political power. On the whole this power was used benevolently. Maintaining Roke as a strong centralising, normalising, pacific element in Archipelagan society, the archmages sent out sorcerers and wizards trained to understand the ethical practice of magic and to protect communities from drought, plague, invaders, dragons, and the unscrupulous use of their art.

Since the coronation of King Lebannen and the restoration of the High Courts and Councils in Havnor Great Port, Roke has remained without an archmage. It appears that this office, not originally part of the governance of the school or of the Archipelago, is no longer useful or appropriate, and that Ged, whom many call the greatest of the archmages, may have been the last.

Celibacy and Wizardry

Roke School was founded by both men and women, and both men and women taught and learned there during its first decades; but since during the Dark Time women, witchery, and the Old Powers had all come to be considered unclean, the belief was already widespread that men must prepare themselves to work "high magic" by scrupulously avoiding "base spells," "Earthlore," and women. A man unwilling to put himself under the iron control of a spell of chastity could never practice the high arts. He could be no more than a common sorcerer. Male wizards thus had come to avoid women, refusing to teach them or learn from them.

Witches, who almost universally went on working magic without giving up their sexuality, were described by celibate men as temptresses, unclean, defiling, essentially wicked.

When in 730 the first Archmage of Roke, Halkel of Way, excluded women from the school, among his Nine Masters only the Patterner and the Doorkeeper protested; they were overruled. For more than three centuries, no woman taught or studied at the school on Roke. During those centuries, wizardry was an honored art, conferring status and power, while witchery was an unclean and ignorant superstition, practiced by women, paid for by peasants.

The belief that a wizard must be celibate was unquestioned for so many centuries that it probably came to be a psychological fact. Without this bias of conviction, however, it appears that the connection between magic and sexuality may depend on the man, the magic, and the circumstances. There is no doubt that so great a mage as Morred was a husband and father.

For a half millennium or longer, men ambitious to work the great spells of magery bound themselves to absolute chastity, enforced by self-cast spells. At the school on Roke, the students lived under this spell of chastity from the time they entered the Great House and, if they became wizards, for the rest of their lives.

Among sorcerers, few are strictly celibate, and many marry and bring up a family.

Women who work magic may practice periods of celibacy as well as fasting and other disciplines believed to purify and concentrate power; but most witches lead active sexual lives, having more freedom than most village women and less need to fear abuse. Many pledge "witch-troth" with another witch or an ordinary woman. They do not often marry men, and if they do, they are likely to choose a sorcerer.

The two stories that follow were my first approach to and exploration of the "secondary world" of Earthsea, about which I later wrote three novels. I didn't know much about the place at first, and readers familiar with the trilogy will notice that trolls became extinct in Earthsea at some point, and that the history of the dragon Yevaud is somewhat obscure. (He must have been on Sattins Island some decades or centuries before *Ged found him, and bound him, on the Isle of Pendor.) But this is only to be expected of dragons, who do not submit to the unidirectional, causal requirements of history, being myths, and neither timebinding nor timebound.*

"The Rule of Names" first explores an essential element of how magic works in Earthsea. "The Word of Unbinding" foreshadows the end of the last book of the trilogy, The Farthest Shore, *in its imagery of the world of the dead. It also reveals a certain obsession with trees, which, once you notice them, keep cropping up throughout my work. I think I am definitely the most arboreal science fiction writer. It's all right for the rest of you who climbed down, and developed opposable thumbs, and erect posture, and all that. There's a few of us still up here swinging.*

The Word of Unbinding

Where was he? The floor was hard and slimy, the air black and stinking, and that was all there was. Except a headache. Lying flat on the clammy floor Festin moaned, and then said, "Staff!" When his alderwood wizard's staff did not come to his hand, he knew he was in peril. He sat up, and not having his staff with which to make a proper light, he struck a spark between finger and thumb, muttering a certain Word. A blue will o' the wisp sprang from the spark and rolled feebly through the air, sputtering. "Up," said Festin, and the fireball wobbled upward till it lit a vaulted trapdoor very high above, so high that Festin projecting into the fireball momentarily saw his own face forty feet below as a pale dot in the darkness. The light struck no reflections in the damp walls; they had been woven out of night, by magic. He rejoined himself and said, "Out." The ball expired. Festin sat in the dark, cracking his knuckles.

He must have been overspelled from behind, by surprise; for the last memory he had was of walking through his own woods at evening talking with the trees. Lately, in these lone years in the middle of his life, he had been burdened with a sense of waste, of unspent strength; so, needing to learn patience, he had left the villages and gone to converse with trees, especially oaks, chestnuts, and the grey alders whose roots are in profound communication with running water. It had been six months since he had spoken to a human being. He had been busy with essentials, casting no spells and bothering no one. So who had spellbound him and shut him in this reeking well? "Who?" he demanded of the walls, and slowly a name gathered on them and ran down to him like a thick black drop sweated out from pores of stone and spores of fungus: "Voll."

For a moment Festin was in a cold sweat himself.

He had heard first long ago of Voll the Fell, who was said to be more than wizard yet less than man; who passed from island to island of the Outer Reach, undoing the works of the Ancients, enslaving men, cutting forests and spoiling fields, and sealing in underground tombs any wizard or Mage who tried to combat him. Refugees from ruined islands told always the same tale, that he came at evening on a dark wind over the sea. His slaves followed in ships; these they had seen. But none of them had ever seen Voll. . . . There were many men and

creatures of evil will among the Islands, and Festin, a young warlock intent on his training, had not paid much heed to these tales of Voll the Fell. "I can protect this island," he had thought, knowing his untried power, and had returned to his oaks and alders, the sound of wind in their leaves, the rhythm of growth in their round trunks and limbs and twigs, the taste of sunlight on leaves or dark groundwater around roots.—Where were they now, the trees, his old companions? Had Voll destroyed the forest?

Awake at last and up on his feet, Festin made two broad motions with rigid hands, shouting aloud a Name that would burst all locks and break open any man-made door. But these walls impregnated with night and the name of their builder did not heed, did not hear. The name re-echoed back, clapping in Festin's ears so that he fell on his knees, hiding his head in his arms till the echoes died away in the vaults above him. Then, still shaken by the backfire, he sat brooding.

They were right; Voll was strong. Here on his own ground, within this spell-built dungeon, his magic would withstand any direct attack; and Festin's strength was halved by the loss of his staff. But not even his captor could take from him his powers, relative only to himself, of Projecting and Transforming. So, after rubbing his now doubly aching head, he transformed. Quietly his body melted away into a cloud of fine mist.

Lazy, trailing, the mist rose off the floor, drifting up along the slimy walls until it found, where vault met wall, a hairline crack. Through this, droplet by droplet, it seeped. It was almost all through the crack when a hot wind, hot as a furnace-blast, struck at it, scattering the mist-drops, drying them. Hurriedly the mist sucked itself back into the vault, spiralled to the floor, took on Festin's own form and lay there panting. Transformation is an emotional strain to introverted warlocks of Festin's sort; when to that strain is added the shock of facing unhuman death in one's assumed shape, the experience becomes horrible. Festin lay for a while merely breathing. He was also angry with himself. It had been a pretty simpler minded notion to escape as a mist, after all. Every fool knew that trick. Voll had probably just left a hot wind waiting. Festin gathered himself into a small black bat, flew up to the ceiling, retransformed into a thin stream of plain air, and seeped through the crack.

This time he got clear out and was blowing softly down the hall in which he found himself towards a window, when a sharp sense of peril made him pull together, snapping himself into the first small, coherent shape that came to mind—a gold ring. It was just as well. The hurricane of arctic air that would have dispersed

his air-form in unrecallable chaos merely chilled his ring-form slightly. As the storm passed he lay on the marble pavement, wondering which form might get out the window quickest.

Too late, he began to roll away. An enormous blank-faced troll strode cataclysmically across the floor, stopped, caught the quick-rolling ring and picked it up in a huge limestone-like hand. The troll strode to the trapdoor, lifted it by an iron handle and a muttered charm, and dropped Festin down into the darkness. He fell straight for forty feet and landed on the stone floor—clink.

Resuming his true form he sat up, ruefully rubbing a bruised elbow. Enough of this transformation on an empty stomach. He longed bitterly for his staff, with which he could have summoned up any amount of dinner. Without it, though he could change his own form and exert certain spells and powers, he could not transform or summon to him any material thing—neither lightning nor a lamb chop.

"Patience," Festin told himself, and when he had got his breath he dissolved his body into the infinite delicacy of volatile oils, becoming the aroma of a frying lamb chop. He drifted once more through the crack. The waiting troll sniffed suspiciously, but already Festin had regrouped himself into a falcon, winging straight for the window. The troll lunged after him, missed by yards, and bellowed in a vast stony voice, "The hawk, get the hawk!" Swooping over the enchanted castle towards his forest that lay dark to westward, sunlight and sea-glare dazzling his eyes, Festin rode the wind like an arrow. But a quicker arrow found him. Crying out, he fell. Sun and sea and towers spun around him and went out.

He woke again on the dank floor of the dungeon, hands and hair and lips wet with his own blood. The arrow had struck his pinion as a falcon, his shoulder as a man. Lying still, he mumbled a spell to close the wound. Presently he was able to sit up, and recollect a longer, deeper spell of healing. But he had lost a good deal of blood, and with it, power. A chill had settled in the marrow of his bones which even the healing-spell could not warm. There was darkness in his eyes, even when he struck a will o' the wisp and lit the reeking air: the same dark mist he had seen, as he flew, overhanging his forest and the little towns of his land.

It was up to him to protect that land.

He could not attempt direct escape again. He was too weak and tired. Trusting his power too much, he had lost his strength. Now whatever shape he took would share his weakness, and be trapped.

Shivering with cold, he crouched there, letting the fireball sputter out with a last whiff of methane—marsh gas. The smell brought to his mind's eye the marshes stretching from the forest wall down to the sea, his beloved marshes where no men came, where in fall the swans flew long and level, where between still pools and reed-islands the quick, silent, seaward streamlets ran. Oh, to be a fish in one of those streams; or better yet to be farther upstream, near the springs, in the forest in the shadow of the trees, in the clear brown backwater under an alder's roots, resting hidden . . .

This was a great magic. Festin had no more performed it than has any man who in exile or danger longs for the earth and waters of his home, seeing and yearning over the doorsill of his house, the table where he has eaten, the branches outside the window of the room where he has slept. Only in dreams do any but the great Mages realize this magic of going home. But Festin, with the cold creeping out from his marrow into nerves and veins, stood up between the black walls, gathered his will together till it shone like a candle in the darkness of his flesh, and began to work the great and silent magic.

The walls were gone. He was in the earth, rocks and veins of granite for bones, ground-water for blood, the roots of things for nerves. Like a blind worm he moved through the earth westward, slowly, darkness before and behind. Then all at once coolness flowed along his back and belly, a buoyant, unresisting, inexhaustible caress. With his sides he tasted the water, felt current-flow; and with lidless eyes he saw before him the deep brown pool between the great buttress-roots of an alder. He darted forward, silvery, into shadow. He had got free. He was home.

The water ran timelessly from its clear spring. He lay on the sand of the pool's bottom letting running water, stronger than any spell of healing, soothe his wound and with its coolness wash away the bleaker cold that had entered him. But as he rested he felt and heard a shaking and trampling in the earth. Who walked now in his forest? Too weary to try to change form, he hid his gleaming trout-body under the arch of the alder root, and waited.

Huge grey fingers groped in the water, roiling the sand. In the dimness above water vague faces, blank eyes loomed and vanished, reappeared. Nets and hands groped, missed, missed again, then caught and lifted him writhing up into the air. He struggled to take back his own shape and could not; his own spell of

homecoming bound him. He writhed in the net, gasping in the dry, bright, terrible air, drowning. The agony went on, and he knew nothing beyond it.

After a long time and little by little he became aware that he was in his human form again; some sharp, sour liquid was being forced down his throat. Time lapsed again, and he found himself sprawled face down on the dank floor of the vault. He was back in the power of his enemy. And, though he could breathe again, he was not very far from death.

The chill was all through him now; and the trolls, Voll's servants, must have crushed the fragile trout-body, for when he moved, his ribcage and one forearm stabbed with pain. Broken and without strength, he lay at the bottom of the well of night. There was no power in him to change shape; there was no way out, but one.

Lying there motionless, almost but not quite beyond the reach of pain, Festin thought: Why has he not killed me? Why does he keep me here alive?

Why has he never been seen? With what eyes can he be seen, on what ground does he walk?

He fears me, though I have no strength left.

They say that all the wizards and men of power whom he has defeated live on sealed in tombs like this, live on year after year trying to get free. . . .

But if one chose not to live?

So Festin made his choice. His last thought was, If I am wrong, men will think I was a coward. But he did not linger on this thought. Turning his head a little to the side he closed his eyes, took a last deep breath, and whispered the word of unbinding, which is only spoken once.

This was not transformation. He was not changed. His body, the long legs and arms, the clever hands, the eyes that had liked to look on trees and streams, lay unchanged, only still, perfectly still and full of cold. But the walls were gone. The vaults built by magic were gone, and the rooms and towers; and the forest, and the sea, and the sky of evening. They were all gone, and Festin went slowly down the far slope of the hill of being, under new stars.

In life he had had great power; so here he did not forget. Like a candle flame he moved in the darkness of the wider land. And remembering he called out his enemy's name: "Voll!"

Called, unable to withstand, Voll came towards him, a thick pale shape in the starlight. Festin approached, and the other cowered and screamed as if burnt. Festin followed when he fled, followed him close. A long way they went, over dry lava-flows from the great extinct volcanoes rearing their cones against the unnamed

stars, across the spurs of silent hills, through valleys of short black grass, past towns or down their unlit streets between houses through whose windows no face looked. The stars hung in the sky; none set, none rose. There was no change here. No day would come. But they went on, Festin always driving the other before him, till they reached a place where once a river had run, very long ago: a river from the living lands. In the dry streambed, among boulders, a dead body lay: that of an old man, naked, flat eyes staring at the stars that are innocent of death.

"Enter it," Festin said. The Voll-shadow whimpered, but Festin came closer. Voll cowered away, stooped, and entered in the open mouth of his own dead body.

At once the corpse vanished. Unmarked, stainless, the dry boulders gleamed in starlight. Festin stood still a while, then slowly sat down among the great rocks to rest. To rest, not sleep; for he must keep guard here until Voll's body, sent back to its grave, had turned to dust, all evil power gone, scattered by the wind and washed seaward by the rain. He must keep watch over this place where once death had found a way back into the other land. Patient now, infinitely patient, Festin waited among the rocks where no river would ever run again, in the heart of the country which has no seacoast. The stars stood still above him; and as he watched them, slowly, very slowly he began to forget the voice of streams and the sound of rain on the leaves of the forests of life.

The Rule of Names

Mr. Underhill came out from under his hill, smiling and breathing hard. Each breath shot out of his nostrils as a double puff of steam, snow-white in the morning sunshine. Mr. Underhill looked up at the bright December sky and smiled wider than ever, showing snow-white teeth. Then he went down to the village.

