

CARNELIAN



CARNELIAN

a novel by Mark Schreiber

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## LONDON 1990

Carnelian woke. His eyes opened slowly, pressing against the weight of seven hundred years' confinement. There was nothing to be seen, however, for the coffin admitted no light. He breathed deeply but the air was stale and old, as if it were air from his own time, trapped when he had been trapped. He became aware of his body, still robed, and his hands, folded serenely on his stomach. He felt no physical pain or discomfort, and could not guess the present year or month. He lacked all normal subjective indicators of duration. He did not feel tired. He had not dreamed. For all he knew he had been entombed only yesterday.

Yet the hole had been well dug, the site carefully chosen. The plot to ensnare him had been too cleverly conceived to be so quickly thwarted. The details did not seem clear to him now, but his thoughts were bombarded by memories from more active years, memories which he found no less troubling than his burial. Of Henry III and Edward I. Of castles and the later Crusades. Of Emperors and Popes, scholars and ecclesiastics, moors and mountains, inns and taverns, plagues and famines, fires and floods, tournaments and battles. And Bloodstone.

The bulldozer paused. The operator leaned forward, scratching his head, staring at the coffin, which lay in the pit below. This park had never been used as a cemetery. The excavation crew had discovered no other coffins. And this one was buried twelve feet deep. And bound with iron chains.

Confused and curious, he used the bulldozer to lift the coffin to level ground, taking care not to turn it over. Then he hurried to examine it. What puzzled him most was the

coffin's age, for though the wood was well preserved, it resembled nothing from modern times. Strange runes and geometric shapes were carved on the lid, and the sides were embellished with mystic symbols and engravings of an evil-looking creature. If this alone was not extraordinary, there were the iron chains. Three of them encircled the coffin, two at the ends and one in the middle, secured by sturdy locks. In their day they would have been quite difficult to remove without the key, but now many of the links were badly corroded, and the chains seemed less a barrier than a curiosity.

The operator was able to break two of the chains and slip off the third. He worked eagerly, with much expectation, for he believed a coffin would not be bound unless it contained treasure. Even as he lifted the lid his thoughts glittered with diamonds and gold, stolen long ago by some superstitious thief or doomed cult, and his mind filled with visions of an early and luxurious retirement.

But when he looked into the coffin he saw a man. A very old man, remarkably well preserved, for there was no sign of decay or putrefaction. And then the worker noticed the chest rise and fall and a coldness overcame him. He stood there, not daring to touch the creature, but unable to turn away. He had never before believed in the undead, but now he feared he was looking at a vampire. Although the creature did not resemble the vampires he had seen in movies, he knew of no other being that could survive entombment and would require chains to prevent his escape. The creature was tall and thin and wore a long white robe and sandals. His hands were well-manicured and youthful, his spidery fingers unadorned with rings. His long hair and beard were ice white, silky and untangled, as if they had been recently brushed. His skin was pale and, despite its age, not severely wrinkled. There were deep lines of worry on his forehead, but fewer around his eyes and mouth.

The worker felt certain the creature was breathing, for his chest rose and fell steadily. But he did not know what to



do. Vampires were supposed to be vulnerable to sunlight, yet the creature lay exposed to the hot London morning and instead of turning to dust seemed to grow more alive. The worker began to contemplate the efficacy of wooden stakes, but the idea made him tremble.

Just then the creature's eyes opened. They were deep and gray and reflected another century. The construction worker did not linger to examine them, but ran away to find the nearest authority.

When Carnelian's eyes could finally tolerate the light he pushed himself out of the coffin and stood uneasily on the soft grass. The sky was partly cloudy and the air muggy, yet to Carnelian this was the brightest day he had ever seen, the freshest air he had ever breathed. He was standing in a park, in what during his age had been a neglected field in a city of stone and wood and mud. A city of thousands, not millions, of farmers and peasants, lords and kings.

Carnelian was confused by the bulldozer, but deduced it had been responsible for his liberation. Since no one was present to greet him, he presumed he had been unearched by accident. He walked away quickly, choosing not to examine the bulldozer and the coffin. His repugnance exceeded his curiosity and he longed for nothing more than to put the unpleasant experience of his burial behind him.

His limbs were stiff, but they loosened as he walked. He was remarkably healthy considering his long confinement and was grateful to be conscious and free again. He rejoiced in the feel of the warm earth beneath his sandals, in the sights and sounds and smells of the park. Trees and flowers in bloom, birds singing, insects flitting past. Familiar, reassuring sensations. He even welcomed the dryness in his mouth and emptiness in his stomach, and grew excited at the thought of food and drink.

But when he reached the perimeter of the park his celebration of the familiar was overwhelmed by astonishment at the new, for before him stood the city. He

was completely surprised, for in the park he had not seen beyond the trees, and, despite the presence of the bulldozer, had assumed this age to be similar to his own.

He stood unmoving at the edge of the grass, his eyes and ears so bombarded with stimuli that he did not know what to look at or listen to. Everything seemed to overlap and flow together, disparate yet interconnected in a scene that was vast and awesome and completely confusing. There were people, hundreds, perhaps thousands of them, neatly groomed, wearing tightly fitting clothes, walking hurriedly in every direction, as if each person had a different destination. They walked assuredly, though Carnelian could guess no purpose in their movements. The only times he had seen people gathered in such numbers had been at festivals or battles, where the spectators or participants focused their attention on a common stage or cause. But the only thing these people seemed to share was the city, for they appeared to take as little interest in one another as possible, perhaps even to the point of rudeness, or so Carnelian thought, because those who passed him not only failed to greet him, but most of them even glanced away.

There were the strange carriages that traveled the black roads at frightening speeds. Gleaming like insects, they were varied in color and shape, and seemed limitless in number. They all contained people, though some held dozens, while others only carried one. How these machines worked, if indeed they were machines and not some new form of beast, Carnelian could not imagine. He noticed that they seemed to flow in groups and patterns, governed perhaps by blinking colored lights at the crossroads. Yet how so many machines could travel in densely packed arrays at such speeds without colliding with one another was as much a mystery to him as the movements of the planets and stars.

There were the structures beyond. Immense buildings, taller than cathedrals, set within close proximity of one another like toadstools at the base of a dark tree. Some were built with a substance which reflected the sun, and all

contained scores of glass windows, set in precise rows. The engineering skills displayed impressed him, and the symmetry of the glossy buildings with their abundance of glass struck him as being chillingly beautiful.

There were other wonders as well. Giant pictures with printed messages towered above the street. One that Carnelian could read told him to drink a particular wine. A boy passed him carrying a box which emitted loud music. He heard a thunder in the heavens and saw in the distance a great creature traversing the sky with incredible haste, trailing a line of black smoke. He watched until he could see it no more, but the imprint it made on his memory would live forever. He had never believed in dragons, and now, with a childlike thrill of discovery, he thought he had seen one.

His heart beat rapidly and his body felt light. The wonder and mystery of this new age made him dizzy with anticipation. He was at once terrified and overjoyed, fearing this world and yet inexorably drawn to it, as if it held the power to either ennoble or destroy him. He was awed by its size and density, its wealth and variety. Frightened because so little was comprehensible and so much was confusing. He wondered for a moment if awaking to such a hauntingly advanced world might be a fate worse than the dreamless sleep of entombment. But the need for accomplishment overshadowed all caution, and his path was laid. The excitement built within him until he could wait no longer. With confidence and resolution he strode into the street, and collided with a machine.

Consciousness left him. Many people gathered around the body. A constable held them back while questioning the hysterical driver. When the ambulance arrived, Carnelian was pronounced dead.

When he woke again he found himself naked in an enclosure as dark and narrow as the coffin. But the sides were composed of metal rather than wood, and he

discovered that by pressing against the top he could slide the compartment out.

He lay in a white room, brightly lit. As he sat up he noticed he occupied one of many drawers that lined the wall. He slid his compartment out as far as it would go and hopped down. When he turned around he saw a man in a green frock standing by the door staring at him, his eyes bulging, his face as white as the walls.

“Excuse me...” Carnelian began.

But the man screamed and rushed away.

Carnelian looked around, expecting to see the reason for the man’s terror, but he was alone in the room. To his relief he spotted his clothes on one of the tables. As he slipped on his sandals he noticed a tag on his big toe and tore it off, understanding at last that he had been mistakenly pronounced dead. He regretted having frightened the man and wished he could have the opportunity to explain, but more pressing matters weighed on his mind.

He quickly left the morgue and walked up a flight of stairs to a long white corridor, lined on both sides with closed doors. In the middle of the corridor a group of people were walking into an opening. Not knowing where else to go, Carnelian decided to follow. Just as he entered and determined the room was a closet, the doors closed behind and he felt a swift upward motion. He pounded against the doors, fearing he had been trapped again. “Let me out!” he shouted. He took no notice of the other passengers, so stunned was he by his capture. As a final desperate measure he tried to think of a spell that might help him. Then, to his surprise, and slight embarrassment, the doors opened and the passengers filed out, glancing at him as they left. Carnelian was baffled, but felt too grateful for what seemed to him a near escape to remain inside the enclosure and satisfy his curiosity. He hurried out before the doors again closed.

He followed the corridor to a room crowded with people either in pain or accompanying someone in pain. One man

stood at a counter, answering questions from a woman in a white uniform on the other side. An old woman sat impatiently, crutches at her side. Those who spoke used quiet voices. It was a disconsolate scene. Carnelian could sense their pain, and he longed to relieve it. He went to a young boy whose left hand was temporarily bandaged with a cloth. As he approached, the mother rose, mistaking his white robe for a doctor's gown.

Gazing at the boy, Carnelian gently took his hand. "Let me see this," he said in a quiet but firm voice.

The mother unraveled the bloodstained cloth, revealing a deep cut on the boy's palm. "He got it climbing a fence," she explained. "I pray it's not infected!"

Considering everything in this age that was foreign, Carnelian was glad to recognize the English language. Unfortunately, the suffering in the room was also all too familiar.

"It hurts!" the boy said.

"Not anymore," Carnelian replied, holding the boy's hand in both of his and mumbling a few short unintelligible words. He then squeezed gently and released it.

The boy drew his hand to his eyes and scrutinized it with astonishment. He could not even see a scar, and the pain was gone. "Look, Mum!" he shouted, jumping to his feet and thrusting his hand out for his mother to see. "He healed it! He made it go away! Just like that!"

The mother ran her fingers over the hand, distrusting her eyes. "It can't be!" she exclaimed, looking from her son to Carnelian. "I can't believe it! I'm sure there was a cut! I'm sure."

"There was," the boy agreed. "But he healed it!" He stared at Carnelian, questioning him with his eyes.

The mother looked at those seated beside them, hoping to find a witness. The receptionist hurried over at the commotion, followed by a uniformed guard.

"You're causing a disturbance, sir," she said in a stern voice. "I'm afraid you'll have to leave."

Carnelian looked at her. “But I...”

Before he could explain, the guard grabbed him by the arm and ushered him out. Carnelian looked back regrettably at the people in the room, sensing the wounds that remained to be healed. For a moment he wondered whether he had acted wrong—that pain, for whatever reason, was not to be assuaged. But he was convinced that suffering must be relieved, wherever found, and it seemed more plausible to believe his intentions had simply been misunderstood.

Back outside, his thoughts returned to his primary task. Neither his long entombment nor the collision with the automobile had left him with physical injury. His body felt as exuberant as his mind, and he walked swiftly, though this time careful to follow the paths of other pedestrians and avoid the lanes of vehicular traffic.

When a bus stopped beside him he decided to follow a line of people on. Before he could find a seat, however, the driver asked him for his fare. Carnelian retreated toward the door, fearing he would not be permitted to ride, when another robed figure intervened.

“I’ll take care of that, brother,” he said, dropping coins in a box. He smiled at Carnelian and offered him a seat. His robe was gray and dirty, but his closely-cropped hair was combed and his face clean shaven.

“Thank you,” Carnelian said, returning the man’s smile. He sat down cautiously as the bus began to move. Looking out the window, he watched the world blur together, and felt thrilled by the sensation of speed. It was like riding a horse at full gallop, and at times the bus seemed to travel even faster. He could not understand how a machine could reach such speeds, or even move at all, while carrying so many passengers.

Several moments passed before he realized the man in the gray robe was speaking to him. “Forgive me,” Carnelian said, not taking his eyes from the window. “But I did not hear you.”

The man leaned closer. "Where are you going, brother?" he asked in a louder voice.

"Wherever it takes me," Carnelian replied.

The man smiled. "That's the spirit," he said. "Let destiny guide you." He paused. "What's your name?"

"Carnelian."

"Carnelian, that's an odd name. You can call me Brother Stephen. I'm with the Church of the Infinite Way. I'm going to the airport. You can come with me if you'd like. God always has room for one more."

Carnelian watched the passing buildings, trying to read the signs above the doors. "Discount Computer Store," he mumbled to himself. "What are computers?"

"What indeed?" Brother Stephen said, growing more animated. "Tools of Lucifer, they are. Instigators of indolence. If God wanted us to use computers he would have written the Bible on a word processor!"

The man spoke passionately, but Carnelian was unable to follow him, and was more interested in the changing scene outside. "I haven't seen a horse," he realized. "I saw a dragon earlier,"

"And I once saw Lucifer in the pantry!" the man exclaimed. He tried to draw Carnelian's attention away from the window. "We need to resist this false progress, for it leads only to Hell, and return to a more innocent age, when there were no computers and televisions!"

"There were no computers in my age."

"You are older than I am," Brother Steven said. "And those were better days, when men had not yet completely turned their ears from the voice of God. There were the wars, I grant, but they were warnings from Him, and they have not been heeded."

Carnelian looked at the driver and noticed that he turned a wheel with his hands and pressed on pedals with his foot. But the correlation between those simple actions and the vehicle's movement completely escaped him. "What causes this carriage to move?" he asked.

“God’s will, and nothing else,” the man replied. “For if it were not His desire that we ride, no matter how much petrol you add and how thoroughly you check the engine, it will not go! What, may I ask, brings you to your present condition?”

“I only just awoke.”

“Ah!” the man said in a tone of understanding. “I awoke four years ago and know the feeling. Before that I was deaf to God and His infinite wisdom. I dressed in suits and carried credit cards, but was that fulfillment?” He clasped Carnelian on the shoulder. “It is good that I have found you. I tell you it was not chance that brought us together! No, it was not chance!”

The bus stopped and Brother Stephen rose. “Here’s where we get off,” he said, hurrying toward the door. Carnelian followed, not knowing what else to do. He appreciated the company, although the man seemed incapable of imparting practical information and misconstrued everything Carnelian said. He realized the futility of speaking about himself, for he knew he would not be understood. But then he had always had difficulty with ecclesiastics.

As the bus pulled away and they walked to the terminal he heard a roar in the sky and, looking up, forgot his thoughts in his excitement. “A dragon!”

“A dragon indeed,” Brother Stephen agreed.

Carnelian followed him inside, through doors that opened before they reached them and up stairs they did not have to climb. He walked slowly, observing the rush of activity. “So many people!” he marveled. “Where are they going?”

“To eternal damnation, brother. Unless we can save them.”

They reached the center of the terminal and Carnelian would go no farther. It seemed to him that if he stood in this spot the entire day and did nothing but observe the activity around him, much would still elude his perception. There



were men and women in bright uniforms standing behind counters. There were machines that carried baggage through a small opening in the wall. There were shops and restaurants. There were lighted signs with rows of words and numbers, some of which changed instantly while he watched. And everywhere there were people, alone or in groups, women as well as men, children as well as adults. It was as if an entire city had been built indoors, and everyone was leaving at the same time. "What is this place?"

"Heathrow."

"Heathrow," he repeated, and said the word to himself several times. It had a magical sound. Brother Stephen began to speak, but Carnelian was eager to explore and walked away.

He entered a small shop that sold numerous items. But what attracted his attention were the racks of books against the wall. Only at Oxford and at the libraries of wealthy scholars had he seen more books gathered in a single place. He scanned the titles and picked up one with a picture of a demon on the cover. He was surprised how light it felt as he hefted it in his hand. He had just begun to leaf through the pages when Brother Stephen snatched it away.

"Nay, brother, do not waste your time on such doggerell! Look at the cover and ask yourself who wrote this blasphemy. There is only one book worth reading!"

"The printing is so precise," Carnelian remarked. "You have machines to write your books? And what are these?" he asked, looking at the next rack. "Books of a different sort? With shining illustrations. Are they painted? Or do machines draw your pictures as well?"

He picked out one with a half-naked girl on the cover, but Brother Stephen was quick to grab it from his hands. "Resist!" he implored. "I know the temptation is strong. Resist!"

He led Carnelian to a central location and then removed some printed matter from a pocket in his robe.

"What are those?" Carnelian asked.

“Pamphlets explaining the Infinite Way and listing our courses,” he replied, handing him several. “Help me pass them out.”

But Carnelian was less interested in the pamphlets and Brother Stephen’s mission than in exploring the airport. He set them on an empty chair and hurried toward the gates.

Brother Stephen grabbed his hand. “You can’t go in there!”

Carnelian pulled him along, oblivious to the security line, and when some guards tried to detain him he simply shouted a spell at them and the guards let them through.

He pulled his incredulous new friend onto moving stairs and along moving walkways, following more people than he had ever seen at one time and place.

Finally he approached large glass windows that afforded a broad view of the strange scene outside. Brother Stephen followed, but Carnelian ignored him. He pressed his face to the glass and stared out, utterly astonished. Before him, on either side, sat half a dozen planes. And in the distance one was taking off.

“They’re machines!” he exclaimed. “Machines! I can’t believe it!” He studied the details on the nearest airplane, its shape and construction, the windows and wings. “It’s so large!” Somewhat enlightened, he now understood why so many people gathered here, and why they rushed and carried baggage. He turned to Brother Stephen, trembling with excitement. “How can I ride in one?” he asked. “Is a fare required? Perhaps you have the necessary coins?”

Brother Stephen frowned. “Our place is on the ground.”

But Carnelian was walking away. He followed a group of travelers through a doorway that held no door, which was overseen by a woman in a uniform.

“Wait!” Brother Stephen shouted, standing back in fear. “You can’t...”

The woman asked Carnelian for his ticket.

“*Ul ehjeira san enni on,*” he spoke in a decisive tone.

“Your ticket please?”

But Carnelian was no longer there. Perplexed, both Brother Stephen and the gate agent looked around, but the figure in the white robe was nowhere to be seen. Brother Stephen began to grow pale, recalling his encounter with Lucifer in the pantry.

Carnelian walked swiftly down a carpeted corridor, unobserved. Ahead a line of passengers was slowly filing through a door. He followed them, and soon found himself standing on the plane. He looked at the rows of seats, astounded that something so spacious and heavy could fly. He did not linger in the aisle, however, because he still possessed form and someone could bump into him. He chose a window seat in an empty row in the back and became visible again.

While waiting for the flight to begin he read the literature in the seat pocket and learned the safety regulations. When the plane began to move he buckled his seat belt and stared eagerly out the window. The pilot's voice welcomed them and announced their arrival time in New York City. Carnelian gave no thought to their destination, so engrossed was he with the prospect of flying in a machine.

The plane stopped for a minute and then began to accelerate. The cabin vibrated and there was a great roar. Carnelian was forced back into his seat as the plane began to climb. He pressed his face against the window, watching the diminishing world. He was fascinated by the speed with which everything shrank below, and the city, which had overwhelmed him, assumed the appearance of a child's toy.

The plane began to level off and the pilot announced that they were free to move about the cabin. But Carnelian did not take his eyes from the window until a uniformed woman tapped him on the shoulder.

"Excuse me, sir, but would you care for dinner?"

Since waking, he had completely forgotten his appetite. Now it returned to him. "I would be most grateful," he replied. "I have not eaten in a very long time."

The woman smiled. "And what would you like to drink?"

"What do you offer?"

"We have wine, beer, cocktails, soft drinks, juices, coffee, tea..."

Carnelian was pleased with the variety of beverages, though only the first two were familiar to him. "I'll have a red wine," he said.

He looked back out the window until she returned a minute later carrying a tray. She unlatched the tray table and set his dinner down for him. "Be careful," she cautioned, "the food's hot."

Carnelian looked at his tray. The cup was transparent, but more pliable than glass. The tray itself was molded from what seemed to be heavy paper. Inside was a strip of dark cooked meat, mixed vegetables, a roll, and a piece of chocolate cake. In a separate bowl was a salad. And beside the tray were three metal implements. Carnelian recognized the knife and spoon, but the pronged utensil was unfamiliar.

He enjoyed the food and wished for more. He looked out the window, noticing that the clouds were breaking apart. Soon they vanished altogether and the scene below was as blue as it was above. He realized they were flying over the ocean and he watched patiently, waiting for the appearance of land. But an hour later there was still nothing below but water and he decided to explore the cabin.

When he stood he was surprised by the lack of turbulence. He knew they were traveling faster than any bird or animal, yet he felt little sense of motion.

"Are you all right, sir?" the flight attendant who had served him dinner asked.

"Quite."

"Never flown before?"

"Not in an airplane."

"In what then? A balloon?"

"As a peregrine falcon," Carnelian told her.

"Is that like a glider? I don't know much about small aircraft."

“My name is Carnelian. Perhaps you have heard of me?”

“Why, are you famous?”

“You have not heard of Carnelian the Wizard?”

The flight attendant laughed, charmed by what she mistook as the old man’s sense of humor.

Carnelian returned to his seat, disappointed that his exploits were unknown to her. He had hoped he was not as unfamiliar to the people of this world as they were to him.

The ocean and sky still filled the window, and Carnelian could have watched them for hours without tiring, but something else attracted his attention. In the front of the cabin two giant disembodied heads were talking, though he could not hear their voices. They appeared somehow flat, as if projections. Carnelian watched, bewildered, as they became smaller but full-bodied and walked across not the plane’s cabin but a street on the ground. He was trying to understand how they could manage this when they entered a machine and drove away. Suddenly Carnelian was looking through the machine’s front window as they drove. Then he was watching from the air as another machine followed. Then he was again sharing the driver’s perspective as the machine gained speed. It careened around corners and darted from lane to lane, nearly colliding with other machines traveling in different directions. Then it sped down a steep hill, at the bottom of which lay a body of water.

Carnelian shrank back against his seat, terrified. The men would fall into the water and drown, and for some reason he was being permitted to watch. But he could not simply be a witness to this tragedy. He had to act. He was contemplating which spell to cast when the stewardess noticed his interest and pointed out the headphones.

## NEW YORK

### 1

Upon landing Carnelian found himself in another airport, this one even more congested than Heathrow. He followed the other passengers to the back of a long line, where officials were checking documentation. Since Carnelian had none, and doubted the officials would believe he was a wizard from the thirteenth century, he quietly became invisible and passed unnoticed through immigration and customs.

He paused in the main terminal, uncertain where to go next. The flight had so fascinated him that he had given no thought to his plans. He had flown on the plane for the experience of the ride, not because he wished to reach a particular destination. Indeed, he did not know where New York City was. At first he had assumed it merely replaced old York, but that was impossible, for they had crossed the ocean, and seemed to have landed on another continent.

He sat down for a moment and considered his course of action. Had he not been so glad to be free again, and so taken with the marvels of this new age, he might have felt lonely. For although both the ecclesiastic on the bus and the flight attendant had shown him kindness, neither recognized him. And his intentions in the hospital had been completely misunderstood. He knew centuries had passed and the world had changed beyond comprehension. But he reasoned that in this over-populated age there must be some people who were knowledgeable about wizards and capable of understanding his mission.

So he decided that his first objective should be the finding of such a person. He glanced at the travelers who passed him, looking for hints of enlightenment in their eyes. But they all seemed as ignorant as Brother Stephen. He could approach them, speak with them, ask them what they knew

about wizards. But everybody appeared to be in a hurry. Such a search could take hours and still not produce results. He decided, therefore, to cast a spell. He stood in a relatively uncrowded area and closed his eyes, letting his thoughts return to his own age. He saw a dungeon from which he had once escaped, the castle of a baron he had once served, the face of a peasant he had once healed, and he began to chant the words. Suddenly, however, he felt someone's grip on his arm and he opened his eyes with a start.

"Move it! Move it!" a man in a blue uniform said, pushing him away. "Go say your prayers somewhere else!"

Carnelian glared at the policeman, tempted to turn him into a rat. But he knew the man acted not with malice but out of ignorance and he forgave him. He walked to another part of the terminal and tried again. This time he was not interrupted. The images returned and he carefully chanted the words. Finished, he waited a moment before opening his eyes. Spells to summon information were unreliable, for even when they worked they sometimes contained distortions.

He slowly turned around, looking for the sign. He did not know where the response to his request would appear. The answer could be anywhere within his field of vision. He looked carefully without success, and was just about to try casting the spell again when he noticed an address in small print superimposed on the departure screen, between "Flt 903 Philadelphia 8:15" and "Flt 744 Los Angeles 8:35." He barely had time to memorize it before it faded into "Flt 911 Montreal 8:20." The wizard smiled with satisfaction and hurried toward the exit.

He found the scene outside just as crowded and noisy. Yellow machines lined the street, along with larger machines similar to the one Carnelian had rode but lacking an upper deck. He noticed that the drivers of the yellow machines waited for travelers leaving the airport. Then they put their baggage in a compartment and drove the travelers away.

Carnelian wondered at the arrangement and decided to experiment. He went to a waiting machine whose door was open and climbed in. To his surprise the driver, a bald, portly man, did not even look at him, but switched on a clicking apparatus and sped away.

“Where to?” he asked after a moment.

Carnelian was staring at the maze of signs and roads. “Take me to 1670 Bellcrest Court, Long Island.” He glanced at the changing numbers on the clicking apparatus and realized it was a meter to determine his fare.

They were traveling quite fast and, unlike the plane ride, Carnelian could feel their every motion. He lunged forward when they stopped, and from side to side when they turned a corner. He felt quite dizzy by the time the driver finally turned to him. “Here you are,” he said.

They were in a pleasant residential street. Children were playing in front of the houses, and Carnelian saw a dog in the distance. “You will be paid,” he promised, and then mumbled some words the driver could not hear and vanished.

The driver stared at the suddenly vacant seat. Yelling for his fare, he ran outside. But Carnelian was nowhere to be seen, and the stares of the neighborhood children persuaded him to curb his wrath. Cursing, he returned to his taxi and sped away. But he would soon forget his lost fare, and would not associate his mysterious passenger with the sudden reappearance of hair on his scalp a week later.

Carnelian looked at the home marked 1670. It was a spacious single-story white brick house set behind a small neatly-trimmed lawn. He did not know who might live here and how he would be greeted, for while the spell was meant to lead him to a person knowledgeable about wizards, Carnelian did not assume that person’s attitude toward wizards would necessarily be a favorable one. For a moment he wondered if he were about to encounter an expert in black magic, someone who would try to thwart his plans. But



then he decided there was no justification for his fear and started up the path.

The door was leaning open. Carnelian entered slowly, as if it might be a trap. He found himself in a small hallway, and could hear children's voices not far away. They came from behind another door that was also ajar. Peering in, he saw four boys huddled over maps and booklets at the kitchen table, apparently playing a game. They spoke animatedly, occasionally cheering or moaning as they moved three tiny metal figures around a paper map. Carnelian did not understand their dialog, though he found it fascinating.

"There's a werewolf in the corridor," the oldest boy announced, glancing at his notes.

"I'll attack it with my silver scimitar," the child next to him said. "Who goes first?"

"You do," the older boy replied.

The attacker rolled a twenty-sided and then a normal die. "Four hits. How many does it take?"

"Six."

The older boy then rolled for the werewolf. "Two hits against your dwarf."

"I want my magic user to cast a sleep spell," the youngest child said.

"Sleep spell won't work against lycanthropes."

"Oh."

"Just wait," the boy playing the dwarf said. "It's almost killed." He rolled again and scored three more hit points. "Got it!"

The older boy started cleaning up. "We gotta go," he said, speaking for the fourth player, who was apparently his brother.

"Me too," the boy playing the dwarf said.

Carnelian decided to wait rather than announce his presence to the entire group. He retreated into the corner and did not step out until they had left.

The boy that remained was the one who had played the magic user. He appeared to be about ten years old and had

sandy brown hair. His face was round, graced with light freckles and a small nose. When he saw Carnelian he jumped back, trembling. The wizard stood in the darkened hallway, his features lit by the evening light which passed through the screen door.

Carnelian stepped forward into the light, and as he did so the boy clutched the door handle. "I did not mean to frighten you," he said in a friendly voice. "My name is Carnelian, and I am a wizard. I thought you might know me. Sorry."

The boy quickly opened the door, but it was Carnelian who fled.

The child felt more curious now than frightened. As Carnelian walked across the lawn, no longer in shadows, he seemed quite harmless, and strode with the air of one who has traveled far. The child recalled his introduction, and wondered if it could be true.

"Wait!" he shouted as Carnelian reached the sidewalk.

The wizard turned around. The child now saw kindness in his face, and wisdom.

"Did my parents send you?" he asked, thinking they might have hired the man to baby-sit or entertain him.

"No."

"You're a real wizard?"

"I am."

"Where are you going?"

Carnelian turned to him but did not approach. "I don't know. This morning I was liberated from a long confinement, and, being unfamiliar with your age, I have wound my way here. But you are a child and I should not presume upon your confidence. Indeed, I should counsel you to beware of strangers."

He turned to go, but the more he had talked the more the child's hopes rose that this was no prankster or madman. How often he had fantasized about just such a meeting. "Prove you're a real wizard." He thought for a moment and then removed a pair of twenty-sided dice from his pocket

and set them on the steps. "Stand where you are and make these dice roll."

Carnelian was impressed by his imperious manner. He smiled. "Why not a sleep spell against lycanthropes? *Fortensa al ulu immani donloc!*" he said, gazing at the dice, his hands outstretched.

The boy watched in awe as the dice rattled slightly and then rolled down the steps.

*"Col nod inammi ulu la asnetrofl!"*

Then, to his utter astonishment, they rolled back up, coming to rest precisely where they had started. "It doesn't always work this well," Carnelian admitted, stepping forward. He picked up the dice and examined them for a moment before handing them to the boy, who stared at them as if they were enchanted gems.

"What's your name?"

The child looked from the dice to Carnelian and just stared.

"I didn't cast a spell of silence on you."

"Brandon," he said in a whisper.

"Where are your parents, Brandon?"

"My father's at work," he said automatically, still thinking about the dice. "My mother went to the grocery."

"And they left you here alone?"

"They'll be home soon. You can meet them."

"Do they believe in wizards?"

"No one believes in wizards."

"Not even you, Brandon? Have you never heard of Carnelian? I do not think any purpose will be served by meeting you parents. It is you, apparently, whom I have journeyed here to meet. And though you are but a child, and have never heard of me, you still may be of some assistance."

He wandered through the living room. "You might tell me what you call those machines that travel the roads."

The child looked at him, surprised that a wizard could be ignorant in such elementary matters. "You mean cars?"

He looked at a large box which reflected his image in a dark glass. "And this?"

"That's the TV. Or television." How come you don't know all these things?"

"I have been imprisoned until this morning. I come from another age. What does it do?" he asked, pondering his reflection in the dark screen.

"It shows movies and stuff," the boy explained. He picked up a small instrument from a table and pressed a button. The screen grew bright and Carnelian could see a car chase.

"Yes," he said. "I saw one of these on the plane."

"Where did you come from?" Brandon asked. But when the wizard did not reply the boy resumed his demonstration, clicking through the channels.

The scenes changed rapidly before Carnelian's eyes—a couple kissing, a couple arguing, young people singing about a soft drink, a pretty woman declaiming the merits of a particular shampoo, a group of uniformed men throwing a small white ball on a diamond-shaped field.

"Your father must be very wealthy to own one of these devices."

"We have three," Brandon informed him. "Everyone has TVs."

Carnelian examined the back of the set.

"Be careful," Brandon warned him. "You could get shocked."

"Shocked?"

"It's plugged in."

"Plugged in?"

"You know, plugged in." He went over and showed Carnelian the cord.

"Where does it go?"

"It plugs into the wall," Brandon said.

"For what purpose?"

"Because it has to be plugged in to work."

Carnelian yanked the cord out and examined both the plug and the socket. "I don't see anything."

"That's because it's electricity."

"And what is electricity?"

"That's what makes things like TVs work."

"But I can't see it. Is it hidden in the wall?"

"No. Well, maybe in a way. It's complicated. I can't explain. You'll have to ask my dad."

Carnelian proceeded to Brandon's bedroom. Brandon followed closely behind and turned on the light.

Carnelian spun around. "Where did that light come from?" "I turned it on."

"How?"

Brandon pointed to the switch on the wall. The wizard pushed it down, watching the ceiling. Then he switched it on and off several times in rapid succession. "I have wondered about these lights," he said. "For I have seen lights everywhere, lights like this, and also colored lights and lights that spell words. I suppose all function according to a common principle?"

"They use electricity," the boy replied.

Carnelian looked at the fixture in the middle of the ceiling. "And what sort of flame burns there?"

"It's not a flame, it's a light bulb. Here, I'll show you."

He ran from the room and returned a few seconds later with a new bulb. "You just screw this in and turn it on and it lights up."

Carnelian took the bulb and examined it. In his haste to comprehend it, however, he squeezed the glass too hard and it shattered in his hand. He stared in surprise as blood spurted from his palm.

"I'll get a towel!" Brandon exclaimed. He rushed from the room, feeling responsible, hoping the wizard was not seriously injured. But when he returned with a towel Carnelian was no longer bleeding, and there was no evidence of a cut on his hand. Yet Brandon was certain he had bled, for there were drops of blood on the carpet.

“God!”

“I apologize for breaking your light bulb,” the wizard said. “Do not worry about the bloodstain. It will vanish in a few moments.” He bent to pick up the shattered glass.

“Do you have a spell to put it back together?”

Carnelian smiled. The room was clean and well organized. The dresser drawers were all shut, the bed made, the books on the desk stacked neatly. Upon the walls hung drawings and posters. The bookshelf and the boxes beside the window were filled with toys.

The wizard felt the bed. “You live in an age of luxury.”

“When did you live, Sir?” the child wondered, not knowing how to address the wizard, regarding him with new respect after seeing his wound heal.

“Hundreds of years ago.”

“Where did you come from?”

“England.”

“And you’ve been held prisoner all this time? Where? In a dungeon?”

“In a coffin.”

“A coffin!” Brandon exclaimed. “Underground? Who put you there?”

But Carnelian was more interested in asking questions than in answering them. He walked around the room, looking at the pictures on the walls, most of which were drawings of monsters Brandon had made. “You have an active imagination,” he said, taking down a drawing of a red wizard fighting a dragon. “What is this?”

“Don’t be mad!” Brandon said in an embarrassed voice. “I never saw a real wizard before!”

Carnelian smiled and set the picture on the bed. “Perhaps you will draw me after I leave.”

Brandon panicked at the thought of the wizard leaving. He was a child who had never felt comfortable with the normal world, whose spirit was nourished by fanciful journeys through mysterious lands and the pursuit of imaginary treasures. But for all his daydreaming, he had

known from the age of three that there was no Santa Claus, and he did not believe in the creatures of myth and legend. And now that his wildest hopes had been confirmed, he was faced with the disheartening prospect of watching a real wizard walk out of his life.

“You can’t leave!” he exclaimed, forgetting his previous respectful tone.

“Certainly I can,” Carnelian replied. “And I shall.”

“But you have to meet my parents and my friends. They’ll never believe me otherwise.”

“Is that important?”

Brandon thought for a moment. “Not if you take me with you.”

“I can’t take you with me.”

“But I can explain things to you and tell you their names.”

“I’m sorry, my child. But I have work to do.”

“Are you going on a quest? You have to take me!”

“If you truly wish to help me, tell me where I might find old manuscripts. Is there a monastery nearby, perhaps?”

“A monastery? I don’t know. There’s the main library in the city.”

“Do you know the address?”

“Just a minute,” he said, running from the room. He found the address in the telephone book and hurried back to the wizard with a piece of note paper. “The library is the address on top,” he explained. “The other address is mine. Will you come back?”

Carnelian smiled at the boy’s cleverness. “And can you tell me how to reach this library?”

“You have to go to Manhattan, if you know where that is. You take the train. And after that you might have to take a subway. I’m not sure, but you can find out at the station.”

“What is a subway?”

“It’s a train, but it runs underground.”

“And what is a train?”

Brandon found this harder to describe. "It's long and it runs on tracks and has an engine." He paused, and then left the room. "Follow me."

He led Carnelian to the basement. "This is a toy train," he said, pointing to the model railroad on the table. "Of course, the real ones are much bigger."

Carnelian noticed the plug. "Electricity operates this too?"

"Yes. I'll show you. He plugged in the transformer and the train proceeded slowly around the circuit. "You can speed it up," he said. "And this button makes it go in reverse."

The wizard watched with delight. "May I try?"

Brandon, grateful for every moment Carnelian remained, eagerly stepped aside.

The wizard played with the railroad for a minute, experimenting with the controls. "Unfortunately my attention is drawn by more pressing matters."

He strode up the stairs, Brandon rushing after him.

"Goodbye," the wizard said at the front door.

Brandon felt breathless and on the verge of tears. "Wait!" he yelled. "I didn't tell you how to get to the station."

Carnelian waited.

"You go down the street and turn left. Then you turn right at the next street and that's where the station is."

"I appreciate your assistance." He turned to leave.

Brandon had never felt such desperation. "Wait!" He paused to catch his breath. "You said you had no money, and the train costs money. I know you could probably get on by casting a spell, but you should take some money too, just in case."

He dashed back to his room, fearing Carnelian might leave in his absence, and returned with several bills and some coins. "Here's thirty dollars and sixty cents," he stated, handing him the money. "I was saving for a Dungeon Lord action set."

"And you're giving it to me? Thank you."



“Please come back!”

Again, Carnelian turned to go.

“Wait!” Brandon felt embarrassed for yelling at the wizard, but he could not bear to let him leave just yet. “Can I touch you?”

Carnelian smiled affably while the boy gently pressed his fingertips to his robe. It felt silkier than his mother’s nightgowns, yet more durable than his own jeans, and he imagined with reverence the magic that had created it.

“Thank you, Sir,” he said with grave admiration. But he could not let the wizard leave without requesting one last favor. “Could you show me another spell before you go?”

The wizard stepped back, but then paused uncertainly. Suddenly, he knelt down. “Look into my eyes!” he told him.

The child gazed forward with anticipation. The wizard’s eyes were gray and bright, but otherwise seemed normal. Brandon was just about to ask what he was supposed to look for when the pupils and irises began to fade. He peered closer and saw a castle shrouded in mist. Then he saw an army marching to battle. Knights on horseback with gleaming armor, wielding lances or swords. Peasants on foot, most without protection, carrying cruder weapons. Then he saw a black bird flying over the battlefield, the bodies of dead soldiers scattered below.

“God!”

The scene vanished. The wizard’s bright eyes returned. Brandon stepped back. “Is that real?”

Carnelian rose. “Once.”

He turned and strode away. Brandon gazed after him, his own eyes filled with distant adventures.

Carnelian found the train station without difficulty and was told to board the next train to Penn Station. No sooner had he approached the rails to look at them more closely than he heard a roar and the train rushed in, cutting through the tranquil evening like an enormous blunt sword. He jumped back, the model railroad having failed to prepare him

for the real thing. The train seemed as if it would rush past them, but at the last moment it screeched to a halt and the doors opened automatically.

There were few passengers in the car Carnelian boarded. He sat by the window, marveling at the variety of transportation available to the people of this age. The sun had nearly set as the train accelerated. After a man came for his ticket Carnelian sat back and was lulled by the rocking of the car and the monotony of the endless houses that rolled past. His thoughts turned leisurely to his own time, which no spell could return him to. The wonders of the present age had so fascinated him he had forgotten the joys of his own. But now he grew sentimental and reminisced. He remembered those whom he had willingly served. Now they were all dead and he could serve them no longer, could not share in their laughter, nor heal their pain. He remembered the feasts given to celebrate victories or bountiful harvests, the banquet thrown in his honor by the Earl of Sussex in gratitude for repelling a band of marauders, a particular tavern where one could drink the best ale in England. He remembered riding swift horses over the foggy moors, long walks through woods at dawn, sitting by the fire while storms raged outside. It was a simpler time. People traveled less, and feared more. Rumor always outran fact, and superstitions spread like plagues. Horizons were not yet obscured by cities, and enchantment by technology. It was a time when men of learning searched for the philosopher's stone. Science was young and still innocent.

As the railroad car rocked and the monotony of houses blurred by, Carnelian felt how deeply he missed the past. A child of this age might see the lost centuries in his eyes, but, for all his magic, it would forever be behind his vision, and never again before it. As the train descended into the tunnel that led to Manhattan and the windows turned black, he wondered what sort of fate he had awakened to. And he tried to imagine what it must be like to die.

When he emerged from Penn Station his mood changed again. Night had fallen, yet he had never seen a night less dark. It was as if he stood in a forest of buildings, as overwhelmed as an ant might feel surrounded by redwoods. They seemed to reach the stars, and outshone them, many of their windows lit against the darkness. Hundreds of cars raced through the wide street, casting long beacons of light. As many people walked the streets as he had seen in London that morning. In his age the nights were black and unsafe. Villagers did not venture outside without good reason or strong company. But here women walked unescorted, and people did not cower against the darkness, but celebrated the night as if it were a festival. Carnelian found himself comforted by the activity around him. It lightened the oppressive weight of the buildings.

A man at the station had told him how to reach the library. Carnelian kept gazing up as he walked, finding the architecture magnificent and ominous. He wondered when these buildings had been built and if they ever toppled. One structure in particular impressed him, dwarfing those beside it, casting a soft blend of red, white, and blue light at its summit.

He found the library at Fifth Avenue and Forty-First Street, a large building, though not tall compared with the others, guarded by a pair of stone lions at the entrance. The doors were locked, however, and a sign stated they would not reopen until morning.

He turned back, undecided. The city lay before him, but he did not know where to go. He had hoped to gain enough information tonight to determine his course of action. But now that he had found the library closed he realized he would have to wait until daybreak.

A few more hours was not a long delay after having been detained seven hundred years. But Carnelian felt a strong sense of urgency, as if every minute mattered. He could not suppress his curiosity and would not be able to sleep tonight without knowing in which direction his mission lay, and what events had occurred since his entombment.

He started slowly down Forty-Second Street. The people who passed him avoided his gaze. Carnelian reasoned that an evil force could not ravage the earth without gaining notoriety, and that among the thousands of people who walked these streets there must be some who knew, some who would not stare at him blankly but respond with impassioned bitterness at the mention of the name. He must find these people.

His resolve renewed, he stepped into the path of an approaching man. "Excuse me," he said in a polite but urgent voice. "I am Carnelian the Wizard and I seek news of Bloodstone!"

The man stepped around him without acknowledging the question. Carnelian disregarded his rudeness and hurried to the next person. "Excuse me, but..." The words went unfinished, for the man did not stop to listen. Several others also walked by as Carnelian approached, not even pausing when he spoke. He grabbed a young bearded man by the arm. "Tell me if you've ever heard of the dark wizard Bloodstone!" The young man looked at him with contempt and broke away. He rushed to an older couple. "Listen to me!" But they glanced at each other instead and quickly passed on.