"Morning, Mr. Underhill," said the villagers as he passed them in the narrow street between houses with conical, overhanging roofs like the fat red caps of toadstools. "Morning, morning!" he replied to each. (It was of course bad luck to wish anyone a *good* morning; a simple statement of the time of day was quite enough, in a place so permeated with Influences as Sattins Island, where a careless adjective might change the weather for a week.) All of them spoke to him, some with affection, some with affectionate disdain. He was all the little island had in the way of a wizard, and so deserved respect—but how could you respect a little fat man of fifty who waddled along with his toes turned in, breathing steam and smiling? He was no great shakes as a workman either. His fireworks were fairly elaborate but his elixirs were weak. Warts he charmed off frequently reappeared after three days; tomatoes he enchanted grew no bigger than canteloupes; and those rare times when a strange ship stopped at Sattins Harbor, Mr. Underhill always stayed under his hill—for fear, he explained, of the evil eye. He was, in other words, a wizard the way walleyed Gan was a carpenter: by default. The villagers made do with badly-hung doors and inefficient spells, for this generation, and relieved their annoyance by treating Mr. Underhill quite familiarly, as a mere fellow-villager. They even asked him to dinner. Once he asked some of them to dinner, and served a splendid repast, with silver, crystal, damask, roast goose, sparkling Andrades '639, and plum pudding with hard sauce; but he was so nervous all through the meal that it took the joy out of it, and besides, everybody was hungry again half an hour afterward. He did not like anyone to visit his cave, not even the anteroom, beyond which in fact nobody had ever got. When he saw people approaching the hill he always came trotting out to meet them. "Let's sit out here under the pine trees!" he would say, smiling and waving towards the fir grove, or if it was raining, "Let's go have a drink at the inn, eh?" though everybody knew he drank nothing stronger than well-water.

Some of the village children, teased by that locked cave, poked and pried and made raids while Mr. Underhill was away; but the small door that led into the inner chamber was spell-shut, and it seemed for once to be an effective spell. Once a couple of boys, thinking the wizard was over on the West Shore curing Mrs. Ruuna's sick donkey, brought a crowbar and a hatchet up there, but at the first whack of the hatchet on the door there came a roar of wrath from inside, and a cloud of purple steam. Mr. Underhill had got home early. The boys fled. He did not come out, and the boys came to no harm, though they said you couldn't believe what a huge hooting howling hissing horrible bellow that little fat man could make unless you'd heard it.

His business in town this day was three dozen fresh eggs and a pound of liver; also a stop at Seacaptain Fogeno's cottage to renew the seeing-charm on the old man's eyes (quite useless when applied to a case of detached retina, but Mr. Underhill kept trying), and finally a chat with old Goody Guld, the concertina-maker's widow. Mr. Underhill's friends were mostly old people. He was timid with the strong young men of the village, and the girls were shy of him. "He makes me nervous, he smiles so much," they all said, pouting, twisting silky ringlets round a finger. "Nervous" was a newfangled word, and their mothers all replied grimly, "Nervous my foot, silliness is the word for it. Mr. Underhill is a very respectable wizard!"

After leaving Goody Guld, Mr. Underhill passed by the school, which was being held this day out on the common. Since no one on Sattins Island was literate, there were no books to learn to read from and no desks to carve initials on and no blackboards to erase, and in fact no schoolhouse. On rainy days the children met in the loft of the Communal Barn, and got hay in their pants; on sunny days the schoolteacher, Palani, took them anywhere she felt like. Today, surrounded by thirty interested children under twelve and forty uninterested sheep under five, she was teaching an important item on the curriculum: the Rules of Names. Mr. Underhill, smiling shyly, paused to listen and watch. Palani, a plump, pretty girl of twenty, made a charming picture there in the wintry sunlight, sheep and children around her, a leafless oak above her, and behind her the dunes and sea and clear, pale sky. She spoke earnestly, her face flushed pink by wind and words. "Now you know the Rules of Names already, children. There are two, and they're the same on every island in the world. What's one of them?"

"It ain't polite to ask anybody what his name is," shouted a fat, quick boy, interrupted by a little girl shrieking, "You can't never tell your own name to

nobody my ma says!"

"Yes, Suba. Yes, Popi dear, don't screech. That's right. You never ask anybody his name. You never tell your own. Now think about that a minute and then tell me why we call our wizard Mr. Underhill." She smiled across the curly heads and the woolly backs at Mr. Underhill, who beamed, and nervously clutched his sack of eggs.

"'Cause he lives under a hill!" said half the children.

"But is it his truename?"

"No!" said the fat boy, echoed by little Popi shrieking, "No!"

"How do you know it's not?"

"'Cause he came here all alone and so there wasn't anybody knew his truename so they couldn't tell us, and *he* couldn't—"

"Very good, Suba. Popi, don't shout. That's right. Even a wizard can't tell his truename. When you children are through school and go through the Passage, you'll leave your child-names behind and keep only your truenames, which you must never ask for and never give away. Why is that the rule?"

The children were silent. The sheep bleated gently. Mr. Underhill answered the question: "Because the name is the thing," he said in his shy, soft, husky voice, "and the truename is the true thing. To speak the name is to control the thing. Am I right, Schoolmistress?"

She smiled and curtseyed, evidently a little embarrassed by his participation. And he trotted off towards his hill, clutching his eggs to his bosom. Somehow the minute spent watching Palani and the children had made him very hungry. He locked his inner door behind him with a hasty incantation, but there must have been a leak or two in the spell, for soon the bare anteroom of the cave was rich with the smell of frying eggs and sizzling liver.

The wind that day was light and fresh out of the west, and on it at noon a little boat came skimming the bright waves into Sattins Harbor. Even as it rounded the point a sharp-eyed boy spotted it, and knowing, like every child on the island, every sail and spar of the forty boats of the fishing fleet, he ran down the street calling out, "A foreign boat, a foreign boat!" Very seldom was the lonely isle visited by a boat from some equally lonely isle of the East Reach, or an adventurous trader from the Archipelago. By the time the boat was at the pier half the village was there to greet it, and fishermen were following it homewards, and cowherds and clam-diggers and herb-hunters were puffing up and down all the rocky hills, heading towards the harbor.

But Mr. Underhill's door stayed shut.

There was only one man aboard the boat. Old Seacaptain Fogeno, when they told him that, drew down a bristle of white brows over his unseeing eyes. "There's only one kind of man," he said, "that sails the Outer Reach alone. A wizard, or a warlock, or a Mage . . ."

So the villagers were breathless hoping to see for once in their lives a Mage, one of the mighty White Magicians of the rich, towered, crowded inner islands of the Archipelago. They were disappointed, for the voyager was quite young, a handsome black-bearded fellow who hailed them cheerfully from his boat, and leaped ashore like any sailor glad to have made port. He introduced himself at once as a sea-peddlar. But when they told Seacaptain Fogeno that he carried an oaken walking-stick around with him, the old man nodded. "Two wizards in one town," he said. "Bad!" And his mouth snapped shut like an old carp's.

As the stranger could not give them his name, they gave him one right away: Blackbeard. And they gave him plenty of attention. He had a small mixed cargo of cloth and sandals and piswi feathers for trimming cloaks and cheap incense and levity stones and fine herbs and great glass beads from Venway—the usual peddlar's lot. Everyone on Sattins Island came to look, to chat with the voyager, and perhaps to buy something—"Just to remember him by!" cackled Goody Guld, who like all the women and girls of the village was smitten with Blackbeard's bold good looks. All the boys hung round him too, to hear him tell of his voyages to far, strange islands of the Reach or describe the great rich islands of the Archipelago, the Inner Lanes, the roadsteads white with ships, and the golden roofs of Havnor. The men willingly listened to his tales; but some of them wondered why a trader should sail alone, and kept their eyes thoughtfully upon his oaken staff.

But all this time Mr. Underhill stayed under his hill.

"This is the first island I've ever seen that had no wizard," said Blackbeard one evening to Goody Guld, who had invited him and her nephew and Palani in for a cup of rushwash tea. "What do you do when you get a toothache, or the cow goes dry?"

"Why, we've got Mr. Underhill!" said the old woman.

"For what that's worth," muttered her nephew Birt, and then blushed purple and spilled his tea. Birt was a fisherman, a large, brave, wordless young man. He loved the schoolmistress, but the nearest he had come to telling her of his love was to give baskets of fresh mackerel to her father's cook.

"Oh, you do have a wizard?" Blackbeard asked. "Is he invisible?"

"No, he's just very shy," said Palani. "You've only been here a week, you know, and we see so few strangers here. . . ." She also blushed a little, but did not spill her tea.

Blackbeard smiled at her. "He's a good Sattinsman, then, eh?"

"No," said Goody Guld, "no more than you are. Another cup, nevvy? keep it in the cup this time. No, my dear, he came in a little bit of a boat, four years ago was it? just a day after the end of the shad run, I recall, for they was taking up the nets over in East Creek, and Pondi Cowherd broke his leg that very morning—five years ago it must be. No, four. No, five it is, 'twas the year the garlic didn't sprout. So he sails in on a bit of a sloop loaded full up with great chests and boxes and says to Seacaptain Fogeno, who wasn't blind then, though old enough goodness knows to be blind twice over, 'I hear tell,' he says, 'you've got no wizard nor warlock at all, might you be wanting one?' 'Indeed, if the magic's white!' says the Captain, and before you could say cuttlefish Mr. Underhill had settled down in the cave under the hill and was charming the mange off Goody Beltow's cat. Though the fur grew in grey, and 'twas an orange cat. Queer-looking thing it was after that. It died last winter in the cold spell. Goody Beltow took on so at that cat's death, poor thing, worse than when her man was drowned on the Long Banks, the year of the long herring-runs, when nevvy Birt here was but a babe in petticoats." Here Birt spilled his tea again, and Blackbeard grinned, but Goody Guld proceeded undismayed, and talked on till nightfall.

Next day Blackbeard was down at the pier, seeing after the sprung board in his boat which he seemed to take a long time fixing, and as usual drawing the taciturn Sattinsmen into talk. "Now which of these is your wizard's craft?" he asked. "Or has he got one of those the Mages fold up into a walnut shell when they're not using it?"

"Nay," said a stolid fisherman. "She's oop in his cave, under hill."

"He carried the boat he came in up to his cave?"

"Aye. Clear oop. I helped. Heavier as lead she was. Full oop with great boxes, and they full oop with books o' spells, he says. Heavier as lead she was." And the stolid fisherman turned his back, sighing stolidly. Goody Guld's nephew, mending a net nearby, looked up from his work and asked with equal stolidity, "Would ye like to meet Mr. Underhill, maybe?"

Blackbeard returned Birt's look. Clever black eyes met candid blue ones for a long moment; then Blackbeard smiled and said, "Yes. Will you take me up to the hill, Birt?"

"Aye, when I'm done with this," said the fisherman. And when the net was mended, he and the Archipelagan set off up the village street towards the high green hill above it. But as they crossed the common Blackbeard said, "Hold on a while, friend Birt. I have a tale to tell you, before we meet your wizard."

"Tell away," says Birt, sitting down in the shade of a live-oak.

"It's a story that started a hundred years ago, and isn't finished yet—though it soon will be, very soon. . . . In the very heart of the Archipelago, where the islands crowd thick as flies on honey, there's a little isle called Pendor. The sealords of Pendor were mighty men, in the old days of war before the League. Loot and ransom and tribute came pouring into Pendor, and they gathered a great treasure there, long ago. Then from somewhere away out in the West Reach, where dragons breed on the lava isles, came one day a very mighty dragon. Not one of those overgrown lizards most of you Outer Reach folk call dragons, but a big, black, winged, wise, cunning monster, full of strength and subtlety, and like all dragons loving gold and precious stones above all things. He killed the Sealord and his soldiers, and the people of Pendor fled in their ships by night. They all fled away and left the dragon coiled up in Pendor Towers. And there he stayed for a hundred years, dragging his scaly belly over the emerald sand sapphires and coins of gold, coming forth only once in a year or two when he must eat. He'd raid nearby islands for his food. You know what dragons eat?"

Birt nodded and said in a whisper, "Maidens."

"Right," said Blackbeard. "Well, that couldn't be endured forever, nor the thought of him sitting on all that treasure. So after the League grew strong, and the Archipelago wasn't so busy with wars and piracy, it was decided to attack Pendor, drive out the dragon, and get the gold and jewels for the treasury of the League. They're forever wanting money, the League is. So a huge fleet gathered from fifty islands, and seven Mages stood in the prows of the seven strongest ships, and they sailed towards Pendor. . . . They got there. They landed. Nothing stirred. The houses all stood empty, the dishes on the tables full of a hundred years' dust. The bones of the old Sealord and his men lay about in the castle courts and on the stairs. And the Tower rooms reeked of dragon. But there was no dragon. And no treasure, not a diamond the size of a poppyseed, not a single silver bead . . . Knowing that he couldn't stand up to seven Mages, the dragon had skipped out. They tracked him, and found he'd flown to a deserted island up north called Udrath; they followed his trail there, and what did they find? Bones again. His bones—the dragon's. But no treasure. A wizard, some unknown wizard from

somewhere, must have met him singlehanded, and defeated him—and then made off with the treasure, right under the League's nose!"

The fisherman listened, attentive and expressionless.

"Now that must have been a powerful wizard and a clever one, first to kill a dragon, and second to get off without leaving a trace. The lords and Mages of the Archipelago couldn't track him at all, neither where he'd come from nor where he'd made off to. They were about to give up. That was last spring; I'd been off on a three-year voyage up in the North Reach, and got back about that time. And they asked me to help them find the unknown wizard. That was clever of them. Because I'm not only a wizard myself, as I think some of the oafs here have guessed, but I am also a descendant of the Lords of Pendor. That treasure is mine. It's mine, and knows that it's mine. Those fools of the League couldn't find it, because it's not theirs. It belongs to the House of Pendor, and the great emerald, the star of the hoard, Inalkil the Greenstone, knows its master. Behold!" Blackbeard raised his oaken staff and cried aloud, "Inalkil!" The tip of the staff began to glow green, a fiery green radiance, a dazzling haze the color of April grass, and at the same moment the staff tipped in the wizard's hand, leaning, slanting till it pointed straight at the side of the hill above them.

"It wasn't so bright a glow, far away in Havnor," Blackbeard murmured, "but the staff pointed true. Inalkil answered when I called. The jewel knows its master. And I know the thief, and I shall conquer him. He's a mighty wizard, who could overcome a dragon. But I am mightier. Do you want to know why, oaf? Because I know his name!"

As Blackbeard's tone got more arrogant, Birt had looked duller and duller, blanker and blanker; but at this he gave a twitch, shut his mouth, and stared at the Archipelagan. "How did you . . . learn it?" he asked very slowly.

Blackbeard grinned, and did not answer.

"Black magic?"

"How else?"

Birt looked pale, and said nothing.

"I am the Sealord of Pendor, oaf, and I will have the gold my fathers won, and the jewels my mothers wore, and the Greenstone! For they are mine.—Now, you can tell your village boobies the whole story after I have defeated this wizard and gone. Wait here. Or you can come and watch, if you're not afraid. You'll never get the chance again to see a great wizard in all his power." Blackbeard turned, and without a backward glance strode off up the hill towards the entrance to the cave.

Very slowly, Birt followed. A good distance from the cave he stopped, sat down under a hawthorn tree, and watched. The Archipelagan had stopped; a stiff, dark figure alone on the green swell of the hill before the gaping cavemouth, he stood perfectly still. All at once he swung his staff up over his head, and the emerald radiance shone about him as he shouted, "Thief, thief of the Hoard of Pendor, come forth!"

There was a crash, as of dropped crockery, from inside the cave, and a lot of dust came spewing out. Scared, Birt ducked. When he looked again he saw Blackbeard still standing motionless, and at the mouth of the cave, dusty and dishevelled, stood Mr. Underhill. He looked small and pitiful, with his toes turned in as usual, and his little bowlegs in black tights, and no staff—he never had had one, Birt suddenly thought. Mr. Underhill spoke. "Who are you?" he said in his husky little voice.

"I am the Sealord of Pendor, thief, come to claim my treasure!"

At that, Mr. Underhill slowly turned pink, as he always did when people were rude to him. But he then turned something else. He turned yellow. His hair bristled out, he gave a coughing roar—and was a yellow lion leaping down the hill at Blackbeard, white fangs gleaming.

But Blackbeard no longer stood there. A gigantic tiger, color of night and lightning, bounded to meet the lion. . . .

The lion was gone. Below the cave all of a sudden stood a high grove of trees, black in the winter sunshine. The tiger, checking himself in midleap just before he entered the shadow of the trees, caught fire in the air, became a tongue of flame lashing out at the dry black branches. . . .

But where the trees had stood a sudden cataract leaped from the hillside, an arch of silvery crashing water, thundering down upon the fire. But the fire was gone. . . .

For just a moment before the fisherman's staring eyes two hills rose—the green one he knew, and a new one, a bare, brown hillock ready to drink up the rushing waterfall. That passed so quickly it made Birt blink, and after blinking he blinked again, and moaned, for what he saw now was a great deal worse. Where the cataract had been there hovered a dragon. Black wings darkened all the hill, steel claws reached groping, and from the dark, scaly, gaping lips fire and steam shot out.

Beneath the monstrous creature stood Blackbeard, laughing.

"Take any shape you please, little Mr. Underhill!" he taunted. "I can match you. But the game grows tiresome. I want to look upon my treasure, upon Inalkil. Now, big dragon, little wizard, take your true shape. I command you by the power of

your true name—Yevaud!”

Birt could not move at all, not even to blink. He cowered, staring whether he would or not. He saw the black dragon hang there in the air above Blackbeard. He saw the fire lick like many tongues from the scaly mouth, the steam jet from the red nostrils. He saw Blackbeard’s face grow white, white as chalk, and the beard-fringed lips trembling.

“Your name is Yevaud!”

“Yes,” said a great, husky, hissing voice. “My truename is Yevaud, and my true shape is this shape.”

“But the dragon was killed—they found dragon bones on Udrath Island—”

“That was another dragon,” said the dragon, and then stooped like a hawk, talons outstretched. And Birt shut his eyes.

When he opened them the sky was clear, the hillside empty, except for a reddish-blackish trampled spot, and a few talon-marks in the grass.

Birt the fisherman got to his feet and ran. He ran across the common, scattering sheep to right and left, and straight down the village street to Palani’s father’s house. Palani was out in the garden weeding the nasturtiums. “Come with me!” Birt gasped. She stared. He grabbed her wrist and dragged her with him. She screeched a little, but did not resist. He ran with her straight to the pier, pushed her into his fishing-sloop the *Queenie*, untied the painter, took up the oars and set off rowing like a demon. The last that Sattins Island saw of him and Palani was the *Queenie*’s sail vanishing in the direction of the nearest island westward.

The villagers thought they would never stop talking about it, how Goody Guld’s nephew Birt had lost his mind and sailed off with the schoolmistress on the very same day that the peddlar Blackbeard disappeared without a trace, leaving all his feathers and beads behind. But they did stop talking about it, three days later. They had other things to talk about, when Mr. Underhill finally came out of his cave.

Mr. Underhill had decided that since his truename was no longer a secret, he might as well drop his disguise. Walking was a lot harder than flying, and besides, it was a long, long time since he had had a real meal.

The Daughter of Odren

Before daybreak in late summer and early autumn, fog gathers on the waters of the Closed Sea, drifting up over the steep eastern coast of the Island of O, blurring away the upland fields and pastures that run out to the cliffs. Every blade of grass and frond of fern bows to a burden of waterbeads. The fog smells of salt and seaweed and smoke from the early fires of farmhouse hearths.

In the darkness before dawn, a bobbing, glowing, pallid sphere moved through the fields: the light of a candle-lantern on the fog immediately around it. Beside it was a dark blur, the skirt of the woman who carried the lantern. She moved on steadily through the fog and dark, following a path deeply foot-worn and as deeply worn into her as into the earth. She did not hesitate and did not pause until the path brought her down into a shallow valley. There, something loomed ahead of her, a bulk that caught the lantern light, a dim mass taller than herself. She came up to it: a standing stone, its rough, pitted surface pale where the lantern-light shone on it, the rest of it dark in darkness. She set down the lantern near it and the shadows changed, running up the stone. She put down the basket she carried. She went to the standing stone, bowed to it, and embraced it. She stood for some time holding it stiffly in her arms, her forehead bowed against it.

After a while she drew back from it and spoke. "Remember me," she said in a low voice. "Remember your life. Remember your children. Think of me. I'm here. I'll never leave you. Think of yourself, what you were. You will be avenged. Be patient. Don't sleep. Never sleep. Wait." Then she embraced it in a harder, briefer hold, and turned away.

From the basket she took a jug and reached up to pour water over the uneven top of the stone. A clay bowl lay in the weedy grass at its base, with a trace of coarse meal in it. She emptied it, rinsed it from the jug, dried it on her apron, and refilled it with a handful of meal from her basket. She set it down and laid across it a spray of flowers, blue autumn daisies, short-stemmed, half dried-up though wet with fog and dew.

Laying her hand on the stone, she whispered: "Here's food, food for your soul, for your strength. Eat, drink. Be strong. Wait. Don't sleep, Father. Wake, and wait. You will be avenged. Then you can sleep."

Looking around and seeing the mist pale with the first daylight, she stooped and blew out the candle in the lantern. She took up the lantern and basket and turned back the way she had come. The fog whitened and seemed to thicken as it imperceptibly filled with light. She could not see more than a few steps ahead on the foot-worn, narrow track up the slope out of the shallow valley and across rough pastures, but she walked with the same unhesitating stride. The steady sound of the sea at the foot of the cliffs was loud in the valley of the standing stone but died away soon in the inland pastures, muffled by fog and earth. Sheep a little darker than the fog stared at her from close to the path, heavy with wet, their wool all full of round fog-drops. She heard their movements, the clink of bells. An ewe made a hoarse roaring blat and a half-grown lamb bleated in reply.

It was a half mile or so across the pastures to Hill Farm. The farmer was leaving for the hayfield as his wife came into the farmyard. He greeted her, his voice subdued. "Good morning, mistress."

"Good morning, master," she said, also speaking low. "I'll bring your lunch to the Low Meadow."

Farmer Bay nodded. "Thanks," he said, and trudged off into the thinning mist, a short man going grey, gnarled with muscle, shouldering his scythe. It had been a good summer for haygrass and they were cutting the Low Meadow for the second time.

After Bay's wife had seen to the house and kitchen garden she took the smaller scythe and a basket of bread, cheese, and pickled onion and went to join her husband in the hay-meadow. The sun was hot and high in the eastern sky by then. The fog had burned off the land and withdrawn to lie in a low, dark-silver line along the east edge of the sea, hiding the islands.

As she topped the rise before she went down to the meadow the farmer's wife turned to look back at the rise and fall of the land between her and the high sea-horizon. Bay's farmhouse stood sheltered on a mild slope among old willow trees a quarter mile away. To the west of it were other farms, and south of it she could see the tallest chimney and some treetops of the village. Northward, on higher land, the groves and high slate roofs of the house of the Lords of Odren stood out clear. To her east, a fold of the hills hid the vale of the standing stone where she had been that morning and every morning for fourteen years. Her eyes knew that fold of land and what it hid, and all the lands and fields and the roads around it, and the half circle of the eastern sea beyond it all. It was a great, still scene, and she saw it all with a still heart. She was just turning to go down to the hay-meadow when her

gaze became alert and fixed.

Two people were on the road that came north from the village, a whitish track meandering along among the pastures some way inland from the cliffs. At this distance the two figures were as small and black as insects. They stopped where a footpath crossed the road from inland and led out to the edge of the cliff. She watched them intently while they stood. They were apparently talking. She could see one of them making gestures, like the waving of an ant's feelers. When they went on past the footpath up the road, she watched them a moment more, then turned away and went on down to the haying.

"No," the young man said, stopping suddenly. "No, you're wrong, Hovy. It was that path. The next path off this road would be to the orchards. It has to be that one." He set off walking much faster back down the road to the barely marked track that crossed it. A shuffle of footprints where they had stood discussing their way was clear in the white dust there. He headed resolutely inland. His companion followed him silently.

The footpath, not much used and barely visible in places, wound about through hilly pastureland and ended in a long, dry vale under dry slopes. Bay trees, willows, and a single tall cedar stood among a scatter of old gravemounds and fallen, broken marker stones. An ancient cairn of boulders piled higher than a man and half overgrown with shrubs and weeds stood in the center of the burial ground. The young man walked toward it. He stopped and stood as if bewildered, staring at the red-orange flowers of a creeper growing among the stones of the cairn. He looked at the older man who followed him.

The older man shook his head.

"This is Evro's Cairn," the young man said, as if regaining the name, the memory. "But then where . . ."

The other man gestured northwestward, a short, small movement of his hand, as if inviting the other to precede him. He stood patiently waiting for the young man to go first, or to speak. The young man still looked bewildered and did not move, and after a minute the other set off. There was no path, but he walked as if he knew where he was going, starting up one of the slopes of short dry grass at a steady pace and crossing over it. The young man followed him, hurrying to catch up.

Both of them wore travel-dirty clothes and mended sandals. The younger man

walked empty-handed; the older man had a stick in his hand, a pouch slung over his shoulder. He was in his fifties, or older, and had a worn, worried look. When they came through the fold of the hills into a narrow valley he stopped as soon as he saw the standing stone. He turned his anxious face to his companion. The young man hurried on past him, going straight to the stone.

A field mouse skittered out of the bowl of meal, scared from its daily breakfast, and vanished into the weeds at the base of the stone.

The young man stopped a few feet from the stone and straightened up to face its pale grey, blunt bulk. It stood about his own height and maybe twice his girth, a little wider than it was deep. A cleft ran up the lower part, dividing it in two, and the top of it narrowed in enough to give a faint suggestion of a head.

"The Standing Man," Hovy whispered.

The young man nodded impatiently. He moved a little closer, reached out his right hand, and touched the stone. He drew in his breath.

"What's this?" he said, looking down at the bowl of meal and the withering branch of flowers.

"I don't know," the other man said.

"Somebody's made an offering here, Hovy."

In the flood of sunlight in the silent valley they stood silent, the three of them, the young man, the older man, the stone.

"It's kind of you to let me rest here," said the stranger to the innkeeper. "'If you want dried fish, go on down to the port,' I said to 'em, 'but I'm not taking an extra step today.'" She stuck out her worn shoes with patched soles.

"On your way north, eh?"

"Our nephew that's been living with us is going back to his folk there. Might be we'll settle there too if there's work. There's none where we're from." She gestured vaguely to the south.

"And where would they live then?" the innkeeper asked, looking up from the beans she was shelling, ready to chat. "In Riro, would it be?"

"Oh, let me give you a hand with those. I can't sit and see work done and not lend a hand. No, it's not Riro. The name of the village has just gone out of my head, but it's a great long way up the coast, I believe. I'll find out how long it is with my own feet, won't I? Paro, would that be the name of the place?"

The innkeeper shook her head, indifferent. Riro was the north end of her world.

"It's a long road is all I know! Now, these are lovely beans. Fat and sweet as little

quail."

"They'll be supper. With a bit of rabbit, or a hen if you'd rather."

"Oh, rabbit by all means. I love a bit of stewed rabbit with raily beans. D'you call 'em railies?"

"I've heard it. Mostly we call 'em trailers."

The guest nodded, thumbing the plump pink beans from their mottled shells into a bowl and tossing the shells into a wide basket in rhythmic alternation with her hostess.

"Now it seems I once was told a story about the great house here," she said. "Or is it about Riro, the story I'm thinking of?"

"No," the innkeeper said with perfect certainty. "It's about Odren." She screwed up her long face, suppressing satisfaction. "A terrible story," she said.

"Is it? It was to do with a sorcerer, I think? An uncanny man? Eh, I don't know if I want to hear it if it's about uncanny things. I do lie awake nights fearing things! Though what there is to fear I don't know. My man and I can hardly get poorer than we are, and what's to fear worse than starving?" She laughed her cheerful laugh, but her eyes had an anxious look in them.

The innkeeper was not diverted from her course. "Terrible it is, the story," she said. "Uncanny, and worse than that. It was when I first came here from Endway Farm. Fourteen, fifteen years ago. The lords of Odren, they're the great folk here; they own land here and all north of here for a long way. The master of Odren, he's the master of many among us. And so. That was the time when pirates had gathered in the isles, out there."

Her voice had begun to take on the long rhythm of the storyteller. She waved a bean-pod to the east. She was not entirely pleased when the guest interjected, "They do say the new king's done away with pirates, and they're all gone."

"Maybe so. But there was no king back then. And pirates there were. A great cloud of ships they had, a great flock of evil men they were, greedy as seagulls, raiding the fishermen's boats and the trading ships and so bold they'd come to land and raid our villages and farms as well, thieving, murdering. We had watchfires and all to warn of their coming, but how could we stop them when they came? So all the towns and domains of this shore made a counsel that they'd build ships, or man the ships they had, and so make a fleet of our own and sail out to destroy the pirates."

They both continued to shell beans, but more slowly, the dramatic pauses uninterrupted.

"So, the master of our domain here was Lord Garnet. A grand, fine man he was. A firm hand he had, but a liberal one for poor folk, as befits the rich. Well, he pledged himself and some of his people to join the fleet. But being a landlord, not a sea trader, he had no ship. He wanted his own ship, for a lordly man like him wouldn't like serving under some other man. He got word of a sorcerer south down the coast with a great gift of shipbuilding. So he sent for this man. And he came."

A pause. The guest breathed the listener's soft, assenting "Ahh," and softly dropped a handful of beans into the bowl.

"Ash was his name. A young man, tall, with long hair black and bright as fresh tar down his back. A handsome man. So they all said in the village. I could never look on a sorcerer as handsome, myself. They're not men at all in my eyes." There was a note of righteous disgust in her voice. The listener nodded, emptying another pod.

"So this Ash came to the great house, up the road there. And he set to work down on the beach under the headland, building a great ship. There was carpenter's work to it, of course—they were rolling great trees to the sawpit here, and building a cradle on the beach to hold the nave of it, and all the boat-builders from Yaswe to Riro came to work on it. But the spells of the sorcerer hastened the work and made it easy, so that it went fast as fast, and the ship was floating on the sea before the month was out. And Odren had been gathering his men and what they needed for the ship and the journey. So now they were to set sail to join the fleet. The fleet had already gathered far out there near Eel's Eye, and was waiting for the last few ships to join them. Many people from the villages and farms went down to Odren Cove to see ours set sail. I was there.

"The lord had named the ship for his wife, the *Lady of Odren*.

"It was a beautiful sight, that ship. I've seen the brave merchantmen go by, and the great galleys from O-tokne, but never one so fine as the *Lady of Odren*. She had high slender sides, and a high mast, and sails like hills of snow—spell-sails, they said, that would catch any wind. We saw the sorcerer aboard her, making the last passes on her to keep her safe in the battles and storms to come. Then the lady came out onto the pier with her children to bid her husband farewell. They all embraced, and we all cheered as he went aboard. As the ship sailed out the lady wept, and her children wept, and so did many of us standing there. But the ship was so gallant sailing out across the sea with her sails like the while clouds, we could hardly fear harm would come to her. There was two men from this village aboard her, poor souls.

"That was the last of the ships, they say, to join the fleet. They all sailed on together eastward through the Near Isles to find the pirates and destroy them. I can't tell you much of that tale, for I don't know it, though I've heard men who sailed with the fleet telling it over a hundred times, but what are the names of isles and straits to me, and the names of the ships and all the lords and leaders? You can hear them sing all that down in the port, in the 'Lay of the Isle-Pirates.' All I can tell you is that the ships weren't back by winter, when we looked for them. Nor in spring did they come back. Nor in summer, no, nor the next winter."