He stepped into the street, waving his arms frantically, but the cars honked and swerved around him. Remembering his accident in London, he wisely returned to the sidewalk. He glanced at each man and woman that passed as if they were withholding information. Twice more he approached strangers, and twice more was ignored. Reaching Broadway, he threw his arms in the air and glared at the people on the street. "I am Carnelian the Wizard!" he roared. "Come to rid

the world of Bloodstone! Is there not one of you who knows where I might find him?"

No one spoke or approached. Indeed, people seemed to make an effort to avoid him. He looked around in dismay, perplexed by their indifference to his inquiry. He reasoned that Bloodstone might be known by another name, or that people feared to speak of him. It even seemed possible that the citizens of New York had never felt the Dark Wizard's wrath. But none of these possibilities explained their reticence and rudeness. Carnelian was not used to such disrespect.

He crossed the street, walking aimlessly. Shops with flashing signs advertised adult books and movies. He was just beginning to consider the feasibility of casting another information spell when he reached the entrance of one such store and, submitting to curiosity, decided to enter.

Rows of booths lined both walls, with doors for privacy. Carnelian followed a stream of men downstairs. He found booths here too, but there were also young women, scantily dressed, leaning against the doors.

One of them noticed Carnelian and smiled. Carnelian approached her, glad to find someone who seemed friendly.

"Perhaps you can help me," he said.

"I don't doubt it. Tokens over there," she said, pointing to a counter.

Carnelian received a metal coin in exchange for a dollar bill. The girl then instructed him to enter a booth. When she did not follow, he looked around and noticed a device with a slot the size of the token. Surmising that this was some sort of modern oracle, he pressed the coin in.

It disappeared, and a moment later a barrier rose, connecting his booth with another. The girl sat on a stool, her naked legs dangling. She was short, but shapely, with dark hair and long red fingernails. She wore bright eye shadow and lipstick and was dressed in red high heels and a tight-fitting glittering yellow outfit.

Carnelian leaned forward and bumped his head against a panel of glass.

“Ain’t you never done this before, honey?” she wondered.

Carnelian pushed his own stool away, preferring to stand, and leaned forward. “I am Carnelian the Wizard,” he announced.

“Yeah baby.”

“You have heard of me?”

“Sure, honey. Hasn’t everybody?”

“No,” he said seriously. “So much has changed. I have been away so long. I seek Bloodstone,” he said in a grave voice. “Surely if you know of me, you know of Bloodstone.”

“Oh, sure. It’s a big rock that drips real blood, right?”

“Bloodstone,” he repeated. “The Wizard of Darkness. The Wizard of Pain. I know not what untold damage he has wreaked in my absence.”

“Well let me tell you he’s wreaked a lot, honey.”

Carnelian’s eyes sank. “Then my fears are confirmed!”

“Why, just last winter he was responsible for the blizzard. I’m sure it was him did it.”

“A blizzard?”

“And he was behind the garbage strike.”

“Garbage strike?”

“Personally, I think it was him killed Kennedy.”

Carnelian frowned. “I am saddened,” he said. “But not surprised. Yet perhaps his evil reign might be ended. If I can find him.”

She looked at him with mock concern. “Oh, you don’t want to go after this guy.”

“I must. But I am at a loss to know where to begin my journey, and cannot always trust my information spells. Since you are an oracle, perhaps you might know where he resides?”

The girl thought for a moment. “Where do all evil things come from?” she asked rhetorically. “He’s in the cemetery.”

Carnelian pressed his hands against the glass. “Which one?” he implored her.

“In the Bronx, honey. First tombstone on the left.”

The barrier descended and Carnelian was again alone. Feeling fortunate, and filled with a new strength, he strode from the shop like a king marching to battle.

Outside, the night was bright and promising. Carnelian was about to ask someone how to reach the Bronx when he remembered the discourtesy he had met with earlier, and he decided people might be more accommodating on another street.

Walking invigorated him. Though he was anxious to confront his nemesis, he needed to give the matter thought and prepare his strategy. He carried what remained of the money Brandon had given him loosely in his hand, not thinking it might attract attention.

His mind was wandering through distant memories, reflecting on past encounters, when he felt someone grab at his hand and run away. Startled back into the present, he looked up to see a dark figure running through the crowd.

Carnelian pursued, thinking that he might need the money, and never one to let a scoundrel rob him with impunity. The thief turned in to an empty alley.

Carnelian halted at the entrance and yelled a few words in a punctilious voice. A moment later the money fell to the ground. At the other end of the alley, splayed hopelessly on the concrete, lay a sloth.

“Run from me now!” Carnelian said with a feeling of satisfaction as he advanced upon the creature. Standing over it he spoke again, and the animal resumed its former appearance—a child with cunning, suspicious eyes. He seemed dazed for a moment. But when he saw Carnelian standing above him he darted the other way.

The wizard acted immediately, repeating the spell. The boy was again transformed into a sloth. But the child did not understand what had happened. He believed he had

somehow fallen, for his eyes were only inches above the pavement. His body felt different, hairy and sluggish. He could not speak, and could only move imperceptibly.

Carnelian waited a minute before reversing the spell for the second time. He then pointed dissuasively. "Ah!"

The child knelt, ready to flee.

"Next time I might not change you back!" he warned.

The boy glared in defiance, showing he was not afraid. "What do you do to me, man?" he demanded.

In his own age, Carnelian had occasionally seen Moors and black Africans in his travels, but was nevertheless intrigued by the boy's appearance. He noted the tightly curled hair, cut close to the scalp, the wide lips, the flat nose, the contrast between the whites of his eyes and his dark brown skin. But what interested him more than the boy's color was his age, for he found such youth in a thief distressing.

"How old are you, child?" he asked.

The boy folded his arms and cocked back his head. "None a your goddamn business!"

The wizard frowned. "I would let you have the money, but I might need it myself. And you must learn not to steal."

He waited while the boy gathered up the scattered bills and coins. But he also observed the treachery in his eyes, and when the thief tried to escape for the third time Carnelian was ready, transforming him now into a barracuda.

The fish thrashed violently, bouncing against the ground. Carnelian reversed the spell at once, not wanting to harm the boy.

Human again, the child bent over, gasping for air. He did not know why he was out of breath, for he had not even fled from the alley. But it seemed a moment ago he had been suffocating. And now his body ached as well.

"I will ask you again," Carnelian said patiently. "What is your age?"

The boy glared at Carnelian with an expression of defeat. "Twelve," he said quietly.



“Now pick up the money and hand it to me.”

The boy watched him for a moment, but decided to comply.

“Thank you.” He put the money in a hidden pocket inside his robe. “What is your name?”

“What’s yours?”

“Carnelian the Wizard.”

The boy grinned incredulously. “You retarded, or what? And why you dressed like that? They lettin’ everyone on the streets these days.”

Carnelian ignored his remarks. “I asked you your name.”

“Lewis Cooper,” he answered proudly. “What you gonna do?”

Carnelian noticed that his face was soft, despite his hard manner. “Where do you live, Lewis?”

“You gonna bust me or what?”

“I’m going to take you home.”

The child eyed him with suspicion. “What you want to do that for?”

“Children should not walk alone at night,” Carnelian replied. “Even when the streets are lit and crowded with people.”

But the boy suspected darker motives, and the thought of being victimized made him angrier. He would rather go to court than find himself on the wrong end of a crime. But he followed Carnelian back to the street to avoid being attacked in the alley.

“My dad’ll be home,” he said, hoping to discourage whatever perverse designs Carnelian might be entertaining. “He’s a cop.”

“What is a cop?”

The boy stared, convinced he was crazy. But now that they were on the street again he felt a greater opportunity to escape.

He ran to a muscular black man who was standing by the curb. “Help me!” he shouted, grabbing his shirt. “This man’s been following me!”

The black man stepped between Carnelian and the boy, his stance menacing.

"I merely wished to see that he reached home safely," Carnelian explained. "But I will dismiss myself from the matter if you will function in my stead."

"He'll get home," the black man said. "And you'll walk away."

Carnelian nodded and stepped back. But he saw the scheming in the boy's eyes and kept him in view. As anxious as he was to pursue Bloodstone, he felt a responsibility to escort the child home, for he knew if he did not the boy might come to harm, or harm others.

Hardly a minute after their separation the child was stalking a well-dressed young man. Carnelian came up behind the boy and grabbed his shoulder.

The boy turned with a start. He thought he was rid of Carnelian and so had not acted with caution. The man who had helped him was not within sight.

"Please cooperate this time," the wizard said, dragging him along. "I wouldn't want to have to change you into a beast among all these people. Somebody might eat you!"

The boy scowled at him. "I gave you back your money!"

"I insist on escorting you home," Carnelian said.

"You don't wanna go to my neighborhood!" the boy warned. But Carnelian did not ease his grip, and the boy still felt sore from the effects of being a barracuda out of water. "We gotta take the subway," he said. "And you gotta pay, 'cause I don't got no money."

They descended into the next subway entrance and Carnelian bought two tokens, handling the money with one hand while clutching the child with the other. The wizard found the station fascinating, although, after being buried for seven hundred years, he was not completely comfortable underground. He walked to the edge of the platform and peered at the tracks, following them with his eyes into the darkness at both ends. "I have never seen a tunnel of such size!" he mumbled.

The boy gave him a strange look and tried to pull away, but Carnelian held him firmly. A moment later a train rushed in, many doors slid open, and people scrambled on and off. Carnelian followed the child through the nearest entrance and they sat on a hard bench near the door. Carnelian glanced at the pictures and signs above, most of which he did not understand. He looked out at the platform as the train started. A few seconds later they entered the dark tunnel and Carnelian studied their reflections in the dark window as the subway rattled and shook, noting that in the same day he had ridden in machines that traveled above the clouds and below the earth.

While he considered the wonders of modern transportation, the boy managed to inch away. Their reflections vanished as the next station appeared, and the train jerked to a stop, upsetting Carnelian's balance. The doors opened and the boy jumped up, but Carnelian recovered quickly and grabbed his arm.

The child sighed and slumped back onto the bench. "This ain't my stop," he said, looking away. Only three other passengers shared their car, and the boy decided it was useless to plea for help. He rapped the seat nervously with his fingers.

They did not speak or look at each other the rest of the way, each lost in his own thoughts. When they reached the 145<sup>th</sup> Street station, the boy silently rose, and together they left the train.

The buildings in this part of the city were not overwhelming and majestic, but bleak and neglected, crumbling and crowded. The streets were dark, and the people who walked or loitered outside were all black.

The boy quickly glanced around, contemplating escape. But the wizard perceived his intentions and dissuaded him with a sharp glare.

"You ain't safe here," the boy said brazenly, leading the way.

Carnelian ignored the stares that greeted them from teenagers on porch steps and outside doorways. “Will you protect me then?” he said in an amused tone, never having met such an arrogant child.

The boy glowered at him, but in truth felt helpless.

He turned a corner and entered a six-floor tenement. It was dim inside, and the air was stale. He walked up a creaking wooden stairway and opened a door with a key. Carnelian was surprised to see such a place. Everything he had encountered in this new age seemed dynamic and monumental, proof that man had surpassed the dreams of his ancestors, and progressed to remarkable lengths. But this neighborhood and this building were not part of the dream, and reminded Carnelian of a peasant village, barren and dry, that bordered a castle where lords feasted. The building itself seemed older than the slabs at Stonehenge, and in greater need of repair. The railing on the stairway was loose, and boards were missing from the hallway. Cracks in the ceiling spread like cobwebs. The walls were unadorned and peeling. The hallway stank of urine.

He followed the child into the apartment and closed the door. A moment later the light came on. The boy stood across the room, a knife in his hand.

“Don’t touch me!” he warned.

Carnelian smiled. “I’m not going to harm you.”

“You leave right now!” he ordered.

Carnelian stepped forward and the boy stiffened his arm, thrusting the knife toward the wizard’s face.

“Where is your father?” Carnelian asked.

“Ain’t none a your business!”

Carnelian spoke solemnly and the boy changed into a bird. He fluttered wildly, finally managing to perch on the arm of a chair. The wizard picked up the knife, which had fallen from the boy’s hand, and set it on the coffee table.

“What’s going on?” the bird asked, trying not to panic.

“If you will not speak as a human,” Carnelian replied, “then you will speak as a parrot.”

The child did not understand what the wizard was talking about. He felt different, as he had in the alley. But lighter. He could speak, but his voice was strange, affected and shrill.

Carnelian changed him back and let him regain his orientation before repeating the question. "Where is your father?"

The child looked away, wondering what the stranger in the white robe was doing to him. "Ain't got no father."

"But you said..."

"I lied," the child admitted.

Carnelian studied him. "What about your mother?"

"She ain't here."

"Where is she?"

"At work."

The wizard wished he would speak more freely. "Where does she work?"

"In a bar." He glanced at the switchblade, out of reach, and felt naked and vulnerable. "Man, why you askin' all these questions?"

Carnelian looked around. The room was gloomy and small, the upholstery on the furniture faded and torn. Off to the left was a tiny kitchen. Carnelian could see a pile of dirty dishes, and a large container overflowing with garbage.

To the right was a hallway. Carnelian followed it to the first bedroom. A small television was switched on, the volume turned down. The closet was open, and crumpled clothes lay piled in the corner. The night stand beside the bed was covered with makeup and cheap jewelry. An empty bottle lay on the floor.

Carnelian went into the other bedroom. The boy's bed was not as large as his mother's but it was also unmade, and the room was equally disordered. The dresser drawers were open, and clothes lay scattered everywhere. On the walls were pictures of uniformed men wearing strange helmets, carrying or throwing a brown oblong ball. There were no toys.

“What you want?” the boy wondered. “Don’t go lookin’ in my stuff.”

Carnelian paused for a minute, recalling Brandon’s room. When he turned around the boy was no longer there. He found him in the kitchen, grabbing a butcher knife from a drawer.

“I would stay with you until your mother returned,” the wizard said. “But a matter of the greatest importance demands my immediate action.”

The child waited.

“You must promise to stay inside until she comes.”

The boy fingered the edge of the blade. “Yeah, I promise.”

Carnelian reached into his robe. “I shall require money for the subway,” he said. “But I believe I can part with this.”

He set a ten dollar bill on the coffee table and left. The boy dropped the knife and put the money in his pocket, feeling relieved and somewhat triumphant. A minute later he peered out the door and, finding the stairway clear, hurried back outside.

Carnelian returned to the subway station, considering the incident with the boy satisfactorily resolved, and asked the man in the booth for directions to the Bronx. As he boarded the train, his thoughts returned to Bloodstone. He stared at his grim reflection in the dark glass, summoning courage. His thoughts were interrupted, however, by a blind man who staggered into the car from the one ahead, tapping a red-pointed stick with one hand and jingling a tin cup with the other.

Most of the passengers glanced away. But one woman with harsh features, wearing a black outfit, leaned forward as he passed and dropped a coin into his cup.

He turned toward the sound. “Thank you.”

Carnelian felt a profound sadness, and for a moment forgot Bloodstone. He rose majestically before the man and put his hand over his useless eyes.

“Do not be afraid!”

The blind man was either soothed by the wizard’s words or too terrified to move, for he stood still and did not speak.

Carnelian closed his own eyes and saw a burst of white light, followed by streams of vivid color, which coalesced first into abstract patterns and then into objects and faces. “*Abm gallis ernatis forsenqui bopallus yan!*”

He opened his eyes and dropped his hand. The blind man stumbled forward, feeling dizzy. But after a moment he caught himself and looked up, his expression one of ineffable awe.

“No!” he finally managed to say in a whisper. “It can’t be! No!”

He looked around, trembling, staring with reverence and inexpressible gratitude at the white-robed figure who had touched him. But he did not look at Carnelian for long. His ecstasy made him greedy for visual experiences. He dropped his cup and cane and ran the length of the car, looking at every face, at every window, at every empty seat. “I can see!” he shouted. “I can see!” The train pulled into a station and the doors opened. The man who had but a moment ago been blind could not contain his thirst for color to the small subway car, and ran out into the world of vision that beckoned.

Carnelian expected the passengers to share in the man’s joy and celebrate his new eyesight, but instead they ignored the outburst. The woman in black stepped over to the discarded tin cup and reclaimed her coin.

Rows of gray tenement houses rose before Carnelian in the Bronx, their windows unadorned and dark. It was well after midnight, and traffic was quieter than in Manhattan. Few people walked the streets.

Carnelian approached a young couple holding hands, hoping he would receive a kinder greeting than on Forty-Second Street. “I beg your pardon. But could you please tell me how to reach the cemetery?”

The man gave him a strange look, but the woman smiled. “At this time of night?” she wondered. When Carnelian did not reply she pointed down the street. “There’s one about a mile from here. Take a left at the corner.”

Carnelian thanked her and hurried away. But as he walked to the cemetery his pace slowed and his concentration turned inward, for only Bloodstone concerned him now. And the thought of the Evil Wizard drove his memories back. Darkness filled his mind. Anger and despair. He yearned to meet again the object of his wrath, the bearer of so much pain. And this time to leave triumphant.

And yet his pace had slackened, for despite his eagerness and anticipation he was afraid, and could not rid himself of a growing uncertainty. He was troubled by the thought that he might not be ready. He had only awoken this morning and had not fully tested his powers. Perhaps there was more he needed to learn about this new age before seeking a confrontation. And what if he should lose? What if in his haste for victory he fell again and was fated to wait another seven hundred years?

But in following a lonely path that stretched back more than seven centuries, only one argument mattered. If he postponed another day the confrontation that might rid the world of Bloodstone, then the Dark Wizard would have that one last day to inflict pain on the innocent.

The light shone green above him. He paused tremulously, and then turned left and walked steadily, feeling a heaviness in his legs, forcing himself on. Soon the street grew darker and tombstones gleamed in the pale moonlight. The spiked fence spread out ominously before him. Apprehensively, he reached a hand out toward the gate, and found it open.



The darkness reminded him of his own age, for the street lights were no longer visible, and he was forced to rely on the moon and a few scattered dim stars for illumination. The gate creaked as he closed it behind him. He pushed it slowly, wishing to make as little noise as possible. A main road stretched ahead. Carnelian chose to walk on the grass.

Tombstones, all with strange names and modern dates, surrounded him. He glanced from one to another, looking for clues. The size of the cemetery surprised him, for in his own age most graveyards had been small plots of land beside churches, and few people could afford stone markers. Bloodstone might be anywhere. Indeed, Bloodstone may have already sensed his presence and was lying in wait. For a moment Carnelian's doubt returned and he glanced back toward the gate. But he steadied himself and, after a moment, walked on.

He had not gone much farther when he noticed something flickering in the distance. He approached warily and saw that a single candle shone on the ground beside one of the smaller tombstones. Curled around the candle, as if seeking protection from the long night, was the figure of a girl.

Carnelian watched her from where he stood. She lay on the ground, unmoving, her face turned away, her long blond-streaked hair shimmering in the candlelight. She wore a loose-fitting scarlet blouse and faded blue pants. Her shoes had been removed beside her purse and she lay barefoot.

Carnelian waited anxiously, ready to act at any instant, but the girl did not move. He expected to sense Bloodstone here, but felt only the hopeless despair of the figure on the grass. At first, he had thought it was a trap. But Bloodstone's presence would send waves of terror through him, whatever

his disguise. And Carnelian felt only pity staring at the innocuous figure on the ground, only pity.

He knelt down beside her and raised her head into his arms. Her eyes were closed, her body limp, her skin pale. He felt her heartbeat and found it faint. Not far away in the grass, he saw an empty bottle and a small translucent container, also empty.

He lay the girl on her back and gently spread his hands on her stomach. "*Elleth vanitae dhan,*" he whispered solemnly. "*Conberi aspih je!*"

He sensed a cloud lifting, but her eyes did not open. He repeated the spell, closing his own eyes, focusing on his own reawakening. He heard her heartbeat in his mind, faint at first, but growing stronger. He opened his eyes and lifted her head, brushing back her hair. Soon the color began to return to her face. He touched a finger to each eye, repeating the spell a third time, and she awoke.

She looked at him as if in a dream, then closed her eyes, tired. But when she opened them again the spell had worked its magic and she felt fully alive.

Carnelian looked at her grimly. "Bloodstone held you on the very edge of darkness," he told her. "Fortunately I have come in time."

The girl stared back.

"I am Carnelian the Wizard."

She sat up quickly, her body completely healthy but her thoughts confused. She saw that she sat in the cemetery and her memory quickly returned. She jumped to her feet and glanced around, listening to the silence. Then she looked at the tall white-robed figure who stood beside her, his kind features shining ethereally in the candlelight. "I'm dead," she said, resignedly. "And you're some sort of angel."

"I am only a wizard," he replied with a smile. "And you are quite alive."

She noticed the empty bottle and container. "But that can't be." She examined the container and found that it was indeed empty. She looked back at the wizard, radiant against

the surrounding darkness. "I have died. And you have come to take me to another world."

"I did not come for you," Carnelian answered. "I did not know you were here."

The girl looked at the tombstones, thinking she understood. "You came for someone else?"

"Yes."

She turned her eyes away from the graves, as if she might see spirits rising from the earth.

"I came for Bloodstone."

"What are you going to do?"

"Destroy him, if I can!"

The girl leapt back in terror, and would have run if Carnelian had not frightened her into immobility with a pointed finger.

"Do not be afraid!" he told her in a quiet voice, wary of drawing his enemy's attention. "He shall harm you no more!"

She stared at him, confused.

"As he has harmed so many."

The girl felt her body grow cold. "The Devil?"

"No, though many clerics have called him that, and though his roots might kindle the very fires of Hell. He is a wizard."

The girl did not understand. "What is all this about wizards?" Her voice became a whisper, and only with an effort of will could she bring herself to ask the next question. "Where am I going to be sent?"

"Don't you want to go home?"

"Home?"

"Yes. Your parents will be relieved to find that you are safe."

"Parents? But I thought they were alive?"

"You too are alive, my child. As I have said."

She looked around. "Maybe it's a dream." She bent down to the candle and put her hand above the flame, withdrawing it with a cry. She felt the cool grass beneath her bare feet,

and that too was familiar. She ran her hand along the curve of the tombstone. It was smooth and hard. She looked up at the night, and saw the same full moon, higher in the sky.

She glanced at the empty container. "But it can't be," she said quietly. "I took all those pills. I don't even feel tired. Or sick!"

"I healed you. I cast a spell. Three times. You were near death."

She did not believe him, and concluded the pills must have been fake. "Then I am alive," she said. "I'm not dreaming." She picked up the empty container and threw it down in anger. "Shit!"

When she glanced up the wizard was still standing there, watching her with a bemused expression. "Well, what are you looking at?" she shouted, thinking he must be one of the countless schizophrenics who inhabit the parks of New York.

"Please keep your voice down," Carnelian whispered. "Bloodstone will hear!"

"I don't think his ears are that good!" she retorted. "Everyone in this place is dead, except me, and that's only because I got fake pills!"

Carnelian was perplexed by her remarks and wondered if he had fully healed her. "I was told by the oracle that Bloodstone was here."

"The oracle?"

"Yes," he said. "On Forty-Second Street. She was in a shop called 'Adult Books' and spoke to me in a booth for the price of a dollar token."

The girl stared at him, wanting to laugh, and yet at the same time angry that her desire for death had led her right back into the madness of life. But she felt sympathy as well, for it seemed they had both been tricked. "Look," she said patiently, as if addressing a child. "That girl was just putting you on. She wasn't really an oracle."

Carnelian seemed shocked. "I was deceived?"

“You have to be aware of people like that,” she told him. “Or they’ll take you for everything you’ve got. If they haven’t already.” She shook her head. “I don’t know how you’ve made it this far!”

He considered her claim that there was no oracle. “But Bloodstone attacked you.”

“I took some pills.”

“I don’t understand.”

“I tried to kill myself.”

Carnelian looked at her carefully. Now that she was healthy again, he saw that her face was pretty, her skin smooth and young, her eyes bright green. Yet her mood seemed more somber than the cemetery, and her despondency deeper than the graves.

She looked at the ground, wishing she could forget. “I’m just tired of everything,” she mumbled. “Tired of the pain.”

“What of your family?”

“I ran away from home,” she admitted.

Carnelian looked at her closely. “How old are you?”

“Sixteen.”

“As I have been deceived and find myself here without purpose, I shall escort you home.”

She gave him a suspicious glance. “That’s all right. I can find my way.”

“The streets may not be safe for a young woman at night. I shall not harm you,” he then added, perceiving her concern. “Indeed, my presence may prevent much evil.” He saw that she still did not move. “Come,” he said firmly. “What sorrow can I bring you against your own abandonment of life?”

She lived in a five-story walk-up, also dilapidated and reeking of urine, like the boy’s. At the building’s entrance she removed a key from her purse and opened the front door. She paused before entering, waiting for Carnelian to leave. When he did not she frowned at him. “I suppose you want to come in too?”

“I am concerned for your safety.”

“I’ve heard that before.” She looked at him, her sympathy softer than her words, and led him to a studio apartment on the fourth floor. The door was unlocked. The bed was unmade, and clothes were strewn on the armchair. Dirty glasses and plates sat on the nightstand, beside a framed picture of a boy. The only window in the room was open, and the tattered yellow curtains billowed in the soft breeze. Carnelian noticed a strange musical instrument in the corner, similar to a lute, but with a flatter body and a cord.

“Do you want some coffee?”

“What is coffee?” He followed her into the kitchen, which was barely large enough for the table, and watched her pour the water.

“How does that work?” he asked, staring at the faucet. When she stepped away he turned the water on and off several times, fascinated.

“What are you doing?” the girl said. “Go sit down.”

The wizard obeyed without protest, and a few minutes later the girl handed him a cup. “Cream or sugar?”

Carnelian looked at the steaming liquid. “What do you suggest?”

“I drink mine black.”

“Then black is fine.” She was about to warn him it was hot when he raised the cup to his mouth and drank it in one breath. She looked at him in astonishment.

“Coffee,” he mumbled to himself.

She poured him another cup, which he drank just as fast. “Spells give me thirst,” he explained.

The girl nodded agreeably. “You’re not from New York. You have a British accent.”

“What is British? I’m from England.”

“She looked at him with a sense of kinship. “What did *you* run away from?”

“I realize you are doubtful that I am truly a wizard,” he said. “I will demonstrate my abilities tomorrow when I am stronger. Alas that I have no spell to make you believe in

yourself.” He leaned forward, looking at her sharply. “Tell me, what brought you to the cemetery?”

The girl looked away. “You don’t want to hear it.”

“I must.”

“It’s nothing, really. I mean, they weren’t even real pills. And I guess it doesn’t matter. I mean, either way, what difference does it make? Whatever happens happens.”

“What brought you to the cemetery?” Carnelian repeated.

“It’s a long story.” She paused. “I need a cigarette.”

She returned a moment later with her purse and an ashtray. “Want one?” she asked, taking out the pack.

“What do you do with it?”

She lit one for herself, ignoring the question, and took several puffs before speaking. “I had a boyfriend in St. Louis. Larry was his name. Larry Willis.”

Carnelian raised his eyebrows. “The name on the tombstone.”

The girl nodded. “Well, to make a long story short, we were in love. I was only fourteen at the time, and he was a few years older, but I don’t think that matters. I mean, Juliet was only fourteen, right? But my parents didn’t want me to see him. We even planned to get married some day. But they only cared about how sorry I would be when I got pregnant and he left me. Which never happened.” She looked down for a moment, wiping her eye.

“After he turned eighteen his family moved to New York. He wasn’t going to go with them at first, but then we decided to try to get in with a New York band. You see, he played guitar, and I sang. We played with a couple bands in St. Louis, but the idea of being in New York really excited me. I thought everything would be fine as long as we were together. And in a way I guess it was. As soon as he made enough money to get an apartment I ran away to join him. We didn’t have much luck with our music because it’s so competitive up here. But we didn’t starve, either. He had a daytime job, and I got work as a waitress.” She paused.

“Then three months ago he was murdered. He went out one night and they found him in an alley the next morning.” Her voice broke off and she rubbed out her cigarette. “I always thought I was a survivor, but I was wrong. Then this morning I lost my job and figured it was senseless to go on.”

She began to cry. Carnelian reached out a hand but she shrugged it away. “I’m okay,” she said, pulling herself together. “At least I’m not going to kill myself. I can’t even do that right.”

She glanced at the clock on the stove. “I’ve got to get to sleep. Though I don’t have anything to wake up too.” Her eyes began to water again.

“You have traveled further than you realize tonight,” Carnelian said, rising. “And when your eyes begin to clear you will see possibilities that you overlooked before.”

She nodded vaguely. “Thanks.”

“As for myself,” the wizard continued, “I would be grateful if you would allow me to rest here until daybreak. I will worry about you otherwise. And I have slept outside for so long.”

The girl eyed him suspiciously, but his innocent expression vanquished her fears. “Why not?” she replied. “I guess I can’t turn out a fellow runaway. But you’ll have to sleep on the floor.”

After seven hundred years buried underground, Carnelian felt he had no reason to complain.

She removed a sleeping bag from the closet and set it on the floor, beside her bed. Even though she considered him harmless, she took a knife from the kitchen and, after turning out the light, placed it under her pillow.

She fell asleep immediately without bothering to undress. Carnelian lay awake for several minutes, staring at the darkness, thinking. The realization that Bloodstone was not in the cemetery dismayed him. He had assumed that the Dark Wizard would be there, and that a confrontation would ensue. En route to the cemetery he had prepared himself, gathering inner strength and reflecting on spells, impatient



for revenge. Yet now he would have to wait and exercise patience. Bloodstone could be anywhere in the world. And spells might not find him. The search could take months, even years. And in the meantime Bloodstone would be free to inflict pain upon mankind.

The thought of the world's suffering left him feeling angry and helpless. If he could not cure the despondency of a teenage girl, how could he hope to conquer Bloodstone? He did not know. But he knew that when the time came, he would not lack the courage to try.

He sat up, looking at the dark room, at the sleeping girl, at the closed curtains billowing in the breeze. "Where are you?" he whispered. But he expected no answer, and none came. He lay back down restively and closed his eyes. Sleep took him unwillingly, as if it were another captor.

She heard a cry and woke. It was still dark. She looked around and saw Carnelian sitting on his sleeping bag, staring at the walls.

He did not look at her. "A nightmare," he explained in a disheartened voice. "I apologize for having disturbed you."

"I didn't know people still had nightmares at your age."

"Especially at my age," Carnelian whispered.

The girl lay back down and returned to her own dreams, leaving Carnelian to ponder what remained of the night.

When she woke again it was daylight. Carnelian stood at the window.

"Not much of a view," she said. "Only fire escapes and walls."

Carnelian turned around, and she noticed his hair and beard were wet. "I have not bathed in a very long time. I hope you do not mind?"

"How long have you been awake?"

"I could not sleep again after the nightmare."

"And you've been up all this time and aren't even tired? I feel like I could sleep forever." She noticed the concern

with which he watched her. "I don't mean it that way," she then said. She glanced at the photograph on the night stand and sighed. "Though I can't see that it matters. No one cares about me."

"I care."

"Yeah, and who are you? Some lunatic let out with the latest budget cuts?" She looked at him. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean that."

"I'm just in a lousy mood." She got out of bed and went into the kitchen. "You want some breakfast? I have eggs. And I know you want coffee."

She watched in amazement as Carnelian ate five eggs and drank four cups of coffee. "I don't know where you put it all," she said. "You're so thin." She looked at her own food, uneaten. "I suppose I should look for a new job," she said unenthusiastically, lighting a cigarette.

"Why don't you come to the library with me?"

"Why?"

"I hope to find references to Bloodstone."

"Oh that. I think I'll pass."

"You should not be alone," he cautioned. "And I could use your assistance. There remain many things in this age with which I am not familiar."

"I don't know much about libraries."

He rose to his feet. "Then we shall both learn."

The city depressed her with its cold indifference, but Carnelian's company warmed her, and his sense of purpose, mad as it might be, helped her forget her longing to die.

Carnelian was amazed at the library's size. "I have never seen so many books!" he told her. "I have no idea where to begin."

He approached the reference desk and inquired about Bloodstone. The name was not familiar to the librarian, who checked several encyclopedias and dictionaries without success. Carnelian realized Bloodstone might now be known by another name, and perhaps not even revealed as a wizard,

so he asked if there were older references, and was directed to the Rare Book Room.

He repeated his request to the librarian there, who then disappeared into the back. Several minutes later the librarian returned with a large, fragile book, which he set carefully on the table. It was entitled *A History of Sorcerers and Witches* and was dated from the sixteenth century. The paper was brittle and Carnelian turned the pages slowly after donning gloves, under the librarian's supervision.

The listings were printed in Gothic lettering and the illustrations drawn in black and red. "There is much here that is apocryphal," Carnelian said disdainfully. "And much that is simply untrue." His own name, as he expected, was not mentioned, for it was a book of dark powers. As he turned the final pages he began to doubt he would find his adversary listed either. But then, only three pages from the end, he grasped the book with one hand and pointed with the other. "There!"

The librarian stepped forward with a word of caution, but Carnelian ignored him. The girl leaned over, haunted by the book's age and subject, and surprised to find even the flimsiest foundation for her companion's delusion. For there, in red letters, was the name *Bloodstone*, and beneath it a drawing of the wizard-grim-faced, demonic, his eyes a menacing red, his skin traversed by red veins, draped in a black cloak and wearing a black skullcap.

She read aloud the entry: "A fierce sorcerer, believed to be immortal, Bloodstone terrorized Britain at the time of Henry III, and rumors of his necromancy still abound. The castle he once occupied has since been destroyed and stories are told that he now resides in a fortress in Wales. Bloodstone is a shape changer and can summon ghosts and apparitions. He also possesses the power to cause earthquakes, floods, and other disasters. Among humans he tolerates no friends, and supplication to him is without reward. It is said that he was sent to bring an end to the race of man, and that his mission cannot fail."

She looked at the picture in silence. Carnelian, too, stared. Then suddenly he slammed the book shut and rose. “Come!” he said. “I crave the open air!”

Outside, they walked aimlessly, and in silence, Carnelian deep in thought, the girl feeling even more disconsolate after reading about the sorcerer who would destroy humanity.

They reached Central Park, and the trees seemed to soothe them, for they began to relax their pace and become aware of their surroundings.

“It’s only a legend,” the girl said, thinking it cruel to encourage his delusions. “It isn’t real.”

Carnelian looked at her.

“There are no wizards.”

Carnelian smiled. “There was a time when people believed too readily. Now they don’t believe at all. I suppose it is for the better, though I find it disconcerting.”

He stopped in front of an empty bench, in the shade of a tree. “I told you I would cast a spell,” he reminded her. “I can change you into a bird, if you wish. The child I transformed into a parrot yesterday was less than thrilled with the experience, but it was done without his consent, and I suspect you will find the sensation of animal flight a most pleasant one.”

The girl frowned, regretting her efforts to communicate rationally with him.

He raised a finger and started to speak, but then paused. “I have been so preoccupied with Bloodstone,” he realized, “that I have neglected to ask your name.”

“It’s Julie,” she replied, turning to leave. “Look, I have to go.”

“Wait!” he commanded. “Let these people pass.” He paused until they were alone. Then he guided her away from the path. “Stand here,” he said. “Relax.”

“I really don’t think—”

But he ignored her, drowning out her words with ones more powerful. In an instant she became a peregrine falcon.

Her tiny head darted from side to side in astonishment, seeing the world through different eyes.

“Fly,” Carnelian told her. “Fly!”

Awkwardly, she found her wings. Flapping wildly at first, she gained proficiency with altitude. Carnelian watched her fly higher and still higher, and then soar away. He watched with a pleased expression, waiting for her to turn back. But soon his expression changed to one of concern, for she did not turn back, but soared into the distance, beyond his sight.

“I should have known,” he said to himself.

He lingered in the park for several minutes before deciding to go to Long Island. Brandon was riding his bicycle outside his house. When he noticed the wizard his eyes lit up and he raced over.

“I knew you’d come back!” he exclaimed, letting his bike fall to the ground. “Did you find the library okay?”

Carnelian nodded. “I went there today.”

“What were you looking for?”

“Information about another wizard.”

“Another wizard?” Brandon exclaimed. “You mean there are two wizards?”

“I’m afraid so.”

“Is he an evil wizard?”

Carnelian nodded, walking toward the child’s house. Brandon followed closely. “Tell me.”

“Not now.”

The boy was disappointed. “What’s his name?”

“Bloodstone.”

“Bloodstone,” the child whispered solemnly. “Is that who trapped you in the coffin?”

But Carnelian did not answer. He climbed up the porch steps, about to enter, but then paused at the door. “Are your parents home?”

“Yeah.”

The wizard turned back, remembering the skepticism of the people he had encountered. “They might not believe who I am.”

“Not unless you cast spells to prove it,” the boy said. “I started to tell them about you last night, but they thought I was making it up, so I stopped. The same with my friends.”

“Is there a place where we can talk?”

The boy could not have hoped for anything better than the chance to speak with the wizard again. "I have a clubhouse in the back."

He led Carnelian around the side of the house to a small wooden shed. "Go inside," he urged.

Carnelian had to bend over to enter. Inside was a small table and chair, and numerous toys.

"Please sit down," the boy said, pulling out the chair. "I have something for you." He started to leave, but the wizard stopped him.

"Tell me," he said. "What do you call that machine you were riding?"

"What machine?"

"The one with two wheels, that you let fall on the grass."

"You mean the bicycle? Didn't they have bikes in your age?"

Carnelian looked at some plastic figures set on the ground. "What are these imaginative creatures?"

The child looked at him. "Don't you know about dinosaurs?"

"Dinosaurs?"

"They're not imaginative. They're real. Or they used to be. They're extinct now. But you can see their bones in the museum."

Carnelian picked up the figure of a carnivore. "Were they very large?"

The child looked at him in amazement. "Are you testing me?"

"Why would I be testing you?"

"To see how much I know. To see if I'm worthy."

"Worthy of what?" He did not give Brandon time to answer. "No, I am not testing you. I truly wish to know."

"They were the biggest things ever," the boy replied. "Except for whales. Bigger than elephants. I thought everyone knew that?"

Carnelian smiled. "Not everyone."

“But dinosaurs lived millions of years ago. Way before your age, or any people lived. You must have known about them.”

“But we did not.”

“God!” the child said. “What did you know about?”

Carnelian smiled again and set the figure down. “You have many books in your house,” he said. “I want you to get some for me.”

“Books?”

“There is much I need to learn,” he explained. “Is that possible?”

“Sure,” the child replied, running off. He returned a few minutes later with his arms full. “I don’t know if this is what you want,” he said, setting down the books. “I couldn’t get my parents’ encyclopedia. But here’s a children’s encyclopedia, and a history book, and a science book, and a book that tells about the planets, and another that tells about dinosaurs.”

Carnelian looked at the illustrations on the covers. “Do you have any maps?”

The boy thought for a moment. “I have a globe.”

“A globe?”

The child hurried away and returned carrying a plastic globe. Carnelian examined it with great interest. “So the world is round?”

“Didn’t you know that either?”

“Not for certain.”

“Oh, I guess you were before Columbus.”

Carnelian looked at the globe. “And what is America?”

The boy stared, amazed at the wizard’s ignorance. “That’s the country you’re in now.”

“Is it? I heard it called the States.”

“Well, the United States is another name for it. And here’s New York, where we are.”

“I see. And where is England?”

The child pointed. “Ah,” the wizard said. “And there is France.” He turned the globe slowly. “So many countries!”



Finally he set it down. "Can I borrow this?"

"Sure," the boy replied. "The books too. Though I don't understand why you just didn't look at the books in the library."

Carnelian remembered the claustrophobia he had felt after seeing Bloodstone's picture. "These should do."

He stepped outside, but Brandon grabbed his robe. "Wait!" he said. "I've got something for you."

He dashed off and hurried back with a straight branch, about five feet long and four inches in diameter. "I hoped you'd come back," the boy said, catching his breath. "Every wizard needs a staff. And I figured you probably lost yours, or it wasn't buried with you. Of course, it isn't enchanted. But you can probably cast a spell to give it real magic."

Carnelian took the staff with a smile. "That was very kind."

"I hope it's the right size."

The wizard held it in his hand. He started to go.

"You will take me on your quest, won't you?"

The wizard turned back. "What makes you believe I'm embarking on a quest?"

"You're going after Bloodstone, right? It was Bloodstone who trapped you in the coffin?"

"Yes."

"You aren't going after him alone, are you? I can help you by scouting and running errands and explaining what things are."

Carnelian smiled. "And your parents?"

"This is more important," the child replied. "Besides, I'll come back as soon as we win."

"I didn't win last time," the wizard pointed out.

"But you have to win this time," the boy insisted. "And you have to take me with you!"

"I don't think so."

The boy's mother called him. "I have to go in for supper," he said in a disappointed voice. "I can help you,"

he yelled as the wizard walked away. "Please come back before you go!"

He paused on the driveway, as if at the end of a wonderful dream. When he finally went inside he could not eat, but stared out the window at the empty street.

Carnelian returned to Julie's apartment, not knowing where else to go. His money was almost gone and he wanted a place to sleep, as well as light to read by. He opened the building's front door with a spell. Julie's door was now locked as well, now that her suicide attempt had failed, and he had to use a spell for that too. The lights were on but her absence was palpable, and he regretted his foolishness changing her into a falcon rather than a flightless bird.

He had no sooner set down the books and the globe than he heard a ringing sound. It lasted a moment, paused, then rang again. Carnelian traced it to a red object lying on the coffee table, connected to the wall by a thin cord. It rang again, and he noticed the device consisted of two parts, connected to each other by another cord, tightly spiraled.

Hesitantly, he grabbed the top part and lifted it. He heard a distant voice say hello. Perplexed, he looked at the instrument, but saw only buttons with numbers, and tiny holes cut into the object. The holes at the top described a circle; those at the bottom were arranged in rows.

"Hello. Is anybody there?"

Carnelian heard a man's voice emanating from the device. He lifted it to his ear. "Hello?"

"Hello," the man replied. "My name's Rick, and I'm with Landmark Federal Insurance. Are you, or any member of your household, over sixty-five?"

Carnelian looked at the instrument. "Where are you?"

"I'm calling from New York, Sir. You sound as if you might be over sixty-five. Am I correct?"

"Yes."

"And are you currently on Medicare or Medicaid? Because even if you are, there are some hospital costs they

do not cover. This could come as quite an unpleasant surprise should you require medical care. That's where our insurance plan comes in..."

Carrying the object with him, Carnelian looked out the window, then looked in the kitchen. Finally he opened the door and peered down the corridor. "I can't see you," he said.

"That isn't necessary," the man replied. "No representative need call on you at this time. We only ask that you let us send you the information."

"Information?"

"About our over sixty-five health plan."

"But I'm immortal," Carnelian said.

"An excellent attitude," the man replied, laughing amiably. "But unfortunately we all require medical care at some point. Now if you'll just give me your address..."

Carnelian replaced the receiver. The man's voice went away, and there was no more ringing. He picked up Brandon's encyclopedia and eagerly leafed through it, looking for a picture of the object. He was delighted to find one, although the explanation left him more incredulous than before.

He went back to the telephone and pressed several buttons. After a few moments a woman's voice said, "If you'd like to make a call, please hang up and try again. If you need help, hang up and then dial your operator."

Carnelian tried to speak but was interrupted by an unpleasant tone. He hung up and then, noticing the letters *OPER* beneath the zero, pushed that button.

"Operator," another female voice answered.

Carnelian pressed the receiver to his ear in excitement. "Hello!" he said.

"May I help you?"

"You may indeed," the wizard replied. "I would like to know if it is possible to make a call to a distant place. Let us say, for example, England?"