After a long silence the guest murmured, "Mistress, your telling is better than any Lay."

The innkeeper was impassive, though evidently not displeased. It was a while before she took up the story. She shelled a few beans without looking at them, or at anything. "My sister's daughter Fern worked in the great house at Odren in those years," she said, and paused again. Her hands rested in her lap. "She was the youngest of the lady's women, and something of a pet to her. I myself went up often to carry fresh butter, for we weren't keeping the inn then but dairying. I could talk with Fern. So this is no hearsay or gossip I tell you, but the truth as you won't hear it from any other mouth. But the cause of the trouble, anyone can tell you that. My lord sails away and leaves his lady, and with her he leaves a handsome young man, a sorcerer who has no more work to do, since the ship is built and gone. Yet there he stays. The lady puts out word that the great house is in need of rebuilding, and the sorcerer's staying on to see to that work. And indeed some scaffolds were set up and some roofing seen to. But what need for sorcery, with slate right to hand at Velery, and workmen willing and able? And then the lady says that the sorcerer, wizard she calls him, is staying on at Odren to work spells of safety on the house and its children, and such stuff.

"Nobody spoke well about it, but few spoke much ill about it either. The lady was the mistress and Ash was a sorcerer. You never know what such a man may hear or do. But my niece Fern and other women in the house told me it was a wicked thing how the boy and girl were treated now. And I myself saw the girl dressed poorly, always out in the gardens and fields with her little brother.

"Then the people at the great house heard that the sorcerer had seen our ship and all its people lost. He saw the battle in his water-mirror. That's a bowl with spelled water in it. He looked and saw the pirates boarding, and the fighting and fire, saw the ship sink. He rushed through the house, crying out, 'They are gone, gone down, they are gone!' And my niece said when she heard his cry it was as if

she saw the ships before her own eyes in a great whirl of fire and seawater red as blood. The people of the household wept and screamed, and the lady sank down as if struck by a stone.

"But after she rose up, she gathered all the people of the house together and told them that they mustn't speak of what the sorcerer had seen in his bowl. For though her heart told her it was true, yet better not to grieve so many people before the word came from the east, and maybe there was hope for other ships of the fleet, if not for the *Lady of Odren*.

"She said that name as steady as any other name, my niece told me.

"The daughter of Odren was a girl of sixteen then. When she heard what her mother said she cried out that it was a lie and her father was not dead. The lady tried to calm her, but the girl raged and stormed and ran away from her and from the sorcerer, shouting that she would not have them touch her.

"After that she kept as far from her mother as she could. She was called Lily, as her mother was, but she changed her use-name and told the people they must call her Weed, and her brother, Little Garnet, she called Clay. He was about ten then. The mother let them do as they pleased, even to changing their names. Truth was, she paid them no heed at all, Fern told me. She was always with the sorcerer, combing his long tar-black hair and caressing his cheeks and unlacing his sandals and stroking his feet, Fern said, and his hands were always on her, pressing and caressing. None of the people of the house dared show much kindness to the children, for fear of the sorcerer's ill will. For he was truly a man of power. My niece had seen what he could do. She never would tell me what it was, but she'd learned to fear him.

"There was a gardener's man, though, who was kind to the little boy, a west country man. The great folk in the house took no notice of him, so I suppose he didn't fear the sorcerer."

She stopped. The listener asked no question, though the pause went on a long time.

"Then came news that the pirates were defeated. One ship alone came back to port, down at Barreny. Her crew told of the long pursuit, and a hundred sea-battles when the pirates turned their fleet upon us or lured aside and destroyed one ship or another of ours in their wicked cruelty. But at last we'd scattered them and defeated them, sunk their ships, cleaned them out of the Closed Sea, and our ships would be coming home—those still above the water.

"Then one ship and another began to come in to port all up and down the coast.

They'd all been scattered by the spring gales as they tried to sail west. But no sign or word of our ship. Summer went on, autumn came again. And word of what the sorcerer had seen had got about, so people all said he'd seen truly, and the *Lady of Odren* was lost.

"And then one bright morning the daughter of Odren comes crying from the sea-cliffs over the cove, 'The ship! The ship! My father's ship!'

"And it was her, the *Lady of Odren*, her sails all stained and worn, sailing in on the wind from the east.

"My niece was there in the house, and what I tell you now, she saw and told me.

"When the Lady Lily looked from the window and saw the ship entering the cove, she stood like stone. She spoke to the sorcerer in her room for a moment. Then she went out and down the long stairways to the beach along with many others, and was first on the pier to greet her husband as he came off the ship. His hair had grizzled, but my niece said he looked a warrior, a big powerful man, laughing aloud, and he picked his lady up and swung her about in the joy of seeing her again. And she held to him and stroked his face and said, 'Come home, come up to the house, dear lord!'

"She had the cooks make a feast, and that evening the candles were all lighted, and the lord told his tales of sea-battles and showed his scars and squeezed his wife and petted his son and daughter. And Ash, he smiled and kept aside like a humble sorcerer.

"The lady stayed with her husband, clinging to him every moment till they went to their bedroom. So it was her daughter couldn't speak to him alone, nor anyone else.

"Now, in the morning at first light the lady came from her room asking the women had they seen her lord. She had waked and he was gone from her bed. No one had seen him. She made light of it, saying he must have gone out to walk his domain as he often used to do, alone and early. And she told them to make breakfast ready for his return. But then as the day came, someone looked from the window and said, 'The ship is gone.' And so it was. The harbor was empty.

"And from that morning on there has been no sight or sound or word of the Lord of Odren, or his ship the *Lady of Odren*."

"Strange, strange!" said the listener, in a subdued tone. "What can have become of them? Was it . . ."

She didn't finish her question, and the innkeeper didn't answer it. She said, "Well, then they found that Odren's children were gone too. The people told the

lady that. She'd been wailing and weeping for her husband, but she went silent then as if she'd been struck. All she could say was 'The children? My children?' And she didn't weep, but began going about the house and the grounds seeking them, silent, like a mother cat whose kittens have been taken to drown, Fern said. And that went on for hours, until the sorcerer gave her a potion to quiet her."

After a while the listener asked, "And they none of them ever came back?"

The innkeeper smiled a bit grimly. "The girl turned up just the next day. She'd run off with her brother across the fields. A farmer took them in overnight. Farmer Bay, it was, who'd lately lost his young wife in childbirth. His mother was there with the baby, so there were women in the house. Next day Bay sent word to the lady and she sent for the children, but the girl wouldn't come nor let her brother go. She said she'd die before she entered her house until her father was there. The mother went to see her, but the girl would have kept her out of the farmer's house if the farmer had dared forbid her, and she wouldn't look at her or speak to her, and the little boy clung to his sister and wouldn't go to his mother for all she coaxed. So at last, to keep the scandal down, the Lady Lily said that if her daughter and son chose to stay with Farmer Bay while the great house was all in grief and mourning, she would permit it. And she went back across the fields.

"There was a show of seeking for Lord Garnet and sending boats out to look for the ship, but that all died down before very long. It was as if his return had been a dream, all but for the men who'd sailed with him and were back home now, or had been killed in the battles, like our two villagers. And again there wasn't much talk. The lady rules at Odren, and the sorcerer rules the lady, that's how it is, people said, and they made the best of it.

"Well, after maybe a fortnight, the boy Clay, the son of Odren, goes missing from Hill Farm—gone, like his dad, no one knows where! But that wasn't sorcery. The girl said to her mother, 'I sent him away. I've saved him from the wicked man you live with. He's safe with a good man. I don't know where he has gone, and if I did I'd never tell you.' The girl wasn't moved by pleading or by threats. So the Lady Lily said to her in fury, 'You've debased yourself, running away, living with a farmer. So you shall marry him.' And the girl says, 'I'd sooner marry Bay than ever see Ash again.' And with that, the lady orders the farmer to marry the girl.

"So, if you came seeking the daughter of Odren, she's Bay's wife Weed, and stepmother of his daughter. As for the boy, and the gardener Hovy . . . Well. I have a good memory for faces. Still, I couldn't think who your husband was till I was in the midst of my story. Weed sent her brother away with him. Is that it?"

The guest was silent. She sighed. “I’m Hovy’s sister, Linnet, not his wife,” she said, subdued but steady. “And I’m all the mother Clay’s had since he was ten.” She looked up at the innkeeper. “But I’ll tell you, mistress, I’m in fear for us now, me and my brother! I’m in fear. What are we doing here among these terrible people? It was the boy’s will. He would come back. Hovy’s always done his bidding.”

The innkeeper shook her head. “We all do the masters’ will. We’re swept up in it, along with them, like leaves in the wind. And what now? Where will the ill wind blow us now?”

They had long since finished shelling the beans. The innkeeper got up and went inside to draw them each a clay mug of thin beer, for the autumn day had grown quite warm. “Have this, now,” she said, sitting down companionably. “Have a swig of this, Missis Linnet, and tell me, how much of my story did you know before I told it?”

“Little but the names, missis. I know only the story Clay told, the story his sister told him. She told him he must remember it, every word of it, and he did. He’d say it over to me and to Hovy, again and again, over the years. So that it would be always in his mind, as his sister said it must be. So that he could come back when he was grown and set things right.”

She looked downcast at that prospect, but cheered up a little with a sip of beer. “Lovely brewing, missis.”

“It is that. Can you tell me this story?”

Linnet was reluctant, uneasy, and the innkeeper did not press her. They spoke of the weather, the harvest, the quality of malt. Then Linnet said in a kind of whispered outburst, “I know what happened. To their father. The girl, his daughter, she saw it.”

The innkeeper looked at her with round eyes, her dignity lost for a moment. “Weed? She saw it?”

“She never slept that night, the night her father came back. She watched. Deep in the night she saw the sorcerer go by. She followed him, hiding and creeping. She watched from the window.”

Linnet’s voice had fallen into singsong recitation; she was repeating words she had heard said a hundred times, the same words in the same order. The innkeeper listened unmoving.

“She saw him go down to the cliff above the bay. He made signs and spoke. The ship down in the bay moved from her mooring. Her sails shivered in the starlight.

No wind blew but she moved forward out of the bay. Out to sea. She was gone.

"The sorcerer came back up into the house and passed by the girl where she hid. She followed him back to the door of the bedroom. The lady came out to meet him. They spoke in murmurs. The lady went back into the room and after a time came out with her husband. She was saying: 'You must come and see the golden house. We must go secretly.' She coaxed him and put his shoes on his feet. He did as she pleased. And they went outside and down the road. The sorcerer followed them, Ash.

"The girl followed far after him, hiding herself.

"There was only the first light in the east.

"They came to the standing stone, the Standing Man. The three stood there. The girl hid among the willows where the path comes into that valley. She heard them talk. The lady said that Ash had looked with a wizard's eye at the Standing Man and saw that hidden within it was the door into a wonderful house of gold. The hinges of the door were of ruby and diamond. The lady said, 'We did not open the door.' She said, 'We waited for you to come, since you are my lord and the Lord of Odren.'

"He said, 'I see no door into the Stone.'

"She said, 'You must put your hands upon it.'

"The sorcerer said, 'Lean your forehead on it. When I speak the key word, then you will see the golden house.'

"And the lord laughed and did what they asked. He stood there with his hands and his forehead on the stone. The sorcerer raised up his arms quick and high and spoke a word. The air turned black. The girl could not move. There was no air to breathe. It was like death. When she could see again she saw her father and the standing stone and did not know what she saw. It was the man and it was the stone. She saw her mother crouched on the ground watching the sorcerer weave his spells.

"The girl crept away. She ran up to the house and woke her brother. They went to Hovy in his gardener's hut. She said they must flee at once and find someone to take them in. Hovy took them to the house of a farmer he had come to know. Bay of Hill Farm took them in.

"And the rest you know."

She looked at the innkeeper as if awaking from a trance.

"And what now?" she said. "What now?"

The dogs of Hill Farm barked. Bay's wife, Weed, said from the scullery, "Is there someone at the gate?"

Her stepdaughter, Clover, a girl of fifteen or so, ran out to look and came back. "Two men," she said.

Weed dried her hands on her apron and went out into the house yard, hushing the dogs. As she walked toward the men at the gate she looked at them with a direct gaze, her head up and her face expressionless. Her look changed.

"Hovy?" she said, her eyes on the older man.

Then she looked again at the younger man, and cried out in such a voice that the girl behind her stopped short in terror—"Clay! O Clay!" She tore the gate open and flung her arms round him, sobbing his name and saying, "Brother, brother!"

"Then it's you, it's you indeed, Lily," the young man said, trying to hold her away a little, half laughing and half in tears himself.

"You haven't been there?" she demanded suddenly, pushing him to arm's length and gripping his shoulders. "He'd know you—"

"No, no, I haven't been there yet. But this is a sorry place to find you, sister!"

She looked around as if she did not know what place he meant. "You're back," she said. "You're here. You kept the promise! Oh, I have longed for you, longed for you!" And she leaned away from him a little again to look at him with pride and amazement. "A man grown," she said, exulting, and held him and kissed him again. Then taking his hand she led him into the house.

Hovy followed them to the doorway, where he stopped and waited. Clover, a stocky, round-faced girl, stood at the corner of the house. She stared at Hovy with patient curiosity, and he endured her stare with patient indifference.

Inside the house, Weed took her brother's hands again, still radiant with the joy of seeing him and touching him, but speaking urgently. "Hovy must go away," she said. "People will know you through him. You, they'd never know. Only *he'd* know you. How you've changed! Oh, what a little boy you were! A little squirrel! Remember I called you Squirrel? And you called me Mountain, because I used to sit on you when we played?"

He smiled, shaking his head.

"And look at you now. As tall as Father—and you have his shoulders—Oh, Clay! The last time I was happy was the day I saw the ship sail in! All these years—there's never been a day I didn't think of him and you, of you and him. Never an hour. But now you're here, my ship, my sword, my brother! You kept the promise! Now we can make it right! I couldn't do it, I couldn't do it alone. With you I can do what we

must. And you came for that. I know you came for that. To set it right."

"I did," he said. "And I can do it."

They were alike as they stood face to face in the dark, low-beamed room. She was not as tall as he, but as strongly built. He was handsome, with arched eyebrows and bright dark eyes. Her face was heavy, her brows drawn straight across, and the flash of her eyes was somber. But in mouth and nose and turn of the head they were alike. As he held her hands in his he looked at them and laughed again—"Which are yours and which are mine?"

"Mine are the hard rough ones," she said, and stroked his hands, and then turned her palms up to show the calluses. "See? That's the sickle, the churn, the plow, the washtub. My life."

"You've lived here all this time?"

"I'm Bay's wife."

"His wife?"

"How else could I stay here? Where was I to go?"

"It can't be. I thought—It's wrong. You are the daughter of Odren!"

"That I am. Wherever I live."

"And I'm his son. I never forgot. Never a day I didn't say the words you said to me." Her eyes flashed brighter at that. "I know what to do, Lily. I can do it. I have the gift, Lily, do you understand? I took the jewels you gave me and went to O-Tokne where there was a Roke wizard, a grey-cloak. Four years I spent with him, learning what I need to know. And I know it. I can set Father free."

"The gift?"

He nodded.

She stared at him, as disbelieving as he had been of her marriage. "Wizardry?"

"I have the gift and I have the skill. I earned it, Lily! I cared nothing for all the teaching but what led to what I must do. I know what I must know. And I can do it."

She stood, her hands still in his hands. She said slowly, "If you did . . . if could you set him free . . . what then?"

"He'd know his enemy. As he didn't when he came home."

She gazed at him as if trying to see her way. "And—?"

"And he would destroy her," the young man said with fierce certainty.

Her bewildered look did not change.

"Her?"

"The witch who destroyed him." He drew in his breath. "His wife. Our

mother." He spoke the word with all the strength of hate.

She took this in. "And . . . the man . . . Ash?"

"Ash is nothing. A sorcerer who fell into the power of a witch. Without her he has no power."

"But I—"

"The wizard of O-tokne saw it all clearly. It was she who betrayed Father, she who destroyed him. She used Ash to do it. But facing Father and me, now we know what she is, Ash will be powerless."

She stood gazing at him, her face almost blank.

At last she said, "I only thought of killing *him*."

"You couldn't see it clear. He's nothing without her."

She drew her hands from his and looked away. "I saw him make the spell, Clay. It was Ash who made it. I saw him."

"He did as she made him do. I remember all you told us. He does her bidding. He does her will."

"I thought she did his will," Weed said, not in denial or argument, but stating it as a fact.

"No," the young man said. He put his arm protectively around her shoulders. "She's besotted with him because he's her creature. He was nothing till she took him up. A common sorcerer, a boat-builder, a dog. It wasn't in Ash that the power lay, but in *him*—in Father. My gift is from him, no doubt of it. She could take Father's power from him and use it against him because he trusted her. But now he knows her! And when I free him from the spell his power will be his own again, and we'll destroy her. And her dog with her. This is how it will be, Lily. It was at a high cost I learned what I needed to know."

She listened with her heavy, pondering look. After a while she said only, "That's her name. Not mine."

He did not understand.

"I'm Weed," she said.

"Weed, then," he said, soothing and gentling her, cradling her against him. "Whatever you like! My sister, my only friend."

They clung together. So they were standing when there were voices at the door, and the farmer entered his house.

He stopped and stood, the short, gnarled, bent-shouldered man. He ducked his head to the young man, muttering, "Master Garnet."

The young man nodded.

"Hovy's there outside," the farmer said in a quiet, dull voice, speaking to the space between the brother and the sister.

His wife went to the door. "Come in, Hovy. Forgive my discourtesy. I was mad with joy to see my brother, and never spoke to you who kept him all these years and brought him back safe to me. Come in!"

And after seating the men at the table she called in her stepdaughter, and with her set out supper for them all: thick chunks of stale bread soaked in milk with green onion chopped in it, and a bowl of little, late, sour plums.

The young man did not sit down with them. "Meet me outside, sister," he said, and stepped out, restless. The dogs barked, and Bay spoke to quiet them.

They ate quickly and in silence.

Brother and sister met in the house yard by the kitchen garden.

"I want to tell you what I'm going to do. Tell no one."

"You can trust Bay."

"I trust no one. Come with me if you want, but no one else. And say nothing."

"I've said nothing for a long time."

"Tonight, at dusk, I'll unmake the spell that holds Father in the stone. Then he and I will go to the house together and take them unawares. He'll come on suddenly in all his strength. If Ash tries to lay any spell on Father, I can counter it. They'll be helpless. Father can do with them as he will. The judgment is his. And he was always a just man."

He spoke with exaltation and passionate sureness.

"Father was never a wizard," she said.

"Strength isn't in spells only."

"But there's great strength in spells," she said.

"And I have that strength."

"Greater than Ash's?"

"You mistrust me, do you? Come with me then and see. I know what to do and how to do it."

"Let me tell you what I think, brother."

He stood impatient.

"I've thought about it all these years."

"So have I! As you told me to!"

"And I knew I could do nothing without you."

He nodded.

"Mother raised Ash up to more than he was, yes. But he always had powers

beyond his shipbuilding. He's not in her power—she's in his power. Yes! Listen. He can make her crawl to him when he likes. I have seen it. He's cruel. If you face him, challenge him, I fear for you. He's an old wizard, you're a young one. We can't defeat him with his own power—we must kill him by a trick, by deceit. Once he's dead she'll be freed of his spells, and you can free Father without fear. No, listen to me, Clay"—for he had more than once shaken his head and begun to speak—"I know how we can do it. I've done it in my mind a thousand times but never could finish it, because you weren't here. But you are here now and we can do it! Listen! I send Clover up to the house begging Ash to help me, saying I've been witched and can't move my body. He'll come, because he hates witches and likes to show that his powers are greater than theirs, and because he wants to have me in his power, too. I know that. I've thought about this so often. I know how it will be. He'll come, and I'll be in the bed there, lying as if helpless, and he'll be tasting his power over me and drawing it out. And you, you'll be behind the door, with Father's long dagger, the one he left for you—I stole it from the house before I ran away, I hid it away, long before Father came home, because I didn't want Ash's hands on it. It's here now, up in the rafters. It's long and thin and sharp. And you'll have it ready in your hands. And you'll kill him, stab him in the back as he deserves, through the heart. Or cut his throat from behind, like you would a sheep. And not a soul in this domain will say a wrong was done.

"And then, once he's dead—I never thought that Father could be freed of the stone even if Ash was dead—I never thought of that! But if you can free him, then it will all, all be set right! That is more than I could ever think of! I never thought past killing Ash. What does it matter what becomes of her? She was lost long ago. Hollowed out."

"She is the witch. She betrayed my father and me. I am going to keep the promise. I will set my father free, and he'll punish her as she deserves."

"But Ash—"

"Sister, I need your help, not your doubts. Living here in this sty, with these people, what can you know of these things? I do know them. As Lord of Odren in my father's stead I tell you that you must trust me, and I trust you to obey me. Do nothing and say nothing to anyone. Keep the farmer and his daughter and Hovy all in the house here tonight. And when evening comes, I'll do what I must do."

She stood still. She looked at her brother full in the face for a while, then past him at the hill that rose above the farmyard. The dry grass was the color of amber in the afternoon sunlight. A few sheep grazed up near the oak-grove at the crest.

"All these years," she said—"no, hear me, Clay—I've thought and thought how it was and how it must be. Sometimes thinking gets to be like seeing. I see Father at table in our hall that night he came home, laughing, holding me, holding you to him. Then I see Ash lying across my house floor face down and his blood spreading out like spilled washwater. Then sometimes it all goes thin, like a fog or a wisp of veiling, the farm and the hills and the people, it all fades into the sunlight, and I see strange things. I see the valleys all covered with stones and great houses and crowds and crowds of people, no farms or sheep or anything at all but the faces of people everywhere, and they speak but I can't understand them, and none of them see me though I'm there among them, but they pass and pass and pass not seeing, and their voices are a roar like the sea, and there are great lights among them, flashing and blinding, and still there are more of them, more of them. And I tell myself, the hills are there, the farms are there, they must be, they've always been, and as I say it the blind people begin to fade away, and I come back here at last and hear the little sounds of the animals and birds in the stillness, and the leaves in the wind. And then for a while my thoughts about Father and Mother and how to destroy Ash all shrink away and leave me in peace. But at night they come back. And I think, how many times must this happen?" She fell silent.

Clay, puzzled, impatient, half listening, said nothing.

Bees hummed around the red bean-flowers in the kitchen garden, and the leaves of the willows by the farmhouse stirred.

"Well, then," he said, "this evening I go to the Standing Man."

For a while she did not speak. "Go in the morning," she said, her voice soft, defeated. "Before light. I go there every morning. I take food and water to Father. Ash knows it. He came once years ago to watch me. He laughed and went away. He won't be there, though. They sleep late at Odren. It would be better in the morning."

Clay resisted, pondered, and at last said, "I'll stay the night here, then."

His sister nodded and turned toward the house.

The fog crept low on the fields in the darkness at about waist height. The lantern Weed carried swung above it sometimes, illuminating the ragged, pale surface around like a dim circle of foam or snow. Where the fog rose higher the light shrank into a misty sphere. Clay had told her not to bring the lantern, but she said, "Best to do as I always do," and lighted the candle in the lantern of brass and horn. She went first, unhesitant. Her brother followed, sometimes stumbling or pausing

to get his footing on ploughland or uneven pasture ground. The glow of the lantern descended before him. He followed it, feeling his way. They came into the small valley and to the standing stone.

"Put it out," he whispered.

She blew out the light. The fog seemed to darken, then lighten around them. Sky and air were paling to grey. It was silent except for the pulse of the sea below the cliffs.

She stood still, at some distance from the stone. Her brother was also motionless. After a long time she murmured, "It's getting on to day."

After a time she heard his voice, very low at first. At the sound of the words the hair on her head moved, her whole body shuddered. She stood with her hands clenched, following the spell with all her being, willing it to take hold, to open the stone. Her lips moved silently: "Father, Father, Father . . ."

The valley was full of dimness now, not dark, yet nothing visible.

Clay spoke again, louder. A deep groan broke across the words. The air quivered, rippled, waves of blackness ran through it. There was a cracking, splitting sound and a rattle of broken rock.

Silence followed.

She could see the stone, barely, grey in grey. Her brother stood close to it, motionless.

He raised his hands up and outward. The sister shrank away seeing that remembered gesture. She crouched down in ungovernable fear.

He spoke again, louder, clearly, still louder, and stepping forward put his hands on the stone, pushing and spreading as if to split it open. It groaned again and the groaning grew louder, deeper, with an intolerable shrieking, grinding noise in it. Clay drew back hastily, clenching and unclenching his hands. He stood staring as the hideous noise went on and on and the Standing Man shuddered and lurched and labored, growing dimmer in the dim light and seeming to lose outline, looming up, then shrinking down. Fragments dropped from it, shards of stone. The noise dulled at last to a kind of painful, toneless moaning. The Standing Man stood there, rocking or trembling, stone-shaped, man-shaped.

"Father?" the young man said, his voice hoarse and faint.

Weed stood up. She opened her mouth but said nothing. She saw a bulky body, but if it had a face she could not make out the features. The light of day was growing but the shape and the face were as if still in twilight.

She spoke to it, a shrill, sharp cry—"Come free, Father! Come free!"

The Standing Man rocked again. It leaned as if it was going to fall. The rumbling groan grew louder. Moving the way a boulder is moved by men with ropes and wedges and crowbars, heavily, jerking, it lurched a step or two forward on stiff, hardly separated legs. Clay drew farther back from it. It pivoted slowly. With short, dragging, clumsy, heavy steps it walked to the path, now visible in the pale twilight, and began to labor up out of the valley to the road that led to the great house of Odren. As it walked it made the continual groaning that was not like a sound made with breath but like rocks deep in the ground grinding and grating against each other in earthquake.

"Father," the young man said faintly. He started after it. Weed caught up with him, and seized his arm—"Stay back! stay back!" she whispered, and he obeyed.

Side by side the son and daughter followed the Standing Man's slow steps up the road to the house on the cliff top. The road lay plain in the dawn light. The fog had sunk below the edge of the cliff and lay out over the sea in dim levels.

The groaning grew louder again, and louder, with a grinding shrillness in it, as they approached the house. Lurching and pivoting, the Standing Man came to the door, tormenting the air with its noise. It stood there. The door opened.

The Lady of Odren stood in the doorway, a slight figure in a white nightgown, with loose grey hair.

Ash the sorcerer stepped out past her, his hands raised, shouting words in the wizard's tongue.

The Standing Man ceased its awful groan. It stood silent. It turned around again, lurching, clumsy step by step. Its arms were short, blunt, with no hands. It was searching for something, turning its body that was all one piece with its head. No eyes were in the blank, pitted face, but it looked at Clay.

The sorcerer came out of the house behind the stone figure, speaking. The figure moved toward Clay. The sorcerer followed it. Clay stood motionless, arms at his side, eyes fixed on the Standing Man as it approached him.

Weed let go of Clay's arm and started forward. She called in a sharp voice, "Mother!"

Ash turned to look at her as she ran past him. The stone stopped and stood motionless. The sorcerer looked back at it and spoke again, controlling it with voice and gesture, ordering it to go forward toward Clay. Doing so, he did not see Weed wheel quickly around behind him raising a long, thin digger. She drove it into his back through his long, black, shining hair . . .

He dropped to his knees, coughing. He fell forward, and that helped her pull

out the dagger. She stooped, pulled his head back with his hair, and cut his throat.

Her mother was beside her, panting and crying, "Ash, Ash, what is it, Ash!"—kneeling over the man, embracing him, her grey hair falling over him. "What did he do? What have you done?" she cried, staring blindly at her daughter.

The Standing Man had turned toward her. It was making its senseless, agonized groaning. The Lady of Odren stood up in panic to run from it. It caught her effortlessly in its blunt arms, crushing her body against itself. Holding her it labored with its clumsy, stiff steps across the ground to the wooden stairs that led down to the stony beach a hundred feet below, walked past the head of the stairs to the cliff's edge, walked out onto the air, and fell.

The light wind of sunrise blew eastward from the land. The young man crouched shaking and gasping on the path in front of the house. His sister stood gazing at the bright empty air above the sea. The sorcerer lay like a heap of bloody clothes on the pathway. There were people in the doorway, faces at the windows.

Weed threw down the dagger. "That's yours," she said to her brother. "It's all yours, now."

He looked up at her. His face was blank, his lips trembled. "Where are you going, Lily?"

"Home."

She walked past the gardens of Odren, across the fields of the domain and the sheep-commons, to Bay's farmlands. The sun was up when she reached Hill Farm, but no one was about. She went in. The farmer, his daughter, and Hovy were indoors, silent, waiting.

"It's done. It's finished," she said.

They were too shy to question her. The girl, Clover, finally whispered, "The sorcerer?"

"Dead. And my mother is dead. Poor soul."

No one dared ask more.

"And the stone is broken." She drew a deep breath. "My brother has come into his inheritance."

Hovy asked with his eyes if he could go. She nodded.

"Clover, have you let the chickens out?"

The girl slipped out after Hovy.

The farmer stood by his table, his hands hanging at his sides.

"So. You'll go back there," he said at last in his deep, timid voice.

"There? What for?" She went to the back of the room and into the scullery. She filled a bowl of water and began to wash her hands. "Why would I leave you and Clover?"

He said nothing.

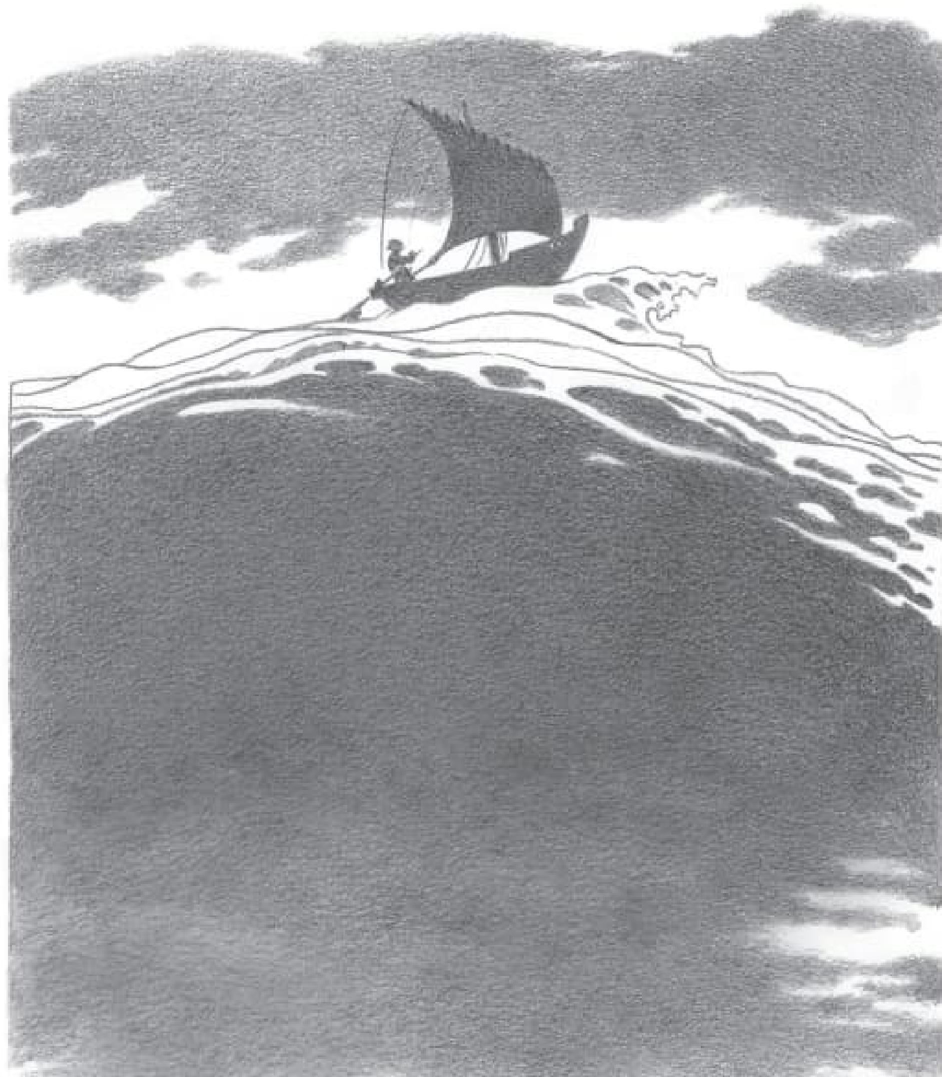
She came back to the front of the room, dried her hands on a cloth, and stood facing him. "You took me into your house, Bay. You married me. You've been kind to me. And I to you. What does the rest matter?"