"What is the number please?"

“You mean I can actually speak to someone in England as if they were here?”

“You have to give me the number, Sir.”

Carnelian pondered the limits of this remarkable invention. “Is it also possible to speak with the dead?” he inquired.

Carnelian heard a buzzing on the other end and hung up the phone, wondering what other marvels awaited his discovery.

Lying on the floor beside the bed was a small box with a dial, and a cord that was plugged into the wall. He switched it on and heard loud music. He turned the dial and the music faded, replaced by a crackling noise. Carnelian turned the dial some more and heard a different song. Turning it farther, he heard a commercial for water beds, and at the end of the dial heard a man preaching about miracles and salvation. Carnelian tried to talk to him, but soon realized that this was a device for speaking only, and not also for listening, as was the telephone.

The wizard turned the preacher off and went over to the television. Before turning it on, however, he scrutinized the cord that ran into the wall. Carefully, he pulled out the plug and examined the prongs. They seemed to be metal, but unremarkable. Nothing happened when he touched them. Yet he knew they were important, for the device did not operate unplugged.

He bent down to look at the narrow slits in the wall, but he could see nothing. He put a finger in one and received a slight tremor through his body. He stood up with a start, impressed with the power Brandon had called electricity.

He read about electricity in the encyclopedia and science book, as well as radios and air-conditioners and internal combustion engines. He read about satellites and silicon chips, evolution and atoms, cybernetics and mass production. Then he opened the book on space and saw a picture of a uniformed man standing on the moon.

Awestruck, he went to the window and could see the moon peering through the clouds over the building across the alley.

“Once I understood the universe better than any man,” he said to himself, gazing at the body which had served as a source of mystery and presentiment for his contemporaries. “But now even the smallest child knows of things I cannot even guess at. What is my magic to all of this?”

Tired from his hours of reading, he closed the books, turned out the lights, and lay down on the sleeping bag, anticipating a long sleep.

But instead he felt a shadow engulfing him. Bloodstone’s red eyes stared at him, burning. Then all was darkness. He was inside the coffin, not yet asleep but weary. Too tired to speak or move. He could hear the chains as they fell on the lid and were locked.

He woke with a scream. It was dark in the room and outside, but bright compared with his nightmare. He turned on the light, breathing heavily.

He went to the window, looked at the wall of the building across, at the garbage cans in the alley below, at the starless sky. “Where are you?” he wondered in a whisper that was loud against the silence.

In a decisive moment he grabbed the globe roughly in both hands and spun it slowly, staring at the rotating continents and countries. “Bloodstone, where are you?”

Then he spun it quickly, so that the nations blurred and their names could not be read. *“Irredum neyy vasidium nasqueth pontquit ve!”*

He set the globe down and watched it spin. But instead of slowing, it spun even faster and then suddenly exploded, sending fragments of the plastic sphere hurling across the room.

Carnelian was unhurt by the explosion, merely disappointed. “I shall have to buy the child another one,” he mumbled to himself as he turned the light back out. He fell onto the bed, and slept deeply.

He was watching television and trying to cook eggs when Julie returned. Her clothes were torn, her face dirty, her hair tangled, and her elbows scraped. When she saw Carnelian she stepped back in surprise and crossed her arms. "What do you think you're doing?" she demanded.

Carnelian smiled. "I am pleased to see you are safe."

"Safe?" she screamed. "You almost killed me! Safe!" She grabbed a cigarette from a pack on the counter and nervously lit it.

"You were supposed to fly back to me."

"Why should I fly back? What have I got to come back to?"

"The spell is only temporary," the wizard explained.

"I found that out!" she shouted, extremely distraught. "There I was, soaring a thousand feet above the ground, thinking maybe life wouldn't be so bad after all if I could be a falcon, when all of a sudden I get a queer feeling, like I'm being turned inside out, and I start to fall. I wasn't on the ground a minute before I changed back, somewhere in Yonkers! I had to hitchhike home, looking like this!"

"At least you seem to value life this morning."

"Why do you say that? Because I don't want to fall a thousand feet? You scared the hell out of me! And worse, you gave me hope and then took it away."

"I assumed you realized the effects were temporary."

"But I thought you were crazy! I didn't know you could really change people into animals!"

"Now at least you believe."

"That you're a wizard? Sure. That you healed me, that I didn't take fake pills? But so what? Can you bring back the dead?"

"No."

"Can you change me into a bird forever?"

"No."

"Then what good are you?" she shouted.

She went to the refrigerator and grabbed a beer. "What are you doing here, anyway?"

“I was concerned for you. And I had nowhere else to go.”

“Well find somewhere!” she ordered.

Carnelian did not move.

“Get out of here!” she then shouted. In a moment of rash anger, she grabbed a glass candlestick from the table and threw it at him. It shattered against the wall.

She went into the bathroom, slamming the door.

Carnelian looked at the closed door for a minute, considering it wise not to speak. He had worried that when she returned home she might not be in the brightest of spirits, but he certainly had not expected to be greeted with such anger. He glanced at the shattered candlestick on the floor. His magic could not repair it. Nor could it make her well again. He had healed her body, but only aggravated her despair. Such a moment made him aware of his limitations, and he wondered how he could ever conquer Bloodstone when easier opponents defeated him.

He realized he should have alerted her to the temporary nature of the spell and did not blame her for her indignation. Believing he had no right to stay where he was not welcome, he decided to leave, and had turned to go when something on the television made him pause.

A man had said, “Next, more about the mysterious devastation of Menkaure’s Pyramid in Egypt.”

Carnelian moved closer to the TV, as if drawn by an unseen force. All other thoughts left his mind, and he waited with anticipation while people on the television talked about cereal.

Julie stepped quietly into the kitchen, her face washed and her hair combed, but her appearance and her thoughts still in a state of disarray. She looked at Carnelian uncertainly, but no longer with hostility. He noticed her presence, but did not take his eyes from the television.

“I’m sorry,” she said, barely loud enough for him to hear. “You don’t have to leave if you don’t want to. You didn’t mean any harm. It’s just that you got my hopes up, and being

a bird, flying above everything—it was great! It was the only time I’ve ever felt happy, except with Larry. But that didn’t last, and I should have known this wouldn’t last either.”

The commercials ended and the morning news program returned. Carnelian raised a hand to quiet her, and Julie looked at the screen, wondering what had drawn his interest.

A reporter stood in the desert, holding a large photograph.

“This is a picture of Menkaure’s Pyramid as it looked yesterday. Here is how it looks today.” He stepped aside, pointing to a enormous mass of rubble behind him.”

“What is it?” Julie wondered.

But Carnelian ignored her.

“Built during the Fourth Dynasty to house the sarcophagus of Pharaoh Menkaure, and much smaller than the pyramids of Khufu and Khafre, which stand behind, it has survived for nearly 4,500 years. Then suddenly, sometime during the night—no one is certain exactly when—it collapsed into the enormous pile of limestone you see behind me. The Egyptian government has cordoned off the area and restricted access to the other pyramids. Foul play is suspected, but no evidence of explosives has yet been found, and no one has claimed responsibility. This is Michael Simmons in Cairo.”

“What is it?” Julie repeated. “What’s the matter?”

Carnelian continued to stare at the screen. “He knows!”

“What are you talking about?”

“Bloodstone,” the wizard said slowly. “He knows.”

“Bloodstone?” She remembered the book in the library. “The wizard you’re after?”

“That was his work,” Carnelian said.

Julie seemed incredulous. “Wait a minute, what do you mean? Are you saying this other wizard destroyed that pyramid?” She laughed uneasily. “How could he do that?”

“His powers are great,” Carnelian replied.

“Why would he destroy a pyramid?”

“As a message,” the wizard told her.



“A message?”

Carnelian nodded. “A message to me. That he knows I have awoken.”

“What makes you so sure?”

“A pyramid is a tomb, is it not? For one who will be reborn in another world. So Bloodstone had entombed me. And so I have been reborn.”

“But how could he destroy a pyramid?” she asked. “Did he just cast a spell?”

Carnelian looked at her.

“It’s just so much,” she went on, “All at once. First I find out you can really turn people into animals, and now this!” She lit another cigarette.

Carnelian made no effort to explain. “I must act at once,” he said, stepping away from the TV. “The element of surprise is gone. But at least I know in which direction my course lies.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I must go to Cairo.”

“You think he’ll still be there?”

“He may be waiting for me,” Carnelian replied. “It may be a trap.”

“Then you don’t want to go.”

“No!” he exclaimed. “I must take the risk. I must confront him as soon as possible. Before he wreaks more damage. I know I may not be ready. But I must take the chance.”

He paced the room, recalling the distance on Brandon’s globe from North America to Africa. Finally he turned to Julie. “How can I get there?”

Julie was surprised he would ask her advice. “Why don’t you just change into a bird and fly?”

But Carnelian shook his head. “Too slow,” he replied. “And it might tire me. Do airplanes travel to Cairo?”

“I’m sure they do.”

He seemed pleased. "I could travel invisibly, as I did from London, but that might not be convenient. I would rather purchase a ticket. Could I possibly borrow the money from you?"

Julie laughed. "I don't have it."

"Oh."

"I don't see why it's a problem. If you can become invisible all you have to do is walk into a bank and take what you need. You could be a millionaire."

"But that would be stealing."

She laughed at him. "Well if you get caught, just change them all into owls or something!"

"That wasn't my concern," he replied. "But I suppose I can replace whatever I borrow after Bloodstone has been defeated." He looked at her with resolve. "Come! Show me the nearest bank."

"Now?"

"It is unwise to delay."

Julie was still deeply depressed and made no effort to comprehend Carnelian. Now that her anger had passed, she found herself drawn to him as a kindred spirit, someone alone and in trouble. His pursuit of Bloodstone, though of no immediate interest to her, did provide a diversion and made her feel useful.

She led him down the street to the nearest bank. They went inside together and looked around. "I don't know about the safe," Julie said in a hushed voice, careful not to draw attention. "Your best bet is probably the teller drawers. They keep cash in there."

Carnelian watched as several bills were handed to a man from a woman behind the counter.

"Since you won't be noticed, you may want to go through several drawers. But even so, they're going to notice the missing money almost immediately, so you should probably hurry."

They went to an alley nearby and Carnelian chanted the spell of invisibility. Julie had acted mechanically at the bank,

almost treating the robbery as an intellectual exercise. But when the wizard vanished before her eyes she felt a brief joy, as she had when he transformed her into a falcon. A wonder at the miracle of life, a belief that his magic would bring her happiness. She reached out and could feel his robe, though she could not see it.

“Don’t bump into anyone,” she cautioned with a smile.

She heard him move away and cheered him on. But when he was gone and she sat down in the alley, alone, surrounded by foreboding gray walls and the stench of week-old garbage, her despair returned, and she wondered in what sort of world she would be sitting in now if the wizard had not saved her.

Carnelian entered the bank with a sense of guilt, wishing he could obtain the money ethically. He avoided brushing into people for reasons of courtesy rather than from a fear of being apprehended, and had entered the bank behind another customer so that he would not have to open the door.

The bank was not busy. Of the six windows, three were occupied. Carnelian went to the unoccupied stalls. The drawers at the first two were locked, but the third was open. He quickly put the bills inside his robe and closed the drawer. He had little knowledge of the value of this currency and, remembering Julie’s advice to rob several drawers, walked behind one of the tellers. He waited until she left her station and then quickly withdrew the money from her desk. He left as she returned, and was tempted to give the money back when he saw the look of horror on her face after she opened the empty drawer. But he remembered the devastated pyramid and hurried out the door.

Julie jumped to her feet when he suddenly appeared before her. “Did you get it?”

He nodded somberly and pulled out the bills.

“There’s over fourteen thousand dollars here!” she exclaimed.

“Is that enough?”

“That’s plenty!”

“Perhaps I should return some.”

“No!” The girl paused, surprised by her greed. Money had never been particularly important to her. “You may need it later,” she reasoned, handing it back to him.

The wizard nodded, replacing the money in the pocket inside his robe. “Now I can purchase a ticket?”

“Yes. You’ll need a passport, though.”

“A passport?”

“Yes. It’s a little booklet with a picture that allows you to travel to other countries.”

“Where can I obtain one?”

“You can’t. You’re not a citizen. Even if you could, I think it takes weeks.”

“I see.”

“Can’t you just conjure one up?”

“No.”

Julie did not understand. “I would think a simple thing like making a passport would be easier than becoming invisible, or changing me into a bird.”

But the wizard shook his head. “It is far easier to conceal or transform or destroy something that already exists than to create something that had not existed before. Yet perhaps my magic might succeed in altering another’s passport to fit my needs.”

“I still have some of Larry’s things,” Julie told him, “that I didn’t give back to his family. I think his passport is with them.”

Carnelian grabbed her by the arm. “Then let’s not stand here talking!” he said, leading her from the alley.

She rummaged through the closet, removing an old shoe box. She opened it on the bed and slowly looked through the contents, reminiscing. “Here’s some poetry he wrote for me,” she said, unfolding the paper. “I guess you don’t want to hear it.”

Carnelian stood at the window, mourning the destruction of the pyramid. A monument which had been ancient even in his own age.

Here's a picture of us together," she said. "It isn't very good." She replaced the photograph, wiping her eyes. "After he died, I went through this box every day. But finally I couldn't stand it anymore and I put the box in the closet and haven't looked through it until now. It was hard enough just to keep his guitar out, and his picture on the nightstand. But I couldn't put those away."

She looked at few more items in silence before finding the passport. Carnelian grabbed it from her hand and examined the document.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

The wizard rubbed his beard. "The printed matter should not be too difficult to alter. The picture is another matter."

"It isn't a good photograph of him," Julie said. "Otherwise I might not let you change it. Even so, I'm not crazy about the idea. Do you think after you're finished you can change it back?"

"It will be much easier to change back," Carnelian assured her. "The problem is altering it in the first place."

He took the document into the kitchen and set in on the table. "*Aspacci nev eleh sajarah!*" He turned away in disappointment. "No!"

"Is there anything I can do?" Julie wondered.

"Just leave me alone," the wizard replied. "This may take a while. You could inquire about the airplane ticket."

"Sure." She was glad to help. It took her mind off Larry. She replaced the shoe box in the closet and began phoning the airlines. While she waited for flight information she could hear Carnelian chanting and swearing in turn.

"How's it going?" she asked later, approaching him at a quiet moment.

Carnelian shook his head. "I have the print. But the photograph..." He looked up at her. "What have you learned?"

"I got you a reservation on a flight leaving the day after tomorrow." She noticed he was not pleased. "It was the earliest flight I could get."

Carnelian turned back to the passport. "It will do," he decided. "It might take me until then to alter this."

"Are you hungry? You want me to get something to eat?"

Carnelian handed her one of the bills he had stolen. "Order what you like. My appetite has left me."

But when she returned he was hungry, though no closer to success. "I bought hamburgers," Julie said. "I guess you never had one before. If you don't like it I can get something else."

Carnelian tasted it and found it to his liking. He ate half of Julie's as well. "It discourages me," he said when he was finished. "This task is not an easy one."

"I don't understand why you go to all this trouble when you can just become invisible."

"I would rather conserve my energy for other spells."

"You mean for Bloodstone?"

The wizard leaned forward. "For you."

Julie stared.

"You're coming with me," he told her.

Julie was truly surprised, and didn't know whether to feel flattered or frightened. "With you?" she wondered. "Why?"

"I need your help."

"But how can I help you? What can I do?"

"You have assisted me today, have you not?"

"Yeah, I guess."

"So you will aid me in Egypt, or wherever else Bloodstone may lead us."

"Wherever else?"

“Of course, I will not ask you to come if you do not wish to.”

Julie felt confused. She could not think. “I don’t know.”

“You have the rest of today and tomorrow to decide. Now leave me to make my passport.”

She lay on her bed, listening to his chanting and wondering what to do. She didn’t share Carnelian’s sense of mission, and suspected her presence would hinder more than help him. But she also dreaded being alone. The wizard comforted her, even though he could not cure her melancholy. And as long as she remained with him she would not have to worry about money or look for a new job.

She had decided to accompany him when he burst into the room and laid the open passport before her eyes.

“It’s perfect!” she exclaimed, glancing from the picture to the wizard.

“I used three spells on the skin color alone!” he said.

“I’ve decided to go with you,” Julie announced as the wizard replenished his energy with hamburgers at a nearby diner. “Though I don’t see how I can be of any use.”

The wizard smiled. “I am glad you have chosen to come,” he replied. “And I am sure you will prove most useful.”

“I don’t see how.” She thought for a moment. “I don’t have a passport.”

She expected Carnelian to be dismayed, but he reacted without concern. “You will not need one.”

“Why not?” Her eyes widened with comprehension. “You’re going to change me into a bird!”

“Not a bird.”

She leaned forward. “What then?” she wondered, suddenly anxious.

“A fly.”

“A fly!” she screamed.

“Do not be alarmed. It will not be uncomfortable.”

But Julie felt differently. The thought alone ruined her appetite, and she began to regret her decision.

“You might find the experience as fascinating as being a peregrine falcon.”

“But that was a bird,” Julie pointed out. “Not an insect. I can’t stand flies!”

“I am not terribly fond of them myself,” the wizard admitted. “But this is the best way.”

“Why couldn’t I be a dog or a cat?”

“That would require more energy.”

Julie sat back. A fly had landed on their table and she watched it contemptuously as it buzzed around her food. At last, angrily, she swatted it away. She looked at Carnelian. “You think I want to be a pest?”

“You will bother no one,” Carnelian told her. “And no one will bother you. I will change you back as soon as we reach Cairo.”

Julie frowned. Going and staying seemed equally unattractive. “I don’t know,” she said. “I’ll have to think about it.”

On their way home she bought a newspaper and read the latest details concerning the destruction of Menkaure’s Pyramid, but, as Carnelian suspected, no evidence of human sabotage had been discovered.

Julie spent the night watching television, trying to escape into the melodrama of her favorite shows. Carnelian joined her for a while, but spent most of the night studying the books Brandon had lent him. Neither slept well that night. Carnelian woke Julie with a cry as he had two nights before, and he sat in the darkness for some time before lying back down. Julie had fears of her own, and woke from a nightmare soon after, about running through a foreign airport, giant flies swarming around her.



When she woke she found Carnelian peering into the open refrigerator. “Looking for something?”

He turned around. “Remarkable machine. I found it described in there,” he said, pointing to the open science book on the table. “But it is still beyond me. Perhaps you could explain the principles of freon?”

“Not me,” Julie replied. “All I know is that if you keep the door open all the cold air goes out.” She stepped past him and took out the milk and the remaining eggs. “Sit down. I’ll fix you breakfast.”

She drank soda instead of coffee. Carnelian could tell she was filled with doubts concerning the trip to Cairo, but she did not speak for several minutes.

“Will it be safe?” she finally asked.

Carnelian shook his head. “There are few things more dangerous than Bloodstone,” he answered.

“I don’t mean that,” she said. “I’m not worried about Bloodstone, at least not right now. What I want to know is, will it be safe to be changed into a fly?”

“If the insect form is killed,” he explained, “then so is the human. But I will guard you.”

“Have you ever been a fly?”

“Once. To spy on someone.”

“What did it feel like?”

“I was more concerned with my mission than with my form,” the wizard replied, “so I did not examine the sensations in detail. I do recall a feeling of lightness, and of course the eyesight is different.”

“But you don’t forget who you are?”

“You knew who you were when you became a falcon,” he pointed out. “Your desires will change, according to the type of creature you become, and you will perceive the world in a different fashion, but your identity remains.”

“And you’ll change me back as soon as we land?”

“As soon as we pass the inspectors at the airport.”

“But what if the spell doesn’t work?”

“I assure you it will. Shall I demonstrate it now?”

“No!” Julie finished her soda, and summoned the little courage she possessed. “All right, I’ll go. But only because I have nothing to lose.” She looked at him. “And because I trust you.”

The wizard smiled. “Your esteem is highly valued. I would warn you, however,” he added in a more serious tone, “that while becoming a fly may be safe, the mission itself is one of great danger, and I cannot guarantee that either of us will return. You are not worried at present about Bloodstone, but as we approach him his proximity will darken your already disconsolate soul, and you may find yourself alone against him if, as before, his considerable strength defeats me.”

Julie turned away. “Don’t tell me any more,” she said, remembering the picture in the library.

Carnelian rose to his feet. “Very well. We have a busy day ahead, and a busier one tomorrow. I have some matters to attend to, so I will not see you until this evening. In the meantime, I would like you to run some errands.” He handed her some money. “Buy a carnelian stone.”

“A carnelian stone?”

“Yes. And purchase maps and books that will inform me about Egypt. Anything you can find, as long as it won’t require too much space. When you return you can pack. You do have a container for traveling?”

“I have a suitcase, if that’s what you mean.”

Carnelian nodded. “Pack clothes, and whatever other personal necessities you might need. But not too much. We shall travel with only one suitcase, of which you should not occupy more than half”

“Why half?”

“Because another will be joining us.”

Julie sprang out of her chair. “Who?”

But the wizard was already out the door.

He found Lewis standing outside his tenement with a group of older black youths. When the boy noticed Carnelian he frowned and turned away, more embarrassed than afraid.

The wizard approached the group, unconcerned that the boy was ignoring him. "I'm glad I found you, Lewis," he said in a cheerful voice. "I have a matter of great importance I wish to discuss with you."

The boy looked at his friends rather than at Carnelian.

"Who is this guy?" the oldest youth asked, sitting on the steps, playing with a combination lock.

"How should I know?"

"He knows your name, LC," one of the others pointed out.

"May we speak in private?" Carnelian asked.

"I don't wanna talk to you."

The others formed a circle around Carnelian, and the boy felt sufficiently protected to refuse his request.

But the oldest youth found the situation amusing. "Go ahead," he told him. "Talk to the man. Maybe he has some quarters. We can go down to the arcade."

"Got any quarters, Grandpa?" one of them teased, grabbing his robe.

"He looks like the Tooth Fairy to me," another remarked, putting a hand on his shoulder. "Tooth Fairy owes me money!"

The boy looked at Carnelian for the first time. "What you want, man?"

Carnelian ignored the harassment. "May we speak inside?"

"Anything you wanna say, say in front of my friends."

"That's okay," the oldest interrupted. "Go inside and have a nice talk." He laughed. "If you need us to protect you from this ancient dude just yell!"

The boy glared at his friend, but followed Carnelian up to his apartment.

“Your mother isn’t home?” he asked, glancing into the other rooms.

“No.”

“I suppose you don’t see much of each other?”

“That’s none a your business!”

Carnelian did not sit down. The boy remained standing also, at a comfortable distance, by the door, remembering their last encounter.

“Have you heard about the pyramid?” Carnelian asked.

“What pyramid?”

“A pyramid was destroyed yesterday by a wizard named Bloodstone. Tomorrow I am going to Cairo to pursue him. I want you to come with me.”

“You crazy, man!”

“Have you ever flown in an airplane? It’s far more exciting than stealing money from old men on the streets.”

The boy was bewildered by the wizard’s return, and could only conclude that he was insane.

“I must warn you, however, of the dangers,” Carnelian continued. “Our opponent is considerably more formidable than the victims of your boredom and greed.”

The boy found the wizard’s smile disconcerting. “You crazy,” he said. “You shouldn’t be on the streets.”

“You will find this real enough,” Carnelian replied, taking out the money from his robe.

The boy jumped forward, so strong was the money’s attraction.

His eyes widened in wonder. “Where you get that?”

“I borrowed it from a bank.”

But the boy was skeptical. “What bank’s gonna loan you money?”

“Well actually I took it. But I intend to pay them back.”

The boy took another step forward. “You stole it?” He found it difficult to picture Carnelian as a bank robber, but he could not think of any other way a crazy old man could

obtain so much money. He looked at him with new respect, and possibilities filled his thoughts.

“You gonna pay me?”

“I will pay for all expenses,” the wizard answered, replacing the money in his robe. “But I will not bribe you. Come or do not come.”

The thought of traveling appealed to the boy, and he recognized the potential for personal gain. But he remained skeptical. “How do I know you really going to Egypt?” he asked.

“You’ll know tomorrow morning when our flight departs,” Carnelian replied, pleased that he had begun to show interest. He found a pen and wrote Julie’s address on the back of a magazine.

The boy, though, was still far from convinced. “Why you want me to come?”

“Because you do not frighten easily,” the wizard replied. “And because I believe there is good in you.” He saw the boy’s hesitation and decided he needed further encouragement. “Never mind,” he said, starting toward the door. “Your mother wouldn’t let you go.”

“I go where I want!” the boy said defiantly.

“But you might get homesick.”

He pointed to his surroundings. “You think I’d get homesick for this!”

Carnelian smiled. “Meet me here this evening,” he said, showing him the address on the magazine. “You will find a girl there.” He bent over. “Do not attack her,” he cautioned with a grin. “She is on our side!”

As Carnelian left, the boy realized it would be easier to rob the wizard now with his friends’ help than to follow his strange instructions. He heard him speaking unintelligibly on the stairway, but did not see him. He hurried outside, where his friends were trading jokes. The oldest still sat on the steps, fiddling with the lock.

The boy glanced down the street. “Where’d he go?”

His friends all looked at him. “Where’d who go?”

Brandon was not playing outside, nor were his parents' cars in the driveway. It was late afternoon. Carnelian decided to knock on the door.

The boy answered, smiling with delight when he saw the wizard. "You've come back again!"

"Are you alone?"

The child nodded. "Come in. I was just watching TV."

Carnelian stepped into the living room and glanced at the television. A program was just ending and the news was coming on.

"I'm so surprised!" the boy exclaimed. "Every time you come back I'm surprised! Did you read my books?"

"I have found them most useful," Carnelian replied. "But I am not yet finished. If you don't mind, I would prefer to buy them from you." He set a \$100 bill on the coffee table. "I hope this will also repay the money you lent me. And there is the matter of the globe."

Brandon ignored the money. "You want to keep the globe too?"

The wizard shook his head. "It exploded."

"Exploded!"

"I am sorry. I hope it is replaceable."

The child did not care about replacing the globe. "How did it blow up?" he wondered.

"An accident," Carnelian replied. "I was casting a spell to find Bloodstone. It did not work."

"So you don't know where he is?"

"I found out yesterday. Perhaps you heard about the pyramid?"

The child stared. "You mean the one that crumbled? He did that?" A look of fear came into his eyes. "He sure is powerful!"

The wizard nodded. "And who knows how many monuments he has destroyed and how many lives he has taken in the years I have been entombed? Let us hope his long reign of terror ends in Egypt."

He was about to leave when the news caught his attention. This time it was not the destruction of a pyramid, however, but a more serious disaster which drew his attention.

“There was a severe earthquake today in Quino, Mexico,” the anchorman stated, “a tiny village only twenty miles from Mexico City. Twelve people are known to be dead and there are hundreds of wounded as rescue workers sift through the rubble, searching for survivors. Experts claim that if the epicenter had been a few miles away, in the heart of Mexico’s densely populated capital, the death toll would have run into the tens of thousands.”

Carnelian turned away from the TV. “My plans are changed. Quick, get me a map!”

Brandon brought him his parents’ atlas and the wizard hurriedly looked at a map of Mexico.

“Do you think Bloodstone caused the earthquake?” the child guessed.

“Yes.”

“How do you know?”

“I don’t for certain. But I suspect it is true. And if it is not, there are still victims to help.”

“Then you aren’t going to Egypt?”

“No.”

Brandon had heard nothing in the anchorman’s report which suggested the earthquake was anything but another natural disaster. “But what makes you think Bloodstone did it?” he pursued.

The wizard closed the atlas. “I have known him to cause earthquakes before,” he replied. “Similar in nature to this. That is, very violent but limited in range. Also, I had a dream.”

“A dream?”

“I did not remember it till now. Apparently my spell to locate him was not completely without results. And yet he is aware of me as well, for he destroyed the pyramid. He has a

morbid penchant for gamesmanship. And I must play without the advantage of surprise.”

He rose decisively. “Can you telephone the airlines and get me the next flight to Mexico City?”

“I guess so. Sure.” He looked apprehensively at the wizard. “How many seats do you want?”

“Just one.”

The boy had feared that answer. He turned away with tears in his eyes. But he made the calls.

When he returned Carnelian was standing by the open front door, looking outside.

“There’s a flight leaving late tonight,” Brandon said in a quiet voice, handing him a slip of paper with the necessary information.

Carnelian was pleased there was a flight so soon. “You’ve done a good job.”

“The lady said there are plenty of seats,” the boy added hopefully.

“I am sorry,” he said. “But you are too young and I would not take you from your parents. You will find more pleasure at your table with your friends and your strange dice.” He smiled, and patted the child on the head. “Perhaps if all goes well, and circumstances permit, I shall see you again one day.”

The boy said nothing as Carnelian left. He fell forward against the screen door, clawing the wire mesh like a prisoner. He wanted to run after him, to shout, to beg. But he let the wizard go.

When Carnelian returned to Julie’s apartment he found his companions arguing over an open suitcase.

Julie turned to the wizard in frustration. “If he calls me ‘sister’ one more time I’m going to strangle him!”

Carnelian smiled. “I am pleased to see you have made each other’s acquaintance!”



Julie leaned toward him. "What do you want to bring this kid along for?" she whispered.

"The lives of the city dwellers will be safer in his absence," he remarked.

"And ours will be in more danger!"

"She won't let me take all my stuff," the boy complained, pointing to a duffel bag on the bed.

"You said we could only take one suitcase," Julie told the wizard.

"So I did." He turned to Lewis. "We are traveling light. You will have to share."

"But I can't fit all this in there."

"Pack only what is essential. We can buy whatever else you require when we reach Mexico City."

Julie stared at him. "Mexico City?"

"Yes. Our plans have been altered and we travel tonight. I therefore ask that you try to cooperate with each other. I will explain everything later." He looked at Julie as an afterthought. "Did you buy the stone?"

She nodded, pointing to a wrapped object on the chair, atop a pile of travel books. "It's on a chain, if that's all right. I didn't know what you wanted."

"This will do," the wizard replied, examining the stone. It was a highly polished gem, the color of sunburned flesh, an inch in length and oval in shape, hung from a thin, gold-plated chain. "I must go into the other room to cast a spell on this," he said. "I trust you to be finished with your packing when I return."

They took a taxi to Kennedy Airport. The ticket agent scrutinized his passport, but then smiled and sold him a ticket.

Everything was going to plan. Now all Carnelian had to do was find a secluded corner where he could change the children into flies and put them in his pocket.

"Carnelian! Wait!"

The wizard was nonplussed to see Brandon sprinting across the terminal, a small suitcase in his hand.

Carnelian realized he had made a serious error in judgment when he asked the boy to telephone the airlines. Of course the Brandon would know where to find him.

The child ran over with his small suitcase as if the wizard would be happy to see him. Carnelian frowned, but the child did not notice, for he was looking at Julie and Lewis. "Who are they?"

"Who are you?" Julie wondered.

Brandon felt betrayed. "You're taking them but not me?"

"You are too young," the wizard explained.

Brandon looked at Lewis. "How old is he?"

"Twelve."

"That's only two years older!" he pointed out angrily. "Come on! You gotta take me! I'll help you. I'll do whatever you want! I even brought my passport so I can go to other countries!"

"You have a passport?"

Brandon nodded. "My family went to Italy when I was little."

"You're still little," Lewis said. "Why don't you go home before we call your mother?"

Brandon looked at Carnelian. "I'm not going home!" he stated. "If you don't take me with you I'll just run away somewhere else!"

"But your parents will be concerned."

"I left them a note."

"A note?"

The boy nodded. "I told them I was going away to help a wizard and that I'd be home as soon as we defeated Bloodstone."

"I'm sure that will ease their mind," Julie remarked.

Carnelian hesitated. "Very well," he finally decided. "We haven't the time to argue."

Brandon cheered, unable to contain his excitement. “I see you brought my staff,” he said with pride, noticing the branch in the wizard’s right hand. “Will you use it against Bloodstone?”

“Perhaps. Or against these two if they don’t behave. Brandon, this is Julie.”

“Pleased to meet you.” Julie smiled.

“And this is Lewis.”

“LC.”

Brandon extended his hand. “Pleased to meet you.”

But Lewis only scowled. “You ain’t gonna let him take that suitcase, are you?”

“There isn’t time now to make changes,” Carnelian replied. “We can pack again in Mexico if necessary.”

“You just stick up for your own color,” Lewis growled.

“You will all be the same color in a few minutes,” he said, leading them away.

“What does that mean?”

“Haven’t you told him?” Julie wondered.

“He does not believe I’m a wizard,” Carnelian said.

Lewis grew suspicious. “What’s going on? How come you only got one ticket?”

“Because he’s changing us into flies!” Julie replied, enjoying the moment.

But Lewis merely looked at her as if she was as crazy as Carnelian and followed him through the terminal.

“The problem with airports is that there are always so many people about,” the wizard said, trying to find a place to cast his spell. He finally decided to take Lewis and Brandon into the men’s room, where they entered a single stall. He transformed Lewis before the boy could protest and put the fly inside his robe.

Brandon gaped, though more in wonder than fear.

“Do you still wish to come?”

“Of course!”

Carnelian smiled at the boy’s enthusiasm and repeated the spell. Outside he found Julie biting her nails.

She looked at his robe, the color having left her face. “Are they in there?”

“Would you like to see?”

“No!” She glanced around anxiously. “Where do you want to go?”

Carnelian led her to a relatively quiet corner. “I suspect this is the most privacy we can hope for. Are you ready?”

She laughed nervously. “I feel like I’m in line for a roller coaster. Only worse.”

“What is a roller coaster?”

“I’ll tell you if I survive.”

Trust me,” the wizard said, and he chanted the spell.

Carnelian gazed out the window as the plane took off. But this time he could not enjoy the flight. Bloodstone had struck and lives had been lost. He wondered how many others Bloodstone had killed in the intervening centuries. He tried to divert his thoughts by leafing through the travel books Julie had bought, but that only increased his apprehension. Finally he closed his eyes and fell into a light sleep.

Julie and Brandon were resting as well. Standing still in Carnelian’s dark pocket, comfortable, too tired even to reflect on being a fly. Lewis, however, felt agitated. He did not believe he was a fly, but rather that he had somehow been tricked, and trapped. He could not talk, and felt light and dizzy. He regretted his decision to accompany the old man and felt victimized.

He buzzed around, not knowing that he buzzed, and finally managed to emerge from Carnelian’s robe, not knowing the dark place was a pocket. He denied his perceptions, reasoning that he had been secretly hypnotized, or given a drug that tricked his senses. The world stretched out, as if seen through a wide-angle lens. People and objects appeared gigantic, and he seemed to be able to fly in short bursts. The only perception he acknowledged was that they

were on an airplane. He had never felt any particular fondness for Harlem. But now he wished he were home.

He felt a strange desire to land on a man's arm. The man swatted at him and Lewis instinctively flew away. He did not know what was happening, but he didn't consider himself in danger. He wanted to smell the man, and suddenly it seemed smell was his dominant sense.

Carnelian woke when Lewis left his pocket. He heard the fly buzz down the aisle and jumped up with a start. He knew at once it was Lewis, for the others understood they were flies and would not so foolishly expose themselves to danger. He glanced from row to row and listened hopefully for the buzzing sound, chastising himself for allowing Lewis to escape.

He spotted Lewis and yelled out just as the man was about to swipe at the insect a second time. "Do not swat that fly!" he exclaimed.

The man looked up in surprise and Lewis flew to a safer position on the seat back. "Why not?" he demanded.

Carnelian caught Lewis with a sudden motion and put him in his pocket. "It is a special fly," he replied.

The man grinned, amused as much by Carnelian's attire as by his claim. "Does it do tricks?"

The wizard was relieved that Lewis was safe, but he also felt insulted. He recalled those skeptics in his own time who had dismissed his achievements as simple sleight of hand, and felt disappointed that so few people in this age believed in true enchantment. He was tempted to turn the man into a fly himself and swat him for his insolence.

## MEXICO CITY

### 1

After passing through customs Carnelian found a quiet corner and removed the flies from his pocket. Julie was the first he changed back.

She glanced around anxiously, thinking she was still in New York until she saw the signs in Spanish. She had been in a state similar to sleep and recalled nothing of the flight. “We’re here? Already?”

“How do you feel?”

“Dizzy.” She touched her body, as if to be certain she was again human. “But I’m fine.” She looked at him with a new trust.

The wizard next focused on Brandon, and the child glanced around excitedly. “Are we in Mexico?”

Carnelian nodded.

“But I don’t remember anything!”

Carnelian now chanted the spell to Lewis, who remembered more than he wanted to. The boy glared at his three companions and retreated a step. “What you do to me?” he demanded.

“He changed us into flies, LC,” Julie told him.

Lewis regarded her with contempt. “You as crazy as he is!” he exclaimed. He looked back at Carnelian. “I had this strange dream. Everyone was real big, and one man started swatin’ at me!”

“That was no dream.”

Lewis didn’t believe him, and saw little point in arguing. He would not admit to himself that Carnelian frightened him, and did not want to run away when Julie and Brandon seemed unperturbed. “When we goin’ to go wherever it’s at you wanna go?”

Carnelian spread out his arms. “We’re here.”

Lewis looked around and noticed all the Mexicans. “We in Mexico? That can’t be.” He felt anxious, torn from his environment, and from all he knew. He realized he was now more vulnerable to Carnelian than ever.

At Julie’s advice, Carnelian exchanged some of his dollars for pesos and they found a taxi outside. Between the little English the driver knew and the few words of Spanish Julie understood, she managed to communicate their destination. It was shortly after dawn, and the mountain peaks in the distance blended into the hazy sky.

Carnelian rode in the front seat, leaning forward against the dashboard, watching the passing scenery, marveling at Nature’s power, and fearing Bloodstone’s.

After a long ride through increasingly tortuous and primitive roads, they were stopped by soldiers whose jeep blocked the road. One of them walked over to the driver and spoke to him for a minute. Carnelian took the opportunity to get out of the taxi to better view the situation.

The village lay up the road. Carnelian perceived that, while it probably had never been prosperous, at least there had once been homes here. Impoverished homes, perhaps, tiny and without conveniences, but homes nonetheless. Yet now only a handful still stood, as fragile as Brandon’s clubhouse. The rest had been damaged or completely destroyed. The stucco homes had fared best, but most of the houses were constructed of wood and had been flattened by the earthquake. It was strangely quiet. Except for the soldiers, there were few people in the neighborhood. Those who had survived the earthquake had either taken their remaining possessions to a safer hillside or had been evacuated and were waiting to return. Carnelian felt a great sadness at the sight of such a tragedy, and his rage at Bloodstone grew.

One of the soldiers motioned him to get back into the taxi.

“They’re not letting people in,” Julie explained as the driver turned the taxi around. “Only reporters and residents.”

“Should we change into animals?” Brandon asked eagerly.

“Not now. But we will return later. Now let us go to the city and the hospitals.”

“And to eat?”

Carnelian sat back against the seat as they returned down the mountain road, no longer hungry.

“And to eat.”

The traffic of New York was no preparation for what greeted them in Mexico City. Even Julie and Lewis were struck by the chaos around them. The thin air was much more polluted than that of New York, obscuring the mountains and making the hot weather oppressive. The steel and glass buildings in the center contrasted starkly with the surrounding ring of indigent favelas.

Carnelian paid the driver at a stop light, realizing walking would be faster. They found a cafe and ate by the curb.

“I’ve never been so hungry!” Brandon said, eating a taco that was spicier than those he was used to at the fast food chains in the United States. “Being a fly sure does give you an appetite!”

Lewis looked away in disgust, embarrassed to be in such company. While the others talked he entertained himself by watching the pedestrians who passed by. One woman carried a large purse. She held it loosely by the long strap, and Lewis thought how easy it would be to snatch it. He also imagined his subsequent escape, disappearing quickly into the dense crowd. Occupied with such thoughts, he felt as if he were at home.

“Where do you think Bloodstone is?” Brandon asked.

The wizard looked into the noisy street. “I have no idea.”

“Could he have left Mexico already?”

“That is possible.”



“But you think he’s still here?”

“Yes.”

Brandon felt a slight chill in the scorching weather.

“Why?”

“Because it gives him pleasure to observe the effects of his work.”

“So he may still be in the village?”

“Yes.”

“And we’re going back there?”

Carnelian nodded. “Tonight.”

Brandon picked up his taco and found that his hands were shaking. Julie looked at the wizard, wishing he appeared more formidable, and asked him to order her a beer. Lewis heard none of this, his eyes coveting a wallet bulging out of a back pocket.

Carnelian decided to visit the hospital alone. He led the children into a hotel that was on the way. “I assume we can procure lodgings here?” he asked Julie, glancing around the plush lobby.

Julie nodded. “It’s pretty expensive, but you can always rob another bank.”

Carnelian registered without difficulty, as the clerk spoke excellent English, and took no notice of the wizard’s attire, since he paid cash in advance.

“Wait here. I will return later,” he told them in the room.

Brandon was disappointed. “Can’t I come with you to the hospital?”

The wizard shook his head. “They might not permit you in, and I shall need all my energy for healing, so I cannot change your shape. But I will not be long.”

Brandon was too tired to argue. After Carnelian left, he pulled back the covers from one of the beds and fell asleep immediately. Lewis opened the curtains and looked out the window at the crowd below.

“He really is a wizard, you know,” Julie told him.

Lewis turned toward her menacingly. He felt too restless to remain in the room and hurried out the door.

Julie followed him into the hall. "Where are you going?"

Lewis didn't answer as the elevator opened. Julie decided not to leave Brandon and returned to the room.

Lewis walked aimlessly, though he did not venture far. He enjoyed being on his own again, even if only for a short time. He had never felt more uneasy around anyone than with Carnelian. He knew how to deal with older kids, he knew how to deal with cops. Yet the wizard contained many contrasts, and the boy found himself both wanting to stay with him for the potential rewards and wanting to avoid him because of the inexplicable discomforts. He was not sure whether to categorize Carnelian as a victim or a villain. Lewis had found himself on several occasions in an unusual state of mind as the result of the wizard's will. And yet Carnelian had given him money, and seemed innocent or foolish enough to trust him. Naturally, Lewis believed he was crazy. And yet Carnelian was capable of functioning in the outside world, seemed quite independent, and had money. Lewis formed no conclusions from his reflections, except to continue to be cautious, and not to relinquish more than he gained.

And yet as he walked the streets he was tempted not to go back. To rid himself of Carnelian once and for all. To pick enough pockets to buy a ticket back to New York, and return to his mother and his friends. He did not yet miss his mother, and did not trust his friends, but it was a world he understood. There were risk, of course, but he understood them. Here with the wizard anything could happen. It was this uncertainty, this inability to ascertain his status that bothered him most.

He followed a purse for several blocks but did not grab it. The woman entered a building and he let her go and did not pursue another. He reasoned that it just wasn't worth the

effort as long as the wizard was paying for everything, and he leisurely returned to the hotel.

Carnelian found the hospital as crowded and complicated as the one in London. Some things that had perplexed him on the day of his awakening, however, were now quite familiar to him. As he entered the elevator he smiled, remembering his terror the first time he had ridden one, when he believed it was a trap. He stepped off on the third floor, uncertain where to go, and entered the first ward. All of the beds were occupied, mostly by the elderly, some of whom were connected to machines.

Carnelian assumed the machines and bottles of fluid served a beneficial purpose, but they did not impress him, for the patients appeared quite ill. None of them, obviously, was a victim of the earthquake—the people he had come here to heal. And he did not possess the energy and time to heal everyone in the hospital. Yet now that he was here, he found it impossible to ignore these poor people and simply walk away.

He went to the bed of an old woman lying unconscious on her back. A needle stuck in her arm was connected to a bottle of clear fluid hanging from a stand. Carnelian glanced at it disdainfully, wondering what it accomplished. Then, with a swift motion, he removed the needle from the woman's arm.

*"Hajanni bein na..."*

He was interrupted by a nurse who screamed at him in Spanish. Rushing over, she threw her arms around the chanting wizard and tried to pull him away from the bed.

Carnelian did not struggle, but continued to look at the sick woman. *"Lydvis acta fen na crellias!"*

A male orderly appeared and grabbed Carnelian roughly by the arm. The nurse let go and hurried to the bed to reinsert the needle. Before she could do so, however, the patient stirred. The nurse gasped, thinking she was taking her

last breath. But the woman opened her eyes and smiled, as if she had just woken from a pleasant dream.

*“Que hora es?”* she wondered aloud. *“Tengo que irme casa!”*

The nurse dropped the IV and looked up. The orderly stared back, standing alone. The stranger had vanished.

Carnelian decided it would be wiser to leave the machines as they were and to travel the corridors invisibly, reappearing only at the bedside of a patient when no one was watching.

On the fourth floor he found victims of the earthquake. Mexicans of all ages with injuries ranging from broken bones to concussions and lacerations. He went first to the victim whose injuries seemed to be the most serious. The man was sleeping uneasily, his head bandaged, his neck in a brace. As Carnelian bent over him he imagined the earthquake and its effects undone, and summoned the strength to close the wounds Bloodstone had opened.

After healing the man, he went to the others, determined to cure them all. There were, of course, patients in the hospital whose status was more critical than those he attended to now, and his decision was a difficult one. But he could not heal everybody. He felt his mission in life was not to alleviate all man’s suffering, a goal he could never achieve, but to counter Bloodstone to the best of his ability, to heal those his enemy hurt, and finally to destroy him. Only then could he focus his attention on more general matters.

Several times nurses interrupted him and he had to become invisible. Those he had healed also posed a problem, for their sudden activity, and in some cases astonishment, distracted him. But eventually he reached the last bed.

He was not naïve enough to believe all the earthquake victims were confined to this ward, or even to this hospital. But he felt too fatigued to seek out the others now, and he was anxious to return to the children. Evening was approaching. And he might have to contend with Bloodstone before the night was over.

Brandon was still sleeping when he returned to the hotel. Lewis was sitting on the other bed, watching TV. He ignored Carnelian when he entered.

“Where’s Julie?”

“She went down to get cigarettes,” he replied, keeping his eyes on the TV.

“Did you sleep?”

“I ain’t four years old,” he retorted, glancing at Brandon. “I don’t need naps.”

“Still, I wish you had slept. It may be a long night.”

Lewis was not concerned. “Why don’t you gimme some spendin’ money?”

“What do you need?”

“I dunno. I’d just like to get some stuff. There’s a store in the lobby.”

“The suitcase is already full, and we must travel light.”

“No sweat. I’ll just get some food and stuff.”

Carnelian thought for a moment. “Purchase enough for the three of you,” he instructed, handing Lewis two bills without even looking at them. “Drinks also. We may not return to the city tomorrow.”

After Lewis left he gently nudged Brandon. The child was reluctant to open his eyes, but when he saw the wizard he jumped up and seemed wide awake. “You know what I dreamed about?” he asked in a voice that preferred the reality. “I dreamed about being at home. Just watching TV. Before, when I was at home, I always dreamed about having adventures. Now that I’m having an adventure I dream about home! Isn’t that strange?”

Carnelian smiled. “It isn’t strange at all.”

Brandon did not understand, but other matters concerned him more. “Are we going to spend the night in the village?”

“Yes.”

“But it’s destroyed. Where are we going to sleep?”

“Wherever we can.”

Brandon found the idea appealing. "It'll be like camping!"

Julie returned with her cigarettes, followed a few minutes later by Lewis, who carried a bag filled with candy, snacks, a six-pack of soft drinks, and an English language copy of *Sports Illustrated*. Carnelian grabbed his staff and the suitcases and led them to a waiting taxi.

It was dark when they reached the village. Carnelian instructed the driver to stop before they reached the checkpoint, and they traveled the rest of the way on foot. Beside the starlight and the wide moon, the only illumination came from a fire by the soldiers' jeep. They walked quietly in the bushes, avoiding the road. Only a few guards now patrolled the area, and Carnelian was able to lead them into the village without resorting to magic.

"Why are the soldiers here?" Brandon asked in a whisper.

"To keep people from looting," Julie replied. "Though there doesn't seem to be anything to loot."

Carnelian entered a house on the edge of the settlement. The door was still standing, but the wall contained holes in either side. It was not occupied.

"We shall pass the night in here," he said, setting down the suitcases on the cracked wooden floor.

Julie used her lighter to see. The house was little more than a shack. There were only two rooms, and the ceiling in the second room had collapsed. There was no kitchen, only a collection of cooking utensils and a portable stove. There was also an electric heater, but the house contained no other appliances. Nor was there a bathroom or running water.

Carnelian was reminded of the peasant cottages of his own day, not much different from this, and wondered how people could progress so far in some areas and so little in others.

Brandon sat down on one of the two straw beds. "This is neat!"

"It sucks," Lewis complained. "I'd rather sleep at home."

Julie sat down next to Brandon, but it was so dark she could barely see him. "Can we light a fire?"

"No," the wizard replied. "We don't want to attract the soldiers' attention."

"Or Bloodstone's," Brandon added.

"Bloodstone does not require a fire to find us, my child. But I do not sense his presence in the area, so I deem it safe to leave you for a while."

Julie did not want to be parted from the wizard in this forlorn place. "Where are you going?" she asked in a worried voice.

"To search for survivors."

"Can't we come with you?"

"I will take Lewis. The two of you shall remain."

"I don't wanna go," Lewis said.

The wizard turned to him, his eyes strangely illuminated in the darkness. "I am not giving you a choice."

After they were gone, Brandon huddled close to Julie. "I hope they'll be all right."

"I hope we'll be all right! Even the cemetery was better than this!"

"What cemetery?"

Julie did not answer but lit a cigarette. In the tiny glow they could see each other's face.

"Carnelian said not to light any fires," Brandon reminded her.

"He meant big fires. Besides, we're inside."

"There are holes in the walls the soldiers can see through."

"No one's going to see," Julie said, her desire to smoke greater than her fear of being discovered. "It's too dark in here anyway."

"Yeah," Brandon agreed. "It's spooky. It's cold too."

Julie used her lighter to provide greater illumination. The house remained shrouded in shadow, but she noticed some

blankets piled in a corner. She divided them between Brandon and herself.

“Thanks,” Brandon said.

“Do you want something to eat?”

“Yes, please.”

She was amused by his courtesy and handed him the groceries. “Take what you want.”

He chose a bag of potato chips and one of the soft drinks. “It sure gets cold here at night,” he said. “It was so hot this afternoon.”

“We’re in the mountains,” Julie pointed out.

“I should have packed a coat.”

Julie smiled. “Is this the first time you’ve run away?”

“Yes.”

“You love your parents, don’t you?”

“Don’t you?”

Julie shrugged. “Yeah, I suppose so. We just don’t get along.”

“They didn’t want you to come on the quest with Carnelian?”

She laughed. “They don’t even know about Carnelian. I left long before that.”

“How old are you?”

“Sixteen.”

“Well, that’s almost an adult,” Brandon reasoned. “I’m only ten.” He looked toward the door. The wind howled through the openings in the walls and ceilings.

Julie lit another cigarette, more for the comfort of the glow than from a desire to smoke. “What do you think of LC?” she asked.

“I don’t think he likes me,” Brandon replied. “He’s always giving me mean looks.”

“I wouldn’t worry about it,” Julie told him. “He’s just trying to act tough. But he doesn’t scare me.”

“He doesn’t scare me either. Not even Bloodstone scares me.”

Julie did not believe him. “Not even Bloodstone?”



“Well, maybe just a little.”

Julie laughed, glad to have his company. Brandon’s problems took her mind off her own. Comforting him helped her forget that she herself needed sympathy. “Would you like to lay down on my lap?” she asked when he was finished eating.

He nodded in the darkness and moved over. Julie pulled the blankets around him.

“Thank you.”

“You’re the most polite child I’ve ever met!” she told him. “Maybe some of it will rub off on LC.” They both laughed. “Tell me about what you do at home,” she then suggested.

“I play a lot,” he said quietly. “Especially in the summer, when I don’t have school.”

“What do you play?”

“Different things. Fantasy games. I ride my bike. I have a clubhouse in my back yard.”

“A clubhouse? That sounds like fun.”

“It is. It’s almost as big as this house!” he exclaimed. “I didn’t know people lived in places like this. I know people live in slums. But this is worse than any slum I’ve ever seen!”

“I think it’s worse than any slum LC’s ever seen too. It’s sad that people have to live this way.”

“Maybe when I get back home I can send them my clubhouse so they’ll have an extra room.”

Outside, Carnelian and Lewis walked quietly through the dirt streets, looking at the rubble in the darkness.

“It is possible there may be one or two survivors trapped still in the ruins,” the wizard explained.

“If they ain’t found already they be dead by now,” Lewis said.

“Perhaps not.”

“Well, you do it yourself. I can’t see out here!”

“It is not necessary to see, my child. You shall smell.” Lewis thought he was crazier than ever. “Smell!”

But before he could say more the wizard had turned him into a bloodhound. Lewis did not know what had happened, only that he was closer to the ground, could run on all fours, and that his sense of smell was remarkably acute. He darted off, following his nose.

Carnelian was dismayed by the speed with which Lewis ran away. "Not so fast!" he called in a hushed tone. "Stay within my sight!"

The dog did not obey and Carnelian ran after him, wishing he had tied him to his hand. The area was littered with debris, and the mottled bloodhound would be difficult for even Carnelian's keen eyes to spot among the shadows.

He ran a while longer, then stopped, wondering what to do. He could not return to the shelter without Lewis. And yet he did not want to leave Julie and Brandon alone all night. He sat down and closed his eyes, preparing to cast a spell that might lead him to Lewis, or Lewis back to him. The spell was not completely reliable, but the wizard preferred it to running in circles.

He had no sooner opened his mouth, however, than he heard barking. He jumped to his feet, feeling only dread at the sound. "Be silent you fool!" he urged, regretting his decision to employ Lewis.

But the bloodhound continued to bark. Carnelian hurried in the direction of the sound.

Lewis continued to run and bark, rejoicing in his freedom, completely unaware of his situation. Carnelian, all too aware, but feeling almost powerless, pursued.

A moment later an explosive sound rang out, echoing in the hills. The barking ceased. Carnelian, though he knew little of firearms, suspected the worst, and assumed some sort of weapon had been used.

He gripped the staff so tight that it caused him pain. The dog lay in the dirt road, on its side, blood dripping from its hind leg. Carnelian bent down and, seeing that it was not dead, wasted no time in healing. Placing his hands on the animal, he changed it back into human form. He did not

worry about being attacked himself, for no weapon, however modern, could harm him. His only concern was Lewis's safety.

The child cried out in pain, looking around.

Carnelian put his hand over the boy's mouth. "If you value your life be silent! The pain will only last a moment."

Lewis pushed the wizard's hand away and leaned up to look at his leg. "I've been shot!"

"I am sorry."

His memory was vague and the pain tremendous. "By you?" he said, grimacing.

Carnelian shook his head. "A soldier," he answered. "Who may still be near."

"But I don't remember. I was runnin'. I heard a shot, but I didn't see no one. It was strange. Like a dream." He lay back down, the pain too intense for speech.

Carnelian welcomed his silence and immediately cast the spell. The first time he spoke it the wound vanished. The second time Lewis's body relaxed, and the agony left his face.

He sat up with a start. "I don't feel it anymore!"

"How is your leg?"

The boy stood up, staring at his left calf. "Fine," he whispered. He looked at the wizard. "But I was shot!" He looked back at his leg. There was a hole in his pants, and fresh blood on his clothes, but no wound. "It can't be! It hurt so bad! I ain't never known nothin' hurt so bad!" The boy took a couple steps. He stared at Carnelian and for a moment wondered if he really was a wizard. But his skepticism remained, and he assumed the incident must have been a trick or a dream, and felt embarrassed for having cried out. Unable to account for the hole in his pants and the blood on his clothes, he told himself the mystery wasn't worth solving.

Carnelian placed a hand on the boy's shoulder and Lewis was so bewildered that he let him keep it there. The wizard looked at him with a grim expression. "I am deeply sorry," he said. "Please forgive me."

Lewis preferred to believe there was no reason for Carnelian to apologize. "There's nothin' to forgive."

Julie and Brandon were still awake when they returned. "We heard a shot," Julie said as they entered. "Are you all right?"

Lewis was taken aback by her statement. "You heard a shot?"

"Did you find any survivors?" Julie asked.

"No, but we almost lost one."

She sat up straight, trying to see them better in the darkness. "Then that shot we heard?"

"Lewis was wounded, but I have healed him."

She turned to Lewis with concern. "What happened?"

"Nothin'!" he said angrily.

She patted the other bed. "Why don't you lie down?"

But Lewis did not want their company. He grabbed one of the blankets and went into the other room, the one in which the ceiling had collapsed, and found space on the floor. The stars shone above him, and it was cold, but he did not care. He had not slept in over twenty-four hours, and would have collapsed on the walk back to the shelter if his suspicion of Carnelian had not driven him on.

"What happened?" Julie asked the wizard after Lewis had left.

"I made an error in judgment," Carnelian admitted. "And it has not been the first, either. I changed him into a bloodhound and he ran away and began barking. He did not understand he was a bloodhound, you see. It was foolish of me to bring you. To put your lives in danger."

"Our lives were already in danger. Mine anyway," Julie said. "What do we do now?"

"Sleep. I do not sense that Bloodstone is near. And we all need rest."

"Were your parents wizards?" Brandon asked after Carnelian lay down.

“I don’t know. A legend in my time told that both Bloodstone and I were born of the stones for which we are named. The stones were enchanted, then swallowed by our mothers, whom they impregnated.”

“What is a carnelian stone?” Brandon asked.

The wizard removed his amulet and showed it to the boy. The pale red stone shone with a light it had not possessed when Julie bought it. Brandon held it with reverence for a moment before handing it back.

“Legend has it that Bloodstone was created by a mad sorcerer to destroy the race of man, and that I was conceived years later to destroy him.”

Brandon thought for a moment. “Tell me what I saw that time I looked in your eyes. There was a battle and a bird.”

“That was King Edward’s war with Wales. The crow was Bloodstone.”

Brandon was thrilled that he had seen Bloodstone’s image, as if the experience imparted prestige. “Whose side was he on?”

“Death’s side.”

“But which army did he fight for?”

“Whichever was losing. He lengthened the wars and increased the carnage.”

“And who did you fight for?”

“I did not participate in wars,” Carnelian replied. “Except to fight against them.”

“How?”

“By creating winds that delayed invading ships. Or fogs that slowed the steps of battle and impaired an archer’s aim.”

“And it worked?”

The wizard looked away, the memories unpleasant. “Never!” he confessed. “I postponed a battle now and then, and perhaps some lives were saved that might have otherwise perished. But men have always been too eager to slay one another.”

Brandon was respectfully silent for a moment, aware that the memories were painful for the wizard. But he could not sleep without learning more. “Did you live in a castle?”

“At times. I kept a castle near Oxford. Though, because I traveled so frequently, I usually stayed with friends and grateful strangers.”

“With kings and lords?”

Carnelian laughed, forgetting the old wars. “Yes. But also with scholars and peasants. A poor widow needs a wizard’s aid as much as any king, if not more. And her wit is usually sharper!”

The wind howled through the shack and stung Brandon’s face. He pulled the covers tighter about him. “Did Bloodstone also live in a castle?”

“Yes.”

“Did you ever go inside it?”

“I did indeed,” the wizard said in a more serious voice. “On one occasion he was not home and I explored the premises. On another, less pleasant occasion, I was held prisoner and stayed for a considerably longer time.”

Brandon grew more excited. “What happened? Tell me what his castle was like and how you escaped.”

“Perhaps another time. We must sleep.”

“Tell us a story first,” he pleaded. “Please!”

The wizard hesitated. “Very well,” he finally agreed. “But we will not speak of Bloodstone. Instead I shall tell you of Marie Bejart.”

“Who was Marie Bejart?”

“Listen and you will find out.” He paused for a moment, recalling the details. “You may know something of the Inquisition,” he then began. “It was an effort by the Church to force heretics to repent, or to punish them if they did not, and thus deter others from speaking or acting in a manner unacceptable to the Church. Most of the trials, at least in my time, were mild, and the Inquisition was not very evident in England. But there were abuses, particularly in France and Spain, and many were tortured or killed.”

“Burned at the stake,” Julie said.

“Yes,” Carnelian said sadly. “Then you know. Well, it happened during one of my journeys to France. I was staying with a kindly marquis, whose name I can’t recall. In any event, I had granted him some small favors, and word must have gone about the village, for one day while I was walking a young man approached me. He was not sure I was a wizard, but had heard I had helped the marquis and assumed that, being his guest, I must be a person of influence. He told me his mother, Marie Bejart, had been accused by the Church of being a witch and was being held in a dark cell. The boy’s father could not help because he was away fighting for the Church in the Crusade. Such a fact, rather than helping the wife, only served to further infuriate the inquisitors, who felt the woman must be condemned so her virtuous husband would not return home to a heretic, and so his children would not be corrupted.

“Of course these children—the son, who approached me, and a daughter—were her only hope. But they were not even allowed to see her, and knew no one who might keep her from the stake. Even the marquis’s power in these matters was slight.

“I sympathized with the family—the desperate children, the helpless mother, the husband who, being lucky enough to survive the Crusade, would come home to discover his Church had burned his wife.

“So I agreed to help the son and immediately set off for his mother’s cell, to which I had no difficulty gaining access. The place was indeed dark and dismal, the only light coming through the cracks in the ceiling, for there was no window. However, the daylight was strong and I was able to see her clearly. Her hands were manacled to the wall and she had recently been flogged. I felt particularly sorry for her because she was still a young woman and had probably been attractive before her imprisonment. She had been accused of witchcraft because she grew herbs in her garden, which she uses for medicinal purposes. The people in my day had a

penchant for finding a witch behind every hawthorn tree, while the deeds of a genuine wizard went unnoticed. I proceeded to take what I considered the appropriate action. And which turned out to be the worst thing I could have done under the circumstances. I released her.”

Brandon pondered the wizard’s decision. “How could freeing her be bad?” he wondered.

“Because that only further convinced the inquisitors that she was a witch,” Carnelian replied. “And a powerful and dangerous witch at that, who must be caught at any expense, and then burned without delay!

“I, of course, did not realize this at the time. Though I have spared many from the stake and the rack, Marie Bejart was the first, and I was naive enough to believe she and her children were safe to resettle in another town.

“But I was mistaken. The inquisitors pursued her with ferocity and recaptured her at night on the road. I was about to leave the marquis when the son rode up on horseback, breathless and pale. He told me his mother had been captured again and was at this very moment being led to the stake in the village square.

“We rode there with the greatest haste. But the dilemma I faced was great. For it was not enough to simply liberate her. No, I must free her in a manner which will not further incriminate her. A manner, if possible, which will prove her innocence.

“Ideas raced through my mind, but none was satisfactory. The village square was before us and we could see a woman tied to a stake upon a platform, twigs piled about her feet, and a large crowd watching with horror and a macabre excitement.

“The son dismounted and tore through the crowd, shouting. But he was still far from the platform when a man lit the pyre and flames leapt up, engulfing his mother!”

Julie leaned forward. “You did save her, though?”

“I sat watching in horror,” the wizard continued. “It was too late for spells. Perhaps if I had half a minute more I



might have saved her. But as it was I could only watch. And I could not even do that for long, for the sight sickened me, and I had to turn away.

“But a moment later gasps from the crowd made me turn back. To my infinite joy, the woman was not burning!” The wizard laughed loudly. “She was, indeed, a witch! A few moments later she turned into a raven and flew away, to the consternation of the inquisitors! I found the incident most amusing. Witch-hunters always believe witches must be burned, but this witch drew her power from fire! They should have kept her in the dark cell, where she was helpless!”

Brandon was quiet for a minute, savoring the story. “Were there many real witches?” he then asked.

“Only a few,” Carnelian replied. “And as for wizards, I have only encountered Bloodstone.”

Julie and Brandon lay down, thinking about the inquisitors and the witch. The wind began to gust and stung bitter cold. They could hear debris blowing around outside.

“It’s only the wind,” Julie said fearfully, more as an answer than a question.

Carnelian lay down and did not respond. He did not know.

Julie was the first of the children to wake. Carnelian was already up, sitting on the edge of his bed, thinking.

“How did you sleep?” she asked, glancing around. The shack looked more sparse and devastated in the daylight than it had during the night.

“As usual.”

“Nightmares again? I didn’t hear you. The wind was so loud.” She peered outside, grateful for the daylight. “You want to go for a walk?”

“I do not know how safe it is outside,” he replied. “The soldiers may still be present. I suggest you stay here.”

“What about you?”

“I must go in to the city, to the hospitals. I shall return before dark.” He stood to go, but hesitated, remembering something he wanted to ask. “There is a point on which you must enlighten me,” he said. “In my hasty study of your time, I have neglected to familiarize myself with your instruments of war. Explain to me the weapon the soldiers carry.”

“You mean guns?”

“Guns?”

“Yes. Well, really rifles. That’s what the soldiers were carrying. I don’t know how they work. They fire bullets, which are like tiny missiles. That’s why you don’t see knights in armor anymore, because bullets can pierce armor.”

“I see,” he said in a worried tone. “It is as I feared. The art of warfare has progressed as much as the sciences of transportation and architecture. Man must then be as far from peace as ever. I dread to ask, but you must tell me more so that I might be prepared.”

Julie looked concerned. “You think Bloodstone would use these weapons?”

“I fear he already has.”

“Well, I’m no expert on war, and I’m not sure how to describe things.” She paused, thinking of the best way to express her limited knowledge. “There are tanks, which are sort of like cars with big guns. There are ships with big guns, and planes that drop bombs...”

“What are bombs?”

“They’re explosives. They blow things up. The worst are nuclear weapons. You can’t imagine how destructive they are. A single one could wipe out a city. And the radiation, which is poison, could last for centuries, killing as many people as the blast, and contaminating the food and water.”

The wizard’s face grew grave. “Have they often been employed?”

“Only once,” Julie replied. “But those were small bombs compared to the ones now. They can destroy the world.”

Carnelian thought of Bloodstone. “Where are they stored?”

“I don’t know. In different places. Many are in rockets in silos in the ground. Others, I think, are in submarines.”

“What are submarines?”

“Boats that travel underwater.”

“Boats that travel underwater!” He frowned, gazing through an opening in the wall at the rubble outside. “I suppose it is inevitable,” he mused, “that all strides forward will be used to the greatest disadvantage. It has always been so in the past. But such strides!” He rapped his staff angrily against the broken floor. “What can a wizard do against ships that travel underwater? What can a wizard do in such a world?”

When Brandon and Lewis woke, Carnelian was already gone. Julie was sitting on the wizard’s bed, smoking.

Brandon said “Good morning,” but Lewis ignored him. The older boy grabbed food and drink from the bag, as well as his *Sports Illustrated*, and returned to the other room.

A few moments later Brandon decided to follow. The room was hardly a room anymore, most of the ceiling having

collapsed, and the walls leaning at precarious angles. Lewis sat on the only undisturbed area of the floor, leafing through the magazine. He noticed Brandon and glanced up. "What you want?"

"Nothing," Brandon said defensively. He sat down next to Lewis, peering over his shoulder as he flipped through the pages. "How come you're just looking at the pictures?" he asked. "Can't you read?" Lewis did not reply, and Brandon moved closer. "You want me to read it to you?"

He reached for the magazine, but Lewis held it back.

"No!"

Brandon sulked away. "I was only trying to help."

"Don't worry about him," Julie said when he returned. "He's just mean."

Brandon sat down on the other bed. "I just wish Carnelian were here. We should be helping, instead of just sitting around. I don't know why he brought us."

"He didn't bring you," she reminded him.

"Well, I don't know why he brought you. And LC," he added, glancing toward the other room. "It's just not supposed to be like this on a quest," he said in a disappointed voice.

Julie smiled. "How many quests have you been on before?"

"None. But it's not like I imagined."

"I'm sure if you ask him he'll let you go home."

Brandon turned away. "I didn't say I wanted to go home."

He pouted until Lewis appeared. "Read this."

Brandon jumped up, feeling useful, and followed Lewis into the other room. The magazine was open to an article about a football game. "Do you play football, LC?" he asked after reading the article aloud. "Do you wanna toss?"

"Toss what?"

"I don't know. I'm sure we can find something."

Lewis rose reluctantly. "Yeah, I guess so. Ain't nothin' better to do."

They were about to leave the shelter when Julie stopped them. “Where do you think you’re going?”

“Just out to toss,” Brandon answered.

“Carnelian said to stay inside.”

“He ain’t our father,” Lewis retorted. “And you ain’t our mother. Besides, it’s as safe out there as it is in here.”

Julie glanced around, wanting to go outside herself. “All right,” she agreed, leading them out. “Just don’t go far.”

The sun was bright outside, the sky cloudless. The village, though still in rubble, was alive this morning. Voices could be heard, and people seen, some with mules, one with an old pickup truck. Some were moving away, most were rebuilding. They could hear the sounds of primitive construction—no heavy machinery or power tools, just hammers and nails, rusty saws, the grunts of men and boys lifting heavy loads. They could see a group of women carrying water from a well. No one seemed to notice them, however, too concerned with rebuilding their lives to stare at foreigners. The soldiers had either left the area or were patrolling the perimeter.

The sun and the mountain air felt good to Julie, and helped to lift her spirits. Still, as she looked at the destruction wreaked by the earthquake, and the destitution caused by man, she felt a pity that only compounded her own unhappiness. “I might as well make myself useful,” she decided, and approached the villagers to offer her help.

Lewis picked up a stone and threw it at Brandon, hard. Brandon jumped out of the way as the stone whizzed past. “What are you doing?”

Lewis laughed. “I thought you wanted to play toss?”

“Not that hard!”

Lewis saw that Brandon was beginning to have second thoughts and picked up another stone. “All right,” he said in as mollifying a voice as he could manage.

He threw it softly this time. Brandon reached with both hands but missed. Lewis kicked the dirt with contempt. “Man, you stink!”

“I need to warm up!” He picked up the stone and threw it back. Lewis caught it without effort and gave Brandon another chance.

This time he got a hand on the stone, but it still fell to the ground. “I’ll get it!” he promised, hoping Lewis would not quit.

They tossed for several minutes. Brandon caught a few, but missed most.

“If the guys know’d I was tossin’ with a ten-year-old white wimp,” Lewis complained, “I’d never be able to show my face back home!”

“I’m not a wimp!” Brandon yelled back.

Lewis grinned. “Oh yeah?”

“Yeah!” Brandon wished Carnelian were here to protect him. Or even Julie.

“Well, we’ll see about that!” Lewis said, running toward him. Brandon yelled and fled. He wanted to find Julie, but Lewis was chasing him away from the village. He ran as fast as he could, but Lewis was older and faster, and Brandon found breathing difficult in the thin mountain air.

Ahead, the mountain sloped steeply upward. Lewis slowed to allow Brandon to reach it. He laughed when Brandon saw there was nowhere to go, and then he attacked.

He grabbed Brandon by the shirt and spun him around. Brandon fell, scraping his arm on a rock. He started to yell out, but Lewis picked him up before he could speak and punched him in the jaw.

Brandon cried. He wanted to be strong, but the pain was too great, and his feelings were hurt as well. But his tears only seemed to make Lewis angrier. The older boy picked him back up and pressed him to his face. “You a wimp! You nothin’ but a wimp!” He let go and stepped back, preparing to strike him again. “Now we’ll see—”

But his words were lost in the sudden roar. The ground shook beneath them and it seemed as if the earth would be pulled from under their feet. Brandon cried out, terrified. Lewis forgot his anger and felt only a pathetic helplessness.

The rumbling intensified, and both had to make an effort to keep their balance. Lewis looked up and saw boulders on the slope breaking loose.

“Look out!” he shouted, lunging at Brandon. He pushed him out of the way and they fell together to the shaking ground. Time seemed suspended during the aftershock, but it was over in seconds. The movement ceased but the world continued to spin, as if they had just stepped off a dizzying amusement park ride. The earth was quiet again; the only sounds were human voices, the shouts of concerned mothers for their children, of husbands for their wives, the cries of the injured.

Lewis rose quickly, not wishing to appear beaten or afraid. Brandon climbed to his feet more slowly, an expression of shock on his face, the pain in his chin forgotten. When he turned back to look at the spot where he had stood his sense of horror grew, for he saw only a pile of boulders.

With an effort he turned away, shuddering. He looked at Lewis with gratitude, their fight no longer important. “You saved my life!”

Lewis walked away. Brandon ran after him. “You saved my life!” he repeated. He had just begun to think about Julie when she spotted them and hurried over. Ahead they could see the shelter, still standing.

“Are you hurt?” Julie asked, her face and clothes dirty, but not injured.

Lewis walked past her toward the shelter and did not reply. Brandon ran to her and she hugged him in relief. “Lewis saved my life!” Brandon said.

Lewis sat by the shelter, but not inside, fearing another aftershock. He ignored Brandon’s attempts to show his appreciation, preferring to be alone. Brandon and Julie went through the village, helping the injured. No one in the area had been killed, and few were seriously wounded. Soldiers

appeared almost immediately to ease the confusion, but medical staff did not arrive for an hour.

It was mid-afternoon when Carnelian returned. He found Julie and Brandon assisting one of the doctors, who spoke English.

They brightened when they saw him, though he looked tired. "There were slight tremors in the city," the wizard said. "But no damage. I came as quickly as I could." He touched Brandon's face. "You hurt your chin?"

"I'm okay."

"And Lewis?"

"He's fine," Julie said. "It wasn't as bad as the earthquake Thursday."

"No," the wizard agreed. "Fortunately, I do not think there are any dead. But there are many more injured than you see here. Scores lie in the neighboring villages. I must go to them."

"What about us?" Julie wondered.

"You seem to be valuable here. Do what you can."

Brandon stopped him as he turned to leave. "What about Bloodstone?" he asked.

But the wizard was already gone.

Carnelian wished he could rest. He had not slept well last night, and was fatigued from his traveling to the city and the numerous healing spells he had cast. But there was no time to pause. Sleep would have to wait until many more people had been healed, and even, perhaps, until Bloodstone had been encountered.

As he walked away from the crowd he wondered where Bloodstone would next strike. The thought of leaving the children alone unsettled him, and he decided every effort must be made to return by nightfall.

When he had reached a secluded area he changed himself into a falcon and flew down the mountain to the next village. This village was much larger than the other, and had received more damage during the aftershock than from the initial



earthquake. Few of the dwellings were devastated, but most had sustained minor damage. The townspeople no longer showed any signs of panic, but behaved in a practical and orderly manner, either preparing to leave for safer ground or sweeping the rubble from their modest homes.

Carnelian found the injured lying on tables beneath a large canopy. He did not try to guess what purpose the tables had served before the earthquake, but imagined they were meant to hold food, not people, and hoped to return them to their original function as soon as possible.

He strode through impatiently, ignoring the nurses and soldiers. None of the injuries seemed serious, but many of the victims, not a few of whom were children, moaned in pain. Their lives were not in danger, yet Carnelian could not ignore their suffering. Bloodstone was responsible and must be countered, for the presence of suffering only strengthened him.

Carnelian went first to a young boy, perhaps Lewis's age. His head was wounded beneath a rag bandage. His mother stood by his side holding his hand, impatiently waiting for the nurse.

The wizard laid his hands on the child and began chanting. The mother did not interfere, thinking he was some kind of healer. When the boy stopped groaning she shouted out in joy, but Carnelian had hurried to another table.

Here lay an old man, silent but wincing from the pain in his leg, which seemed broken. Carnelian touched it lightly and spoke. The man relaxed and began to breath steadily.

As the wizard moved through the tent he attracted more attention. At first people merely shouted to him, either nurses and soldiers yelling questions, or the healed and their relatives exclaiming their gratitude. Carnelian ignored them all, never standing still long enough to be properly interrogated or thanked. Yet as he continued it grew apparent to those in the tent that all he touched grew instantly well, and climbed down from their tables as if they

had never been injured at all. The more skeptical stood back, wondering if it were some sort of hoax. But those Carnelian had healed knew their pain was real, and that it was not a doctor who had cured them. Cries went up in Spanish, which the wizard did not understand, except for one word, said over and over by the crowd, with the *J* silent; “Jesus!”

They crowded around him, blocking him from those who needed his attention. They offered thanks, or begged for his blessing and salvation. When he smiled appeasingly at them, hoping to retreat, they grew mad and crowded him further, desperate to touch his robe or his beard. They fell at his feet, or grabbed his staff. Even the soldiers stood among them. Carnelian found it difficult to move. He began to feel trapped, as he had in the tomb.

He shouted at them, annoyed and angry. The villagers withdrew in terror, like school children who have been severely scolded. Their unintelligible supplications suddenly ceased and they cowered before him, as if he might restore their pain. Those he had not yet cured took the opportunity to crawl through the circle and beg for his touch. Carnelian gave it willingly, though his fatigue and the demands for his attention hampered the spells’ effectiveness. The crowd, seeing that his wrath had ended, again pressed forward, shouting as they had before.

Carnelian decided to leave the rest of the injured to conventional medicine. He broke through the crowd and strode away. The villagers, believing they had witnessed a miracle, respectfully remained where they were and watched him go.

Several reporters and camera crews had been present in the village when Carnelian arrived, and had rushed to the tent when the commotion began. Now that Carnelian had emerged from the crowd they swarmed around him, as discourteous as the villagers were reverent, aiming lenses at his eyes and shoving microphones under his nose.

One American reporter, a woman, suddenly appeared before him, forcing him to stop. “Excuse me,” she said

hurriedly, but not without an air of politeness. “Can you please answer some questions?”

Carnelian was surprised to hear English. He looked at the woman.

“These people seem to believe you’ve performed miracles,” she continued. “They claim you have healed them with your touch.”

The other reporters pressed in closer.

“Who are you?” she asked. “You aren’t Mexican. Are you a doctor?”

Carnelian looked in dismay at the cameras, dreading the thought of his image appearing in newspapers and on television. He had always avoided excessive publicity, especially when his identity and mission might be misconstrued. Now, as much as ever, privacy was essential, for he could not confront Bloodstone while surrounded by worshippers, or hounded by reporters.

“What are you doing here?” the lady pursued.

Carnelian realized he must avoid the sensational, and hoped that if he appeared uninteresting enough they would let him leave. “I’m just an Englishman on holiday,” he said in a quiet voice.

The reporter paused, shocked by the answer. She had expected mad, deluded pronouncements. Yet in this context, such a prosaic reply seemed to make less sense than a sermon from a lunatic. It did not correspond with the ravings of the villagers, or with the wizard’s strange appearance.

The reporter regarded him with more respect than before, beginning to feel a mistake had been made. “But these people claim you have cured them,” she said.

“How could I?” the wizard asked.

The reporter was disappointed the interview would not be usable and felt foolish for having wasted her time on a man whose only eccentricity was his dress. The other journalists, too, lost interest in Carnelian and made room for him to pass. He walked away quickly, thinking of the next town, hoping his energy would last.

It was evening and Julie was out of cigarettes. She and Brandon were exhausted, having helped the doctors and villagers for hours without rest. Now that the village was quiet again they stood alone, ignored even by the soldier who sped along the dirt road and disappeared behind the mountains. No one seemed curious about them, preoccupied as they were with their own problems.

"I'm hungry," Brandon said as they walked back to the shelter. "Is there any food left?"

"No. There aren't any cigarettes either. He better return soon," she complained, "and take us back to civilization. I don't know why he brought us here in the first place."

"He probably had a lot of people to heal," Brandon pointed out.

"Well why doesn't he take care of us?" she exclaimed. "You're starving and I'm having a nicotine fit! Doesn't that count for anything?"

Brandon noticed the edge in her voice and decided not to reply.

She led him to a pile of refuse and began digging for cigarette butts. She found one without a filter, so harsh that it stung her throat, but she smoked it greedily, and felt a moment's relief.

Brandon patiently waited, glancing at the pile of trash and discarded belongings, possessions in such hopeless condition that even the indigent villagers preferred to be without them. Near the bottom of the pile a smile caught his eye. It belonged to an old rag doll, torn and soiled.

Brandon pulled it out and dusted it off. At home he only played with new toys, and attached no sentiment to tattered stuffed animals. But he had brought none with him, and found comfort in the doll. It had suffered and was alone. It was something he could cling to when Carnelian was gone.

"I wonder who it belonged to," he said.

Julie felt sad, looking at the pair. She wished Carnelian had left Brandon at Kennedy Airport. As for the doll, if Brandon had not seen it, she would have taken it herself.

They walked most of the way in silence, Brandon clutching the doll to his chest. When the shack came into view he stopped and looked at Julie.

She noticed his hesitation. "What's the matter?"

Brandon felt frightened and confused. "Why does LC hate me?" he asked.

Julie frowned. "He doesn't hate you, Brandon."

"Yes he does!" he insisted. "He saved my life, but he still hates me. Maybe even more. But I don't know why."

"He's just jealous."

Brandon did not understand. "But he catches better than I do."

"He's poorer than you are."

Brandon looked away, suddenly enlightened. He had assumed Lewis's dislike for him was personal. Julie's explanation came as a relief. "Do you think that's why?"

Julie took his hand and led him inside. "Don't worry about it," she advised him. "I don't think he likes anyone."

Lewis was lying on one of the beds, throwing a stone in the air, obviously bored. When Julie and Brandon entered he got up and went into the other room. After a moment, Brandon set down the doll and followed.

Lewis ignored him, leaning against the collapsed roof, throwing the rock.

"I just wanted to let you know," Brandon began in a nervous voice.

Lewis didn't even look at him.

"After we destroy Bloodstone and go back home you can come over to my house one day and pick out anything of mine you want."

Lewis felt insulted by the offer. When Brandon left he sat down, restless and angry. There was nothing to do here and nowhere to go. The earthquake had only increased his sense of helplessness and fear.

He got up and went outside, ignoring Julie, who asked where he was going. After taking a few steps he turned around, but she was not following.

Night had fallen and most of the villagers were in their homes, either eating dinner or resting after the long day. Fires could be seen glowing from some of the shacks. The only other illumination came from the sky. Hundreds of stars shone through the cloudless atmosphere, along with the waning moon.

Theft for Lewis was a weapon to battle the boredom and powerlessness of his bleak life. Desperate in this primitive place to express strength and deny his own fear, he turned to it once more.

He approached a three-room dwelling, in better condition than the abandoned shack he and the others occupied. It was inhabited, for a fire was lit in the main room. The other two rooms, however, were dark.

Glass was a luxury in the village, and the windows were covered only with a length of burlap. Lewis found that it was not fastened at the bottom and stealthily climbed inside.

He had entered one of the two dark rooms. A straw mattress lay on the unpolished wooden floor. An unframed mirror, cracked by the earthquake, leaned against the wall, and a man's clothes lay neatly folded in cardboard boxes. There was nothing else in the room.

Lewis was dismayed to find people more destitute than he. But if there was nothing of value to steal, he would steal something without value, just for the challenge and excitement. He had no sooner stepped over to the boxes of clothes, however, than he heard footsteps. He saw a man silhouetted in the doorway. Lewis stood still, not certain whether he had been seen. The man said something in Spanish, then stepped inside. He was turning to leave when he spotted Lewis and yelled out. Lewis dashed to the window and scrambled through. He crashed to the ground and sprinted away, not looking back.

When he stopped to catch his breath, confident he had safely escaped, he noticed how cold it had grown. He also sensed that it was darker, though it took him a moment to understand why. When he looked up the stars were no longer visible, and the mountains were shrouded in mist. The fog swept in like a hurricane, and soon he could not even see the dwellings around him.

He had never experienced such a fog, and grew apprehensive. He did not know in which direction the shack lay, but lacked the patience to wait until the fog cleared. When he stretched out his arm and his hand disappeared in the mist he grew even more anxious and decided to try to escape it.

But running only took him farther away from the village. He could not see the ground, and several times stumbled. His legs disappeared somewhere above the ankle.

Panting, he turned around, feeling confined although out in the open. Except for his breathing, the night was very quiet.

He began to panic, realizing he was lost, and ran still farther. He stopped when he heard laughter. It was a male voice, deep and menacing. Lewis would have approached it, but the voice seemed to originate from no single direction. Rather it surrounded him, like the fog itself. Faint at first, it rose to an unpleasant volume which Lewis could not ignore. He believed it to be a hallucination. Nevertheless, the voice disturbed him.

He tried to flee, but the ground slipped beneath him. At first he thought he was caught in another aftershock, but there was no roar, no trembling of the earth, just a falling away of the ground under him, as if he had stumbled into quicksand.

Yet this was not quicksand, for the ground was dry. Nor had he fallen into a pit, for his descent was gradual, as if the earth had decided to swallow him, and only him, leaving the rest of the mountain untouched.

He gasped, desperately reaching out, but there was nothing to hold on to. He fell several feet, landing in dirt. He was relieved he had not fallen farther. The hole seemed to be narrow, and not much deeper than Lewis was tall. But it was difficult for him to observe it with any clarity in the fog.

The laughing ceased. Lewis quickly scrambled to his feet, anxious to climb out from the hole. But a figure standing on the edge of the pit froze him in terror. The monster cut through the fog, its red eyes peering down at him like beacons from an evil lighthouse. Lewis could not even see his own shoes, but the wizard's black cloak and skullcap were clearly visible in the mist, as was his face, pale green, latticed with bright veins.

Lewis, trembling, stared, unable to look away, drawn by a power he had never imagined possible. Moments passed painfully slow, as if suspended in the fog. The wizard stood patiently, unmoving, his thin lips pressed together in anger and contempt. His eyes held Lewis and did not stray.

With a swift, silent motion he lifted his hands and the child fell. Earth from the top of the pit cascaded down and Lewis knew he was being buried alive. Dirt covered his legs, showered into his mouth, and crushed him against the bottom of the hole with its accumulating weight. The wizard remained visible, standing unchallenged at the edge, arms outstretched, unspeaking.

Lewis tried to struggle, but the falling earth made movement increasingly difficult. He spit the dirt out of his mouth and yelled in utter desperation. "Carnelian! Help! Carnelian!"

He lay back, exhausted and beaten, summoning the strength for one final effort at escape, when the earth stopped falling. Only his face remained uncovered, and he could see that the wizard no longer stood above him. The fog lifted as quickly and mysteriously as it had settled. Looking up, Lewis could once again see the stars in the sky, the waning moon.



The layer of dirt that covered most of his body was not deep enough to hold him down, now that the avalanche was over, and he impatiently pushed it away. Still suspicious, he glanced around. But he was alone. He did not try to understand what had happened, but grabbed a root and pulled himself out of the pit. On stable ground again, he breathed the cold night air deeply and brushed off the dirt. Now that the fog had lifted he had little trouble finding his way back. He ran, anxious to be among others, and appreciative of the starlight.