He stood unconvinced.

"I'm free," she said.

"A poor freedom."

She took his thick-fingered hand and put her lips to it, then pushed it back at him. "Go on, go to work. My brother's the master now. May he be kinder than the last one. I'll bring lunch to the Low Meadow."



FIRELIGHT

He was thinking of *Lookfar*, abandoned long ago, beached on the sands of Selidor. Little of her would be left by now, a plank or two down in the sand maybe, a bit of driftwood on the western sea. As he drifted near sleep he began to remember sailing that little boat with Vetch, not on the western sea but eastward, past Far Toly, right out of the Archipelago. It was not a clear memory, because his mind had not been clear when he made that voyage, possessed by fear and blind determination, seeing nothing ahead of him but the shadow that had hunted him and that he pursued, the empty sea over which it had fled. Yet now he heard the hiss and slap of waves on the prow. Mast and sail rose above him when he glanced up, and looking astern he saw the dark hand on the tiller, the face gazing steadily forward past him. High cheekbones, Vetch had, his dark skin stretched smooth on them. He would be an old man now, if he were still alive. Once I could have sent to know. But I don't need a sending to see him, there in the East Reach on his little island, in his house with his sister, the girl who wore a tiny dragon for a bracelet. It hissed at me, she laughed . . . He was in the boat, and the water slapped her wood as she went east and east, and Vetch looked forward, and he looked forward over the unending water. He had raised the magewind but *Lookfar* scarcely needed it. She had her own way with the wind, that boat. She knew where she was going.

Until she could not go anymore. Until the deep sea went shoal beneath her, ran shallow, ran dry, and her bottom grated over rock, and she was aground, unmoving, in the darkness that had come on all round them.

He had stepped out of the boat there in the deep sea, over the abyss, and walked forward on dry land. In the Dry Land.

That was gone now. The thought came to him slowly. The land across the wall of stones. He saw that wall—the first time he saw it, saw the child running silently down the dark slope beyond it. He saw all the dead land, the shadow-cities, the shadow-people who passed one another in silence, indifferent, under stars that did not move. It was all gone. They had harrowed it, broken it, opened it—the king and the humble sorcerer and the dragon who soared over them, lighting the dead skies with her living fire . . . The wall was down. It had never been. It was a spell, a seeming, a mistake. It was gone.

Were the mountains gone then, too, that other boundary, the Mountains of Pain? They stood far across the desert from the wall, black, small, sharp against the dull stars. The young king had walked with him across the Dry Land to the mountains. It seemed west but it was not westward they walked; there was no direction there. It was forward, onward, the way they had to go. You go where you must go, and so they had come to the dry streambed, the darkest place. And then on even beyond that. He had walked forward, leaving behind him in the waterless ravine, in the rocks he had sealed shut and healed, all his treasure, his gift, his strength. Walked on, lame, always lamer. There was no water, no sound of water ever. They were climbing those cruel slopes. There was a path, a way, though it was all sharp stones, and upward, upward, always steeper. After a while, his legs would not hold him, and he tried to crawl, hands and knees on the stones, he remembered that. After that, the rest was gone. There had been the dragon, old Kalessin, the color of rusted iron, and the heat of the dragon's body, the huge wings lifting and beating down. And fog, and islands beneath them in the fog. But those black mountains were not gone, vanished with the dark land. They were not part of the spell-dream, the afterlife, the mistake. They were there.

Not here, he thought. You can't see them from here, in this house. The window in the alcove looks west, but not to that west. Those mountains are where west is east and there is no sea. There's only land sloping up forever into the long night. But westward, true west, there's only the sea and the sea wind.

It was like a vision, but felt more than seen: he knew the deep earth beneath him, the deep sea before. It was a strange knowledge, but there was joy in knowing it.

Firelight played with shadow up in the rafters. Night was coming on. It would be good to sit at the hearth and watch the fire a while, but he'd have to get up to do that, and he didn't want to get up yet. The pleasant warmth was all around him. He heard Tenar now and then behind him: kitchen noises, chopping, settling a knot into the fire under the kettle. Wood from the old live oak in the pasture that had fallen and he'd split winter before last. Once she hummed some tune under her breath for a minute, once she muttered to her work, encouraging it to do what she wanted, "Come on there now . . ."

The cat sauntered round the foot of the low bed and elevated himself weightlessly onto it. He had been fed. He sat down and washed his face and ears, wetting one paw patiently over and over, and then undertook extensive cleansing of his hind parts, sometimes holding a back paw up with a front paw so that he could clean the claws, or holding down his tail as if expecting it to try to get away. Now

and then he looked up for a minute, immobile, with a strange absent gaze, as if listening for instructions. At last he gave a little belch and settled down beside Ged's ankles, arranging himself to sleep. He had sauntered down the path from Re Albi one morning last year, a small gray tom, and moved in. Tenar thought he came from Fan's daughter's house, where they kept two cows and where cats and kittens were always underfoot. She gave him milk, a bit of porridge, scraps of meat when they had it, otherwise he provided for himself; the crew of little brown rats that holed up in the pasture never invaded the house anymore. Sometimes, nights, they heard him caterwauling in the throes of impassioned lust. In the morning he would be flat out on the hearthstone where the warmth still was, and would sleep all day. Tenar called him Baroon—"cat" in Kargish.

Sometimes Ged thought of him as Baroon, sometimes in Hardic as Miru, sometimes by his name in the Old Speech. For after all, Ged had not forgotten what he knew. Only it was no good to him, after the time in the dry ravine, where a fool had made a hole in the world, and he had to seal it with the fool's death and his own life. He could still say the cat's true name, but the cat would not wake and look at him. He murmured the name of the cat under his breath. Baroon slept on.

So he had given his life, there in the unreal land. And yet he was here. His life was here, back near its beginning, rooted in this earth. They had left the dark ravine where west is east and there is no sea, going the way they had to go, through black pain and shame. But not on his own legs or by his own strength at last. Carried by his young king, carried by the old dragon. Borne helpless into another life, the other life that had always been there near him, mute, obedient, waiting for him. The shadow, was it, or the reality? The life with no gift, no power, but with Tenar, and with Tehanu. With the beloved woman and the beloved child, the dragon's child, the cripple, daughter of Segoy.

He thought about how it was that when he was not a man of power he had received his inheritance as a man.

His thoughts ran back along a course they had often taken over the years: how strange it was that every wizard was aware of that balance or interchange between the powers, the sexual and the magical, and everyone who dealt with wizardry was aware of it, but it was not spoken of. It was not called an exchange or a bargain. It was not even called a choice. It was called nothing. It was taken for granted.

Village sorcerers and witchwives married and had children—evidence of their inferiority. Sterility was the price a wizard paid, paid willingly, for his greater powers. But the nature of the price, the unnaturalness of it—did that not taint the

powers so gained?

Everyone knew that witches dealt with the unclean, the Old Powers of the earth. They made base spells to bring man and woman together, to fulfill lust, to take vengeance, or used their gift on trivial things, healing slight ills, mending, finding. Sorcerers did much the same, but the saying was always *Weak as woman's magic, wicked as woman's magic*. How much of that was truth, how much was fear?

His first master, Ogion, who learned his craft from a wizard who'd learned his from a witch, had taught him none of that rancorous contempt. Yet Ged had learned it from the beginning, and still more deeply on Roke. He'd had to unlearn it, and the unlearning was not easy.

But after all, it was a woman who first taught me, too, he thought, and the thought had a little gleam of revelation in it. Back long ago, in the village, Ten Alders. Over on the other side of the mountain. When I was Duny. I listened to my mother's sister Raki call the goats, and I called them the way she did, with her words, and they all came. And then I couldn't break the spell, but Raki saw I had the gift. Was that when she saw it first? No, she was watching me when I was a tiny child, still in her care. She watched me, and she knew. *Mage knows mage* . . . How silly she'd have thought me, to call her a mage! Ignorant she was, superstitious, half fraud, making her poor living in that poor place on a few scraps of lore, a few words of the true speech, a stew of garbled spells and false knowledge she half knew to be false. She was everything they meant on Roke when they sneered at village witches. But she knew her craft. She knew the gift. She knew the jewel.

He lost the thread of his thoughts in a surge of slow, bodily memories of his childhood in that steep village, the dank bedding, the smell of woodsmoke in the dark house in the bitter winter cold. Winter, when a day he had enough to eat was a wondrous day to think about long after, and half his life was spent in dodging his father's heavy hand in the smithy, at the forge where he had to keep the long bellow pumping and pumping till his back and arms were afire with pain and his arms and face burning with the sparks he could not dodge, and still his father would shout at him, strike him, knock him aside in rage, *Can't you keep the fire steady, you useless fool?*

But he would not weep. He would beat his father. He would bear it and be silent until he could beat him, kill him. When he was big enough, when he was old enough. When he knew enough.

And of course by the time he knew enough he knew what a waste of time all that anger was. That wasn't the door to his freedom. The words were: the words Raki

taught him, one at a time, miserly, grudging, doling them out, hard-earned and few and far between. The name of the water that rose up from the earth as a spring when you spoke its name along with one other word. The name of the hawk and the otter and the acorn. The name of the wind.

Oh the joy, the pride of knowing the name of the wind! The pure delight of power, to know he had the power! He had run out, clear over to the High Fall, to be alone there, rejoicing in the wind that blew strong, westward, from far across the Kargish sea, and he knew its name, he commanded the wind . . .

Well, that was gone. Long gone. The names he still had. All the names, all the words he'd learned from Kurremkarmerruk in the Isolate Tower and since then. But if you did not have the gift in you, the words of the Old Speech were no more than any words, Hardic or Kargish, or birdsong, or Baroon's anguished yowlings of desire.

He sat up partway and stretched his arms. "What are you laughing at?" Tenar asked him, passing the bed with an armload of kindling, and he said, a little bewildered, "I don't know. I was thinking of Ten Alders."

She gave him her searching look but smiled and went on to the hearth to feed the fire. He wanted to get up and go sit at the hearth with her, but he would lie here a while longer. He disliked the way his legs would not hold steady when he got up, and how soon he tired and wanted only to lie quiet again, looking up into the firelight and the friendly shadows. He had known this house since he was thirteen, just named. Ogion named him in the springs of the Ar and brought him on around the mountain. They went slowly, welcomed into the poor villages like Ten Alders or sleeping out in the forest, in the silence, in the rain. And they came here. He slept for the first time in the little alcove and saw the stars in the window above him and watched the firelight dancing with the shadows in the rafters. He did not know that Ogion was Elehal then. He had had a lot to learn.

Ogion had the patience to teach him, if only he'd had the patience to be taught . . . Well, never mind. One way or another he'd blundered his way through, from mistake to mistake. Even a very great mistake, the wrong, the evil done with the spell they taught him on Roke. But before he knew the spell, he'd found the words, in Ogion's book, here, in this house, his home. In his ignorant arrogance he had summoned it, the darkness behind the door, the faceless being that reached out to him, whispered to him. He had brought the evil here, under this roof. As this was his home . . . His thoughts blurred again. He drifted. It was like sailing in *Lookfar*, alone, in cloudy night, in the great darkness on the dark sea. Only the way the wind

blew to tell him where he went. He went the wind's way.

"Will you have a bowl of soup?" Tenar asked him, and he roused. But he was still very tired. "Not very hungry," he said.

He didn't think she'd be satisfied by that. And indeed after a while she came back round the half wall that divided the front part of the house, the hearth and the kitchen and the alcove, from this darker back part. It was bedroom and workroom now but once had been the winter byre for the cow or the pig or the goats and the poultry. This was an old house. A few people in Re Albi knew it had once been called the House of the Sorceress, but they did not know why. He knew. He and Tenar had the house from Elehal, who had it from his teacher, Heleth, who had it from his teacher, the witch Ard. It was the kind of house a witch would live in, by itself and apart from the village, not so near anyone had to call her neighbor, but not so far as to be out of reach in need. Ard had put up houses for her beasts nearby and made her bed against that half wall, where the manger had been. And Heleth, and then Elehal, and now Ged and Tenar slept where she had slept.

Most people called it the Old Mage's House. Some of the villagers would tell a stranger, "He that was the Archmage, away off there in Roke, he lives there," when city folk and foreigners from Havnor came seeking him; but they said it distrustfully and with some disapproval. They liked Tenar better than they liked him. Even though she was white skinned and a real foreigner, a Karg, they knew she was their kind, a thrifty housewife, a tough bargainer, nobody's fool, more canny than uncanny.

A girl, white face, dark hair, sudden, startled, stared at him across a cavern of dazzling crystal and water-carved stone, topaz and amethyst, in the trembling radiance of werelight from his staff.

There, even there in their greatest temple, the Old Powers of the earth were feared, wrongly worshipped, offered the cruel deaths and mutilations of slaves, the stunted lives of girls and women imprisoned there. He and Arha had committed no sacrilege. They had released the long hunger and anger of the earth itself to break forth, bring down the domes and caverns, throw open the prison doors.

But her people, who tried to appease the Old Powers, and his people, who held witchery in contempt, made the same mistake, moved by fear, always fear, of what was hidden in the earth, hidden in women's bodies, the knowledge without words that trees and women knew untaught and men were slow to learn. He had only glimpsed it, that great quiet knowledge, the mysteries of the roots of the forest, the roots of the grasses, the silence of stones, the unspeaking communion of the

animals. The waters underground, the rising of the springs. All he knew of it he had learned from her, Arha, Tenar, who never spoke of it. From her, from the dragons, from a thistle. A little colorless thistle struggling in the sea wind between stones, on the path over the High Fall . . .

She came round the divider with a bowl, as he knew she would, and sat down on the milking stool beside the bed. "Sit up and have a spoonful or two," she said. "It's the last of Quacker."

"No more ducks," he said. The ducks had been an experiment.

"No," she agreed. "We'll stick to chickens. But it's a good broth."

He sat up and she pushed the pillow behind him and set the bowl on his lap. It smelled good, and yet he did not want it. "Ah, I don't know, I'm just not hungry," he said. They both knew. She did not coax him. After a while he swallowed a few spoonfuls, and then put the spoon into the bowl and laid his head back against the pillow. She took the bowl away. She came back and stooped to brush the hair back from his forehead with her hand. "You're a bit feverish," she said.