“Where have you been?” Julie yelled when he returned. She and Brandon were sitting on one of the beds, Carnelian was sleeping on the other. The shack was dark, illuminated only by the light from outside. But when she saw he was covered with dirt and his arms and face were scratched, her anger turned to concern. “What happened?”

Lewis did not look at Julie but stepped past her to the wizard and tapped him on the shoulder.

Carnelian turned over and slowly opened his eyes. When he saw Lewis he bolted up and grabbed the boy by the arms. “My child,” he said in an urgent voice, “are you hurt?”

“I saw him,” Lewis stammered.

“Saw who?” Julie asked.

“Bloodstone,” Carnelian whispered, answering for the boy. He turned to Julie and Brandon. “What happened?”

“We couldn’t see anything because of the fog,” Brandon replied.

“Fog!” the wizard exclaimed. “Why did you not wake me?”

“We thought it was just fog,” Julie said. “And you were so tired.

We didn’t think there was any reason —”

“You did not think!” the wizard interrupted. “And we have almost lost Lewis!” He paused. “But I am the one to blame,” he concluded, looking at the boy.

“You saw Bloodstone?” Brandon asked in an excited voice.

“I was just out walkin’,” Lewis told the wizard, “when all of a sudden the fog comes and I can’t see a thing. Then I hear this laughin’ comin’ from everywhere and I’m dragged down into a hole! And standin’ over me is him!”

“What did he look like?” Julie asked.

“His eyes was like fire and his face was green with red lines all over. And when he looked at me I couldn’t move! Then he raised his hands and dirt came down and almost buried me alive!”

Brandon and Julie moved closer. “How did you escape?” Brandon asked.

Lewis hesitated, thinking of a suitable response. “I looked at him real fierce and then broke free of his spell and threw a rock at him and he disappeared!”

Carnelian raised an eyebrow at the lie but said nothing. He grabbed his staff and stepped outside. “Wait here,” he told them, turning at the door. He fingered the amulet around his neck. “I must battle him alone.”

Brandon would have felt safer following the wizard, but he remained by the entrance with Julie and Lewis. He was thrilled to see that Carnelian remained within view, stopping fifty yards from the shelter with his back to them, looking toward the mountains.

Julie wondered what really happened to Lewis and regarded him skeptically. “So you just threw a rock and he went away?”

Lewis avoided her gaze. “Yeah.”

Julie was about to probe deeper when Carnelian’s voice drew her attention. He was chanting in a commanding voice, his staff raised.

There was a gust of wind. “He’s challenging Bloodstone,” Brandon explained, as if he had witnessed similar situations in the past. He pushed between Julie and Lewis for a better view. “I hope he’s strong enough.”

Lewis watched Carnelian with a new respect, and with fear. The realization that he was not a crazy old man, that Carnelian had indeed transformed him into various animals, terrified Lewis. He had never admitted to being in anyone's power, including his mother's. And now his fate rested in the hands of Carnelian. And his life itself was threatened by Bloodstone.

The wind grew stronger, as clouds obscured the stars. Loose debris rose in the gusts and the children had to glance away to keep the dirt from blowing into their eyes. Carnelian was a dark form in the distance, yelling defiantly as it began to rain. A bolt of lightning, disturbingly close, illuminated the back of his white robe, and his white rain-soaked hair. The thunder was so loud that Brandon recoiled at the sound. He looked at Julie.

Julie gazed at the wizard, fascinated by the scene. Her life was characterized by a sense of helplessness. To view a confrontation between powers who used the elements as weapons was beyond her imagination. Never had she found it more difficult to believe in wizards than now, when Carnelian battled an equally formidable adversary. The Good Wizard's courage and determination against such an enemy impressed her beyond measure, and she wished she possessed but a fraction of his resolve in her daily struggle against despair.

The rain poured harder and the lightning flashed. The children were soaked but did not seek cover. "Is all that Bloodstone?" Brandon asked, watching the storm.

A moment after he spoke a lightning bolt illuminated a large figure standing near Carnelian, his hideous face visible despite his distance. When it was dark again his position could still be perceived, for his red eyes shone through the rain.

The others saw him too. Lewis shrank back in terror, as if the Evil Wizard were seeking him and not Carnelian. Julie gasped, recalling the illustration in the ancient manuscript. Until now she had not given much thought to Bloodstone,

having been somewhat skeptical of his existence, and not sharing Carnelian's certainty that Bloodstone had caused the earthquake.

"Is that him?" Brandon asked, unable to take his eyes from the two brilliant points of light that were Bloodstone's eyes.

Neither Julie nor Lewis answered, but confirmation was unnecessary. Brandon wished he could be more than a spectator, but took consolation in the fact that Carnelian was using the staff he had given him. "Bloodstone doesn't have a staff," he observed as the pair were illuminated by another flash of lightning.

The lightning stopped and the storm passed. The rain diminished to a drizzle and the wind ceased. The children rushed out to meet the wizard, but as they approached they noticed he appeared more defeated than triumphant. He walked slowly, his back hunched over, using the staff as a cane. Water dripped from his beard and robe, and droplets clung to his face like beads of perspiration.

"Is he gone?" Brandon asked in an anxious voice.

"For the moment," Carnelian replied in a whisper.

Brandon waited for more, but the wizard did not elaborate. Instead he walked past them and silently entered the shelter. The children followed but did not speak, respecting his need to rest.

Carnelian looked at the beds, unconcerned that they were soaked from the rain. He set his staff against the wall and removed the amulet from his neck, giving a disappointed smile. "So much for charms!" he remarked. He looked at it for a moment, then threw it down on the floor and turned away.

Brandon rushed to the spot where the amulet lay. He could not see the stone's color in the darkness, but its condition was clear, and disheartening, for it lay shattered in a hundred pieces.

They sat in a cafe in the city the following morning, eating breakfast. The children were famished and ate as if they would never see food again. Indeed, they did not know Carnelian's plans and were uncertain when they would next eat a proper meal. The wizard drank several cups of coffee but had little appetite, disappointed by last night's battle. He was fatigued and had not slept well. He had dreamt of his own time, of his past confrontations with the Dark Wizard. Bloodstone had not weakened in the intervening centuries. Perhaps now he was even stronger. Carnelian had felt his rival's power during the storm. They had stared at each other, Bloodstone silent, indomitable, Carnelian waving his staff in anger, yelling spells, fighting back the apprehension that weakened his spirit. It had been easy to feel confident and optimistic before, when he had first awoken and was impatient for revenge. But now that he had encountered his nemesis and found him as formidable as ever, now that he had stared into those eyes once again, he wondered how such evil could ever be defeated.

"What was it like?" Brandon asked from across the table.

Carnelian was pondering his reflection in the coffee, thinking it frail.

"I mean, fighting Bloodstone," Brandon added. "Was it scary?"

The wizard looked up but did not reply.

"Did he hurt you? Besides breaking the stone?"

Again Carnelian did not answer.

"Where did he go?"

The wizard shook his head. "I do not know."

"How can you be sure you didn't kill him?"

"Because he is immortal."

"Oh." Brandon thought for a moment. "Well, maybe you hurt him real bad," he said hopefully.

But Carnelian felt otherwise. "No," he replied with certainty.

He sat back while the waitress refilled his cup. "What are you going to do?" Julie asked.

“I do not know.”

“Are we going back to the village?”

“Perhaps.”

Julie did not look forward to another night in the village, and would never be able to watch a flash of lightning without seeing Bloodstone’s unearthly face glowering in the rain. But she had grown to care for Carnelian, and found solace in his confidence and power. If he led them back to the village she would follow. And if Bloodstone appeared again she would do as she was told. What troubled her most was Carnelian’s present irresolution, for she would rather he led her to tragedy than to be alone again and forced to make her own decisions.

A barefoot Mexican boy peddling newspapers approached their table. He was no older than Brandon, but was not new to the streets, and seemed determined to make a sale. Julie waved him away, but he only stepped closer. “We can’t read Spanish,” Julie explained.

“You Americans? No problem. I have *New York Times*.” He leafed through his stack of papers and set a copy on their table. “Only twenty-two pesos. Or one dollar.”

Julie was about to hand the newspaper back when Carnelian reached into his pocket, feeling sorry for the child. He handed the boy ten times the amount. “Buy yourself some shoes,” he said.

The boy smiled and hurried away as if Carnelian might change his mind.

The paper lay on the table, untouched. “Aren’t you going to read it?” Julie asked.

The wizard shook his head, preoccupied. “Go ahead.”

“Oh, no. The news depresses me.”

“Then I’ll read it,” Brandon said, more interested in demonstrating his ability to read than in world events. He grabbed the front page and related the headlines.

Carnelian looked up from his coffee. “What’s that about a plague?”

“You mean ‘New Plague in Japan?’”

“What does it say?”

“Three women and two men, remain in critical condition after contracting a mysterious form of plague. Doctors at Tokyo General state the infection is similar to bubonic plague but does not respond to treatments used to fight the Black Death. Also, unlike the three known forms of plague, this new disease is not transmitted by fleas from infected rats to humans, but rather is spread directly by the bite of the rat. All the victims live in the Maguro district of Tokyo and contracted the disease over a period of three days. A correspondence in the bite marks leads health officials to believe a single rat is responsible, and they feel certain the plague will not grow to epidemic proportions. Nevertheless, the victims have been quarantined, and the infected rodent, reputed to measure fifteen inches from head to tail, remains at large.”

Carnelian leaned forward. “Let me see that!” He grabbed the paper from the child’s hands and read the story himself.

“You don’t think...” Julie began. But the dread on the wizard’s face answered her question before she asked it.

“I fear we may be too late,” he said quietly. “At least for the five.”

“I don’t understand,” Julie said. “How could the rat be Bloodstone when we saw him last night?”

“The rat is not Bloodstone,” Carnelian explained. “Bloodstone merely infected it. The disease could have been planted weeks ago, from anywhere. Even as he caused the earth to tremble, Bloodstone may have been sowing the seeds of his next atrocity. And now that it has begun to grow he will doubtless journey there to revel in the suffering he has wrought.”

Talk of rats ruined Lewis’s appetite. He looked at the people on the street, preferring not to follow the conversation.

“How can you be sure it’s Bloodstone?” Julie asked.

“It has happened before,” the wizard replied, recalling that other time. “Fortunately, I was able to contain the

plague before it spread, and there were no deaths. But this time..." His voice trailed off "Japan, if I recall from Brandon's globe, is a considerable distance away. And Bloodstone is strong."

He looked at the three children, regarding them fondly, but also sensing his responsibility. "I cannot ask you to come with me."

Brandon leapt up in protest. "But you have to take me!" he exclaimed. "I won't get in the way!"

"That is not my concern."

"I want to come too," Julie said. "I have nothing to go back to."

Carnelian smiled at them, touched by their courage and loyalty.

He studied Lewis, who was still watching the street.

"Are you gonna go home, LC?" Brandon asked.

Lewis turned to him in anger. "You think I'm afraid? You think I'm scared a rats?"

Brandon remembered how terrified Lewis had appeared last night after his encounter with the Dark Wizard, and during Carnelian's battle in the storm. "No," he replied, "not rats. But maybe Bloodstone."

Lewis glared at Carnelian. "I ain't afraid a Bloodstone!" he yelled. "I ain't afraid a no one."

Carnelian looked at him solemnly. "You know now that I am a wizard," he said. "No longer can I change your shape without your knowledge. Or your consent."

Lewis recalled the fly, the sloth, the barracuda, and felt uneasy. But he did not want to appear cowardly. "I never run from a fight," he said.

The wizard grabbed his staff and rose. "Then our course is decided. We will leave as soon as arrangements can be made."

He left the restaurant, once again resolute. But Brandon was confused. "There's something I don't understand," he said when they were on the street.

Carnelian looked down at him.



“I mean, if Bloodstone is immortal, how do you plan to destroy him?”

The three children expected him to describe a known method for Bloodstone’s annihilation, but the wizard’s expression grew perturbed and he shook his head. “I have no idea,” he confessed.

## TOKYO

### 1

It was late afternoon when they checked in to the Sotobori Plaza Hotel in the Ginza district of Tokyo. Carnelian was exhausted from the flight. Because he didn't have a visa, it was necessary to travel invisibly. This presented problems, for it necessitated changing the children's forms, placing them in his pocket, and then holding the luggage while chanting the spell of invisibility. The strain was made bearable only because he could enter the lavatory and become visible again without attracting attention. He spent most of the long flight to Japan locked in the bathroom.

He paid for two rooms and made sure the children were safely inside before returning to the lobby. As tired as he was, he could not rest while victims of the plague were dying.

He hailed a taxi, paying little notice to the mad rush around him. In his own time he had known of Orientals only through manuscripts. There was no trade yet with Japan, and Marco Polo's exploits in the Orient had not been transcribed. If he had possessed more energy, Carnelian would have stared at the multitude of strange faces, utterly fascinated. But he was too fatigued to bow to curiosity. When a taxi stopped in the heavy traffic, Carnelian stepped in without even looking at the Japanese driver. "Tokyo General Hospital," he said quietly, and lay back against the seat and slept while the taxi swerved into an open lane.

Brandon jumped on the beds. "This is great!" he said. "I've never been in a hotel this big!" He went to the window and peered out. "Look at all those Japanese down there! There's a Japanese kid in my class. Naki Usada. Wait'll I tell him I went to Japan!"

“This sure beats the place we slept last night,” Julie said. She went into the second bedroom and began laying out her toiletries on the bathroom counter. She looked at herself in the mirror. “I can’t believe what a mess I am!”

Lewis glared at her from the doorway. “How come you get your own room?” he wondered.

“Because I’m a woman,” she replied.

He leaned against the wall as if it were his own. “You ain’t no woman. You a girl.”

Julie forgot her appearance and confronted him. “Well, this girl can kick your little ass if you don’t watch what you say!”

Lewis straightened. “Oh yeah?”

Julie poked a finger into his ribs. “Yeah!”

They might have come to blows if Brandon had not entered the room and distracted them. He took no notice of their anger, concerned only with his own needs. “I’m hungry,” he said. “Can we get something to eat?”

Julie stepped past Lewis, satisfied that he would think twice before insulting her again, and picked up the phone. “We can order room service,” she said, relishing their temporary state of luxury. “Just bill it to the room.” She looked at Lewis with an expression of conciliation. “Want anything, LC?”

But Lewis only felt cheated. “I want my own room.”

“Take it up with Carnelian.”

Lewis decided to do just that when the wizard returned. But until then he needed to walk. The room was confining, and he still felt uncomfortable from his sketchy memories of being concealed in Carnelian’s pocket as a fly. He tried not to think about it, and could not remember details, but the mere knowledge that he had endured such an experience unsettled him. He needed to move in the open air, to be unobserved for a while. He took five thousand yen from a pile of notes Carnelian had left them and hurried outside.

Carnelian did not return until after dark. His face was more pale than usual and he walked slowly. The children

gathered around him as he propped his staff against the wall and sat heavily on the nearest bed.

“What happened at the hospital?” Brandon asked. “Did anyone die?”

“No one died,” the wizard replied in a weary voice. “I saved them all.”

“Hey, that’s great!” Julie said, cheered by the news.

But Carnelian shook his head. “You forget!” he exclaimed. “The rat which carries the plague!”

“What about it?”

Carnelian stared at her. “Where is it?”

They walked through Hibiya Park the following afternoon. Though Lewis was wary of getting lost again, he wanted to be alone for a few minutes and wandered off.

“Where are you going?” the wizard asked.

“Just walkin’ around.”

“I’m going with him,” Brandon shouted, running to Lewis’s side before either he or Carnelian could protest.

“Don’t get lost!”

Julie sat on the grass beneath a cherry tree and absently plucked an iris from the flower garden. “I like it here,” she said. “Don’t you?”

“Yes, the park is very peaceful.”

“I mean the whole country. The Japanese are more considerate than Americans.”

“The culture is indeed unusual. But what astonishes me most is my own ignorance. This morning I read that in the thirteenth century they had a feudal civilization, as well as traditions in philosophy and art.”

“You didn’t know that?”

“My dear child, in my age we thought Cathay, or China, was wasteland populated by Tartar barbarians! Of Japan we knew nothing. It was incomprehensible to the people of my time that these strange cultures rivaled our own!” He looked at the sun, blazing down through a cloudless sky. “I always believed the earth revolved around the sun,” he said

pensively. "But most men of my time thought the earth was the center of the universe. If only they had known the sun is large enough to swallow a thousand earths, and that each tiny light in the night sky is an inferno just as great, or greater! If only they had known that the distance which separates the stars is so vast that their light, which I never knew required time to travel, takes hundreds, thousands, millions of years to reach us! And about each of these stars may revolve other earths, on which live other races, who believe they are the center of the universe!"

"I thought wizards knew everything," Julie said.

"No. I am a child like you."

"You're much wiser than I am."

"I am wise enough to bow to the ineffable magic of God," Carnelian said. He sat down on a bench and looked at the dogwoods and cherry trees.

But Julie was ambivalent. "I don't know," she admitted. "He lets people die."

"He does not let me die," the wizard pointed out.

Julie was surprised by the question. "Do you want to die?"

"What is death?" he wondered. "Not the limbo I experienced in the coffin. I have a task to accomplish, and there is much to be enjoyed and marveled at in the world. But I shall always wonder about those other earths revolving around other stars."

"Maybe some day you'll ride a spaceship to one."

"And maybe they cannot be reached that way. What troubles me is the knowledge that my curiosity will never be satisfied. And there is the pain of losing everyone I have known." He looked at Julie with affection, seeing other familiar faces fade into her own. "Only my enemy survives."

Julie thought of her own loss and picked another flower. "Did you have a wife?"

"No."

"Why not?"

“It is wisest for a wizard to remain in the background of human endeavor, aiding others rather than serving himself. Wizards should not be kings or bear children.”

“I think you’d make a good father. You’re kind and patient, and you can protect people. When I first saw you in the cemetery I thought you were an angel. And in a way I was right, because you are supernatural. And no angel could be more virtuous. And I have faith in you. I try not to think about Bloodstone. I can’t say he doesn’t frighten me, because he frightens me a lot. I couldn’t sleep the night you fought him. And I shudder every time I see his face in my mind. But you’ll destroy him.”

The wizard smiled. “I am touched by your assurance. But if you were wiser you would entertain more doubts.”

“Oh, I have doubts,” she confessed, glancing away. “But I try not to think of them. It’s not myself I’m afraid for, but you and Brandon, and even LC.” She looked back at him, now more closely. “I used to dream all the time about losing Larry,” she said. “Now I dream about losing you.”

She pulled out a cigarette and offered him one, but he declined. “I thought wizards smoked,” she said.

“We did not know of tobacco in my age,” he replied.

“But it’s a waste to be immortal and not smoke,” she reasoned, lighting the cigarette and placing it between his lips. He regarded it with mild interest and then took a small puff.

“Not like that,” she told him. “You have to inhale.”

He tried it her way and coughed. “I think I prefer ale,” he remarked.

“Give it a chance,” she said. “What can nicotine do to a wizard?”

Carnelian complied. He did not cough this time but began to feel dizzy. He smoked the rest of the cigarette with heightened pleasure. Julie was smiling at him from what seemed to be a rapidly increasing distance. He picked another iris and inhaled its fragrance after the cigarette’s. A policeman suddenly loomed above them.

“*Konnichiwa*,” he said.

Carnelian rose unsteadily to his feet and smiled. The policeman spoke a torrent of Japanese words he could not distinguish. He pointed to the flower in Carnelian’s hand. The wizard held it up in an offer of friendship.

Carnelian felt Julie poke him in the ribs. “I think he’s going to arrest us,” she whispered to him. “Is he in for a surprise!”

Carnelian did not understand. He continued to smile as the officer looked back at him with a grim expression. “*Koko ni kite kudasai!*” he ordered.

“I beg your pardon?”

“*Koko ni kite kudasai!*” the policeman repeated.

“I’m sorry,” Carnelian said, “but we don’t speak Japanese.”

But neither did the policeman understand English. He grabbed the wizard by the sleeve and began walking, signaling for them to follow.

Julie did not intend to follow him anywhere. But when Carnelian obeyed she had no choice but to catch up with them. “What are you doing?” she wondered, ignoring the policeman, who had, for the moment, forsaken his bicycle and was leading them on foot.

“He wants to take us somewhere,” Carnelian replied. “I suspect he requires our assistance.”

“Assistance!” Julie exclaimed. “I don’t think he wants to help us,” she said impatiently. “I think we’re under arrest.”

But Carnelian did not hear her. He had walked ahead, maintaining pace with the policeman. Julie noticed that he swayed as he walked and wondered if the nicotine had affected him.

They paused on the corner. A minute later a patrol car pulled up and they were ushered inside. The arresting officer sat in the front.

“I wonder where they are taking us?” Carnelian said, enjoying the scenery as they sped through the streets.

“They’re taking us to jail,” Julie told him.

The wizard looked at her, confused. "To jail?"

"We probably picked the royal flowers," Julie replied. She noticed his eyes seemed less focused than usual, as if he were in the middle of a dream. "Well, are you just going to sit there?" She cursed to herself, convinced that the wizard was high. "We don't want to go to jail, do we?" she asked, as if speaking to a child. "You can't fight Bloodstone from behind bars."

"What do you suggest I do? These gentlemen do not understand English. Otherwise I would relate to them the details of our mission and I am sure they would be sympathetic..."

Julie could be patient no longer. "Cast a spell!" she shouted. The arresting officer glanced at her but did not speak.

"A spell," Carnelian realized. "Yes. Of course. A spell."

He thought for a moment and then spoke enthusiastically. But his voice was not as commanding as usual, and the words not as clear. "*Esbereth ni sanh beletoth... beletoth...*" He sat back. "No, I seem to have forgotten."

Julie began to panic, hoping she had not irreparably harmed the wizard's powers. "Try to remember!" she urged. "You must remember!"

Carnelian thought for a moment. "*Beletoth, it comes after beletoth. Portent, fortem, fortien-yes! Beletoth fortien!*"

"Well, say it!"

Carnelian leaned forward, looking at the driver, and spoke in a louder voice than before. "*Esbereth ni sanh beletoth fortien!*"

He waited. Nothing happened.

"Well?" Julie asked expectantly.

The wizard sat back. "It did not work."

"How could it not work?" she asked indignantly. "You said the right words, didn't you?"

"I believe so. But they must be said in the correct way." He looked out the window, seemingly unconcerned.

"What are we going to do?" Julie wondered.



But the wizard ignored her, thinking not of prison or of Bloodstone, but only of the colors that streamed past, the glass and steel buildings, the bright metallic cars, the salarymen in their crisp blue suits, the elegant women in colorful skirts, the neon signs with their strange letters.

They was sitting in a detaining cell later that afternoon. Julie hovered above him, pacing, biting her nails. He had paid little attention to the search earlier, and the cursory questioning by an officer who spoke a halting English. Julie had answered all the questions and asked a few of her own, but managed to communicate little more than her anger.

“I don’t believe this!” she shouted, glancing at Carnelian, who ignored her. “They can’t do this! We have rights! Japan is a democracy, isn’t it? Shouldn’t we at least get a phone call!”

She grabbed the bars and looked out at the desk sergeant. The station was quiet and orderly. Hers was the only voice that could be heard. “I demand to see a lawyer!” she screamed. “I want to see a lawyer right now!”

There was no reply.

“I’m an American!” she continued. “I’m from the country that buys all your products! Is this any way to treat a customer?”

The desk sergeant did not glance up from his paperwork, nor did anyone else respond. Julie turned to the wizard in despair. She noticed sparkling colors in his eyes and wondered if she too had lost her grip on reality. But the designs in his eyes were an effect of the tobacco. “You have to try the spell again!”

He glanced around, unaffected by her urgency. “I have been in darker prisons!” he told her.

Julie turned away, feeling guilty and afraid. “What have I done!” In horror she imagined Bloodstone destroying the world unopposed because a runaway teenage girl had insisted Carnelian smoke a cigarette.

“I’m sorry,” she told him. “You don’t know how sorry! If there was anything I could do...”

She bent down and looked into his eyes. It was like peering into a kaleidoscope, except there was no symmetry or pattern to the transparent colors. They swirled around his pupils, tiny dots and patches of green and blue, yellow and orange and red. “You have to fight it,” she told him. “The nicotine is doing this to you. I didn’t know, or I never would have let you smoke. Think of Brandon and LC! And what about Bloodstone?”

But her pleading had no effect. The wizard touched her cheek with his hand. “You are most fair,” he whispered. “You shall be lovely when you are a woman.”

Julie slumped against the opposite wall, wanting to hit her head against it. “You should have let me die,” she told him, as the tears began to well in her eyes. “Look what I have done to you!”

Lewis and Brandon spent much of the day waiting in the park for their companions, but Lewis grew hungry and insisted on returning to the hotel. Brandon went with him, not wishing to be left alone. Lewis ordered the most expensive dinner from room service and watched Japanese television, unconcerned by the wizard’s absence. Brandon could not eat.

“Where can they be?” he asked, unable to suppress his apprehension any longer. “It’s almost night! How can you think about food now? Carnelian and Julie may have been captured by Bloodstone!”

“Shut up, man, I’m tryin’ to watch this!”

“It’s in Japanese!” Brandon yelled. “You don’t care about him! You only care about yourself.”

He looked through the curtains at the fading daylight.

When Julie was brought an unappetizing dinner of frozen fish and peas she reminded herself that she would be eating lobster in their hotel right now if she had contented herself with smelling the roses. But more important

concerns troubled her, and she was hungry, so she sat on the concrete floor and ate without complaint.

When she was finished she noticed Carnelian had not touched his dinner. "You need to eat," she told him. He did not seem to hear her, so she scooped up a spoonful of peas from his plate. "You need the energy," she said. "Do you want me to feed you?"

But he still did not look at her. Julie bent down to get his attention. Though colors no longer swirled in his eyes, they seemed shrouded in mist, as if they were very far away. "Where have you gone?" she wondered. She touched his beard but he did not respond. "What have I done to you?"

She positioned the tray in front of him. "Open," she said, trying to force the spoon into his mouth.

"No!" he exclaimed, brushing her arm away with a swift motion. "Not now. I am tired. I must sleep."

"You can sleep later. We have to get out of here!"

Carnelian looked at her, nonplussed. "Here?"

"We're in jail," she reminded him. "They're probably going to separate us soon. And you may be taken to a hospital."

"Hospital?" He wondered. "Have I cured the plague?"

Julie was encouraged by this glimpse of memory. "Yes," she answered. "You've cured the victims. But you have to find the rat."

Carnelian spoke as if dreaming. "The rat..."

"We have to get out of here," Julie pointed out. "Then we can look for the rat. You have to say the spell."

"The spell..."

"The spell to free us."

The wizard thought for a moment. "*Esbereth ni sabn...*" The words slurred and he fell silent.

"Go on!"

But Carnelian leaned back and closed his eyes.

Julie retreated to the opposite wall, realizing there was nothing she could do but wait. She dozed off with her head in her arms, but she was not asleep long before she was

wakened by a scream. She let out a cry herself and jumped up. After glancing at the bars, she noticed Carnelian was awake. It was he who had screamed, apparently after another nightmare.

He looked at Julie. His eyes were focused, his expression confused but no longer dazed. "Where are we?" he asked, rising to his feet. His voice was clear and commanding.

Julie rushed over to him. "You're all right!"

He lifted his hands while she embraced him. "I do not consider this a time for celebration."

"I thought you might never recover!" she said in an emotional voice. "You can't imagine how sorry I am!"

"Your foolishness has cost us precious time. Is it still Tuesday?"

"Tuesday night."

He nudged Julie away from the bars and paused to clear his mind. "*Esbereth ni sanh beletoth Jorten!*" His voice was sharp and precise. Julie perceived a supernatural power in the words that had been absent when he chanted them earlier. There was an explosion and the door flew open. Before Julie could step forward the station was filled with an odorless white smoke and she could not see. She felt Carnelian's firm hand grab hers and lead her through the fog to freedom.

They found Brandon waiting impatiently in the lobby. When the boy saw Carnelian he yelled out with relief.

"What happened? Did you fight Bloodstone?"

But Carnelian ignored his questions and hurried upstairs. Lewis was sitting in front of the TV. He did not turn to them as they entered.

Carnelian switched off the television. Lewis jumped up in anger but thought it wise not to speak.

"I require silence so that I may cast an information spell," the wizard explained.

"What's the spell for?" Brandon asked.

"To determine the number of rats carrying the plague," Carnelian answered. He stood in the center of the room and

chanted the words. Before he had finished they heard a loud pop from the lamp in the corner and the room grew slightly darker.

Brandon leapt up. "What happened?"

The wizard turned to Julie, who stood closest to the lamp. "How many of the light bulbs have exploded?"

Julie peeked under the shade. "Only one."

Carnelian nodded thoughtfully. "It is as I thought." He sat down on the bed, satisfied with his progress.

"That means we only have to get one rat?" Brandon guessed. "But how do we know where it is?"

"We don't," Carnelian admitted. "But that is a question we shall leave for tomorrow. I am too fatigued to pursue it now."

They could hear the sound of rain outside. Lewis was about to switch the television back on, but Carnelian looked at him disapprovingly. "I suggest we sleep now," he said. "We have much to do in the morning."

Brandon was disappointed. Now that the wizard was back he wanted to spend time with him. He sat down next to him on the bed and pulled his sleeve. "Tell us a story!" he pleaded.

"Another time."

"But you said you'd tell us about Bloodstone's castle, and how he imprisoned you and how you escaped. You promised!"

The last thing Carnelian wanted to think about were prisons, but he knew by Brandon's grip that the child would not easily relent. "Very well," he agreed.

Brandon clapped and inched closer. Julie leaned forward in anticipation. Lewis slumped back, staring at the room's reflection in the TV. Nevertheless, he was as curious as the others, and listened to every word.

"I believe I have told you already that Bloodstone lived alone in a huge castle. Few men ever ventured there, and none were welcome. For Bloodstone is an enemy to all mankind, even to those who share his evil nature. He has no

desire for human companionship, and never kept servants, preferring to plot and brood in complete privacy. True, there was a dungeon in his castle, but I suspect he constructed it specifically for me.

“In any event, I had occasion to enter the castle one day when he was not there. I did not make a long visit, for I found myself burdened by the dreary place, as if the air were as heavy as the ancient rocks which composed the walls. In truth, the air was musty, and reeked of rotting flesh. Scattered on the floor were the bodies of animals killed in the surrounding woods. Some were discarded after being half-eaten. Others seemed mutilated for no other reason than to satisfy his perverse sense of pleasure.”

“What was his bedroom like?” Brandon asked.

“I do not know,” the wizard replied. “I did not progress that far. A fire was blazing in the main hall. I entered cautiously, wary of traps. The sight of his chair filled me with gloom. It was a heavy chair, as all things in that castle seemed burdened with an unearthly weight, embellished with unspeakable words and demonic images. It stood tall and indomitable as any throne.”

“Did you sit in it?” Brandon interrupted.

“No. That would have weakened me and subjected me to his powers. As it was, however, I made an error nearly as grave. I approached the hearth.”

“Was he hiding there?”

“Not in the flesh,” Carnelian explained. “But his physical presence was unnecessary. His magic pervaded the castle, and seemed nowhere stronger than in the fire. His image took form in the flames and gripped me. I felt dizzy and knew I was succumbing to his power. Scenes of horror and cruelty invaded my thoughts. It was only with the most desperate struggle of will that I was able to force myself away. I hurried from the foul place and never willingly returned.”

“What about when you were imprisoned?”

“Yes, well that was another day, though I believe in the same year. I was taking a quiet, leisurely walk when I saw a child, no older than you, Brandon, leading a mule on the road ahead. The morning, until then, had been peaceful and without incident. The weather was sunny and cool and I recall being in a rather cheerful mood. But when I saw that boy I felt a chilling sense of foreboding. Though we were alone on the road, and I could see no apparent danger, I somehow knew he was in the most serious peril, and only my swift and successful intervention stood between him and the next world. Bloodstone was here. Of that I was certain. And I must battle him for the child’s life. I raised my staff and cried out one spell after another, determined not to let tragedy mar such a pleasant day. But in my effort to save the boy I weakened myself, and when Bloodstone directed his attack against me I was unable to mount an adequate defense.

“When I next gained awareness I was manacled to the wall of his dungeon. I knew at once it was Bloodstone’s dungeon, although I had never seen it, for I could sense his presence in the very walls, and shivered from the gusts of wind that issued from no natural source. The cell was smaller than this room, and the ceiling low, so that my head nearly touched it. No light was admitted from outside, and the dungeon was completely dark.”

“So how could you see it?” Julie wondered.

“The castle’s power was oppressive, and I felt terribly weak, but I was able to use my magic to start a fire. I then saw the heavy iron door opposite, locked with iron chains. And on the floor, not far away, two barrels, one filled with water, the other with dried fruit. I could have used my magic to bring them to my mouth—the effort would require less energy than breaking the manacles—but I did not, for I knew Bloodstone was cunning, and I feared the food and water were poisoned.

“I did nothing for two days but rest. Though I feared Bloodstone might appear during that time, I did not possess

the strength to escape. But after two days I had recovered sufficiently to test Bloodstone's prison. The manacles had been charmed, but I managed in a day to break them. The iron door and the chains that bound it shut were another matter, however, and they held fast against my most potent magic. Fortunately, the door was not flush with the floor. A crack no thicker than a hair separated them. But that was all I required. I turned myself into a vapor and drifted under the door. Fortune was still with me, for I did not encounter Bloodstone on the other side. I left the castle immediately, and felt the lifting of an enormous weight. I tried not to imagine what horrible fate he had planned for me."

"Did you get revenge?" Brandon asked.

"In Bloodstone's eyes, my escape itself was vengeance. But no, I did not capture him in turn. He was stronger than I, and I felt fortunate to escape."

"How did he trap you in the coffin?"

Carnelian sat in silence for a minute, listening to the rain, trying to recall his greatest defeat. "The memories are not pleasant," he finally said.

"How come it took you seven hundred years to escape?" Julie wondered. "I would think Bloodstone's castle would be harder to break out of, but you did that in a few days."

The wizard shook his head. "Iron chains are strong against me," he explained. "And if they have been properly enchanted all the spells I know will not break them. That is why I could not open the door in Bloodstone's dungeon and had to pass beneath. Furthermore, if I am imprisoned in a coffin bound by iron chains and buried at least twelve feet below the ground, I lose not only all my powers, but awareness as well, and fall into an indefinite, dreamless sleep."

"Then how did you escape?" Brandon asked.

"Merely by chance, my child. It so happened that after seven hundred years a construction crew uncovered my coffin and opened it."

"I bet whoever found you was surprised!"



Carnelian smiled. “The man fled before I had the opportunity to thank him. Bloodstone, I imagine, was surprised as well when he sensed my liberation. But had it not been for that construction, I would still lie buried, and Bloodstone would have perhaps another seven hundred years to roam the world unchallenged.”

“Why didn’t Bloodstone bury you the first time?” Julie asked.

“I don’t know,” Carnelian admitted. “Perhaps he did not know my weakness then, or perhaps he wished to torture me, or steal my magic.”

“How did he capture you the second time?” Brandon asked.

“It happened not long after I escaped from his castle. I learned of a merchant ship foundering in calm seas and flew to the scene, suspecting Bloodstone. When I reached the shore there was no sign of the Dark Wizard, but his work glimmered near the horizon, where the ship was sinking without apparent cause. I changed into a bird and flew to the wreck. The ship and its goods were lost, but I had arrived in time to save the men. Afterward I sat upon the rocks to rest. Bloodstone must have been there, though I was not aware of him. A great weariness came over me, and, although I had saved the crew, I felt despondent. I remember thinking to myself in despair, ‘He cannot be conquered.’ And that is the last thing I recall.”

The children were silent, considering Carnelian’s distant drama and relating it to the present. The soft tapping against the window grew much harder, as if prefacing a storm.

When Carnelian woke he felt as if he had slept many hours. Brandon and Julie were dressed and watching television. “Where is Lewis?” he asked.

The children turned with a start. “He’s watching TV in my room,” Julie replied.

The wizard went to the window and peered outside. It was dark. “What time is it?”

“After nine,” Julie said, feeling guilty. “I tried to wake you this morning, but you were in a deep sleep and I thought you needed the rest. So Brandon and I went to the park for a while and then came back here to wait for you. I hope I did the right thing.”

“Me and LC wanted to wake you up,” Brandon remarked.

Carnelian smiled. “You have done well,” he said. “For while I missed the morning, I have discovered something much more valuable.”

Julie brightened. “The rat?”

“Indeed. It’s approximate location came to me in a dream.”

“How do you know it’s the right place?”

“I don’t. But we shall soon find out.”

Brandon grew excited. “We?”

Carnelian glanced toward the other room. “Lewis! Come here a moment please. This matter involves you all.”

He noticed the empty dishes on the dresser. “Good. I see you have eaten. That will save us time.”

Lewis appeared in the doorway as if summoned by his mother to take out the garbage. He leaned back with his arms folded, refusing to show any excitement.

“We are venturing out tonight to catch a rat,” the wizard told them.

“I ain’t goin’,” Lewis stated.

“I shall require your trust and your courage,” he continued.

“While I do not perceive any great danger involved, this is not an enterprise for weak stomachs, and I will not take any of you against your choosing.”

“I ain’t goin’,” Lewis repeated.

“Count me in!” Brandon exclaimed, glad to be invited.

“I’ll go if you want me to,” Julie said after a moment. “But I don’t see how we can help.”

“You will aid me in trapping and then killing the creature.”

“But I can’t stand rats. And I’m certainly no good at catching them.”

“Perhaps not in your present form.”

She began to regret her decision to join him. “You’re going to change us into something?” She saw by his reaction that that was his intention. “What?”

“Cats!” Brandon shouted, thinking the answer obvious.

The wizard smiled. “Precisely. Now since you gave me your answer in ignorance of this detail I will pose the question again.”

Brandon was even more excited. Being a fly had fascinated him, and he looked forward to seeing the world through the eyes of a cat, especially since he would have a purpose to serve instead of merely passing the time concealed in the wizard’s pocket. “I’m going!” he exclaimed, anticipating his heroics.

Julie bit her lip. She felt horror at the thought of having to be a cat and kill rodents with her teeth. “I can’t do it,” she said, looking away.

“Very well.”

She looked back at him, recalling how his face had appeared yesterday after smoking. Though he had forgiven her, she felt guilty for offering him the cigarette, and saw assisting him as a means of compensation. “All right,” she finally replied. “I’ll try.”

The wizard smiled, revealing his surprise. "And what of you, Lewis? Are you to stay here alone?"

"You better believe it!"

"Only the most courageous dare accompany me," Carnelian taunted. "Any coward can rob old men."

"I ain't goin'!"

Brandon was surprised at his unwillingness to join them. "You aren't afraid of rats, are you?"

Lewis gave him a menacing look, but Carnelian stepped between them before he could act. "We will respect your decision," the wizard said. "Indeed," he added, grinning at Lewis, "after the 'storm' last night, remaining here might require more courage!"

He saw the flash of apprehension on Lewis's face and laughed. "Let us go," he said, taking Brandon and Julie by the arm. "Do not wait up for us."

    Ginza glittered in the cool night. Countless lighted signs blinked down at them and reflected off the dark office buildings. Traffic was congested, as during the day. Most of the pedestrians were Japanese businessmen on their way to bars or nightclubs. Nearly all the women on the street were bargirls or tourists. Julie and Brandon saw no children.

    Carnelian hailed a cab and told the driver the address from his dream. He had no idea how distant it was. The driver spoke no English, so Carnelian remained in ignorance. He spent the ride reflecting on his course of action, planning for contingencies.

    Thirty minutes later the driver announced their destination. The street on which they found themselves was as boring as Ginza was bustling, as dark as Ginza was bright. They saw no office buildings here, no department stores, no hotels, only what seemed to be endless rows of drab concrete tenements. No pedestrians walked the street. Many of its residents had already gone to bed, for few lights were visible. An elevated train rumbled not far away. The tops of skyscrapers peered at them from the distance.

Carnelian glanced around, uncertain which direction to take.

Finally, he decided to walk north.

Brandon thought of his friends back home, and wished he could document this night, for he knew they would never believe him. "Imagine being a cat!" he thought aloud.

"You won't have to imagine for long," the wizard said.

"Are we almost there?"

"Almost."

He smiled in delight. "Can you make me into a yellow cat with short fur?" he asked. "We had a yellow cat once. His name was Rodney. One day he brought a dead mouse into the kitchen. Dad wasn't home, so I threw it away. I took a paper towel and picked it up by the tail and took it outside to the trash can. Another time I found a mouse behind the garage that Rodney killed. It was all chewed up and everything."

"Do you have to talk about this?" Julie exclaimed.

"So what happened to your cat?" Carnelian asked.

"Rodney was run over by a car," Brandon replied.

Julie noticed a car speed by on the intersecting street and trembled with fear. "I don't think I can do this," she said.

"You can if you choose to," Carnelian told her. He suddenly stopped in the middle of the street. "Here we are," he announced.

Julie turned around, confused. "Where? I don't see anything."

Carnelian glanced down, and Julie followed his eyes to a manhole cover. "Oh, wait a minute!" she said, stepping back. "You didn't say anything about sewers!"

"You must remember that what is abhorrent to a human may seem natural to a cat."

"But if you change my form I'll still have my own identity. I'll still feel repulsed."

The wizard shook his head. "Trust me. Though you will still know who you are, you will have the instincts and desires

of a cat. When I changed you into a falcon were you afraid to fly?"

"No," she admitted. "It was wonderful. But I wasn't flying into sewers!"

Carnelian looked at the boy. "What about you, Brandon?"

The child was staring at the manhole, trying to summon courage. He recalled the first time he jumped off the high diving board at his club pool. After standing on the edge of the board, gazing at the deep water, he had wanted to climb back down, but his swimming instructor blocked the way. Now the way was not blocked; Carnelian would not force him to go. Yet after countless hours dreaming of heroic deeds and playing them out in games, this was his chance to be a hero in life, and he would never forgive himself if he declined the opportunity.

"I said I'd go," he answered quietly, without his former excitement. "I'm not afraid of rats."

Carnelian patted him on the head. Julie looked at him with new respect, and felt ashamed of her cowardice. "Couldn't I help in some other way? I mean, couldn't I wait here with a net and then catch it after you flush it out?"

Carnelian's silence was answer enough. She sighed, wishing there were another alternative. "You're sure it won't be terrible?" she finally asked. "I mean, the smell, the water?" She shivered. "The rat?"

"I assure you you will find the environment as benign as I found the prison cell before the tobacco you gave me wore off."

Whether meaning to or not, his remark reminded her of her guilt, and the need she felt to redeem herself. "You promise it won't be dangerous? I won't get hit by a car?"

"The situation is no more perilous than any other on this journey."

"That hardly eases my mind." She frowned, knowing she could delay no longer. "All right," she consented. "Just do it fast. Before I get sick."

The wizard smiled with pleasure and lifted the manhole cover. As the children peered down into the darkness he said the spells. Brandon and Julie felt lighter. The world seemed larger and no longer dark, but different shades of gray. They understood the purpose of the tenements lining either side of the street, but felt no desire to investigate them. They were hungry and needed to eat, but they did not crave chicken or steak. Though killing a rat was intellectually abhorrent, instinctively it seemed the most natural act in the world.