"My hands are cold."

She sat down on the stool again and took his hands. Hers were warm and firm. She bowed her head down to their clasped hands and sat that way a long time. He loosened one hand and stroked her hair. A piece of wood in the fire snapped. An owl hunting out in the pastures in the last of the twilight gave its deep, soft double call.

The aching was in his chest again. He thought of it not so much as an ache as an architecture, an arch in there at the top of his lungs, a dark arch a little too large for his ribs to hold. After a while it eased, and then was gone. He breathed easily. He was sleepy. He thought of saying to her, I used to think I'd want to go into the woods, like Elehal, to die, he meant, but there'd be no need to say it. The forest was always where he wanted to be. Where he was whenever he could be. The trees around him, over him. His house. His roof. I thought I'd want to do the same. But I don't. There's nowhere I want to go. I couldn't wait to leave this house when I was a boy, I couldn't wait to see all the isles, all the seas. And then I came back with nothing, with nothing left at all. And it was the same as it had been. It was everything. It's enough.

Had he spoken? He did not know. It was silent in the house, the silence of the great slope of mountainside all round the house and the twilight above the sea. The stars would be coming out. Tenar was no longer beside him. She was in the other room, slight noises told him she was setting things straight, making up the fire.

He drifted, drifted on.

He was in darkness in a maze of vaulted tunnels like the Labyrinth of the Tombs where he had crawled, trapped, blind, craving water. These arched ribs of rock lowered and narrowed as he went on, but he had to go on. Closed in by rock, hands and knees on the black, sharp stones of the mountain way, he struggled to move, to breathe, could not breathe. He could not wake.

It was bright morning. He was in *Lookfar*. A bit cramped and stiff and cold as always when he woke from the broken sleep and half sleep and quick, quick-vanishing dreams of nights in the boat alone. Last night there had been no need to summon the magewind; the world's wind was easy and steady from the east. He had merely whispered to his boat, "Go on as you go, *Lookfar*," and stretched out with his head against the sternpost and gazed up at the stars or the sail against the stars until his eyes closed. All that fiery deep-strewn host was gone now but the one great eastern star, already melting like a water drop in the rising day. The wind was keen and chill. He sat up. His head spun a little when he looked back at the eastern sky and then forward again at the blue shadow of the earth sinking into the ocean. He saw the first daylight strike fire from the tops of the waves.

Before bright Éa was, before Segoy
Bade the islands be,
The wind of morning on the sea. . . .

He did not sing the song aloud, it sang itself to him. Then came a queer thrumming in his ears. He turned his head seeking the sound, and again the dizziness passed through it. He stood up holding to the mast as the boat leapt on the lively sea, and scanned the ocean to the western horizon, and saw the dragon come.

O my joy! be free.

Fierce, with the forge smell of hot iron, the smoke plume trailing on the wind of its flight, the mailed head and flanks bright in the new light, the vast beat of the wings, it came at him like a hawk at a field mouse, swift, unappeasable. It swept down on the little boat that leapt and rocked wildly under the sweep of the wing, and as it passed, in its hissing, ringing voice, in the true speech, it cried to him,

There is nothing to fear.

He looked straight into the long golden eye and laughed. He called back to the dragon as it flew on to the east, “Oh, but there is, there is!” And indeed there was. The black mountains were there. But he had no fear in this bright moment, welcoming what would come, impatient to meet it. He spoke the joyous wind into the sail. Foam whitened along *Lookfar*’s sides as the boat ran west, far out past all the islands. He would go on, this time, until he sailed into the other wind. If there were other shores he would come to them. Or if sea and shore were all the same at last, then the dragon spoke the truth, and there was nothing to fear.

Earthsea Revisioned

On August 7, 1992, Ursula K. Le Guin presented the lecture, "Children, Women, Men, and Dragons," which was later printed as "Earthsea Revisioned," at Worlds Apart, a children's literature institute sponsored by Children's Literature New England and held at Keble College, Oxford University, Oxford, England.

In our hero-tales of the Western world, heroism has been gendered: the hero is a man.

Women may be good and brave, but with rare exceptions—Spenser, Ariosto, Bunyan?—women are not heroes. They are sidekicks. Never the Lone Ranger, always Tonto. Women are seen in relation to heroes: as mother, wife, seducer, beloved, victim, or rescuable maiden. Women won independence and equality in the novel, but not in the hero-tale. From the *Iliad* to *The Song of Roland* to *The Lord of the Rings*, right up into our lifetime, the hero-tale and its modern form—heroic fantasy—have been a male preserve: a sort of great game park where Beowulf feasts with Teddy Roosevelt, and Robin Hood goes hunting with Mowgli, and the cowboy rides off into the sunset alone. Truly a world apart.

Since it's about men, the hero-tale has concerned the establishment or validation of manhood. It has been the story of a quest, or a conquest, or a test, or a contest. It has involved conflict and sacrifice. Archetypal configurations of the hero-tale are the hero himself, of course, and often the night sea journey, the wicked witch, the wounded king, the devouring mother, the wise old man, and so on. (These are Jungian archetypes; without devaluing Jung's immensely useful concept of the archetype as an essential mode of thought, we might be aware that the archetypes he identified are mind forms of the Western European psyche as perceived by a man.)

When I began writing heroic fantasy, I knew what to write about. My father had told us stories from Homer before I could read, and all my life, I'd read and loved the hero-tales. That was my own tradition, those were my archetypes, that's where I was at home. Or so I thought until—in the enchanting phrase of my youth—sex reared its ugly head.

The late sixties ended a long period during which artists were supposed to dismiss gender, to ignore it, to be ignorant of what sex they were. For many decades, it had been held that to perceive oneself as a woman writer or as a man

writer would limit one's scope, one's humanity; that to write as a woman or as a man would politicize the work and so invalidate its universality. Art was to transcend gender. This idea of genderlessness or androgyny is what Virginia Woolf said was the condition of the greatest artists' minds. To me it is a demanding, a valid, a permanent ideal.

But against the ideal, the fact was that the men in charge of criticism, the colleges, and the society had produced male definitions of both art and gender. And these definitions were set above question. The standards themselves were gendered. Men's writing was seen as transcending gender; women's writing as trapped in it. Why am I using the past tense?

And so the only way to have one's writing perceived as above politics, as universally human, was to gender one's writing as male. Writing as a man, to male standards of what is universally human, was centralized, privileged; writing as a woman was marginalized. Masculine judgment of art was definitive; feminine perception and option was secondary, second-rate. Virginia Woolf warned us that a woman's writing will not be adequately judged so long as the standards of judgment are established and defended by men. And this is in the present tense, as it was sixty years ago.

Well, then, if art—if language itself—doesn't belong to women, women can only borrow it or steal it. *Le vol*; flighty, women are. Thieves, fly-by-nights. Off on their broomsticks.

And why should men listen to stolen stories unless they concern important things—that is, the doings of men? Children, of course—even man-children—are supposed to listen to women. Part of women's work is telling stories to children. Unimportant work, but important stories. Stories of the heroes.

From the general to the personal: since my Earthsea books were published as children's books, I was in an approved female role. So long as I behaved myself, obeyed the rules, I was free to enter the heroic realm. I loved that freedom and never gave a thought to the terms of it. Now that I know that even in fairyland there is no escape from politics, I look back and see that I was writing partly by the rules, as an artificial man, and partly against the rules, as an inadvertent revolutionary. Let me add that this isn't a confession or a plea for forgiveness. I like my books. Within the limits of my freedom, I was free: I wrote well; and subversion need not be self-aware to be effective.

To some extent, I pushed against the limits. For example, I followed the intense conservatism of traditional fantasy in giving Earthsea a rigid social hierarchy of

kings, lords, merchants, peasants, but I colored all the good guys brown or black. Only the villains were white. I saw myself as luring white readers to identify with the hero, to get inside his skin and only then find it was a dark skin. I meant this as a strike against racial bigotry. I think now that my subversion went further than I knew, for by making my hero dark-skinned, I was setting him outside the whole European heroic tradition, in which heroes are not only male but white. I was making him an Outsider, an Other—like a woman, like me.

(You will not see that dark man on most of the covers of the Earthsea books, by the way; publishers insist that jackets showing black people "kill sales" and forbid their artists to color a hero darker than tan. Look at the jackets of Alice Walker's or Paule Marshall's novels to realize how strong this taboo is. I think it has affected many readers' perceptions of Ged.)

I had a vanilla villainess in the first book, but in the sequel, it was my heroine who was white. I'm not sure why. I'd made the Kargish people white in the first book, and had to stick to it, but perhaps also I simply lacked the courage to make my heroine doubly Other.

In *The Tombs of Atuan*, Arha/Tenar is not a hero—she is a heroine. The two English words are enormously different in their implications and value; they are indeed a wonderful exhibition of how gender expectations are reflected/created by linguistic usage.

Tenar, a heroine, is not a free agent. She is trapped in her situation. And when the hero comes, she becomes complementary to him. She cannot get free of the Tombs without him.

But—a fact some critics ignore—neither can Ged get free without her. They are interdependent. I redefined my hero by making him dependent, not autonomous. But heroines are always dependent, not autonomous—even a Fidelio. They act only with and for their man. I had reimagined the man's role, but not the woman's. I had not yet thought what a female hero might be.

No wonder; where are the women in Earthsea? Two of the books of the trilogy have no major female characters, and in all three, the protagonist, in the precise sense of the word, is male.

Communities of men in Earthsea are defined as powerful, active, and autonomous; the community of women in Atuan is described as obedient to distant male rulers; a static, closed society. No change can come, nothing can be done, until a man arrives. Hero and heroine depend on each other in getting free of this terrible place, but the man originates the action of the book.

And in all three books the fundamental power—magic—belongs to men; only to men; only to men who have no sexual contact with women.

The women of Earthsea have skills and powers and may be in touch with obscure earth forces, but they aren't wizards or mages. They know, at most, a few words of the language of power, the Old Speech; they are never methodically taught it by the men who do know it. There are no women at the School of Wizards on Roke. At best, women are village witches. But that's at worst, too, for the saying is quoted more than once: "Weak as women's magic, wicked as women's magic."

So, no women in college, no women in power, and that's how things are in Marlboro country. Nobody said anything about it when the books first came out.

The tradition I was writing in was a great one, a strong one. The beauty of your own tradition is that it carries you. It flies, and you ride it. Indeed, it's hard not to let it carry you, for it's older and bigger and wiser than you are. It frames your thinking and puts winged words in your mouth. If you refuse to ride, you have to stumble along on your own two feet; if you try to speak your own wisdom, you lose that wonderful fluency. You feel like a foreigner in your own country, amazed and troubled by things you see, not sure of the way, not able to speak with authority.

It is difficult for a woman to speak or write with authority unless she remains within a traditional role, since authority is still granted and withheld by the institutions and traditions of men (such as this amazing medieval institution where we are guests this week, on whose august lawns Virginia Woolf was forbidden to walk). A woman, as queen or prime minister, may for a time fill a man's role; that changes nothing. Authority is male. It is a fact. My fantasy dutifully reported the fact.

But is that all a fantasy does—report facts?

Readers and reviewers of the trilogy did not question Ged's masculinity, as far as I know. He was seen as thoroughly manly. And yet he had no sex life at all. This is of course traditional in the hero-tale: the hero may get a pro forma bride as a final reward, but from Samson and Delilah to Merlin and Nimue to the war stories of our century, sexuality in the hero is shown not as prowess but as weakness. Strength lies in abstinence—the avoidance of women and the replacement of sexuality by nonsexual male bonding.

The establishment of manhood in heroic terms involves the absolute devaluation of women. The woman's touch, in any sense, threatens that heroic masculinity.

By the early seventies, when I finished the third book of Earthsea, traditional definitions and values of masculinity and femininity were all in question. I'd been questioning them myself in other books. Women readers were asking how come all the wise guys on the Isle of the Wise were guys. The artist who was above gender had been exposed as a man hiding in a raincoat. No serious writer could, or can, go on pretending to be genderless. I couldn't continue my hero-tale until I had, as woman and artist, wrestled with the angels of the feminist consciousness. It took me a long time to get their blessing. From 1972 on, I knew there should be a fourth book of Earthsea, but it was sixteen years before I could write it.

The fourth book, *Tehanu*, takes up where the trilogy left off: in the same hierarchic, male-dominated society, but now, instead of using the pseudo-genderless male viewpoint of the heroic tradition, the world is seen through a woman's eyes. This time the gendering of the point of view is neither hidden nor denied. In Adrienne Rich's invaluable word, I had "revisioned" Earthsea.

Earlier in this conference, Jill Paton Walsh suggested that in *Tehanu*, I was "doing penance." Irredeemably secular, I'd call it affirmative action. In my lifetime as a writer, I have lived through a revolution, a great and ongoing revolution. When the world turns over, you can't go on thinking upside down. What was innocence is now irresponsibility. Visions must be re-visioned.

In *Atuan*, Tenar lived in a world apart, a tiny desert community of women and eunuchs; she knew nothing beyond it. This setting was in part a metaphor of the "innocence" long instituted as the value of a girl, her "virtue" (the word deriving from "*vir*," "man"; her worth to men being her only worth). That book and that innocence ended as she entered the "great world" of men and their doings. In *Tehanu*, she has lived in that world for years and knows her part of it well, the part she chose. She chose to leave the mage Ogion, her guardian and guide to masculine knowledge; she chose to be a farmer's wife. Why? Was she seeking a different, an obscurer knowledge? Was she being "womanly," bowing to society's resistance to independently powerful women?

Tenar certainly considers herself independent and responsible; she is ready to decide and to act. She has not abnegated power. But her definition of action, decision, and power is not heroic in the masculine sense. Her acts and choices do not involve ascendance, domination, power over others, and seem not to involve great consequences. They are "private" acts and choices, made in terms of immediate, actual relationships. To those who still believe that the public and the private can be separated, that there is a great world of men and war and politics and

business and a little world of women and children and personal relations, and that these are truly worlds apart, one important, the other not—to such readers, Tenar's choice will appear foolish, and her story sadly unheroic.

Certainly, if we discard the axiom "what's important is done by men," with its corollary "what women do isn't important," then we've knocked a hole in the hero-tale, and a good deal may leak out. We may have lost quest, contest, and conquest as the plot, sacrifice as the key, victory or destruction as the ending; and the archetypes may change. There may be old men who aren't wise, witches who aren't wicked, mothers who don't devour. There may be no public triumph of good over evil, for in this new world, what's good or bad, important or unimportant, hasn't been decided yet, if ever. Judgment is not referred up to the wise men. History is no longer about great men. The important choices and decisions may be obscure ones not recognized or applauded by society.

Indeed, Ged's first heroic act, in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, was this kind of heroism; a personal choice almost unwitnessed and not sung about in the songs. But it was rewarded, and its reward was immediate: power. His power increased. He was on his way to becoming Archmage. In Tenar's Earthsea, there's neither acclaim nor reward; the outcomes of actions are complex and obscure.

Perhaps it is this lack of applause, of "importance," that has led some reviewers to state that all the men in *Tehanu* are weak or wicked. There are certainly a couple of very nasty villains, but *all* the men? Ogion? I suppose dying is a kind of weakness, but I thought he came through it rather well. As for the young king, he rescues Tenar from a persecutor, just as a hero should, and is clearly going to be an innovative and excellent statesman. Several women readers have objected fiercely that Tenar's son, Spark, is a selfish lout. Are all sons good, then, all wise, all generous? Tenar blames herself for Spark's weakness (just like a woman!), but I blame the society that spoiled the boy by giving him unearned power. After he's managed that farm awhile alone, he'll probably shape up. Why do we expect more of the son than of the daughter?

But as for Ged, well, he has indeed lost his job. That's something we punish men for very cruelly. And when your job is being a hero, to lose it means you must indeed be weak and wicked.

In *Tehanu*, Ged's virtues are no longer the traditional male heroic ones: power as domination over others, unassailable strength, and the generosity of the rich. Traditional masculinists don't want heroism revised and unrewarded. They don't want to find it among housewives and elderly goatherds. And they really don't

want their hero fooling around with grown women.

There didn't use to be any sex in Earthsea. My working title for *Tehanu* was *Better Late Than Never*.

Tenar always loved Ged, and knew it, but she can't figure out why she now, for the first time, desires him. Her friend—the witch Moss—explains it to her: wizards give up one great power, sex, in order to get another, magic. They put themselves under a permanent spell of continence that affects everyone they have to do with. "Why didn't I know that?" Tenar says, and Moss cackles and explains that the magic of a really good spell is that you don't know it's working. It just "is"; the way things "are." But when Ged loses his power as a mage, his spell of chastity went with it, and like it or lump it, he's got his manhood back. The witch thinks this is funny.

Moss is a dirty old woman who's led a lively life. It seems that witches don't have to be chaste. They don't make the great sacrifice. Perhaps their powers are even nourished by their sexuality, but that's not clear. In fact, curiously little is known about witches in Earthsea, even by witches, even by the author. It looks as if the wizards have generally used their own powers in their own interests to keep their knowledge and skills from women. Women's work, as usual, is the maintenance of order and cleanliness, housekeeping, feeding and clothing people, childbearing, caring of babies and children, nursing and healing of animals and people, caring of the dying, funeral rites—those unimportant matters of life and death; not part of history or of story. What women do is invisible. (Since they live without women, the wizards must do a lot of these invisible, "disappeared" things themselves, such as darning and dishwashing, a fact that I, like Moss, find funny. But pleasing, also. I was touched and delighted to discover that Ged was better at mending than I am.)

Old Moss is no revolutionary. She was taught that what men do is what matters. She supports this in her own devious way, saying, "Ours is only a little power, seems like, next to theirs. But it goes down deep. It's all roots. It's like an old blackberry thicket. And a wizard's power is like a fir tree, maybe, great and tall and grand, but it'll blow right down in a storm. Nothing kills a blackberry bramble." I'm afraid Moss is as essentialist as Allan Bloom. But because in this book, *Tehanu*, the witch is allowed to speak; her mere presence subverts the tradition and its rules. If women can have both sex and magic, why can't men?

Continence, abstinence, denial of relationship. In the realm of male power, there is no interdependence of men with women. Manhood—according to Sigmund Freud, Robert Bly, and the hero-tale—is obtained and validated by the man's

independence from women. The connection is severed. The heroic man's relation to women is limited to the artificial code of chivalry, which involves the adoration of a woman-shaped object. Women in that world are nonpeople, dehumanized by a beautiful, worshipful spell—a spell that may be seen, from the other side, as a curse.

A world in which men are seen as independently real and women are seen only as non-men is not a fantasy kingdom. It is every army. It's Washington, DC, and the Tokyo Stock Exchange. It's the corporate boardroom and the executive suite and the board of regents. It's the canon of English Literature. It's our politics. It's the world I lived in when I wrote the first three books of Earthsea. I lived under the spell, the curse. Most of us did—most of do—most of the time. The myth of man alone, or alone with his God, at the center, on the top, is a very old, very powerful myth. It rules us still.

But thanks to the revisioning of gender called feminism, we can see the myth as a myth: a construct, which may be changed; an idea, which may be rethought, made more true, more honest.

A rule may be unjust, yet its servants may be just. At the university Virginia Woolf could not enter, Tolkien taught. The mages of Roke were honest and just men, trying to use their power mindfully, keeping Equilibrium according to their lights. When she first came to Gont, Tenar lived as a student with a very wise mage, Ogion. Wouldn't he have taught her the uses of power? Well, we don't know if he would or not, because she refused. She quit grad school. She went off to be a nobody; a wife and mother. And now, as an aging widow not even allowed to own her farm, she's a subnobody. Was this a sacrifice? If so, what for?

Ged's bargain seems clearer. In the third book, he sacrifices his power, spending it to defeat a mortal evil. He triumphs, but at the cost of his heroic persona. As Archmage he is dead. And in *Tehanu*, we find him weak, ill, depressed, forced to hide from enemies, at best a mere farmhand, good with a pitchfork. Readers who want him to be the Alpha Male are dismayed. They're dubious of a strength that doesn't involve contests and conquests and bossing people around.

Apparently, it was the bossing around that Tenar refused, when she stopped studying with Ogion. Maybe Ogion, a maverick mage, would have shared his knowledge with her, but even if the wizardly hierarchy had accepted her, which seems doubtful, she evidently didn't want their kind of power. She wanted freedom.

She doesn't approve of sacrifice. "My soul can't live in that narrow place—this for that, tooth for tooth, death for life. . . . There is a freedom beyond that. Beyond

payment, retribution, redemption—beyond all the bargains and the balances, there is freedom." And she didn't do any dying to get it. All her former selves are alive in her: the child Tenar; the girl-priestess Arha, who still thinks in Kargish; and Goha the farmwife, mother of two children. Tenar is whole, but not single. She is not pure. The sacrificial image of dying to be reborn is not appropriate to her. Just the opposite. She has borne, she has given birth to, her children and her new selves. She is not reborn, but rebearing. The word seems strange. We think of birth passively, as if we were all babies or all men. It takes an effort to think not of rebirth but of rebearing, actively, in the maternal mode: to think not as the apple but as the apple tree.

But what is Tenar's freedom? A very contingent thing. She lives alone. One night, men surround her house, meaning to rape her and take her child from her. Victimized, she panics; she rushes from door to window. At last, fear turns to rage, and seizing a knife, she flings the door wide open. But it is Ged, playing the man's role to the hilt, who actually stabs one of the assailants. He has been gendered into violence, just as much as they have. And she has been gendered into mere response. Neither acts with genuine freedom, though they do act.

At the end of the book, both Ged and Tenar face the defenders of the old tradition. Having renounced the heroism of that tradition, they appear to be helpless. No magic, nothing they know, nothing they have been, can stand against the pure malevolence of institutionalized power. Their strength and salvation must come from outside the institutions and traditions. It must be a new thing.

Tenar's last child is one not born of her body, but given to her out of the fire, chosen by her soul. Raped, beaten, pushed into the fire, disfigured, one hand crippled, one eye blinded, this child is innocence in a different sense of the word. This is helplessness personified: disinheritance, a child dehumanized, made Other. And she was the key to this book. Until I saw Therru, until she chose me, there was no book. I couldn't see the story till I could look through her eye. But which eye, the seeing or the blind?

In a story I wrote not long before *Tehanu*, called "Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight?" a child called Myra survives a plane crash in the Oregon desert and is found by a coyote—that is, by Coyote, who created the world, according to the people there, and made quite a mess of it in the process. Myra has lost the sight of one eye in the crash. Some of Coyote's neighbors, Bluejay and Rattler and others, hold a dance and stick an eye made of pine pitch into the

socket, and after Coyote licks it, it works fine. And Myra has a kind of double vision. She sees where the animals live not as burrows and dens but as a little village. She sees Coyote as a skinny woman in blue jeans with grayish blonde hair and a lot of no-good boyfriends, and she sees Horse as a beautiful long-haired man, and so on. And though the animals know she's human, they see her as one of their own kind—Coyote sees her as a pup; Horse sees her as a filly; and Owl, who isn't paying much attention, sees her as an egg. But when Myra gets near where human beings live, she sees, with one eye, just a town like the one she grew up in; streets and houses and schoolkids. With the other eye—the new one, the wild one—she sees a terrifying hole in the fabric of the world—a no place where time rushes like a torrent, and everything is out of joint—Koyaanisqatsi. In the end, she has to go back and live there, with her own people; but she asks Grandmother Spider if she can keep her new eye, and the Grandmother says yes. So maybe she will go on being able to see both worlds.

In *Tehanu*, Tenar is brushing her hair on a windy dry morning, so that it crackles and makes sparks, and the one-eyed child Therru is fascinated, seeing what she calls "the fire flying out all over the sky."

At that moment, Tenar first asked herself how Therru saw her—saw the world—and knew she did not know; that she could not know what one saw with an eye that had been burned away. And Ogion's words—*"they will fear her"*—returned to her, but she felt no fear of the child. Instead, she brushed her hair again, vigorously, so the sparks would fly, and once again, she heard the little husky laugh of delight.

Soon after this scene, Tenar herself has a moment of double vision, seeing with two different eyes. An old man in the village has a beautiful painted fan; on one side are figures of lords and ladies of the royal court, but on the other side, usually hidden against the wall:

> Dragons moved as the folds of the fan moved. Painted faint and fine on the yellowed silk, dragons of pale red, blue, green moved and grouped, as the figures on the other side were grouped, among clouds and mountain peaks.
>
> "Hold it up to the light," said old Fan.
>
> She did so, and saw the two sides, the two paintings, made one by the light flowing through the silk, so that the clouds and peaks were the towers of the city, and the men and women were winged,

and the dragons looked with human eyes.

"You see?"

"I see," she murmured.

What is this double vision, two things seen as one? What can the blinded eye teach the seeing eye? What is the wilderness? Who are the dragons?

Dragons are archetypes, yes; mind forms, a way of knowing. But these dragons aren't St. George's earthy worm, nor are they the emperor of China's airy servant. I am not European, I am not Asian, and I am not a man. These are the dragons of a new world, America, and the visionary forms of an old woman's mind. The mythopoeticists err, I think, in using the archetype as a rigid, filled mold. If we see it only as a vital potentiality, it becomes a guide into mystery. Fullness is a fine thing, but emptiness is the secret of it, as Lao Tze said. The dragons of Earthsea remain mysterious to me.

In the first three books, I think the dragons were, above all, wildness. What is *not owned*. A dragonlord wasn't a man who tamed dragons; nobody tamed dragons. He was simply, as Ged said, a man dragons would take notice of. But he couldn't look at them, not eye to eye. The rule was clear: a man must not look into a dragon's eyes.

In the first book, we briefly met a young girl who wore a very small dragon on her wrist, like a bracelet; it had consented, temporarily, to be jewelry. Some tiny note was struck here that I remembered when, in the last book, Tenar meets a dragon—a full-scale one. She knows the rule, but then, she's not a man, is she? She and the dragon look at each other, eye to eye, and they know who they are. They recognize each other.

This echoes a legend told early in the book about the time when dragons and human beings were all one people, and how they became separated, and how they might yet be one.

And that legend brings into the European hero-tale tradition the great Native American mythos of the time when animals were people the time of the making. Myra, the little Buffalo Gal in the Oregon desert, can live for a while in that Dreamtime, that spiritual realm, because she's a child and a child adopted by a coyote; a wolf-child. Tenar doesn't live in it, but she connects with it—she can look the dragon in the eye—because she chose freedom over power. Her insignificance is her wildness. What she is and does is "beneath notice"—invisible to the men

who own and control, the men in power. And so, she's freer than any of them to connect with a different world, a free world, where things can be changed, remade. And the pledge of that connection is, I think, her adoption of the child who has been destroyed by the irresponsible exercise of power, cast out of common humanity, made Other. Tenar is a wolf-mother.

The dragon Kalessin in the last book is wildness seen not only as dangerous beauty but as dangerous anger. The fire of the dragon runs right through the book. It meets the fire of human rage, the cruel anger of the weak, which wreaks itself on the weaker in the endless circle of human violence. It meets that fire and consumes it, for "a wrong that cannot be repaired must be transcended." There's no way to repair or undo what was done to the child, and so there must be *a way to go on from there*. It can't be a plain and easy way. It involves a leap. It involves flying.

So the dragon is subversion, revolution, change—a going beyond the old order in which men were taught to own and dominate, and women were taught to collude with them: the order of oppression. It is the wildness of the spirit and of the earth, uprising against misrule.

And it rejects gender.

Therru, the burned child, will grow up to be fully sexed, but she's been ungendered by the rape that destroys her "virtue" and the mutilation that destroys her beauty. She has nothing left of the girl men want girls to be. It's all been burned away. As for Ged and Tenar, they're fully sexed too, but on the edge of old age, when conventional gendering grants him some last flings and grants her nothing but modest grandmotherhood. And the dragon defies gender entirely. There are male and female dragons in the earlier books, but I don't know if Kalessin, the Eldest, is male or female or both or something else. I choose not to know. The deepest foundation of the order of oppression is gendering, which names the male normal, dominant, active, and the female Other, subject, passive. To begin to imagine freedom, the myths of gender, like the myths of race, have to be exploded and discarded. My fiction does that by these troubling and ugly embodiments.

Oh, they say, what a shame. Le Guin has politicized her delightful fantasy world. Earthsea will never be the same.

I'll say it won't. The politics were there all along—the hidden politics of the hero-tale, the spell you don't know you're living under till you cast it off. At this conference, Jan Mark made the very simple and profound statement that the world apart of a fantasy inevitably refers back to this world. All the moral weight of it is real weight. The politics of fairyland are ours.

With her wild eye, Myra sees the wilderness as well as the human realm as her true home. Therru, blinded, sees with the eye of the spirit as well as the eye of the flesh. Where does she see her home?

For a long time, we've been seeing with only one eye. We've blinded the woman's eye, said it doesn't see anything worth seeing, said all it can see is kids and cooking, said it's weak, short-sighted, said it's wicked, the evil eye. A woman's gaze is a fearful thing. It looks at a man, and he swells up "twice his natural size," and thinks he did it all himself. But then again, the woman's eye looks at a hero, and he shrinks. He shrinks right down to human size, man size, a fellow being, a brother, a lover, a father, a husband, a son. The woman looks at a dragon and the dragon looks right back. The free woman and the wild thing look at each other, and neither one wants to tame the other or own the other. Their eyes meet, they say each other's name.

I understand the mythology of *Tehanu* in this way: the child irreparably wronged, whose human inheritance has been taken from her—so many children in our world, all over our world now—that child is our guide.

The dragon is the stranger, the Other, the not-human: a wild spirit, dangerous, winged, which escapes and destroys the artificial order of oppression. The dragon is the familiar also—our own imagining, a speaking spirit, wise, winged, which imagines a new order of freedom.

The child who is our care, the child we have betrayed, is our guide. She leads us to the dragon. She is the dragon.

While I was writing *Tehanu*, I didn't know where the story was going. I held on, held my breath, closed both eyes, sure I was falling. But wings upheld me, and when I dared look, I saw a new world, or maybe only gulfs of sunlit air. The book insisted that it be written outdoors, in the sunlight and the open air. When autumn came and it wasn't done, still it would be written out of doors, so I sat in a coat and scarf, and the rain dripped off the verandah roof, and I flew. If some of the wild freedom of that flight is in the book, that's enough; that's how I wanted, as an old woman, to leave my beloved islands of Earthsea. I didn't want to leave Ged and Tenar and their dragon-child safe. I wanted to leave them free.

Artist's Note

I want to thank Ursula for graciously allowing me to slip into her memories and to delve there in the treasure trove of details of how she built and populated her world of Earthsea. I could not have drawn these pictures without those insights and her guidance. We shared four splendid years of collaboration and a growing friendship making this book. I already miss her very much.

—Charles Vess, 2018
Abingdon, Virginia

Also by Ursula K. Le Guin

NOVELS

A Wizard of Earthsea

The Tombs of Atuan

The Farthest Shore

Tehanu

Tales from Earthsea

The Other Wind

NOVELS OF THE EKUMEN

Worlds of Exile and Illusion: City of Illusions, Planet of Exile, and Rocannon's World

The Left Hand of Darkness

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The Telling

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