Brandon could see the water at the bottom of the sewer, when before it had all been black. A short steel ladder on the side led down. He was trying to determine how to descend it when instinct took over and he crawled down head first without difficulty. Carnelian was at his side and Julie behind. The boy tried to speak to them, but discovered he could not communicate his thoughts, no matter how loudly he meowed. His sense of smell was acute, but the odors were not unpleasant. He did, however, feel an aversion to the water and feared drowning, which surprised him, since he was an excellent swimmer and the water was not deep.

Fortunately, however, he didn't have to enter the water, for a narrow concrete ledge ran along the side. Carnelian took the lead and Brandon ran after, close behind. At first he worried he would lose his balance and fall. He certainly could not have walked the ledge as a person. But as a cat his step was lithe and assured, and Brandon thought even the most graceful humans seemed clumsy by comparison.

They traveled quickly through the tunnel as it wound beneath the city. Occasionally they could hear traffic from the street above, but otherwise it was quiet. His inability to speak made Brandon feel alone, even though he could see Carnelian ahead, and Julie trailed. It was frustrating not to be able to voice his curiosity. He wanted to know how far they had to go and what role he was expected to play when they found the rat. He feared making a mistake, or taking a wrong turn and losing the wizard.

They reached a point where the tunnel divided, the ledge curving to the left. Without warning, Carnelian jumped across the water, landing cleanly on the opposite side, which curved to the right. If Brandon had considered the maneuver he would have hesitated, but he acted instinctively, jumping with an animal's confidence, feeling the thrill of the chase. His forepaws grabbed the opposite ledge and he pulled himself up without getting wet. Julie, however, allowed her human intellect to interfere and hesitated, leaping halfheartedly. She fell into the water and splashed around wildly, desperately trying to keep her head above the surface. She let out a piercing scream, hoping Carnelian would save her. She finally managed to reach the ledge and clung to the wall, trying to shake the water off her fur.

Brandon smelled something desirable. A moment later he saw a rat swimming in the water. He was startled by a powerful urge to catch it, to kill it with his sharp teeth. So strong was the temptation that even his human repugnance at the thought of biting a rat did not diminish his desire, and he would have jumped into the water after it had he not seen Carnelian running ahead, continuing to follow the contours of the sewer. Brandon paused for a moment, keeping the rat within his vision. But then he hurried on, not wishing to be left behind, consoling himself with the thought that a larger catch awaited him.

They ran through the dark gray tunnel for what seemed a long time, though Brandon did not feel fatigued, and could not estimate how many minutes had passed since he had become a cat. The sight of the rat had aroused his hunger and he experienced a feeling completely alien to him—an animal's need to kill to survive. He felt an emptiness in his stomach and began to yell, losing his patience.

The curving tunnel straightened into a long corridor which ran as far as they could see. Carnelian slowed, then quickly stopped and glanced around. He let out a cry and leapt into the water.



Brandon turned to look. Julie was lagging behind and took a moment to catch up. To their horror and delight they saw a black rat, as large as themselves, surface in the middle of the sewer, its enormous head bobbing above the water as it swam desperately to escape from Carnelian.

Brandon might have been intimidated by its size had he been less hungry and lacked Carnelian's company. But he jumped recklessly into the water, thrashing his paws to stay afloat. The water was cold and uncomfortable, but the hunt justified the sacrifice. Julie remained on the ledge, watching, thinking about the water and the rat's size, hoping her assistance would not be required.

The rat swam faster than Brandon, but Carnelian blocked its path, forcing it to turn around. Brandon attacked at once, grabbing the creature's long, thick tail with his claws. It struggled to break free, but Brandon's grip was tight and he rode it determinably, impressed by the rodent's strength. He did not have to battle it long, however. Carnelian appeared from the side and grabbed the rat by the back. Then swiftly and viciously he plunged his teeth into its neck, killing it.

He returned to the ledge. Brandon held the tail a moment longer, wishing the wizard would let him satisfy his hunger. But apparently that was not allowed. Perhaps the creature would infect him. Reluctantly he let go, and the rat sank below the surface.

Brandon joined the others on the ledge, proud that they had accomplished their mission, but disappointed that he could not enjoy its benefits.

Carnelian led them through a narrow opening not far away. They found themselves on a quiet residential street in an unfamiliar neighborhood. The wizard wasted no time changing them back. They stood in the middle of the road, dripping wet, tired, and dirty.

The world was dark again, and they felt awkward and heavy. Brandon tried to take a step and stumbled. He remained on the ground, trying to walk on all fours. He

moaned in discomfort and was surprised by the human sound.

But a minute later their proper orientation returned. The children felt cold and sticky. The smell was overpowering. Julie got sick, and so did Brandon. When he looked back up he noticed that although Carnelian's hair and beard were wet, and his hands and face dirty, his robe was dry and as white as ever. "How did we do?" he asked.

"Most admirably!" the wizard replied, smiling fondly. "Both of you. I regret your present discomfort. I would relieve it at once, but I am too fatigued to cast any more spells just now. However, we shall soon be in our rooms and you can bathe and sleep."

Brandon grinned proudly, feeling heroic, wishing his friends and family knew what he had achieved. "I grabbed its tail!" he exclaimed. "I slowed it down so you could kill it! I really did it! I told you if you took me I would be useful!" He paused to yawn, feeling exhausted. His hunger as a cat was just a memory, and all he wanted to do now was dry off and sleep. He shivered in the cool night air. "I'm tired," he admitted. "How far do we have to walk?"

Carnelian bent down and lifted him into his arms. "You do not have to walk at all," he said.

When they returned to the hotel Carnelian fixed Brandon a bath. Lewis was watching TV in Julie's room. He glanced at her when she entered but he did not rise.

"Man you stink!" he said. "Where've you been?"

"In the sewers," she told him.

He could not conceal his interest. "Did you get it?"

She nodded. "No thanks to you."

"Hey, I didn't ask to come here."

Julie approached him, angry that he had sat comfortably on her bed while she and Brandon chased the giant rat through Tokyo's sewers. "You could have helped," she said. "Get out of my room!"

Lewis rose defensively. “Hey, Carnelian said I didn’t have to go! What’s your problem?”

“You know, LC, you talk a lot, but you’re not tough at all. You want people to think you’re tough, but I see right through you. You’re nothing but a coward! A wimp! Brandon’s the strong one!”

“Who you go callin’ a wimp?” he shouted, leaning toward her.

“Brandon isn’t afraid of rats!” she said.

Lewis face grew taut and his body rigid. “Brandon wasn’t bit by one when he was five!”

Julie noticed the fear in his eyes, and remembered his childhood had been more painful than Brandon’s, or her own. Her anger dissipated and she felt only sympathy for the boy. He looked away, his posture revealing a vulnerability she had always known he possessed but had never seen. She put her arm around him in a gesture of understanding.

For a moment she thought he was going to talk to her, or even cry. But he shrugged off her arm and went into the other room.

Carnelian spent the following afternoon reading, and the children did not leave the hotel. After dinner he announced that he needed to go outside to contemplate his mission. Brandon asked to join him, but the wizard insisted on going alone, assuring them he would soon return.

Brandon talked Julie into going swimming. Lewis felt restless and left them without saying a word. He could not bear the possibility that they were more courageous than he, but his thoughts were tormented with the realization that they had confronted danger when he had been afraid. And the fact that they were a girl and a ten-year-old boy from Long Island compounded his shame. He hoped a situation would arise in which he could perform heroics and redeem himself.

It was dusk. The business day was over and Ginza was awakening for the night. Most of the stores were dosed, the nightclubs beginning to fill.

Lewis walked aimlessly, looking in the shop windows. He was fascinated by one curio shop in particular. Displayed in its window was a mannequin of a samurai warrior, complete with genuine armor, mask, and sword. He stared at the figure with admiration. For him, this represented the real Japan, not the Japan of business suits and neon lights, but the Japan he knew from martial arts movies. The samurai were fierce and formidable, ruthless when necessary. Their armor was not so different from a football uniform.

The door was still open, so he went inside. The shop consisted of a single small room, crowded with kimonos, masks, painted screens, and other expensive souvenirs. Another customer, also a foreigner, was looking at the pottery. The shopkeeper, an old woman, sat behind a cluttered desk in the back.

Lewis went to the mannequin, which stood on a platform before the window. He had entered merely to look at it more closely, but the sight of the sword loosely placed around the samurai's fingers gave him other ideas. He glanced around the shop but saw no other swords. He wondered whether the samurai's sword was for sale, and how much it cost. He had brought little money, but could always get more from Carnelian. Yet he did not approach the shopkeeper, and the longer he thought, the less he wondered about its price. Several arguments dissuaded him from buying the sword, chief among them the probability that the shop would be closing soon, forcing him to wait until tomorrow, and that the wizard would not permit him to purchase a weapon.

The samurai was not holding the sword raised, but at his side, so that Lewis could easily reach it. The hilt was not tied to the hand, but merely draped over the fingers, making it easy to remove. Lewis admired its long curving shape and the way it gleamed in the dim shop. He imagined playing

with the sword in New York, showing it to his friends, and decided that he must have it.

He looked at the shopkeeper, who was speaking with the other customer. Lewis considered the moment propitious. In a swift motion he removed the sword without pulling down the mannequin. He glanced back quickly to make certain he was in no immediate danger of being caught, and then dashed out the door, carrying the sword by the hilt.

He did not stop, aware that he appeared conspicuous and could be easily identified, but ran until he could run no farther. As he caught his breath he smiled at his success and fingered the edge of the sword. He found it very sharp, and swung it several times in a dark doorway, imagining himself the hero in a martial arts film. When he stepped back out he held the sword more cautiously, realizing he might be approached by a policeman. The sword was too large to conceal under his shirt, and its shape precluded sheathing the blade in his pants' leg, so he carried it unthreateningly, with the point down, and walked in a confident manner, as if the sword were a gift. He noticed the workmanship on the handle, which was covered with bright stones, and wondered if the sword had ever been used by a real samurai. It appeared too new to be authentic, but Lewis was in an imaginative mood, and the possibility that it was genuine thrilled him.

When he stopped at the next intersection he noticed an old man peering at him through the crowd. At first he was not alarmed. But when the old man trailed him the length of the next block he became suspicious. The man was Japanese, short, white-haired, dressed in black. He held a bamboo cane but walked upright and swiftly.

Lewis decided the old shopkeeper had seen him and this was her husband. He turned left at the next corner to make certain. Halfway down the block he casually glanced over his shoulder. The old man was still there.

Lewis abruptly turned in to a deserted alley. The darkness and filth contrasted sharply with the glitter of

Ginza. He hid behind a cluster of garbage cans, anxiously fingering the sword.

As he waited it occurred to him that the old man could not be the shopkeeper's husband, for Lewis had run from the shop at full speed, and, even if the man were not crippled, he could not have matched the pace of a twelve-year-old boy.

A shadowy figure appeared at the entrance to the alley. Lewis peered at him through a space between the cans, his heart beating faster, wondering who his pursuer was, if not the shopkeeper.

The figure slowly approached, his cane rapping ominously against the pavement. Lewis could not see his face in the darkness of the alley, but for a moment he thought he saw his teeth, crooked and sharp, like fangs. Was the figure grinning? Did it somehow know where he was, and sense his fear?

Lewis gripped the hilt of the sword, grateful that he had a weapon, and knelt tensely on the balls of his feet, careful not to make a sound. The figure, he was convinced, was not a man at all, but Bloodstone disguised as a cripple. The Evil Wizard had attacked him once before, in his own form, but that had been in the solitude of the mountains. Here in Tokyo, among crowds, a less conspicuous form would be necessary to isolate the victim.

Lewis wished he had not entered the alley, but it was too late to escape. He had confronted Bloodstone before and survived. This time, at least, he was armed.

He waited until the figure was near, his heart pounding, fearing the weapon would be useless against one who could split apart the earth and cause plagues. But there seemed no alternative. He yelled out as he sprang up, not with the pride of a samurai but with the fear of a desperate boy, and whipped the sword with both hands, like a baseball bat.

The blade cut the figure, who let out a cry. Lewis saw blood spurt from his abdomen and felt like a hero. The bamboo cane rattled on the concrete. The figure fell, hitting

his head against a garbage can. He lay on the ground, his hands covering his abdomen, moaning in pain.

Lewis stared at the tiny man, his terror returning. For this was not Bloodstone at all, but merely an innocent, harmless stranger, who had followed him perhaps to ask a question or favor, or who had not been following him at all, but had taken the same streets and turned in to the same alley simply by chance. All Lewis knew was that he had made a terrible mistake.

The man looked up at him, muttering in Japanese. Lewis could think of nothing to say. The man was dying. Soon the police would come, and he would be arrested for murder. He looked in horror at the sword still in his hand, at the fresh blood staining the tip. Silently praying that the man would not die and he would not be arrested, Lewis threw the sword behind the garbage cans and ran from the scene as fast as any murderer.

Carnelian found Julie and Brandon in the pool. When they saw him they swam out, expecting news.

“Where’d you go?” Brandon asked eagerly, grabbing the wizard’s sleeve with a wet hand. “Why’d you have to leave? Is the plague gone?”

Carnelian smiled at his excitement and sat down at one of the tables. “The plague is gone,” he said. “Largely because of your help. But that is not my concern.”

“Then what were you thinking about?” Julie asked.

“Where and in what manner he next plans to strike,” the wizard replied. “We cannot simply continue following him around the world, healing those he hurts. No, we must begin to anticipate his moves, and so prevent the damage he would inflict.”

“That’s what you went out for?”

Carnelian nodded. “I assumed the shape of a falcon and flew above the city. I thought the perspective might enlighten me.”

“Did you see Bloodstone?” Brandon asked.

“No. Nor did I expect to. I flew without specific expectations, but rather with the vague hope of gaining insight into Bloodstone’s thoughts. I began my flight by focusing on the city, but then as I flew higher I turned my attention to the countryside. It was then that I noticed Mount Fuji.”

“What’s that?” Brandon wondered.

“A dormant volcano,” Carnelian replied.

Brandon grew alarmed. “You mean it’s going to erupt?”

“Not Mount Fuji, of that I feel certain. But as I gazed at it from above the city I sensed that another volcano, somewhere, would soon explode. And Bloodstone would be the cause.”

“Where?” Julie wondered.

But the wizard sat back. “I don’t know.”

Brandon was about to ask a question when Lewis rushed in. His face was sweating and he seemed tortured with fear, as he had that night in Mexico after his encounter with Bloodstone. To Brandon he was no longer a sadistic delinquent but a frightened child in need of help.

He dashed over to Carnelian, plaintively grabbing his sleeve. “You gotta come!” he pleaded, trying to catch his breath. “You gotta come right away!”

The wizard rose to his feet. “What has happened?”

“I stabbed a man!” he panted. “I thought it was Bloodstone! He’s dyin’! You gotta save him before he dies!”

The other three were shocked by the boy’s statement. Brandon tried to speak, but Carnelian silenced him. “Go to the room!” he ordered Brandon and Julie. He grabbed Lewis firmly on the shoulder. “Show me!”

Lewis ran the entire way back, fearing for his own life as well as the life of the man he had stabbed. He did not stop at intersections but challenged the traffic, incurring the wrath of several drivers. Carnelian stayed close behind.

Lewis turned in to the alley, which lay in deepening shadow. The body had not been moved. There were no detectives on the scene. But Lewis could not determine the



man's status in the darkness. His stomach sank as he sprinted to the body. The man looked so tiny and harmless that Lewis wondered how he could have ever believed he was Bloodstone. When he stood directly over his victim he could see that his eyes were closed and his expression frozen in a strange mixture of agony and surprise. His arms and legs lay sprawled at odd angles. A pool of blood was darkening beside him on the concrete.

"He's still alive!" Lewis shouted, staring desperately at the old man's chest, which imperceptibly rose and fell.

Carnelian pushed the boy aside and knelt down over the body. "*Elleth vanitae dhan conberi aspith je!*"

He whispered the spell twice before rising. A minute later the wound healed and the man opened his eyes. He glanced around, confused, with curiosity at Carnelian, with alarm at Lewis. He climbed to his feet as quickly as his old legs could manage. Lewis sighed with relief, his heart beginning to beat normally again. He marveled at the man's health, the image of him dying on the ground just moments before still strong in his mind.

The old man felt at his abdomen and was surprised to discover nothing unusual, as if deluded by false memories. But then he perceived the blood on his shirt and on the ground, and his suspicions returned. He looked in bewilderment at the wizard.

"I believe you have something to say to this gentleman," Carnelian said to the boy.

Lewis approached the old man to apologize. But his victim grew fearful and fled from the alley.

Carnelian picked up the old man's cane and pondered it in silence. Lewis drew back, afraid the wizard would strike him with it. But after an anxious minute Carnelian let the cane fall back to the ground.

"Where is the weapon?" he asked.

Lewis found the sword behind the trash cans, where he had thrown it, and handed the hilt to Carnelian. "I'm sorry!" he exclaimed, fearing the wizard would stab him to make

him feel the pain he had inflicted upon the stranger. ‘I’m so sorry! You don’t know how sorry I am!’

Carnelian examined the weapon. The blood on the tip had since dried, and the blade seemed more dangerous now to Lewis than it had in the mannequin’s hand. “Where did you get this?” he demanded.

“I bought it a couple hours ago.”

Carnelian pierced him not with the sword but with a stare.

Lewis looked away in shame. “All right,” he confessed, “I stole it! But I didn’t mean to stab anyone! I just wanted it for a souvenir! I swear to God!”

The wizard continued to stare at him.

“After I stole it the man was followin’ me, or I thought he was followin’ me,” Lewis explained. “I thought he’s after me, so I run into the alley and hide. Then he comes in too, and I get it in my head he’s Bloodstone. So I attacked him. But then when I see him lyin’ there just moanin’ I know’d I made a mistake. I ain’t lyin’. I know’d what I done was wrong, but I didn’t mean it. It was a mistake! Please don’t be mad!”

Carnelian tapped the sword in his hand. “The last time we were in an alley together I believe I changed you into a barracuda.”

Lewis fell to his knees. “Please don’t change me!” he begged. “I won’t cause you any more problems! I promise! I’ll do anything you want!” he offered in his panic. “I’ll go anywhere you want, even if it’s in sewers to kill rats!”

Carnelian looked at him sternly. “What would have happened if you had not found me at the hotel?” he asked.

“I’d be a murderer,” Lewis answered. “I know it. And I’m grateful. You saved me. I do anything you want. I never meant to kill no one!”

The wizard wiped his hand across the blade and the bloodstain disappeared. Then he gave it to Lewis. “Return this to the store from which you stole it,” he told him. “With apologies.”

Lewis nodded and swiftly departed, with new appreciation for the wizard's mercy.

It was after midnight. Julie slept in her room. Lewis and Brandon lay on the bed they shared in Carnelian's room. The wizard was in the bathroom so as not to disturb them, casting an information spell. He had already attempted it once without effect. Now, after chanting the words, he scrutinized the walls, the tub, the mirror, but again he found no sign. Disappointed, he decided to try again tomorrow, and turned off the light.

He was about to go to sleep when he heard a sound. He stepped over to the children's bed and looked at Brandon, who lay clutching his doll, sobbing softly into his pillow, as if trying not to be heard. The wizard frowned, but did not speak or touch him, respecting the boy's obvious desire for privacy.

The taxi sped from the city in the overcast morning. Brandon eagerly anticipated their destination. "Where are we going?" he asked for the third time.

"You'll know shortly," Carnelian replied.

"Will we be there soon?"

"Yes."

Brandon sat back between Lewis and Julie. "Have you discovered where the volcano is?"

"Not yet."

"How are you going to find out? In a dream, like with the rat?"

"I will cast a spell."

"Why haven't you done it yet?"

"I have. Without success."

"Well, we better find out soon. Before it's too late. Does where we're going have something to do with Bloodstone?"

Carnelian did not answer, and Brandon was forced to be patient. Even when they reached the airport he received no

information. "Are we leaving Japan now?" he asked. "Where are we going? Why is there only one suitcase?"

At last, when they reached the terminal, the wizard turned to him. "I am sending you home," he said in a fond voice.

The boy looked at him in disbelief.

"A plane leaves for New York in two hours," Carnelian stated. "I have brought your passport and enough money to purchase a ticket. After you land, telephone your parents. I am sure they will be overjoyed to see you."

Brandon looked at them all, realizing that the others would remain. "What did I do wrong?" he wondered.

The wizard smiled. "Wrong!" he exclaimed. "My child, you have acted more courageously than any boy I have ever known!"

"Then why are you sending me home?"

"Because you miss your parents, and because they miss you."

Brandon began to understand and felt ambivalent about leaving. "But the quest," he said. "Bloodstone!"

"We will do the best we can," Carnelian told him.

"But what if you need my help? I can't go now. Besides, it won't be long before we destroy him."

"I do not know how long it will be," the wizard admitted. "Nor who will be destroyed. But your parents are doubtless wondering where you are."

"I left a note!"

"Even so..."

Brandon thought about home. Playing with his friends in his clubhouse, eating dinner with his parents, sleeping in his own bed. And he realized the mundane life from which he had yearned to escape was what he now valued most.

"Will you visit me when it's over to tell me what happened?"

Carnelian was pleased the boy no longer tried to argue. "If I am able."

“At least I got to help you kill the rat,” he realized. “I grabbed its tail so you could bite it.”

“You make an intrepid cat, my child. And a valiant boy.”

“And you still have the staff I made for you,” Brandon said, trying to justify his leaving.

“I’ll think of you when I use it,” the wizard promised. He patted the boy affectionately on the head. “It was not my intent to bring you on this journey,” he reminded him. “But your company has served me well, and I shall miss you.”

Julie handed Brandon his doll, which she had concealed until now, and kissed him on the forehead. “Have a safe trip,” she said. “Maybe we’ll see each other in New York some day.”

Brandon smiled. “You think so?”

He looked uneasily at Lewis, recalling the boy’s dislike for him. But although Brandon feared the older boy, he felt no animosity. Indeed, he felt a sense of gratitude for the time Lewis saved his life. “Take care, LC.”

The older child thrust out his hand. Brandon looked at it in surprise, thinking he must be holding it out for another reason. After a moment he shook it.

“You all right,” Lewis admitted.

Brandon smiled, for Lewis’s respect meant almost as much to him as the wizard’s.

The walk to the gate and the wait for the plane were quiet moments spent in reflection. Japan and Julie and Lewis and Carnelian, and even the horror of Bloodstone would soon be only memories. Subjects for dreams less fantastic than life. And nightmares.

They were walking back through the terminal after Brandon boarded his plane when Carnelian stopped at a wall map of the world, which displayed the airline’s routes. He was following the line from Japan to Hawaii when an explosion occurred on the map. Julie and Lewis jumped at the sound, which resembled the firing of a toy gun. Carnelian

was startled, but also delighted, for the damage was limited to a small, precise hole in the Pacific.

He turned to the others after finding the island unlabeled. "Where is this?"

"I don't know," Julie said.

Lewis shrugged.

Carnelian impatiently glanced around. He spotted a British tourist who seemed well traveled and brought him over. "I would be grateful if you could tell me the name of this island," he said. "The one through which a hole has been seared."

The man looked curiously at Carnelian and then at the map. "I believe that is Sumatra," he replied. "In Indonesia."

"Sumatra," Carnelian repeated, the name vaguely familiar. "Do they have volcanoes? We must arrange a flight at once. If time permits, we can return to the hotel for our belongings." He looked back at the map, staring anxiously at the telltale hole. "Lives depend on our speed!"

The next flight was eight hours away, so they took a taxi to the hotel to gather their few possessions. When they returned to the airport, four hours still remained until departure time. Carnelian thought of Brandon and decided to fulfill what he considered a personal responsibility, one he had neglected until now.

He bought a phone card and led the children to a pay phone. "I want you to call your parents," he told them. They both reacted unfavorably to the request, but Lewis, to Carnelian's surprise, complied without argument. His mother, however, was not home.

Julie shook her head. "I don't know what time it is there," she mumbled. "I can't call. I haven't talked to them in months!"

"You must."

"You don't know them. Besides, they think I'm in New York. They'll just worry if I tell them I'm in Japan. They wouldn't believe me anyway."

“That isn’t important.”

Julie sighed. She approached the phone as if it were a confessional and slowly followed the instructions. After dialing a long series of numbers she recognized her father’s voice over a crackling connection. “Dad? It’s me, Julie... No, I’m in Tokyo... Tokyo,” she said in a louder voice. “Tokyo, Japan... With friends... No, I’m not in trouble... At the airport... Want...? I don’t want anything... Fine. I’m fine. Can’t I just call? I know it’s been a year... No, I don’t need anything!” she yelled. Furious, she slammed down the phone. She tried to turn away, but Carnelian blocked her.

“You must call back.”

She looked at him, feeling angry and hurt. “I can’t talk to him.”

“Speak with your mother.”

“I can’t talk to her either! That’s why I ran away! You heard what he said,” she complained. He thought I called to ask for money. They don’t know me. They don’t care!” Julie frowned. Finally, she turned back to the phone. “I’m only doing this for you,” she said.

This time her mother answered. Julie spoke in a calmer voice, and not defensively. Carnelian stepped aside to allow her privacy, confident that this time the conversation was progressing amicably. Julie talked for several minutes, and afterward avoided the wizard’s gaze. Still, he glimpsed the tears in her eyes.

## SUMATRA

Carnelian stared in dismay at the row of volcanoes in the distance, their hollow peaks visible through the low-lying clouds, as the plane approached Java.

Julie glanced over his shoulder. The plane was not crowded, and the wizard, to reduce his fatigue and for the children's enjoyment, decided to return them to human form when the flight attendants were not near. They were captivated by the countless islands dotting the blue Pacific. But as the volcanoes came into view, Julie was reminded of their purpose and grew concerned.

"It says there are over four hundred volcanoes in Indonesia," she quoted from a visitors' guide.

The wizard continued to gaze out the window. "The hole in the map augured Northern Sumatra, so the volcano we seek is not among those visible below. Yet there must be many also in Sumatra."

"How are you going to find the right one?" Julie wondered.

"I don't know," the wizard admitted. "It could prove rather difficult. And there isn't much time."

They switched planes in Jakarta and flew on to Medan, the provincial capital in Northern Sumatra. Carnelian had never seen a jungle before and was fascinated, as they approached the Equator, by the seemingly endless expanse of green vegetation and the snaking rivers and streams.

"Science compresses the world so that we can circumscribe it in a matter of days," he said in a pensive tone. "And yet when one sees the vastness of Nature, whether it be the mountains or seas, or a jungle such as this, it becomes apparent we shall never fully comprehend it."

Julie nodded, having felt overwhelmed by her environment for most of her life. "It makes you wonder



what it's all for," she said. "Don't you ever want to forget everything and just give up?"

The wizard turned to her, thinking of his mission and his eagerness to achieve it. "Absolutely not!"

Late in the day they arrived in Medan, a city of over two million people just three degrees north of the Equator, crowded with decaying Dutch colonial buildings, its streets teeming with Japanese motorcycles, ox carts and bicycle rickshaws.

Carnelian approached a palm tree and put his ear to the ground.

"What are you doing?" Julie asked.

The wizard motioned her to be silent. "I am trying to perceive any disturbances in the earth."

She and Lewis waited several minutes in silence while the wizard lay with his ear to the ground, deep in concentration, ignoring passers-by who paused to stare. Finally he rose.

"Well?" Julie asked impatiently.

But Carnelian shook his head. "Nothing." He led them to a waiting taxi.

"Can't you cast an information spell?" Julie asked as they approached the center of the city.

"I should do better by reading minute changes in the wind, especially if I possess a form equipped to sense such variations."

"You mean a bird?"

"Yes."

"And we're going with you?"

"Not this time."

Julie sat back, less anxious now that she knew she and Lewis would not be directly participating in the enterprise. Her feelings were ambivalent, however, for while she dreaded the thought of approaching an active volcano, she recalled with pleasure her moments as a falcon and yearned to fly again.

"How long before the volcano erupts?" she asked.

Carnelian laughed. "My child, I do not even know which volcano Bloodstone has chosen. How should I know the time?"

"You must have some idea?"

"Soon."

"How soon?" she persisted. "Could it happen now?"

"That would be extremely unlikely. I would say we have at least twenty-four hours. Probably more."

"But it could happen before then? It's possible?"

"It's possible," he allowed.

Julie felt herself growing anxious again. She looked at the driver, who had slowed for a bicyclist, and then turned to Carnelian in frustration. "Can't you tell him to go faster?"

"I do not believe he speaks English."

Julie sighed at his complacency. "Aren't you worried?"

"I am concerned, most certainly, for much hangs in the balance. But we have finally arrived in a country before Bloodstone has done any damage, and we may very well thwart his designs upon this island entirely. At the moment, I am feeling rather confident."

He sat back and enjoyed the scenery. Julie reached for a cigarette.

The driver, thinking them of modest means due to their dress and lack of luggage, dropped them off at a three-star hotel from which he received a commission. The wizard, who was becoming adept at modern international travel, paid for two adjoining rooms on the top floor. The air-conditioners did not work, and there was no phone or television, but the beds were clean and the balconies afforded an intriguing view of the mountains.

Carnelian handed the children enough rupiahs to last the morning. "Until I return," he told Lewis, "you will get your wish and have your own room."

"He sure is in a good mood," Julie said after the wizard left. She went to her balcony and looked out at the mountains, wondering if any were volcanoes.

Carnelian walked several blocks, inhaling the humid air, feeling the ground beneath his feet, concentrating. He ignored the traffic and exhaust fumes, sharpening his inner senses, preparing himself for the search. Finally, when he felt he was ready, he stepped into an alleyway, and flew above it as a peregrine falcon.

The earth fell away as he rose, and the interior mountains came into view. Although he flew three thousand feet above the ground, he could count the number of eggs a woman carried in a basket on her head. He could smell the smoke from a palm oil factory miles away. But other, lesser known senses were more important to his search and it was upon their accuracy that he relied for guidance.

It was not easy subjugating vision. As he rose in altitude the land curved more sharply away at the horizon, yet his acute vision continued to resolve details on the ground even as his view expanded. Here, so high above the earth, he could follow the course of a river for miles, and yet distinguish a water buffalo drinking at its edge. He could see the ocean to the east, the mountains to the west, and the jungle everywhere else, mocking civilization.

But looming shapes in the distance diminished the pleasure of the moment and reminded Carnelian that the scene below was neither stagnant nor benign. He stared at the volcanoes, intrigued by their silence. Yet vision would not enlighten him unless it were already too late. And to visit them one by one would be little better than gambling, for he lacked the time and strength to visit them all.

His eyes remained open but ceased to focus. He glided effortlessly, relaxing the bird's muscles as much as possible, slowing its heart rate, quieting its hunger. He imagined a volcano in his mind, threatening to erupt, and concentrated upon this image until he knew nothing else.

Then a jolt, as if by a gust of burning air. The direction—northwest.

He had found his way.

Julie and Lewis walked through the streets until dark, desperate for diversion. Julie decided to try Indonesian cigarettes, which she found much stronger than her own. But she needed something strong now, and excused the flavor. They bought dinner at the market, nasi goreng, exotic fruits and raw vegetables, and ate on the steps of a public building. The children were an object of curiosity, but the Indonesians were too polite to stare and merely glanced and walked on. Those whom Julie tried to engage in conversation spoke too little English to make the effort successful.

Afterward they went to the movie house and saw the nightly feature, a Japanese martial arts film. Lewis was reminded of his near disaster with the samurai sword and preferred to think about volcanoes. They left during a battle with knives.

When they returned to the hotel Lewis went into Carnelian's room. There was no television or radio, and the rooms were uncomfortably quiet, so Julie went out on one balcony and Lewis went out on the other and they sat in the rusting metal chairs facing the mountains.

It was a warm, pleasant night, but Julie was unable to enjoy it. She kept looking at the sky, expecting to see a cloud of ash obscure the stars.

"I hope he's all right," she said, suspicious of the quiet. "I hope he finds it in time." She lit a cigarette, but the smoke and ash made her think of exploding volcanoes. "When do you think he'll return?"

Lewis shrugged.

"What if he can't find it?" she wondered. "What if he's led to the wrong one? Not that I don't have confidence in him, but he's been misled by spells before. And there are a lot of volcanoes here."

She followed the colored lights of an airplane as it gained altitude over the jungle, flying east to Singapore. "I wish he would have let me come with him. I'd feel safer. Even near a volcano. I just don't like it when he's gone."

She listened to the silence for a moment and found it intolerable. "I wish there were something we could do. I feel so helpless here, not knowing. I can't stand the waiting!"

She rubbed out her cigarette, only half finished, and looked at Lewis. "So what about you?" She could see his face dimly in the glow of the balcony light. His eyes shone when he turned to her, but his expression was difficult to decipher. "You must be worried?"

"Bout what?"

Julie frowned. "Don't give me that. I know how easily you frighten. You may not give a damn about us, but you care about yourself. Just admit it. Just tell me you're frightened. I want to hear you say it."

Lewis said nothing.

Julie realized she was taunting him and decided to relent. "All right, be stubborn, I don't care. I'm just trying to get you to talk. I can't stand this silence!"

She watched him in the darkness. "Tell me what happened that night in Mexico when you saw Bloodstone. Tell me how you escaped."

"I already did."

"Tell me the truth."

Lewis thought for a moment, recalling that night. "I was being buried alive," he finally said. "There was nothin' I could do. He just stood up there lookin' down at me with those red eyes. I couldn't move. I couldn't get away."

He leaned toward her to defend himself "I ain't afraid a no person," he said. "But Bloodstone ain't a person. You would a been scared too. I tried to fight him, but you can't fight somethin' like that. I was nearly buried! The dirt was fallin' in my mouth!" He turned away, as if in shame. "So I screamed out and he disappeared. And the fog went away."

Julie sat reflectively. "You were lucky."

When Lewis didn't respond she decided to change the subject. "Were you disappointed your mother wasn't home?"

He looked at her as if he did not understand the question. "When Carnelian made us call home," she elaborated.

Lewis shrugged. "It don't matter."

"I'm sure she's worried."

"I been gone before."

"For eleven days?"

"She got her own problems."

"Don't you think she loves you?"

"Sure she loves me."

"Don't you love her?"

Lewis paused for a moment. "It ain't that."

"Then what? Are you afraid she'll be angry?"

"I ain't afraid a her!" he exclaimed.

"I didn't want to talk to my parents," Julie admitted. "We never could get along, and I hadn't talked to them in months. But they're always on my mind."

Lewis looked out toward the trees. "I worry about her. She's always gettin' in trouble."

"So are you," Julie pointed out.

"But I can take care a myself. She can't take care a no one."

"She doesn't take care of you?"

"Hell no! She wouldn't know how. She always too busy tryin' to get her own life together."

"And you hate her for that?"

"I don't hate her. I just think she's weak." He paused. "She ain't never done nothin' good for me."

Julie smiled at the exaggeration, having using the same words herself on occasion. "If she's that bad why didn't you run away?"

"She needs me."

He looked at her for a moment and then they both laughed. Afterward, they talked about their troubled families and their tormented lives far into the night.

He saw it ahead, dimly outlined against the surrounding night, a thin trail of gases slowly rising out from the crater. It was not the largest volcano in Sumatra, but Carnelian did not doubt its destructive potential, especially if Bloodstone was allowed to unleash its wrath unchallenged.

Lights shone from a village not three miles away. Farmers exploited the fertile soil up to the very base of the mountain. It was these anonymous people Carnelian thought of as he approached the volcano. They did not know him, and probably never would. But their lives depended on his powers.

He landed securely on the lip of the crater and immediately changed into human form. The rising gases included carbon dioxide and hydrogen sulfide, as well as steam. He peered over the edge and saw the orange magma glowing in the vast chamber below, and felt the great responsibility that now encumbered him.

"I will not fail," he said quietly, closing his eyes for a moment, sensing the pressures growing inside as well as beneath him.

Staring straight ahead, he stood erect and raised both arms in the air. "*Alcair na jeriboth ul quascen naipox!*" he shouted. "*Alcair na jeriboth recenna calaph!*"

The volcano began to tremble. Carnelian stood firmly on the lip of the crater, unaffected by the motion, and repeated the spell, his voice louder than the mountain, confident and clear.

The magma slowly began to rise. The trembling increased, and the volcano rumbled. Carnelian quickly glanced around, sensing Bloodstone's presence, but the Evil Wizard was nowhere to be seen. He paused to look at the village lights in the distance and thought of the people awakened by the sound, emerging from their homes, fearful, hoping the disturbance would pass, perhaps preparing to flee. He thought of Julie and Lewis back in Medan waiting for his return. He thought of Brandon, by now home in New York, reunited with his parents. He had not come so far and

waited so long to falter now. This was his opportunity to gain a minor victory over his ancient enemy, and he was determined to take advantage of it, for he knew that even more was at stake than the lives of the surrounding population. If he could gain the upper hand here, his position would be greatly strengthened for a direct confrontation with Bloodstone.

Bending down, he lifted a small volcanic rock from the lip of the crater where he stood. "*Aselli innis vespor malicand ep.*" he roared, throwing the rock forcefully into the center of the crater. It fell several hundred feet, and when it entered the magma there was a brief explosion. Gases spewed forth at an increased rate, and the magma bubbled.

Carnelian confidently stood his ground as the volcano shook, feeling stronger and in better command of his powers than he had felt since awaking in this age. He focused his thoughts on a weakened Bloodstone, a dormant volcano.

The gases began to dissipate, the magma quieted and slowly subsided. Carnelian felt a final jolt beneath him and then the mountain was still. All that issued from the crater now was steam, and soon that too would cease. The wizard stood with his hands on his hips, surveying his work. In his own day he had tamed wild horses with a glance, but never had he achieved anything to match this. He waited several minutes for Bloodstone to appear, feeling strong enough to defeat him. But all seemed peaceful, and the wizard sensed no disturbances. Satisfied with his efforts, and looking forward to the dawn, he changed back into a falcon and soared leisurely to Medan.

When Julie awoke late the next morning she found him sitting on his bed reading maps and English newspapers. Lewis was still asleep.

"You're back!" she exclaimed, rushing to his side. She pulled him away from his papers. "What happened?"



“I found the volcano,” he calmly replied.

“And?” she asked anxiously. “Was Bloodstone there?”

“I waited, but he did not appear. In many ways I was disappointed.”

“What about the volcano? Is it safe?”

The wizard nodded. “My spells proved quite effective,” he said with a smile. “I am rather satisfied this morning.”

She glanced at the headlines on the front page. “Why are you reading the newspaper?”

“It is time to take the initiative,” he explained. “I am reviewing the news to discover if Bloodstone has exerted his heinous influence elsewhere. It seems unlikely, since his actions here on Sumatra would have required much energy.” He tossed aside one of the papers. “And I see nothing which arouses my suspicion.”

“What do you mean about taking the initiative?” Julie wondered.

Carnelian’s face grew serious and he looked at her intently. “Until now we have merely been chasing Bloodstone,” he said. “Now that I have gained strength and thwarted his plans, it is time to take the lead. Our victory here will greatly upset him. If he is anything like the sorcerer I knew in my age he will follow me. His rage will consume him and he will hunt me, knowing he cannot ignore the threat I pose to his crusade against man.”

Julie grew apprehensive when Carnelian spoke of a confrontation. His use of the word hunt particularly unnerved her. “How can that be good?” she asked.

“Because I feel ready for him,” he replied in a confident tone. “My success here has given me strength, and weakened him. Also, he will not have the advantage of lying in wait for me. Being the hunted rather than the hunter will afford me the opportunity to lead him where I wish, and confront him at the moment I consider most opportune.”

Julie did not share his optimism. She recalled what Brandon had asked him in Mexico—a question he had not

answered. "But how will you destroy him," she wondered, "if he's immortal?"

"Perhaps he cannot be destroyed," Carnelian admitted. "But he can be immobilized, or weakened to a point where he cannot cause harm. It is just a matter of overpowering him, and discovering his weaknesses."

"You mean you don't even know his weaknesses?"

"I know exposure to extremely cold temperatures diminishes his power. Other than that, I am not certain what actions are best to take against him. I shall have to experiment when the moment arrives, and hope it does not take too long to discover an effective strategy."

He looked down to study a map.

"I was worried about you," Julie confessed. She glanced over at Lewis, still sleeping soundly. "We both were."

The wizard looked up and smiled. "Well, I'm afraid you'll have to survive without my company for a few more hours. I have not slept yet and am rapidly growing tired." He pushed the maps and newspapers off the bed and climbed under the covers. "Wake me after dusk," he said. "And try not to disturb me unless the matter is of the utmost urgency."

Julie watched him close his eyes and drift off to sleep. His breathing was relaxed and his expression one of contentment. She felt at ease in his presence, despite his ignorance of Bloodstone's weaknesses. She sat quietly by the bed and watched him until Lewis woke.

She and Lewis were eating dinner in her room when they were startled by a cry. A moment later Carnelian appeared in the doorway, a fearful look in his eye. "Did you hear it?" he asked in a troubled voice.

"Hear what?" Julie wondered, surprised by his manner.

The wizard did not answer. He went to the balcony and glanced at the sky. He was about to return to the room and explain his dream when they heard a roar in the distance. Julie and Lewis rushed to his side.

“The volcano?” Julie asked apprehensively.

Carnelian nodded somberly. ‘I’m afraid so.’”

Julie looked at the sky, which was not yet tainted by smoke and ash. The rumble came from a great distance, like the first thunderclap from a gathering storm, but it sent panic through them all, for they could imagine the suffering and damage which would accompany the sound. “But you said you succeeded!” she reminded him.

“So I thought.” A minute later his features regained some of their former optimism. “Still, I believe I have considerably diminished the volcano’s destructive power. The effects may not be disastrous. But now is no time to talk. I must go to the mountain and see for myself.”

“Can’t you take us with you?” Julie pleaded.

The wizard shook his head. And quickly chanting the spell, changed into a falcon and flew away.

He dove beneath a cloud of ash blowing toward Medan. The volcano, now visible in the distance, seemed buried under a premature night, thin streams of lava trickling down its side. Carnelian’s apprehension grew. Though the eruption appeared to be minor, he dreaded the possibility of casualties and blamed himself for failing to completely thwart his adversary.

He was anxious to examine the population, but first he had to calm the mountain. He doubted the volcano would erupt again, but it had surprised him once already and he did not wish to be further disillusioned. He landed on the lip of the crater where he had stood before, impervious to the volcano’s intense heat and the suffocating smoke, so black and dense it obscured the countryside, and even the magma below. Quickly, he cast the spells he had cast before and, without waiting to watch their effect, flew low toward the village, beneath the volcanic clouds, searching for survivors.

He found three near the foot of the mountain, Muslim pilgrims whose mission was as much a mystery to the wizard as his dramatic appearance was to them. They suffered from

severe burns as well as smoke inhalation. All were old men, one very near death, but Carnelian managed to save them. They spoke in a language he couldn't understand, gazing at him as if not even their ineffable faith could justify his presence. He wanted to carry them to safer ground, but thought of those still suffering who might require his immediate attention and swiftly departed, changing into a bird before their unbelieving eyes.

Few rays from the setting sun reached the ground beneath the volcano. The valley was dim and hot, like some earthly hell. But daylight still glanced upon the village several miles away. Carnelian was glad to see the lava had not reached it and the physical damage was slight. The eruption had been weak indeed, and the wizard knew that had he not intervened the entire area would have been buried beneath the onrushing lava.

He was further relieved to discover no one had died. Many had fallen victim to the smoke, or been burned by falling ash, but Carnelian was able to cure the serious cases and left the minor ones to conventional medicine.

He felt the praise of the villagers undeserved, and ignored the frenzy his actions inspired, thinking only of the damage to be undone. Yet as he finished, he began to feel a renewed sense of satisfaction, for while he had not silenced the volcano, he had quieted it, and Bloodstone as well. Indeed, he had never won such a victory over his nemesis.

Confident as before, determined to triumph completely over his enemy in the end, he left the village before the journalists from Medan arrived, and searched the fertile but perilous landscape for others in distress.

It was almost midnight when he reached the hotel. Julie was pacing on the balcony. She ran inside when she saw him enter.

“What happened?” she asked. “Were many killed? I listened to the radio at the front desk, but the reports were vague.”

“There are no dead that I am aware of,” he told her in a tired voice.

Julie was surprised. “But the eruption sounded so horrible!”

Carnelian glanced around. “Where’s Lewis?”

“I don’t know. Out walking.”

“How are you faring?”

“Me?” she asked, more concerned about his well-being than her own. “I’m fine. Great, now that you’re here. And that everything’s all right.” She looked at him, trying to read his thoughts. “Everything is all right?”

The wizard’s expression was noncommittal. “For the moment.” He began to leaf through the maps on the bed. “Our fight is not yet finished, as you well know.” He smiled at her hopefully. “But we have traveled far!” he exclaimed. “And gained much! I had courage enough when I awoke from my long imprisonment, but now I possess the strength to match his. And the initiative is ours, if we take it!”

“What are your plans?”

“We have followed Bloodstone across the world, foiling his plans. Now he will follow us.” He pointed to Nepal on one of the maps. “Here!”

Julie looked at his finger. “Where?”

“The Himalayas. Far from populated cities, where he could do great damage. Into the frigid cold, where he will quickly tire.”

“But how do you know he’ll follow you?”

“Because I have enraged him, and he knows he must be rid of me if his efforts are to succeed.”

“But won’t he be too smart to follow you into the Himalayas?”

Carnelian grinned, as if the instincts of a bird of prey had followed him into human form. “He does not think my talons can hold him,” he said. “So why should he worry in what climate they sweep down? Though his powers are considerable, they are not infinite, and this is where he falters, for he is unable to admit his limitations. That was his

nature in my age, and I don't see evidence it is any different now."

He looked back at the map, considering their plans for departure. Julie stood uneasily, dreading the thought of a direct confrontation with Bloodstone and the frigid desolation of the Himalayas.

But she did not trouble him for details. Another question was on her mind, central to the purpose of their journey. She sat next to him on the bed, seeking his attention. "There's something I don't understand," she admitted. "Something that's been bothering me since you first asked me to come with you. I've been thinking about it a lot, especially the last two days while I've been waiting for you."

"Yes?"

She considered how to phrase the question. "Well, I feel I'm not being useful. That I'm just a burden. Even when we hunted the rat I didn't really do anything. And it's clear my help wasn't necessary. Not only that, but I got you in trouble when I gave you the cigarette. The same for Lewis. He almost killed someone. Brandon's different because you didn't want to bring him in the first place, and you finally sent him home. But you invited Lewis and me. Why?"

The wizard looked up from his maps, nodding thoughtfully, as if he had been expecting the question for some time. "We pursue a common goal," he replied pensively. "The subjugation of Bloodstone. Yet each person has an obstacle to overcome, an obstacle against which the weight of one's entire life presses. It may be a habit that needs to be learned, or a habit that needs to be broken. An idea that must be understood, or a prejudice that must be discarded. A fear that must be faced, or a pleasure that must be forsaken. For me, obviously, it is Bloodstone. According to legend, I was conceived to destroy him. But for you and Lewis there are more important battles in your lives."

"What is Lewis's battle?"

Carnelian reflected for a moment, remembering his first impressions of the boy. “Lewis,” he told her, “must learn how to cry.”

Julie leaned forward, apprehensive over her next question. “And I?”

The wizard raised his eyebrows and looked at her fondly. “You,” he answered, “must learn how to stop crying.”

Julie glanced down, knowing he spoke the truth. His answer made her see their journey in a different light, a light focused on her. So powerful was the wizard and the events into which he had led them that she had ignored her own growth over the last two weeks. But now that she thought about it she realized that in many ways she had indeed begun to change. She found herself frightened of death, where before it was life that terrified her. Carnelian’s relentless optimism had begun to affect her so that she no longer believed his efforts to vanquish Bloodstone were futile. Thoughts of Larry drifted in and out of her thoughts where before they had oppressed her. And she had not cried.

She looked back up at the wizard, trying to control the emotions building within her. She wanted to throw her arms around him and kiss him to show her appreciation, but she knew such a display would not be appropriate. So she settled for a smile and embraced him with her eyes. “I’ve never felt stronger than with you,” she said. But you shouldn’t have brought me. You’ve given me strength, but I’ve only been a burden in return.”

The wizard laughed and gently took her hand. “My eyes are wiser than yours, my child, and they see in you a strength you have not yet learned how to perceive. You possess a magic more sublime than mine—the beauty of a young woman. It is for you, for your safe future, that I seek to end my enemy’s long reign.”

Julie forgot restraint and threw her arms around him. “You make me feel special!”

Carnelian was not displeased by her show of affection. “My child,” he assured her, “you *are* special!”

It was well past midnight when Julie prepared for sleep. She closed the door that separated her room from Carnelian and Lewis's, but did not lock it. In the bathroom, she washed her face and combed through the tangles in her long hair. She needed a shower but felt too tired and decided to wait until morning. Her one nightgown was dirty and the weather was quite warm, so she chose to sleep in the nude. She checked the balcony door to make sure it was locked, turned out the lights, and crawled beneath the sheets.

Outside the wind was blowing. Julie wished she had a radio. She wished the air-conditioner worked, for the room was stuffy. Before she had been too tired to take a shower, but now that she was in bed she found she couldn't sleep either.

She kicked off the sheets and slid open the balcony door. The breeze felt soothing and she stood there a moment, cooling off, looking at the dark mountains.

When she returned to bed she thought sleep would come immediately. But now the wind had grown stronger and the curtain was flapping loudly. It frightened her and she thought of sleeping on the floor in Carnelian's room, but she knew he would chide her in the morning.

Once again she climbed out of bed, this time to adjust the curtain. But before she could reach it a great gust of wind shattered the balcony door. Julie shouted and leapt back, glass falling all around her. Bloodstone stood on the balcony, glaring at her, his luminous red eyes piercing her own, the veins on his odious green face bulging with anticipation and anger. His expression was one of complete contempt for everything that lives, a look so terribly powerful that it caused in Julie a despair deeper than any she had ever known. A sense of helplessness and fear greater than she had ever imagined possible, against which her previous hopes and her confidence in Carnelian seemed but the misguided predilections of a naive girl.



She gasped and leapt back, instinctively pulling the sheet off the bed to clothe herself. It was not her body she feared losing, however, but her soul. For Bloodstone seemed to her no less than the Devil himself, and in this moment she knew there were places darker than the earthly night, places where the soul itself was lost, and pain knew no salvation. She stood shivering in a moment that seemed agonizingly long, waiting for the Dark Wizard to descend upon her.

Bloodstone did not speak, but his intent was clear. The wind rushed behind him as he stepped forcefully into the room. The mirror upon the dresser shattered, the plaster ceiling began to crack and fall. Julie felt the sheet being pulled away and desperately tried to keep it wrapped around her, having nothing else to cling to. Bloodstone appeared unworldly, more supernatural than Carnelian, his dark unearthly origins apparent in his every movement and gesture, as well as in his appearance.

The bed split in half, the lamps toppled, the walls cracked, rifts opened in the floor, as if from an earthquake. The wind howled through the blasted door, blowing her hair in all directions, billowing the sheet she clung to. Bloodstone imperiously raised a finger and she feared she was his. But enough strength remained within her to scream. Her voice carried high above the clamor of the devastated room, and was shriller than the wind. “Carnelian!” she shrieked. “Carnelian! Carnelian!”

The figure wavered, the bright eyes dimmed, and Bloodstone vanished as Carnelian rushed through the door that separated their rooms. The wind had ceased to howl. A few pieces of plaster fell from the ceiling and all was quiet.

Carnelian ran to the balcony and gripped the railing so hard that he bent the metal. “Come back!” he shouted into the darkness. “Try your powers against me if you consider them so great, not against a young girl! Your time has come, Bloodstone!”

He waited a minute, glaring at the night, but Bloodstone did not return. Julie had not moved. She stood by the bed,

the sheet draped around her, as if Bloodstone had frozen her there. Lewis trembled in the doorway, afraid to venture into the devastated room.

Carnelian went to Julie and stroked her gently on the head. The moment she felt his touch she broke down and threw her arms around him, letting the sheet fall to the splintered floor. The wizard tried to comfort her as best he could, but she was screaming hysterically, and clutching him so tightly that he wondered if she would ever let go.

“It’s all right, my child,” he whispered soothingly. “He’s gone.” He glanced at Lewis, who was remembering his own encounter with the Dark Wizard. The boy looked sympathetically at Julie, wishing he could help. But Bloodstone was gone and she appeared safe for the moment.

The wizard carefully untangled Julie’s arms from his waist and draped it around her. Then he knelt beside her and looked into her weeping eyes, ignoring the commotion of the other guests and hotel staff in the corridor.

“It was indeed selfish of me to bring you,” he said quietly, feeling Julie’s pain as surely as he felt her tears. “I required aid in my journey through this strange age. And having met you, I realized I could not abandon you. I hoped in my company you would learn and grow, and learn and grow you have. But what does it gain you if I cannot protect you from perils you would have otherwise never known?”

He watched as she continued to cry, feeling toward her the love of a guardian and a friend. He recalled his words to her earlier that night, that she must learn to stop crying. But her present tears, he realized, were a sign of her growth. “You have journeyed far,” he told her. “And I must do everything in my power to ensure your safety. I know a joyous future awaits you. For it is life you cry for now.”

Carnelian did not risk sleeping that night, or remaining in Sumatra. He had been making plans to journey to Nepal, but after Bloodstone’s attack on Julie he decided they must move without delay. Julie had stopped crying but seemed in

a state of shock, silent, expressionless, oblivious to the world around her.

At the airport in Medan, Carnelian considered sending them home and journeying to Nepal alone. But he didn't want the children to leave his protection, for Bloodstone understood their importance to him, and might pursue them to spite Carnelian, especially if the Dark Wizard feared Carnelian's growing powers and wished to avoid a direct confrontation.

So Carnelian turned them into flies and boarded a flight to Singapore. After they changed planes for the flight to Kathmandu, Carnelian changed them back into human form and took the opportunity to sleep. Julie also slept, her shock overtaken by exhaustion. But Lewis felt rested and gazed out the window, watching the carpet of clouds below.

Suddenly the plane shook, which surprised Lewis because the sky appeared calm. It shook again, from side to side, as if they had encountered turbulence. Some of the passengers gasped. The pilot spoke over the intercom in a language Lewis did not understand. The boy looked at Carnelian and Julie, but they both still slept soundly.

Cries rose from the passengers. Turning back to the window, Lewis saw a flying creature as large as a pterodactyl, but more similar to a vampire bat in appearance. Its body was green with red streaks, its eyes cold flames. Its powerful wings flapped wildly, mocking the aircraft's rigidity. The disturbance in the air caused the plane to tremble, throwing some of those passengers not wearing safety belts from their seats. Lewis watched in terror as the monster rose in the air above the plane, its great jaws gaping, revealing long fangs, and swooped toward his window.

He turned to the wizard and shook him violently, wondering how he and Julie could sleep through such turmoil. "Carnelian!"

The wizard woke at once. Lewis turned back to the window in time to see the creature disappear below the plane.

“It’s Bloodstone!” Lewis shouted. “He’s flying!”

Carnelian looked out the window, then hurried to the other side of the plane and glanced outside, ignoring the distraught passengers. Lewis tightened his seat belt and waited for the next wave of turbulence, feeling sick. But the sky remained calm. He looked at Carnelian, expecting him to be alarmed. But the wizard was smiling with satisfaction as he returned to his seat.

“The vulture has spied us out,” he observed in a pleased voice. “But soon he shall be our prey!”

## NEPAL

### 1

Carnelian arrived in Kathmandu optimistic and well rested. But Bloodstone's thwarted attack still deeply distressed Julie. Her body was tense, she stayed very close to Carnelian's side, and she did not speak, smile or laugh.

The sky was clear and the sun bright, but after dusk the temperature would fall sharply, especially higher in the mountains. Carnelian looked at the white peaks in the distance, estimating the time it would take to reach them.

He turned to the children. "We have come to the end of our journey," he told them in a somber voice. He pointed to the peaks. "Tonight, up there, I shall battle Bloodstone."

Lewis was not surprised. He had guessed as much. Julie only listened vaguely, taking little interest in the wizard's pronouncement.

"I have faced no greater task," he said grimly, but with an air of confidence he had gained in Sumatra. "Bloodstone has defeated me before, and roamed unchallenged in the centuries after my entombment. He has nearly taken each of you from me, a tragedy that would cause me more pain than any natural disaster," he admitted, placing a hand on their shoulders. "For I have come to love you both."

At the word *love* Julie grew attentive and her listless expression assumed a degree of animation. Lewis watched Carnelian with respect, having felt a sense of loyalty and gratitude toward the wizard ever since that night in Tokyo when Carnelian spared him the fate of a being a murderer.

"But tonight I will triumph," he assured them. "We will not return to the cities of man until Bloodstone is a threat no more!"

Lewis looked at him, surprised. "We?"

Carnelian nodded. "Yes," he explained. "You are coming with me."

Though Julie did not speak, she was pleased, and considerably relieved, for she would rather follow the wizard to the top of Everest and there gaze again into Bloodstone's desolate red eyes than remain in a hotel room, alone, to wait.

But Lewis was confused. "Why you wanna take us this time?"

"You will be in danger," Carnelian admitted. "But you might be in greater danger if left alone. If you are at my side Bloodstone will have to destroy me before he can harm you."

"I ain't afraid," Lewis said.

Carnelian looked at the boy critically. "You should be!"

He opened the suitcase and handed them their coats. Julie had packed a sweater and a hooded down jacket, but Lewis had brought only a black nylon windbreaker.

"I'll freeze in this!" he complained as he put it on, looking fearfully at the chilling white peaks beyond. "We ain't got no gloves neither!"

"And I have only my robe," the wizard pointed out. "But I will cast a spell to protect you from the cold. Any further questions?"

"Will we have to climb far?"

"We will not climb at all," Carnelian told him. "That would take too much time."

"Then how..." Lewis stopped before completing the question, suspecting the answer. "We gonna fly?"

"Yes."

"What kinda birds you changin' us into?"

"Golden eagles."

Julie brightened at the thought of flying again. She recalled that afternoon in New York, which now seemed so long ago, when Carnelian had mumbled some strange words and she suddenly, inexplicably, found herself soaring above Central Park.

But Lewis had known less pleasurable experiences as animals and felt uneasy at the prospect of flapping wings

hundreds of feet above the earth. "What if I fall?" he wondered.

"You won't."

"But I don't know how to fly."

"The bird will. You've flown before, after all," Carnelian reminded him.

"Yeah, and almost got swatted!"

The wizard smiled. "You are brave, both of you. I ask for your trust, yet I have not rightly earned it. May tonight repay your suffering!" And with that he grabbed his staff and chanted the spell three times.

The three gazed in awe at the snowcapped peaks that formed a chain from east to west as far as their eagle eyes could see. The ranges of Mexico and Indonesia did not prepare them for the grandeur of these incomparable mountains. Many times they wanted to speak, to verbalize their wonder and astonishment, but they could only squall, and would have to wait until human again to try to describe the planet's loftiest feature. To the west they could see Mount Annapurna and to the east, equally distant, the serrated peaks of Everest. Carnelian had not known of the mountain in his own age, and had heard of the Himalayas only vaguely, as if a fable, fervently recalled by travelers from the East. Now, as he flew, he reflected on the thousands of miles he had traveled since waking from his long confinement, and he likened his life in his own day to that of an ant which thinks its hill the highest, its grass the greenest, its soil the richest, and never ventures beyond its tiny patch of earth to learn differently. He wondered what these mountains cared of Capets and Plantagenets, Holy Lands and Holy Wars, swords and codes of chivalry. Indeed, he wondered what they cared of wizards. Here he and Bloodstone would wrestle for the future of mankind, but would the Himalayas even notice? Would the wizards' presence cause them even the minor irritation of a flea upon an elephant? "They have stood longer than the seas,"

Carnelian thought. “They have survived the empires of man.”

Lewis soared effortlessly on the strong currents, flapping his wings only occasionally. His earlier trepidation was forgotten, and he wished only that the wizard would let him fly across the earth forever. Every time he looked down into the fertile valley far below he expected to be frightened, but the animal half of him allayed his fears. He felt safe at this altitude, safer than he had ever felt on the ground as a boy. And free. All his life he had rebelled against authority, and now not even gravity could rule him. Yet he realized regrettably he would soon have to land and exchange his wings for legs, and flight would become but a memory—a memory so wondrous all normal thrills will suffer from comparison. Never again would he be able to ride a roller coaster or climb a fire escape or sit on the edge of a tenement without recalling the inexpressible joy of soaring as a bird of prey at the summit of the world.

For Julie, flight reminded her that beauty and tranquility still existed in the world, and the sensations of creaturehood swept her thoughts far from Bloodstone and that terrible night in Sumatra. She felt grateful to Carnelian for allowing her to experience flight again. The first time she had been anxious, and disillusioned when the spell wore off, but now she held different expectations and was appreciative for the chance to be a bird, however briefly. She marveled that of all the people in the world, Carnelian blessed only Lewis and her with this spell. The other day she had regarded him doubtfully when he proclaimed her special. She had considered her life plagued with tragic circumstance. Yet now she felt herself blessed, and thought it a miracle Carnelian had entered her life. When Bloodstone impinged upon her thoughts it was as a defeated enemy falling into a bottomless chasm at the hands of her immortal friend.

Lewis thought of Bloodstone with a greater sense of alarm. As the mountains’ jagged faces loomed above them



he remembered the flying creature that had attacked their plane, and suddenly he felt quite vulnerable. No longer was it enough to be a bird of prey. What did a wingspan of ten feet matter to a creature whose wings spanned thirty? He wished he could communicate his concern to Carnelian. Perhaps it was unjustified. Nevertheless, he spent the rest of the flight suspiciously darting his head in all directions, expecting the Dark Wizard to swoop down any moment.

Carnelian led them to Mount Gosainthan, nearly fifty miles from Katmandu, where they regained human form. They had landed on a wide ledge above the timberline, but considerably below the 24,000 foot summit. A rocky footpath sloped down the mountainside, but the valley below was obscured from view. The ledge looked out upon a great chasm separating the mountains. Julie grew dizzy whether she looked up at the distant snow-covered peak or down into the rocky gulf. Although the ledge was free from snow and wide enough for them to walk on freely, she braced herself against the mountain and looked straight ahead.

Carnelian wasted no time casting a spell to protect them from the cold and another to fill their lungs. Though it was still afternoon and the sun was quite warm, the air was thin and the wind chilling.

The children felt an immediate difference, as if the wind had ceased to blow. They could also breathe easier, as if at sea level. But the spell did not prevent them from feeling the sun's rays.

"What about sunburn?" Julie asked, looking into the glare.

"I have brought you into great danger and you ask about sunburn?"

"What if he doesn't come?" Lewis wondered.

"Then we will return tomorrow. Or perhaps he will attack us on his own terms. But I doubt he possesses the patience to wait."

"What if he can't find us?"

“Do not underestimate his power! Did he not find you in your hotel room? Did he not wrestle with out plane? No, he shall find us. I have intentionally brought us into an isolated area, far from distractions and potential victims. Here Bloodstone will be able to concentrate his powers upon me.”

“Isn’t that more dangerous for you?” Julie wondered.

“You forget he dislikes the cold. The more energy he expends, the quicker he will weaken. His eagerness to defeat me will be his undoing.”

She battled her dizziness and looked at Carnelian. “Do you really think you can destroy him?” she asked.

“I must,” Carnelian said firmly. “I must!”

Lewis lay back against the mountain and tossed pebbles into the chasm. “What can we do to help?”

“When the time comes, nothing,” Carnelian told him. “The burden is mine and I must battle him alone. But you may aid me greatly in the meantime by standing guard while I prepare.”

“Prepare?” Julie asked. She had no idea what he meant and feared he was going to leave them. But instead he sat on the hard stone with his legs crossed and his palms outstretched upon his knees, like a yogi, and closed his eyes.

“What’s he doin’?” Lewis whispered, not wanting to disturb him.

“He’s meditating,” Julie answered.

Lewis threw another pebble into the void. “Is it okay to talk?”

Julie peered at the wizard’s serene face. His hair and robe blew in the wind, but he seemed oblivious to his surroundings. “I don’t think he can hear us.”

Lewis looked at the wizard’s changeless expression as he threw another pebble over the ledge. A moment later he spotted a shape circling in the distance. A golden eagle soared below, glowing in the sunlight.

Lewis shook Carnelian. “I see him! I see him!” he shouted.

The wizard was on his feet in an instant, as if he had never sat down. He peered intently at the eagle with eyes as discerning as the creature's. Then he relaxed. "It is just a bird," he said with certainty.

"Are you sure?"

Carnelian gave him a condescending look and resumed his meditation.

Neither Julie nor Lewis could sleep, but they respected the peace and did not converse the remainder of the afternoon. It was dusk before Lewis spoke again. "I'm hungry," he said.

"How can you think of eating now?"

"I always think of eatin' when I'm hungry," he replied. "We may never eat again!"

"Don't talk like that. Of course we'll eat again. After Carnelian destroys Bloodstone we'll return to Khatmandu and celebrate."

They heard a sound like thunder in the distance. Carnelian opened his eyes and breathed deeply, as if trying to detect a scent. "How are you faring?" he asked as he rose and stretched his legs. "Did you take turns sleeping?"

"We couldn't sleep."

The wizard frowned. "That is too bad. The night will be long and I fear you will have no opportunity to rest."

"Was that sound just now him?" Julie asked apprehensively, reluctant to speak the Dark Wizard's name.

"I believe so. But I am not certain."

"What are we going to do?"

"Remain here and wait. I suggest you sleep if you can."

The mountain concealed the setting sun, the last rays of daylight falling softly upon its jagged face, its great peak no longer visible, shrouded in threatening clouds. In the chasm below, the shadows deepened. The air had grown considerably colder. Julie and Lewis could see their breaths. But Carnelian's spell kept them warm, and not even the frigid rocks upon which they sat caused them discomfort.

Yet apprehension over the night to come agitated them, and they found it difficult to close their eyes, let alone sleep. The wizard was standing patiently, but highly alert, his senses tuned to the changing weather. The rumblings in the distance continued.

Julie reached for a cigarette and was dismayed to find but one left. She lit it with some difficulty, for the wind had grown stronger, and took one long puff before gently putting it out against the rocks, hoping she could make it last the night.

“How was your meditation?” she asked.

Carnelian put a finger to his lips and she remained quiet, listening with growing trepidation to the approaching thunder.

The little daylight that remained faded into a pitch black night. He tapped his staff against the rocks and a steady, spherical flame illuminated the ledge. The wizard’s white robe and hair glowed venerably in the conjured light. Nothing beyond the ledge was visible, not even the snow farther up the mountainside. Julie felt as if she sat as a witness to creation, waiting for Carnelian to call the world into being.

The wizard stood motionless, his back to them, looking into the darkness. It seemed to Julie and Lewis that hours passed, but they could not be certain of the time, for neither wore watches, and the moon and stars were hidden by the clouds.

The thunder had rumbled intermittently, growing only slightly louder. But now it began to hail. At first the stones were no larger than raindrops, but soon they grew to the size of golf balls. They showered down, pelting them relentlessly. Carnelian’s spell protected them from the chill but not from the sting, and there was no place to take cover. Julie and Lewis pulled their legs close together and covered their heads with their hands, enduring the pain as best they could, hoping the storm would soon pass. The artificial fire was not

affected, nor was the wizard, who stood impervious to the hailstones.

Julie kept her eyes down to avoid being hit in the face. She grew mesmerized by the pattern the hailstones made as they struck the ledge and flowed off the sides as water. The ledge was now quite slippery, but Julie did not feel wet. She hoped Carnelian would explain what was happening, or at least give them a comforting look. But he continued to gaze into the chasm.

Finally the hail subsided. The storm had not ended, however, but was merely changing course. The wind whistled through the crevices and whipped Carnelian's hair and robe, but he stood firmly, as if rooted to the rocks. Lightning began to strike, and the thunder that accompanied it was deafening. It sounded almost continuously as the storm gained intensity. At any single moment several bolts of lightning were visible. They struck not just vertically, but in all directions, defying the laws of physics, going off at tangents, reversing course, shooting back up toward the clouds, as if following an invisible wire.

Julie feared being struck, and she feared for Carnelian, who seemed to be challenging the sky. But there was no place to hide. She thought about God and she thought about the wizard and she reaffirmed her faith in both, as the heavens roared remorselessly.

Lewis saw a tiny figure illuminated in the distance. "Look!" he shouted, pointing. Julie could not hear him but followed his gaze. There, on the mountain opposite the chasm, slightly higher up, stood Bloodstone. Julie shuddered and screamed, terrified and yet unable to turn away. She drew no comfort from the gulf that separated them, feeling as vulnerable as she had that night in Sumatra. It was only with an effort of self-control that she was able to keep from lunging at Carnelian. Instead she found Lewis's hand and held it tightly.

Bloodstone's arms were outstretched and, although he stood at a considerable distance, the contempt on his

hideous face shone clearly. A bolt of lightning struck the ball of artificial light at Carnelian's foot, extinguishing it, but the night was still illuminated by the electric storm. Julie and Lewis cowered against the mountainside, fearing another strike. Carnelian raised his staff, his body as rigid as the rock he stood upon. "*Grapnath eggeth snaurn depthagnathe albilli vaan!*" he shouted, glaring at his ancient enemy. The words cut into the thunder and were painful to listen to. Julie shivered as he spoke them and had to cover her ears.

A fireball formed beside him, larger than his head. The children could feel its heat as it hovered above the ledge, spinning wildly, its enchanted flames licking the charged air. Without warning it shot away across the chasm in a long arc, exploding against the shelf where Bloodstone stood.

Carnelian repeated the spell six times, and half a dozen fireballs raced across the void. But after each explosion the figure of Bloodstone was still visible, his black cloak flapping in the wind, his dark skullcap pulled tightly over his ears.

Carnelian paused, fatigued from his effort. But the attack had failed, and now the initiative belonged to Bloodstone. Rocks began to fall from above, a few at first, then more. Julie and Lewis buried their heads in their arms. Carnelian looked up in alarm and quickly chanted some words, shaking his staff at the plummeting rocks. A few glanced off the side of the ledge but none hit their intended target. The ground beneath them shook and Julie feared the entire mountain would collapse. Lewis worried that the ledge would break off, sending them tumbling into the chasm.

The rocks fell in increasing numbers, but Carnelian succeeded in sending them astray. When the avalanche finally ended, Julie and Lewis cautiously raised their heads. They were relieved to find the ledge undamaged and Carnelian still standing. But when they turned their eyes across the chasm their hearts sank. For while Carnelian's attack had drained him, Bloodstone's had made him stronger. Bathed now in a pale green light, the Dark Wizard stood twelve feet tall.

Carnelian stared at his nemesis in dismay, disheartened, feeling for the first time uncertain of his future. Julie noticed his knees were shaking. In desperation, he chanted more spells. Blue lightning issued from the clouds, striking against the other mountain. But Bloodstone raised a hand and red lightning of his own chased the blue currents away. He continued to grow, and seemed to be laughing. He now stood as tall as a tree, and threatened to soon dwarf the mountain. The red bolts crackled ferociously around them, like flaming spears from a more brutal world. One dove the sky directly above and shot down in a straight line, striking Carnelian. Julie screamed. The wizard collapsed without a sound. All was dark.

Lewis was stunned, but tried not to panic. He crawled over to the wizard and shook him gently. "Are you all right? Say something. Tell me what to do."

But the wizard did not answer. Lewis touched his face. It was cold.

He crawled over to Julie, who was still screaming, and grabbed her arm. "Shut up!" he yelled firmly. "We gotta get outta here before he comes back!"

Julie peered into the darkness, uncertain that Bloodstone had left, or that it mattered, now that Carnelian was unconscious.

"Give me your lighter," Lewis told her.

Julie grew quiet but was still in a state of shock. "Your lighter," Lewis repeated. "Where is it?"

Julie mechanically brought the lighter out of her pocket. Lewis felt along her arm until he reached it. He then felt for Carnelian's staff and lit the tip. But he saw no sign of Bloodstone. All was quiet. Even the wind had died.

Lewis placed the burning staff under his arm and grabbed the wizard's cold hands. "Take his feet," he told her.

Julie obeyed, and they slowly wound their way down the mountain. After many pauses, and several hours later, Julie collapsed. "I can't go on," she said, exhausted and defeated. "I'm cold. I think the spell is wearing off." She lay down on

the frigid earth beside Carnelian, as if she didn't care, and put his cold hand in hers.

Lewis did not argue, for he too was exhausted. He curled up against the wizard's other side, and fell asleep beneath the breaking dawn.



He woke in a room with white walls. He sat up with a start, recalling the battle on the mountain, wondering where he was and how he arrived here. When he had lain down beside Carnelian he expected to die.

He was lying on a hospital cot, dressed in a white gown many sizes too large. His body ached and his head hurt, but he had received no major injuries on the mountain.

When he turned around he saw Julie sleeping on another cot, but not Carnelian. They were alone in the room.

He nudged her gently, then harder, anxious to wake her. "Get up!" he urged.

Julie slowly opened an eye, then closed it against the bright morning light streaming through the window. Lewis prodded her again. "Wake up! We've got to find Carnelian!"

At the mention of the wizard's name Julie struggled awake, fighting a long dreamless sleep. When sufficiently conscious to notice her surroundings, she sat up quickly and looked at Lewis with concern. "Where are we?"

"I don't know. I just woke up. It looks like a hospital, but I ain't been out." "Where's Carnelian?"

"Don't ask me."

He led her to the door and opened it slowly, uncertain whether they were still in danger. Peeking out, he saw a short hallway. "I don't see no one," he said. "Come on."

They entered a bedroom, simply decorated and well kept. The bed was made, the closet door shut, the laundry basket covered. Julie noticed the framed faded black-and-white photographs on the dresser, wedding pictures of an elegant couple in their youth. Lewis was about to search through the drawers when Julie called him away.

"We don't have time for that," she said impatiently, fearful of being caught. "We've got to find him."

“What if he ain’t here?” Lewis asked as they returned to the hallway.

“Then we’ll go back to the mountain, or wherever we have to go to find him.” She looked at a closed door. “What’s in there?”

Lewis opened it carefully but seemed disappointed. “Only the bathroom.”

He was about to close the door when Julie caught his hand. “I hear something dripping.” She quickly stepped past him and drew back the shower curtain. A sheet covered a figure lying in the bathtub. Gathering courage, Julie pulled it away. She gasped and had to put a hand to her mouth to keep from screaming. For there lay Carnelian, eyes closed, on a bed of ice. Julie shook him, thinking he would wake. But his skin was as hard as the mountain on which he had fallen, and as cold. No longer could Julie refrain from screaming.

“I’m sorry,” a female voice said behind them.

They turned around and saw the woman in the photograph, thirty years older. She was dark-skinned, short and thin, but not frail. Years in the mountains had made her a survivor, and there was a firm independence as well as a gentleness in her face. She wore rugged clothes rather than a physician’s smock, and spoke perfect English with an Indian accent.

“He was dead when you were brought here. There was nothing I could do.” She looked at them with sympathy as well as curiosity. “Was he a relative or friend?”

“A friend,” Lewis quickly replied. “Who are you?”

“I’m Dr. Basu,” she answered in a friendly voice. “This is my clinic.”

“How did we get here?”

“You were found unconscious by Sherpas. Actually, you were extremely fortunate. I seriously doubt you would have survived another night if you had not been discovered. But come, you’ve awakened just in time for breakfast and I’m sure you’re famished. I too have many questions to ask, but

I would be derelict in my duties if I did not first make sure you had food in your stomachs.”

Dr. Basu’s clinic contained the only electric appliances in the village. Her tiny kitchen boasted an old gas stove and a refrigerator, as well as a separate freezer to store ice and medical supplies. The doctor served them eggs, goat’s milk and tea.

She sat down at the table and looked at them. The children stared back, disconsolate and frightened, ignoring their food.

“Eat,” she said. “You need the energy. You’ve been asleep for over twenty-four hours.”

“What day is it?” Julie inquired, wondering why she asked the question, since she didn’t care.

“Friday,” the doctor replied. “You were brought in late yesterday morning. How do you feel?”

Both Lewis and Julie shrugged.

“Neither of you showed any signs of frostbite,” Dr. Basu said, studying them the way a physician examines a patient who displays no serious ailments after experiencing a trauma. “You seemed to suffer only fatigue and a few minor bruises. I’m sorry again about your guardian. It must be a great shock. But I find your own survival astonishing, dressed the way you were.” She looked at Lewis. “No jacket or gloves. And your guardian wearing only a robe. It’s called terminal burrowing behavior. People freezing to death can lose their senses and actually tear off their clothes.”

She waited, but Lewis did not respond.

“Was he a yogi or religious man?”

Neither child spoke.

The doctor sighed, disappointed by their reticence. “Among your guardian’s possessions I found only his passport. It would be helpful if you could supply me with more information, so when I notify the authorities—”

“You ain’t notifyin’ nobody!” Lewis interrupted.

The doctor was taken aback by the forcefulness of his tone. “He can’t very well be left here,” she explained in as

gentle a voice as she could manage under the circumstances. "I have to take him into Khatmandu."

Lewis grabbed his knife in an instant and leaned over the table, within arms reach of the stunned physician. "You ain't takin' him nowhere!" he shouted, squeezing the knife as if he expected to use it.

The doctor's face grew firm and she sat up straight, no longer showing sympathy. "You will set that knife down right now!" she commanded in a manner that refused to relinquish control to anyone while under her own roof.

"What are you doing?" Julie exclaimed, startled out of her stupor by Lewis's rash attack. "Put that down!"

Lewis glanced at her, surprised she would dissuade him. He set the knife back on the table and sat down. But he continued to glare at the doctor.

"Where would you take him?" Julie asked.

"To the hospital," the doctor replied. "I do not have a telephone, so I cannot call for an ambulance. I will transport him myself, after breakfast."

Julie shuddered at the images that flashed through her mind. "The hospital," she said. "You mean the morgue." She imagined the wizard lying on a table beneath a bright light, a coroner selecting a scalpel for the autopsy.

"I'm sorry," the doctor said.

Julie stared at her. "But he's not dead!" She saw the certainty in the doctor's eyes, and wanted to explain that Carnelian was not human. But she knew the doctor would view her words as the ravings of a traumatized girl. She could not argue rationally, but only speak from the convictions of her heart.

"He isn't dead!" she shouted, standing. "He can't be dead! He can't!"

She looked at Dr. Basu with such assuredness that the physician knew there was only one way to convince her. She took Julie by the hand. "I don't like doing this," she told her. "But denying the truth merely makes things more difficult. And it will not bring back your friend."

She led Julie into the bathroom and handed her a stethoscope. Dr. Basu drew apart the robe that still clothed the wizard and guided the instrument to his breast. Julie listened hopefully, desperately, knowing he must be alive. She would have listened indefinitely had the doctor not pulled her away.

“No!” Julie screamed, throwing down the stethoscope, as if the problem were with the instrument. “He must be alive!”

The physician covered the body and closed the shower curtain. “Come,” she said softly. “You need to eat.”

After breakfast the doctor was visited by several villagers who required medical attention. Julie took the opportunity to return to Carnelian. His body was nearly as white as his robe. The sight revolted her, but she firmly believed he was still alive and she would not leave him. She called his name, stroked his frozen hair, shook him as if he were simply dreaming. But his eyes did not open, his lips did not part, his fingers did not close around hers when she held his hand.

While Julie sat with Carnelian, Lewis was thinking of a way to prevent the wizard’s transfer to Khatmandu. He walked outside and inconspicuously approached the doctor’s jeep. The village was primitive, and Lewis doubted there was another motorized vehicle within ten miles. Immobilizing the jeep, therefore, would cause a considerable delay.

Lewis hurried into the kitchen and surreptitiously stole the sugar. As he poured it into the tank he trembled with fear of being caught. Though he committed the act in daylight, and ran a considerable risk, he was used to breaking the law, and often enjoyed it. In the past, though, he had never worried much about being apprehended because he felt he had little to lose. He trembled now because he believed the future of mankind was at stake.

He sighed with relief when he screwed the gas cap back on and quickly stepped away from the jeep, glancing around to make certain he had not been seen.

He could not have acted sooner, for when he returned inside he found two Nepalese men lifting the wizard out of the bathtub under Dr. Basu's supervision. Julie stood by, screaming and crying.

"No!" she yelled, making a futile effort to stop them. "You can't take him! He isn't dead!"

Lewis gave her a sign not to worry, but she continued to protest hysterically as the wizard was carried outside.

Lewis tried to explain what he had done, but Julie walked away. She found the wizard's belongings in the doctor's office-his passport, his money, and his staff, partly burned from the hours it served as a torch. She held it tightly to her breast, as if Brandon's branch were a part of the wizard himself, and cried, not yet having abandoned hope or faith, but unable to rid her mind of the memory of Carnelian being struck down by Bloodstone, of the image of him lying insentient on the rocks, of the impossible silence that rang in her ears when she listened for his heartbeat through the stethoscope. She began to wonder if he might have been mistaken about his immortality. If Bloodstone had discovered a way to kill him at last.

Lewis listened anxiously at the door. Never had his ears been as pleased by a song as they were now by the sound of the jeep's struggling engine. He heard the ignition start several times and bit his lip at the thought of the engine turning over. He peeked outside, knowing that if the jeep started he would have to run out and somehow stop it. But the jeep did not start, and after several minutes the doctor turned off the engine and angrily got out.

She inspected under the hood, and Lewis began to worry that she would discover the problem. But her expression when she slammed down the hood was a perplexed one, and she did not examine the tank. She opened the back of the jeep and silently signaled to the two Nepalese men.

As they carried the wizard back inside, Dr. Basu stormed over to Lewis. He feared she was irritated with him, but it was the vehicle that drew her vexation. "Bleeding jeep!" she

complained. "It always breaks down when I need it most. I swear, one of these days I'm going to trade it in for a yak!"

Lewis and Julie had rejected their breakfast and lunch, but now they could no longer ignore their hunger and ate their dinner of rice and mixed nuts and vegetables as if it were lobster and steak. It was the doctor who did not eat this time. She sat uncomfortably, studying Lewis, seemingly disturbed by his indifference.

Something was troubling her but she did not speak about it. "I'm glad to see you're finally eating," she said instead. "You must be ravenous."

The children did not look up from their plates to respond. "There's more if you like. And feel free to fix yourselves a glass of milk if you get thirsty later this evening. If you'll excuse me," she said, rising, "I think I'll go into the other room and relax. You can join me after you're finished eating if you wish."

Julie and Lewis found the doctor lying on the couch in the living room. She sat up when they entered, pleased that they were not avoiding her. "Come," she said, patting the pillow beside her. "Sit down."

Julie complied, but Lewis got his jacket from the other room and, without a word, walked out the door.

Dr. Basu did not stop him but turned anxiously to Julie. "Where is he going?"

"Being inside makes him jumpy. He'll be back soon."

The room was plain but comforting. Woven rugs covered most of the wooden floor. A large window looked upon the mountainside. But Julie found the sight more ominous than tranquil. She preferred to look at the shortwave radio, which sat upon the mantle.

"Can I turn it on?" she asked.

"Certainly."

“Julie found a rock station and sat back in the dim light of the room’s single electric lamp, trying to forget her worries in the music.

“I don’t miss television one bit,” the doctor remarked. “But I don’t know what I’d do without that radio. It’s my lifeline to civilization.” She paused, observing that Julie appeared to have relaxed considerably since awakening that morning. “You haven’t spoken much,” she said. “I understand. You’ve suffered a terrible ordeal and a great personal loss. But I hope soon, when you feel more comfortable, we may talk. I’d like to know what compelled you to climb that mountain, and who you are. I don’t even know your names.”

“Julie,” she replied. “And Lewis.”

“Where are you from?”

“New York.”

“You’re probably wondering what I’m doing here,” she then said, hoping to elicit a response from Julie by first volunteering information herself “My late husband was a doctor also. We came to the Himalayas almost ten years ago for a holiday. We fell in love with Nepal and decided to open a clinic to serve this village, which had no medical care.”

She sighed, and her voice was touched with regret. “Then about a year ago he died.”

Julie thought of the man in the photograph on Dr. Basu’s bureau and pitied her, knowing what it means to lose someone you not only love, but depend upon as well. For a moment she recalled Larry, but then her thoughts drifted back to Carnelian, and she wondered what her life would be like if he failed to awake.

“I stayed on after he died, as you can see,” the doctor continued after a moment. “I felt to abandon it would be tantamount to abandoning his memory. We were partners in life and, by remaining here, I believe in a sense we are partners still. Besides,” she said in a brighter voice, “I had fallen in love with these people.”



She glanced toward the window. "Look, it's snowing! We don't usually get much snow this time of year. Seems to be coming down rather hard. I think we should look for your friend."

"He'll be back any minute. I'm sure he didn't go far."

The doctor glanced at her watch. "I'll give him ten more minutes. I dread the thought of his catching pneumonia, especially after what the two of you have survived." She looked at Julie. "So tell me about your life in New York."

Julie's initial fear of the doctor had passed, and she began to think of her as a friend. She was drawn by her independence and compassion, and yearned to recount in detail her adventures with the wizard. Julie needed an ally other than Lewis, a friend who was not a child. Someone she could talk to, who could be strong for her, who might have answers.

But every time Julie tried to speak Carnelian's name she hesitated and kept her silence. For she knew that despite the doctor's sympathy and warmth, she would never believe the old man lying lifeless in her bathtub was a wizard, capable of healing wounds with a word, of changing into a bird, of giving meaning to a young woman's life.

The doctor was disappointed by Julie's silence and was about to approach her in a more direct manner when an announcer's voice interrupted the music on the radio.

"This is a special bulletin," the announcer said in a calm but urgent voice. "Europe remains in a state of extreme tension following what the Prime Minister is calling 'the most serious nuclear accident since Chernobyl.'"

Julie turned to Dr. Basu in alarm. "What's he talking about?"

The physician leaned toward the radio. "I have no idea."

They both stared at the dial, listening anxiously to the crackling voice from the BBC.

"At 1:35 this morning, Greenwich time, an American Pershing II missile, based in Germany, exploded in the North Sea, approximately two hundred miles from the

English coastline. No casualties have yet been reported, but many details remain unknown, including how the missile came to be launched and how it was diverted into the sea. The President stressed the launching was an accident and promised an immediate investigation, while here in England there is speculation that terrorists might have been responsible. There has been no official comment from Moscow.”

The doctor anxiously turned the dial, listening for more reports. Julie walked to the window, devastated by the news. She looked at the snow descending serenely on the mountains. But she only saw Carnelian falling. And Bloodstone, growing larger.

Lewis was drinking a glass of milk in the kitchen later that evening when Dr. Basu entered. The boy did not look at her. She hesitated before sitting at the table.

“Terrible about this missile accident,” she said. “Sometimes I think we were more civilized when we lived in caves.”

Lewis said nothing.

“People do awful things in times of great stress,” she continued. “They act against their own best interests. They hurt people they don’t mean to hurt.”

Lewis glanced up, suspicious of her tone.

“I had no sugar for my tea this evening,” she stated flatly, looking at him directly. “Someone mixed it with the petrol in my jeep. I found traces of it on the tank.”

Lewis rose defensively. “What you gonna do about it?”

“Clean it out first thing in the morning,” she calmly answered. “And you’re going to help me.”

She expected Lewis to argue, but he only looked away. “I know what you’re feeling,” she said in a more gentle tone. “I know what it’s like to lose someone who is dear to you. I remember how difficult it was for me to bury my husband.”

“You don’t understand,” Lewis said quietly, feeling helpless and defeated. “He a wizard! He ain’t supposed to die!”

She shook her head. “You are so young,” she said sadly. “But your friend was old. Do you know how old?”

Lewis shrugged. “Hundreds a years.”

The doctor smiled. “He lived a long life. And a good life, I presume. But everyone dies, Lewis. What you loved in your guru, your friend, is already gone, and you must learn to accept that. He cannot remain here. When a person dies his body begins to decay, and believe me, you don’t want to see that happen.” She touched him lightly on the shoulder. “Goodnight, Lewis.”

Lewis gazed out the window after she had left, at the steadily falling snow.

Immediately upon awaking the next morning, Julie went to Carnelian. His expression remained lifeless. His arms and legs did not move. His chest did not rise and fall.

She called his name softly. She touched his cheek and found it just as cold as yesterday. She shook his body vigorously, but the wizard did not respond. She pulled up one of his eyelids, but he did not seem to see her. It quickly snapped shut again when she let go. She cried for a minute, and then washed her face and went into the kitchen.

Dr. Basu and Lewis were eating breakfast, listening to the radio.

“What’s new?” she asked, sitting down at the table.

The doctor shook her head. “Either it’s a mystery, or the Americans aren’t saying. Everyone’s very nervous.”

“Have there been any more accidents?”

The doctor gave her a surprised look. “I rather think one is enough!”

Julie shrugged. “I just thought there might be more.” She looked out the window, slightly relieved that the world was not yet at war. “It sure snowed last night.”

“Very unusual,” Dr. Basu said. “A blizzard this time of year.” She shook her head. “Of all the times to be snowed in!”

Julie turned to Lewis, grasping the implications of the sudden snowfall. “Does that mean...” she began hopefully.

Lewis looked at her as if they had won a minor victory. “She ain’t takin’ him nowhere today,” he replied.

He and Julie sat by the radio in the living room while Dr. Basu attended to patients. An American announcer on a faint channel was reporting the President’s latest statement.

“It’s Bloodstone” Julie said with certainty. “Don’t you think?”

“I dunno.”

“It has to be,” she argued. “I mean, how could a missile be launched by accident? And now, of all times.”

“But no one was killed,” Lewis pointed out. “If it was Bloodstone, wouldn’t he aim it at a city or somethin’?”

“Maybe he couldn’t,” Julie speculated. “It must be difficult to make a nuclear missile go off, even for someone as powerful as Bloodstone. Maybe he couldn’t guide it. Or maybe he wanted it to land in the sea, so that everyone would blame everyone else. What better way to destroy the world than to start a nuclear war?”

Lewis had never given nuclear weapons much thought in the past, when events not directly affecting him did not elicit his concern. Now he wished he could return to those simpler times, when he struggled for only his own survival and not the survival of others, when the decisions he made were not ones of great moment. He had always avoided responsibility at home, but now he realized countless lives might hinge upon his actions.

“What can we do?”

“Nothing,” Julie replied. “It’s up to Carnelian.”

“You think he’s still alive?”

“Of course! Don’t you?”

“I dunno. He sure don’t look alive.”

“He’s immortal.”

“Then how come he ain’t breathin’?”

“Maybe his heartbeat’s too faint for us to hear. Carnelian said the only way he could be stopped was to be buried underground in a coffin bound with iron chains, remember? If Bloodstone has the power to kill him, why didn’t he killed him seven hundred years ago?”

“I dunno.”

“Because he couldn’t, that’s why! Because Carnelian is immortal. The best Bloodstone could do was imprison him.” She sighed, drained by the energy she expended to suppress her own doubts.

“But we can’t just wait for him to wake up,” Lewis said. “The doctor’s gonna take him to the morgue as soon as the road’s clear.”

“That may be days,” Julie said hopefully.

“And what if it’s tomorrow? What we gonna do?”

Julie thought for a moment. “We’ll have to hide him.”

“In the clinic?”

“Maybe. Or we can leave during the night.”

“We’d have to carry him,” Lewis pointed out. “And we’d probably catch frostbite ‘cause we don’t have a spell to protect us from the cold. And the doctor will get everyone in the village searchin’ for us.”

Julie considered the scenario and found it discouraging. “But there must be something we can do.”

Lewis frowned, reflecting on their plight more pragmatically than Julie. “Even if he wakes up, how’s he gonna stop Bloodstone? He got him into the mountains where he wanted him and still lost. He’s always lost. He said so himself. How’s he gonna win now?”

Julie did not have an answer, but could only voice her hope. But as they listened to the latest developments in the missile crisis, even her optimism drifted away, sounding more distant than the somber voices on the radio.

She stared into the darkness, unable to sleep, waiting. Finally she decided it was time. “Lewis?” she whispered.

“Yeah.”

“Ready?”

“I been ready,” he replied.

They silently climbed out of their cots. Julie opened the door slowly, careful not to make a sound. “Her light’s out,” she said, stepping into the hallway. But she may not be asleep yet.”

“I’m like a tiger in the dark,” Lewis boasted, recalling other instances when he had prowled unnoticed in the night, leaving his apartment when he was supposed to be asleep, stalking drunks or tourists through alleyways.

They entered the bathroom. Julie was glad the lights were out, for she preferred not to look at the wizard’s inanimate face.

She slowly drew back the shower curtain and removed the sheet that covered his body.

“You take the arms, okay?”

Lewis struggled to grip the wizard without complaint. Julie took a deep breath before grabbing his bare feet. They were cold and hard, more like a statue in wintertime than a person. She suddenly felt faint and wanted to let go. She thought she might be sick.

Lewis was trying to lift the body when he noticed she wasn’t moving. “Are you all right?”

Julie nodded in the darkness. “I’m just dizzy because I haven’t had a cigarette in so long,” she replied, forcing herself to hold on. She tried to imagine they were lifting furniture. “On the count of three,” she said.

She counted and they lifted him out. As they did so, the ice fell, disturbing the silence. Julie felt a moment of panic, wondering what she would say if Dr. Basu suddenly confronted them. But the doctor did not appear, and they awkwardly turned the wizard around so they could carry him through the door.

They reached their room without incident and set the wizard on one of the spare cots. Julie locked the door and sighed with relief.

But Lewis continued to worry. “What we gonna do when she wakes up tomorrow and finds him missin’?”

Julie’s primary concern was that the roads would be cleared tomorrow and the doctor would transport Carnelian first thing in the morning. “At least now she can’t move him without our knowledge,” she said. “We’ll have to hide him tomorrow, but for now I want him to lie in a warm bed. I’m just glad to get him out of the bathtub and that ice.”

She covered the wizard with a blanket and moved her own cot beside his. Even though he showed no signs of life, Julie was comforted by his presence, and slept easily.

There was a ceiling. This surprised him, for nowhere in his memories of that fateful night was there was a ceiling. Instead there was the sky above the mountains, dark and foreboding. There was the lightning, blazing and ineluctable. There was the pain, and then a total darkness.

But here was a room, light streaming through the window. He felt the bed beneath him, and breathed the pleasant air.

His body felt stiff and weak and his eyes took several minutes to focus. He did not move immediately, waiting for his system to revive. It was difficult to be patient, however, because so many questions plagued him, so many concerns. When he finally did move it was merely to turn his head from side to side. But the sight of Julie and Lewis filled him with joy, and his energy quickly returned. Soon he was standing, staring down fondly at the children.

Julie gasped when she woke, gazing at the figure that towered above her, his robe as bright as any light she had ever seen. "Carnelian!" she cried, throwing her arms around him. His body was warm and alive. She pressed her head to his breast and listened to his heartbeat as if she had always been able to hear it. "I knew you were alive!" she shouted. "I knew you couldn't die!"

Her exclamations roused Lewis, who jumped out of bed when he saw the wizard. "We thought you was dead!"

"You thought he was dead," Julie corrected. "I always knew he was alive."

The wizard looked at them more closely. "Were you hurt?"

"We're fine," Julie assured him. "You're the one who was hurt."

The wizard nodded, and for a moment the children could see the disappointment in his eyes. But he looked at them again and his mood brightened. "It is very fortunate you were not attacked. Still, though, you have suffered from



my failure, and I apologize. Please tell me all that has happened. How long have I been indisposed?"

"We've been here three days," Julie hurriedly replied. "After you were hit by the lightning, Bloodstone disappeared. Lewis and I used your staff as a torch and carried you down the mountain until we were exhausted. We were saved by the Sherpas, who brought us to this clinic. You didn't have a heartbeat, not that we could hear, anyway. Dr. Basu put you on ice in the bathtub. She was going to take you to the morgue in Katmandu, but Lewis put sugar in her gas tank and then a blizzard snowed us in. We snuck you into our room last night after she was asleep, but I don't know what we would have done if you hadn't revived."

The wizard took each of them by the hand. "If I possessed half your resourcefulness and courage, Bloodstone would be cowering in defeat by now," he said, "and I would not have fallen into this shameful sleep. You have both earned my gratitude, and repaid my faith in you many times. Would that I were a king and could reward you suitably. Instead, unfortunately, I must lead you into further danger."

He started toward the door, but Julie grabbed his robe. "Speaking of danger," she said in a voice no longer joyous and lighthearted but weighted with concern, "I think we know where Bloodstone is."

The wizard turned to her apprehensively, his body suddenly tense. "Here!"

"No," Julie replied. "In Germany."

"Germany!" he exclaimed, surprised by the answer.

"A nuclear missile from Germany exploded in the sea," Julie told him. "They're saying it was an accident. But no one knows how it happened."

"When did it occur?" the wizard asked in an urgent voice.

"Soon after your battle with Bloodstone."

Carnelian pulled his beard. "We must go there at once!" he said without equivocation, his desire for justice only intensified by his most recent defeat.

He strode to the door, but before he could open it Dr. Basu knocked angrily on the other side.

"Unlock this door at once!" she ordered in a stern voice.

Julie and Lewis grinned at each other, anticipating her surprise.

Carnelian opened the door.

The doctor jumped back, dropping the teapot in her hand.

Boiling water splashed at the wizard's feet.

Carnelian ignored the water. Instead he smiled pleasantly at Dr. Basu. "You must be the noble doctor who has kindly cared for my companions these past few days," he said, extending his hand.

Dr. Basu stared at him incredulously, as if the object of a prank. "My God!" she said in a stunned voice. "I've seen examples of catalepsy before, but never anything like this!"

Carnelian made no effort to explain. "I sincerely appreciate your hospitality," he said, "and apologize for any inconvenience. Please excuse our rather swift departure." He turned to Julie as if every second mattered. "Lead me to the radio!"

He sat hunched over the shortwave, impatiently turning the dial from one broadcast to another, ignoring the doctor, who poked him with her stethoscope while he absorbed the news. When he had heard enough he angrily switched the radio off and stormed into the bathroom to wash.

But when he looked into the mirror he beheld a darker face. The memories crushed him with the painful truth, each recollection like a shovel full of earth dropped upon his soul. He shuddered at the horror of it all, and felt a despair so deep no hope could ever lift it. He grew dizzy and his legs weakened. It seemed as if he were falling through an endless void, pulling others with him, never to rise again, never to triumph, never to master his enemy.

He stumbled like a mortally wounded soldier and collapsed upon his cot. He bent forward, gazing blankly at the floor, his fingers knotted together. And he remembered.

Julie found him shortly after. “Well?” she asked excitedly, entering the room.

The wizard did not look up. Julie grew concerned by his troubled expression.

“What’s wrong?” she said. “I thought you were in a hurry. Carnelian?”

The wizard looked up at her with rage in his eyes. “Get out of here!” he shouted. “Leave me alone!”

Julie leapt back in surprise. She had never seen him scowl before, much less lose his temper, and blamed herself for having provoked him. She hesitated, wanting to apologize, and to learn the cause of his anger, but the wizard’s tortured face dissuaded her from attempting further conversation. She left the room with her curiosity unsatisfied and her apprehensions unresolved, closing the door softly behind her.

## THE BLACK FOREST

The train rolled out of the station at Strasbourg, France, heading east across the Rhine to West Germany. Carnelian sat by the window, gazing out as if in a trance. Lewis, following the wizard's instructions, lay across the aisle, trying to sleep.

"I don't understand why you want LC to rest," Julie said, sitting beside Carnelian. "What is he going to do?"

The wizard offered no reply.

"I mean, if he needs to sleep, I don't see why I shouldn't sleep also. Can't I be of use?"

She sighed at the wizard's silence, feeling slightly rejected. "I know I've probably caused you more harm than good in the past, and I'm not very courageous, but I'll do anything for you."

She waited for his kind smile, but he did not turn to her. "I hope you're not mad at me." She tried to recall what she might have done to provoke his displeasure, but nothing came to mind. And his manner had been cold toward Lewis as well.

"You're probably not even hearing me," she realized. "You're deep in thought, determining your strategy. I shouldn't be talking." But she found it impossible to rest or remain silent.

"What I want to know," she said in a voice that was almost pleading, "is why on earth we're going to the Black Forest? We know the missile wasn't based here. Nothing I've heard on the news even mentioned the Black Forest, or Strasbourg, or Friburg." She lit a cigarette and smoked uneasily. "I mean, I'm not questioning you. I know you have good reasons. I just can't imagine what they are." A frightening thought crossed her mind and she paused. "Unless you think Bloodstone's there."

The train rolled onto the bridge that spanned the Rhine, between France and Germany. "The Black Forest has spawned many legends. The Grand Rhine," the wizard said in a barely audible voice, looking down at the barges on the gray water, as if speaking not to Julie but to the river itself. "How many stories have arisen from your banks!

"There was Drusella. The fates pronounced hers a doomed and tragic life from its inception. Born deformed, the scars that covered her body had grown not over temporal wounds. No, their origin lay deeper, in the ephemeral world of spirits and demons.

"Yet none was more horrified by Drusella's appearance than she herself, for the girl yearned to be beautiful, and to bring happiness into the lives of others. She would spend days before the mirror, scrubbing her face with exotic soaps and herbs. But always to no effect. There were times she could not even wash away her tears."

The wizard touched a finger to his eye as if he too had been crying. "And though she desperately wished to help others, her touch was one of doom, and many that fell within her grasp died. It began with her mother, who spent her last breath in childbirth. Her father gave what affection he could bear, and had he been less comforting he might have lived longer. As she grew older her pets perished without fail. Children she played with grew sick. Horses she rode fell. Flowers she planted never grew. Soon farmers forbade her on their land for fear of losing their harvest. Mothers refused to let their children play with her. No doctor would dare treat her.

"Banished, Drusella wandered into the forest to live alone, where she hoped to harm no one. But even here her ugliness haunted her. For she could not sing without frightening the birds, or rest against a tree without peeling its bark.

"Thus she lived for many sorrowful years, until one day a half-blind sage traveling through the forest sought shelter at her house. Appreciative of her hospitality and pitying her

deformity, he instructed her to bathe in the Rhine at dawn, promising that its ancient waters would wash away her scars.

“Drusella was bewildered. She had never bathed in the river, having long ago renounced bathing. And she doubted the sage, despite his conviction and his years. But she realized the river could serve another purpose, and so early the next morning she walked to the edge of the Rhine to drown herself.

“But when she entered the enchanted water an incredible change overcame her. The body that had been so ugly for so long grew beautiful before her disbelieving eyes. The scars melted like icicles above a fire, and the filth and stench that had accumulated over years of neglect simply vanished. Where an ugly hag had entered the water, a beautiful woman emerged, with soft eyes and shimmering skin, a lady worthy of any knight, whose smile would haunt the dreams of many men.

“Drusella ran back through the forest singing with joy, and the birds that had once fled in fear now fluttered about her hand. She avoided the house of her cursed past, and instead hurried to the town which had rejected her to seek, after all these years, the happiness denied her.”

He paused, and Julie could tell from his expression that the tale’s conclusion was not a pleasant one. “What happened to her?” she wondered.

“To her?” the wizard replied. “Nothing. But the Rhine, the Great Rhine, touched by this tiny but tragic figure, grew black. The fish within it died. The boatmen riding atop it drowned. The crops fed by its waters withered. The air was filled with the foul stench of all that had perished.

“It would have pained Drusella beyond words if she had known she was the cause. But she could not believe it, for she was beautiful now. Birds perched upon her arm, and men of noble birth desired her society.

“The townspeople were enraged, and equally deceived. They remembered the old Drusella and knew only she could be responsible for such a tragedy. They burned half the

forest to find her, but her house had been forsaken. Reluctantly, after months of searching, the men of the town abandoned the effort and returned home, to try to woo the beautiful woman who had recently moved to town and sometimes smiled at them from her balcony.”

The wizard paused, lost in thought.

“It is only a story,” he concluded, “but legends, like rumors are often spawned by real events, events occasionally more terrible than the imaginative revisions. Do you understand now? No, how could you?”

The wizard continued to gaze out the window, his back reclined in a posture not of rest and comfort but of weariness and resignation, his eyes reflecting not the picturesque hills but a ravaged, irreclaimable wasteland.

They departed the train in Freiburg. Though Carnelian still appeared disconsolate, and spoke little, he acted quickly and decisively, with the air of one who knows what must be done. He entered a bank under a spell of invisibility and returned with an uncounted quantity of deutsche marks. He paused at a restaurant to buy Julie and Lewis breakfast, but he himself ate nothing. Back outside, without warning, he changed into a hawk to scout the area from above. The children thought he would leave them there indefinitely, but a few minutes later he returned and, without explanation, led them away on foot.

Much of the Black Forest was not forest at all, but rolling hills and open valleys. Carnelian, however, wished to avoid inhabited areas and led them into the woods.

As they walked he chanted a spell over a travel book. Every few minutes he tore out a page and let it fall to the ground. Each time Julie glanced at him, but the wizard ignored her, and she decided to respect his silence.

Soon they turned from the road and followed a footpath between the evergreens. When the trees grew dense they turned away again, and this time there was no path. The wizard walked swiftly, as if in a hurry, and it was difficult for

the children to keep up. Julie's legs felt tired but she did not complain. Lewis found the journey easier, as he was used to walking long distances at home. Never had he walked this far, however, and as the signs of civilization grew fainter he wondered about their destination.

"Are we almost there?" he asked. It was the first word either child had spoken since leaving Freiburg.

The wizard did not look at him, but he nodded. Julie's spirits rose. Knowing they were nearly at their destination gave her the strength to go on.

"Wouldn't it be easier to fly?" Lewis wondered.

But this time Carnelian did not respond. He tore out another page from the book and let it flutter to the ground.

They walked another mile before the wizard finally stopped. The three stood in an area dense with tall evergreens, no different from the last several miles of woods they had crossed except that it lay farther from the road. Julie collapsed on the soft ground, exhausted, her legs stiff and her muscles aching. The sun was still high and she was perspiring heavily. She opened one of the bottles of water they had bought in Freiburg and drank without thought of conservation. Lewis was eager to lie down, but the wizard grabbed his arm and drew him aside.

"Do you recall that night in Tokyo?" he asked quietly, not wishing to be overheard by Julie. "That night in the alley when you had stabbed a man? After I healed him you swore to do anything I asked."

Lewis nodded. Indeed, that night would always haunt his memory. He looked at the wizard, trying to mask his fear, for he realized Carnelian would not remind him of his promise if the request he was about to make were not an unpleasant one.

"I need you to run an errand," the wizard told him.

"Where?" Lewis asked, hoping the task might be easier than he first thought.

"Back to the town."



Lewis grew confused. “But we just came from the town!”

“You are tired from our walk,” Carnelian realized. “But I cannot allow you time to rest. I will give you a spell of stamina and the physical strength of four men.” He touched the child and softly spoke a few words. Lewis felt himself invigorated, as if he had just awoken from a long sleep and eaten a large meal.

The wizard gave the boy all his deutsche marks. “I need you to purchase these,” he said. He reached into his pocket and handed Lewis a list.

The child’s eyes widened as he struggled through the list of items. Though Lewis could not read well, it was not the words he found difficult to comprehend but their purpose. “I don’t understand why you want all these things,” he said.

“It is essential that you purchase everything as specified. If you cannot buy them steal them, obtain them however you can. And return to me as quickly as possible. The pages will serve as your roadmark. They will not move from where I dropped them for twenty-four hours, and they will glow in the dark.”

“But why not just do it yourself?” Lewis wondered.

“It is better if my hands do not touch the items,” Carnelian replied vaguely. “And I do not wish for Julie to know.”

Lewis thought again about the items and was struck by a chilling thought. “This ain’t for—”

But Carnelian pressed a finger to the boy’s lips. “Do as I say,” he ordered firmly. “Do not fail!”

He turned his back on the boy.

Lewis stood there for a moment, list in hand. Then he put it in his pocket along with the money and hurried back through the forest, following the trail of pages.

The air was cool, not cold, the night sky clear but for a long diaphanous cloud, drifting slowly beneath the stars. The crescent moon sat high in the heavens, shining mournfully

upon the hemisphere, a silent witness to the countless lovers and philosophers, victims and villains, skeptics and dreamers, through the ages of man, who had at some moment in their lives gazed plaintively at its pale light and wondered, "Why?"

Carnelian and Julie sat within a circle of tall evergreens, beside a fire the wizard had started without magic.

But as he looked into its flames he saw only the darkness it illuminated, only the ashes it created. He saw the past, when superstitious men lacking the comforts of science built fires to guard against creatures of the night. Seven centuries later, man dimmed the stars with electric lights, and walked the streets of his unsleeping cities at all hours of the night. And yet with the countless lights came countless shadows, and new shades of darkness. Despite the enchantments of science, the world remained unsafe.

In the wizard's day men of learning searched for the philosopher's stone, a magical substance which would transform base metals into gold. Today the concern of learned men was not for minerals but for man, and they searched for a means of changing base men into good. But Carnelian, as he stared despairingly, into the fire, no longer believed in the mutability of basic nature, whether in a metal or a living being. And he saw not the vitality of the fire, but the consumption of the wood.

Julie sat close beside him, watching the flames reflected in his melancholy eyes. But she herself was in good spirits, glad he was alive and they together.

"You know, it's been three weeks since you awoke," she said, breaking a long silence. "I mean, since you awoke after being asleep seven hundred years. It seems like a lot longer than three weeks. So much has happened. I awoke too, that night you saved my life. It's as if I had been born asleep, waiting for you to touch me to become alive. I always used to think my life was a struggle, but I see the way you persevere, and I realize I never struggled. I always gave in. That's probably why I was so unhappy. But after being with

you I could never try to kill myself again, no matter how bad things are.” She shuddered, recalling her last night in Sumatra. “I’ll never forget when Bloodstone attacked me,” she said. “I thought he was going to take my soul. I’m not very religious, but I believe we have souls. And when I looked at him I thought I was lost, I thought my spirit was lost. I never knew until then how much I wanted to live. And when I cried afterwards it wasn’t in fear, though I was very scared. It was because I was so happy and grateful to be saved.”

Carnelian winced in pain but did not speak. Julie failed to notice and continued with her thought.

“You’ve shown me so much!” she exclaimed. “You’ve made me feel special. I mean, to be a part of all this, to be chosen, even if you chose me out of pity. I’m ashamed to think how I treated you in the beginning. Making you sleep on the floor, making you smoke. I wish I could do more than just apologize. I wish I could help.

“It’s funny,” she said. “But you know, it was easier for me to believe there are wizards in the world than to believe I could ever be happy.”

She looked at the wizard but he did not respond, staring blankly into the fire as if entranced by the flames. “When that lightning hit you,” she said in voice suddenly sad, “I felt like it hit me too. I wish it had hit me. I wish I could have jumped in front of it and saved you.

“And at the clinic, the waiting was so agonizing! I knew you were alive, but I wasn’t sure when you would wake up. I know you didn’t feel anything, but you looked so uncomfortable lying on all that ice. I wanted to explain that you were a wizard, but I knew she wouldn’t believe me.”

Julie lightly touched the edge of his robe. “I know you’re disappointed you lost the battle on the mountain. But I don’t believe he can defeat you,” she said, wishing to give him encouragement. “He just got lucky.”

She listened to the noises of the forest, the steady chanting of crickets, the call of an owl, the sound of a small animal scurrying up a tree.

“I have faith in you. I know this time your plan, whatever it is, will work. I admit I was really worried in the clinic, especially after I heard the news of the missile launching. But now that you’re awake again I feel safe. As we were walking through the forest today, I felt frightened because I thought you might have come here to hunt out Bloodstone. But now that we’re here I’m not afraid at all. In fact, I believe Bloodstone is very far away.”

The wizard turned to her slowly, not at all comforted by her words. “Why don’t you go to sleep?” he quietly suggested.

Julie nodded, feeling quite tired, and lay down on the soft grass.

But the wizard continued to sit by the fire.

“Aren’t you going to lie down?” she asked.

Carnelian did not look at her but continued to gaze into the fire. “Soon I shall sleep,” he replied wearily.

He said nothing more, and Julie respected his silence. A few minutes later she was asleep. Carnelian continued to sit pensively by the fire, passing the long night.

He had lived during the Gothic flowering, when bishops commissioned ornate, majestic houses for the worship of God. But no cathedral matched the vast natural grandeur of the forest, whose living spires stood as proud arguments to the existence of a divine plan.

Carnelian was aware of the forest in this sense as he sat beneath the trees, and he believed he might be in the presence of God. He had prayed in the past with others and for others. Now, however, amidst the music of God’s creatures, he prayed for himself. He looked at Julie sleeping beside him, so beautiful and trusting, so fragile. Then he gazed at the moon, bathing his face in its cold yellow glow,

as he had gazed at it once before, on another painful night, seven hundred years ago. And he wondered why.

Dawn was breaking when Lewis returned. The fire had long since died, but Carnelian had not moved, as if still pondering the images he had seen in its flames. The boy appeared haggard and exhausted, dragging the coffin behind him.

“Where are the other things?” the wizard asked quietly, not wishing to wake Julie.

Lewis paused to catch his breath. “It’s all in there,” he said wearily, pointing to the coffin. “I had no problem gettin’ everything, except for the coffin. The funeral home was closed, and the guy almost didn’t open the door. And then when he finally came down he wouldn’t sell me a coffin. I had to tell him I wanted it for a toy box and offered him two thousand of these dollars. You should a seen his eyes! He wanted to know where I got so much money. I told him I was an American child TV star. That must a made him feel better, ‘cause he finally sold it to me. I hope I didn’t spend too much. You told me to do whatever was necessary, and I couldn’t steal it. I still have a lot left,” he said, taking the remaining bills from his pocket.

But Carnelian refused the money. Instead he opened the coffin and inspected its contents.

“I hope I done what you said,” Lewis remarked, watching him anxiously. “I sure would hate to go back. I took a taxi to the place where you’d turned off the road. The pages glowed just like you said, so I didn’t get lost. I felt real tired, but I know’d you wanted me back right away, so I didn’t stop and I walked all night.” Lewis did not tell him he felt frightened as well, walking alone through the dark forest with a coffin in tow.

The wizard found the items to his satisfaction and touched the boy lightly on his head. “You have done well,” he told him.

Lewis smiled with pride and relief. "I think I'll sleep now for a week."

He moved to lie down, but the wizard grabbed his arm. "I need you to dig."

Lewis gave him an exasperated look.

"I would do it myself," Carnelian explained. "But the task requires human hands."

"But I can't!" Lewis informed him. "I'm too tired!"

The wizard quickly spoke a few words. "We haven't time for you to rest. How do you feel now?"

Lewis was surprised by his sudden rejuvenation. Though his mind still wanted to sleep, his body no longer felt tired. "I think I'm all right."

"Come with me."

The wizard started away, and Lewis realized the chore of moving the coffin was his. He could not carry it, but had to drag it across the ground, pulling it by the handle. As they left he looked enviously at Julie, who lay undisturbed beneath the brightening sky.

"What about Julie?" he asked.

The wizard did not glance back. "Let her sleep," he said, walking at a pace too fast for the boy.

Fortunately for Lewis, he did not go far. He stopped in a small clearing and slowly circled it while Lewis watched, examining the ground as if he could see beneath it. After scrutinizing the area for several minutes he finally stopped at a spot near the center of the clearing. "Dig here."

Lewis dragged the coffin over to the spot and took out the spade. "The earth is soft," Carnelian told him, "and you shall encounter no obstructions. You are to dig a grave to a depth of exactly twelve feet."

Lewis was overwhelmed by the task. "Twelve feet!"

"You shall dig not a steep pit but a gentle slope," the wizard instructed. "This will enable you to step out of the hole, even as it grows deep, and will allow you to remove the dirt to the surface. Afterward, the coffin will be pushed

down the slope into its final resting place. Do you understand?”

“Not really.”

Lewis took the spade and reluctantly began the job. The earth was soft, as the wizard had said, and came out easily. But Lewis was not encouraged, for though he found the prospect of digging a twelve foot hole dismaying, he was more troubled by its purpose. He looked at Carnelian, who was again encircling the clearing, casting spells. “What are you doing?” he asked when the wizard had finished.

“Enchanting the ground,” Carnelian replied. “To discourage intruders who might disturb the grave.”

He approached Lewis, and the boy resumed digging. But he did not labor eagerly and, as much as he wanted to rest, he did not look forward to completing the task. He glanced constantly at the wizard, who watched him intently and spoke only to instruct him on how and where to dig.

He had dug to a depth of three feet before gaining the courage to speak. He rested on the spade’s handle and looked directly at the wizard. “Can I ask you a question?”

But Carnelian did not seem to hear him. He was staring at the grave, his face bearing a tortured expression, as if engaged in private battle. So tormented did the wizard appear, and so distant, that Lewis did not ask his question but turned his eyes away from the wizard and continued digging.

Carnelian tried to remain calm, but as he watched the hole deepen his agitation grew. His legs began to tremble and he could stand still only with the greatest effort. Soon he could not look upon the grave at all, and he felt the urge to flee.

He walked away without a word, deaf to Lewis’s voice. His pace grew faster when he reached the trees. Suddenly he began running.

He ran without thought of destination, wishing only to distance himself from the grave. The forest blurred before him as he darted through the trees. He felt dizzy from the

turmoil within him, and frightened. He increased his speed, as if being chased. He wanted to live, to breath, to move about freely, to think, to employ his powers. Not to lie interminably in a dreamless sleep beneath the oppressive earth.

He came to a pond in a clearing and stopped, breathless. He walked to the water's edge and peered down. But the reflection was not the one he wished to see. With an effort he turned away, but the battle continued to rage within him, and his instinct for survival grew stronger.

He struggled but seemed only to grow weaker. He felt the glory of his reign, the fear instilled in others, and he wanted to go on, to continue, to finish.

He spotted an ant on the ground. It filled his vision. An intense, inexpressible hatred overcame him. He wanted to kill it, to crush it, to snuff out its life forever. Enraged, he raised his foot. His eyes glowed red as he glared at the insect.

His body trembled as he stood poised to attack. He wanted to scream, to cry, and in a moment of strength he turned his rage inward.

The ant scurried away, oblivious to the danger. Carnelian forced his foot down slowly after it had passed. Then he collapsed in exhaustion, his face perspiring, his arms shaking. He buried his head in his hands and tried to concentrate, to hold on, to triumph over his old enemy.

After some time he rose. And quietly returned to the place where he belonged.

The sun was already high when Julie awoke. She called the wizard's name, thinking he must be near, but when he did not respond she grew fearful.

She noticed a slip of paper lying on the ground a few feet away. It was the wizard's list, which Lewis had dropped when trying to return Carnelian's money. Julie read it with increasing alarm.



1 spade  
3 iron chains with locks  
1 coffin

She turned it over, as if hoping to find an explanation on the back. The list confused and frightened her. The possibility that first came to mind was the one she least wanted to consider.

She knew only that she should not waste time speculating but must search for him immediately. She saw the track on the ground made by the coffin as Lewis had dragged it through the woods. It approached from the direction in which they had reached camp yesterday, and disappeared deeper into the forest. Julie chose to follow the latter direction, running too hard to cry out.

When she reached the clearing she was stunned by the sight before her. The wizard lay in a coffin, the lid still raised. Beside him lay a deep grave. Lewis, who had just finished digging, climbed out, exhausted and dirty.

Julie ran to the coffin, looking from Lewis to the wizard. "What are you doing?" she shouted.

Carnelian sat up, almost as disturbed by Julie's presence at the grave site as she was upset by his presence in the coffin. "What must be done," he said somberly.

Julie stared at him, forgetting Lewis for the moment. "You're going to bury yourself? Is it a trick?"

His silence frightened her. "I don't understand. How are you going to trap Bloodstone by burying yourself?"

The wizard looked at her intently. "I am Bloodstone," he said in a voice filled with torment and shame.

Julie laughed nervously. "Is this a joke?" But she could see clearly by his grim expression that he spoke in earnest. "What are you talking about?" she demanded. "Has he got you under a spell?"

"If memory is a spell," the wizard replied. "And mine well might be, for it is cursed. But it is also the truth, and I can no longer deny it." He looked at her with fondness,

wishing he deserved her trust, and wanting to make the revelation easier. “You must understand, my child,” he told her, “I did not know. It would have caused me pain beyond words if any of you had come to harm.” The lines in his forehead deepened as he leaned toward her. “But I did not know!”

“You can’t be Bloodstone!” Julie argued. “He attacked me, and you fought him. We saw him with our own eyes!”

“He was a projection,” the wizard explained. “A very good illusion. I understand your disbelief, for I was deceived as well.”

“You’re not making any sense!” she said angrily, wishing he would climb out from the coffin. “If what you say is true, how could you be deceived?”

The wizard paused before answering, recalling the past. “I do not remember all the details of my birth,” he finally replied. “But my name was Bloodstone. I was created by an evil witch or sorcerer to bring an end to the race of man. I was endowed with great powers and immortality. But what my creator did not foresee was that I would have a conscience.”

He looked away from Julie, toward the trees, recalling the beginning of the struggle. “I would cause some misfortune,” he said in a regretful voice. “But then I would rescue the very people I was meant to destroy. I was born to aggravate wars, and, given man’s own desire for destruction, it was not a difficult task. Yet I would find myself healing the wounded, diverting ships from battle, creating fogs to slow the march of armies. Indeed, though the hope of ending war was a futile one, I devoted more time to fellowship than to belligerence. It pained me to cause harm, and it pleased me to restore health. I traversed the country, seeking the sick so that I might heal them, the weak so that I might protect them. And though it seemed the task was an overwhelming one, I had decided that my purpose was not to destroy man but to ensure his survival. Not to enslave him but to serve him. So I forsook Bloodstone and took my new name from

the carnelian stone, a gem more human and temperate in color. I changed my appearance to one more pleasing, and I left my sullen castle for the company of men.

“But my nature was strong and could not be conquered. It hid within the shadows of my soul, and emerged frequently, mocking my virtuous intentions. The struggle between my nature and my desire grew so fervid that in time I began to live as two separate persons. First Bloodstone would rule. Then Carnelian would gain control and try to mitigate the damage caused by his enemy. But Bloodstone would always return to wreak further destruction. As Carnelian, I was unaware of my actions as Bloodstone. I would awaken and find that days had passed, or weeks. I would find myself in strange places, with no memory of how I arrived there. I believe I told you that I once searched his castle. And when I recalled the incident to you that is what I indeed believed. But now I remember how it really was—that I had suddenly found myself in my castle as Carnelian. The place was charged with Bloodstone’s presence, but I was anxious to explore, for it was always imperative to discover what deeds I had wrought as Bloodstone, so that I might correct them. Yet when I looked into the fire, still burning on the hearth, I saw his face in the flames and fled in terror.”

“But he held you prisoner in his dungeon!” Julie reminded him.

The wizard shook his head. “Another false memory,” he confessed. “It was not Bloodstone who imprisoned Carnelian, but rather Carnelian who imprisoned Bloodstone. And it was Bloodstone, not Carnelian, who escaped. It occurred on another occasion when I woke as Carnelian, this time near his castle. I told you of the child leading the mule and the portent of his danger. In truth, I sensed Bloodstone regaining control. I tried to drive him away without success. In desperation, to save the child and others, I ran to his castle and chained myself in his dungeon. I should have buried myself then, but there wasn’t time, and I hoped I might still defeat him if he was immobilized for a period. I was

mistaken, of course. When Bloodstone regained control he drifted out as a vapor through the crack beneath the door.

“Not long after, he sank a merchant ship. As Carnelian, I was able to save the crew. But the incident left me disheartened, and I knew what must be done. It was not an easy decision to make, for I do so love this world. But it was because of my love for humanity that I realized the good must be sacrificed to silence the evil. I confided in three men, trustworthy, but not too soft of heart, and I paid them well for their labor.”

He turned back to Julie, as if desiring her forgiveness. “When I woke again I was Carnelian. My memory, whether because of the long entombment or for some other reason, was deluded. I had no recollection that I was Bloodstone. Rather, I thought Bloodstone was another wizard. Furthermore, I believed it was he who was responsible for my entombment, and I feared that he had roamed unchallenged all these years, continuing his reign of terror. I rose from the grave determined to seek him out and annihilate him. I traveled across the world in pursuit, yet I would have accomplished more had I never arisen from the coffin.”

“But you were in New York when the earthquake happened,” Julie argued. “And what about the volcano and the plague?”

“I have told you Bloodstone’s power spans distance. As Carnelian I cannot match it, for it requires considerably more energy to heal than it does to wound. So while I cause a plague on another continent, I cannot cure the victims from such a distance, but must visit them personally for my magic to have effect. Fortunately, in the depths of my mind I possessed strength enough to mitigate the attacks. The earthquake would have caused many more casualties had it occurred in the city. The plague killed no one. The missile landed in the sea.”

“But when could Bloodstone have emerged?” Julie wondered.

“In my sleep,” the wizard replied. “Or at times of great weariness. I had so suppressed my dark nature that I never regarded it as being my own. Instead, it seemed outside of me, as alien as it was abhorrent. I considered my knowledge of the volcano and the location of the rat, for example, as prescience. Not once did I suspect the truth.”

Julie remembered his nightmares, but she still refused to believe him.

“On the mountain, of course, my two selves fought. The attacks against Bloodstone were folly, since he was only a projection. But he succeeded in striking me down, hoping that if I lost awareness he could then dominate. And he nearly did, for it was during my recovery that he caused the missile to launch. But the cold of the mountain and the ice on which we were laid affected him as well as me. It must have also startled my memory, for when I woke I saw Bloodstone’s face in the mirror.”

He looked at her for agreement, but she remained incredulous. “It isn’t possible,” she said softly, studying his gentle face, remembering that horrifying night in Sumatra. “You would never hurt me.”

Her trust only aggravated his anguish. “I owe you the truth,” he told her. “I owe you much more, but now the truth is all I can offer. And yet I doubt I have ever performed an act with greater reluctance than convincing you of my evil.”

He took her firmly by the hand and pulled her down to him. “Look at me!” he commanded, pulling her still closer. “Look!”

Julie stared, and for a moment saw only the wizard’s taut face, humiliated and suffering. But then a change occurred. His pleasant features vanished, replaced by the contemptuous glare of Bloodstone. His eyes shone red. His skin, suddenly pale green, was latticed with bulging veins.

Julie screamed and broke away. She ran to the trees without looking back. But the shock caused her more grief than terror and she soon collapsed on the ground, crying hysterically, not caring if he caught her.

Her thoughts, like her emotions, were too confused for her to make sense of them, and she felt no desire to try. For the first time in weeks she knew the depression that had led her to attempt suicide, the helplessness, the despair, the fading of illusions.

She noticed a figure standing before her and recoiled in fear. It was Lewis. "Do you wanna say goodbye?" he asked.

Julie stared at him and stopped crying. She wanted to scream, but instead she rose and followed him. She paused at the edge of the clearing, fearing Bloodstone would attack her. But Julie realized he had not pursued her when she fled, and she gathered the courage to approach the coffin. Bloodstone was not there, but Carnelian again, as if he had never changed. He was lying on his back now, his eyes open wide to the sky, unblinking in the sunlight. He turned to Julie as she peered down at him, surprised she had returned.

"I have hurt you," he said.

Julie looked into his eyes, and her moment of terror in the hotel room in Sumatra was overshadowed by her awakening in the cemetery in New York. "You have saved me," she replied.

"I have hurt many."

"But you have saved many too," she said. "It isn't your fault. You didn't know. I never met anyone more kind!"

Determination rose within her, replacing the helplessness and fear she had felt a minute before. "There must be a spell you can try, something you can do!"

"There is no other way."

"I don't believe that!" she said forcefully. "You can't bury the good in you. What about all the lives you could save? The people you could heal?"

"It is a small price to pay for the subjugation of such an evil."

"I don't think so!" Julie told him. "I think it's a terrible price to pay! And I'm not going to let you do it!"

She grabbed one of the chains and held it up as if she would never let go.

The wizard frowned. "I wanted you to learn how to hope," he said. "But I have taught you too well. You must now see that there are exceptions."

"But there must be something," she said with less certainty. "If you won't find it, I will. I'll come back!"

The wizard smiled at her determination, the first time he had smiled since leaving Nepal. "Come here," he said fondly. "I have something to give you."

Julie obeyed and the wizard handed her his staff "Please take this to Brandon," he instructed her. "Tell him Bloodstone and I fell together, and that his staff served me well. It is not a lie."

He reached into his pocket and removed his passport. "I promised to restore your boyfriend's photograph."

But Julie grabbed the passport from his hand. "Don't," she told him. "I want a picture of you."

"But I am evil," he said.

Julie looked at him and saw only a savior, forgetting the horrifying transformation she had witnessed only minutes earlier. "You saved my life," she said.

She embraced him tightly, but he did not touch her, feeling he did not deserve affection. When she tried to kiss him he turned away. "Go now," he urged her. "I do not know how much longer I can resist him."

Julie straightened but did not retreat.

"Lewis!" the wizard called.

Lewis approached reluctantly, knowing what was expected of him. Wishing he could refuse.

"Do not fail me!" the wizard commanded.

Lewis glanced at Julie, and then for the last time at Carnelian. The boy's face bore the expression of one committing a terrible but necessary crime.

Julie could not watch but ran away to weep behind the trees. Lewis closed the coffin, bound it with the three iron chains, and carefully pushed it down the slope into the bottom of the grave. When he had filled the hole and patted

down the enchanted earth, the ground bore no sign of having been disturbed.

And Bloodstone slept.

On the long, quiet walk back to Freiburg, many concerns might have occupied Lewis's thoughts: where they would sleep that night, how they would get home, what his mother would say, what he would tell her, whether he would start going to school, how he would relate to his old friends, whether he would ever see his new ones again. But Lewis thought of none of these things. As the sky darkened above the trees, and the sound of traffic beyond signaled their return to civilization, he thought only of Carnelian. And wept.



