

inhuman howling that seemed to come from all around Jenny rather than from the open jaws. Down the corridor there was a terrible crashing. P.C.'s body was flailing with the pick, breaking glass and splintering wood. As Jenny watched he flailed more and more jerkily, then stopped. His body flopped backward, collapsing like a pricked balloon. Meanwhile, from every side, there was clicking and whirring and plinking music. The entire arcade had come to life at once. The foot vitalizer was vibrating. In a shattered cabinet a mechanical ballerina was twirling. The figures in the Ole Barn Dance were clacking their wooden jaws. "Let's get the hell out of here!" Dee shouted over the music of a nickelodeon. Jenny cast one last glance at the black cabinet. The heads were still now, and she supposed their blank and empty expressions were peaceful. Certainly nobody was in there anymore. Then she was moving, stepping over glass shards and P.C.'s motionless body, while the arcade gibbered and screeched around her. A minute later she was in the open air. It was an unspeakable relief to get away from the noise. The outside seemed clean somehow, even if it was in the Shadow World. She looked at Dee. "Are you okay?" "Yeah." Dee was gripping her thigh with both hands, pulling bits of glass out of her jeans. "I got some shrapnel here, but I'm all right." Jenny looked at Summer, who was huddling and hugging her own elbows. "Are you all right?" Summer managed an extremely watery smile. "I got splinters," Michael offered, holding up his finger. "That was brave of you," Jenny said. She was remembering the way he'd looked in her grandfather's house when she had first explained that they needed to stain the runes with blood. Michael just looked at her. "Huh?" "Never mind. Summer, give Dee back her jacket. Audrey, are you okay to walk? Because I have the feeling we'd better keep moving. I think they're mad." She squeezed her shirt pocket and felt the reassuring heaviness there. She felt the need to hurry, as if a storm were gathering behind her. The Shadow Men weren't happy with what she'd done to their prisoners. "Wait, but how do we find the bridge?" Michael said. "We'll just walk around the lake until we see it." They saw it as soon as they cleared the trees by the Penny Arcade. It started somewhere in between the March Hare roller coaster and the Log Ride, rising in a beautiful arch like a rainbow that ended on the island. "I don't think that was there before," Audrey said. "Maybe it just wasn't lit," Dee said. Michael said, "It's going to be like climbing the St. Louis Arch." Everybody looked at Jenny. "We'll do it," she said stoutly. "We have to. We have to get to Tom and Zach-and quick, because they may try to stop us or something. We've got to actually get to them to win the Game." "I don't see how the coins fit in," Dee muttered. But when they reached the nearer base of the arch, Jenny saw. There was a neat little tollbooth in front of it, and a fence with barbed wire that kept you from climbing up the sides. After the first ten feet it was so high in the air that you couldn't have reached the side if you had wanted to. "What holds it up?" Summer whispered, and Jenny said, "Don't ask." Attached to the white tollbooth was a coin receiver with a flat tray-like the kind you see in airports for getting luggage carts. Instead of four spaces for quarters there were three spaces for irregularly shaped coins in the tray. With a little twisting and exchanging, Jenny got all three gold pieces to fit neatly. They lay there and gleamed at her. She looked at the others. It was a momentous moment, a serious, profound moment. They'd finished the treasure hunt and they were about to go collect the prize. She felt as if

be."

Jenny tilted her head back. Far above them-the farthest away of any of the clumps-was an island world that seemed all silver and gold. She could just glimpse something like a shining mountain rising into a golden cloud on it. The bridge to it was very narrow and seemed to be on fire.

"That's where the gods live."

"The gods?" Jenny spoke to Audrey without looking down from the shining island.

"So the myths say. Hmm, and I'll bet that's Vanaheim. World of primal water and plenty, where some of the less important gods live." Audrey pointed to an island painted in jewel-like colors, dark blue and dark green.

"Vanaheim-any relation to Anaheim?" Michael murmured. Audrey pinched her mouth on a smile, but ignored him.

"And that's Alfheim, world of light and air," she said, nodding at an island that was much closer to them, shimmering in the colors of sunrise: yellow, pale blue, light green. "Home of light elves-like good spirits. I'm remembering all this, isn't that amazing? I must have been about eight when I learned it."

"What about those?" Dee said, pointing straight outward. Two island worlds were floating at about the same level as the bridge they stood on: one rocky and lashed by what looked like tornadoes, and the other so bright with orange fire that Jenny couldn't make out any details.

"The rocky one's Jotunheim-the world of primal storms. And the other one has to be Muspelheim, the world of primal fire. Nothing lives there but killer giants."

"What's that?" Michael said, staring downward and to the left.

Audrey looked. "Hell" she said simply.

"I always thought hell would be hot," Summer said, her eyes widening like cornflowers blooming.

"Hel with one l. It's the underworld, where everything sinks in the end. Ruled by Hella, queen of the dead."

It looked like a frozen lake, colder and blacker than the empty space between the worlds. Jenny had never seen such a lightless, joyless place.

The bridge to it was like a slide, broad and frosty.

"We definitely wouldn't want to go there. Or to that one-the one that looks like a cavern. That's Svartalfheim, the subterranean world."

"No more caves, thank you," Michael said.

There was only one island left. It was the one directly below them, and both ends of the bridge they stood on seemed connected to it. From here, the surface was obscured by dark mist and shadows.

Audrey said, "Niflheim, land of ice and shadows. The Shadow World." She shook her head. "I still don't believe this."

"Why not? It's no weirder than anything else we've seen today," Dee said. "But I only count eight worlds. Where's Earth?"

Audrey looked around, then shrugged. "Maybe we don't get to see that bridge until we finish the Game."

"Who cares? Look, we wanted to walk between the worlds, right?" Dee said, her eyes shining. "And now we're doing it. So-shall we?"

Jenny nodded. She felt very tiny and insignificant standing here, and her throat was tight. And she had the feeling that it was going to be harder going down than going up-because now the fall was so much longer.

They started moving. It was hard to walk in the place between the worlds-physically hard. After two or three steps Jenny began to feel muscle-burn in her calves and thigh muscles. She could hear Audrey panting in front of her.

And the barest glimpse of the fall on either side made Jenny's internal organs feel as if they were plunging out of her body.

Her legs wanted to freeze. She wanted to get down on her rump and scoot the rest of the way-no, get down on her stomach and slither. But that wasn't the worst.

She looked back at the lighthouse. "Come on, people. This is it." When she got up her legs were shaky, but she took the lead and Dee let her. The lighthouse looked bigger as they got closer. It was life-size, with a widow's walk around the top and a weathercock. And it was attached to some broad dark building that Jenny hadn't seen before because it wasn't lit up. A restaurant, maybe, she thought. There was a wooden door in the lighthouse's side, with a large iron handle. "Monster positions," Dee reminded Jenny as she reached for the handle. Then Dee stood ready to kick the door shut if anything unfriendly was behind it. "Tom and Zach will be at the top, of course," Michael said, resting with his hands on his thighs in anticipation. But they weren't. It was funny, how the end began. Jenny had been waiting for so long, working and fighting, and all the time waiting for the moment that she would see Tom. She was so used to waiting she wasn't really ready for it to end. She wasn't-prepared. She almost couldn't deal with it. But when it started happenings it happened fast, and prepared or not, she was thrown into it. She pulled on the iron handle, and the wooden door swung open. There was no need for Dee to kick it shut. Everything inside was illuminated, and nothing came rushing toward them. Black metal stairs curved up on Jenny's left, circling upward toward the top of the lighthouse. But straight in front of her she could see the interior of the broad building. The lighthouse had no back wall, and opened right into it. It was a wonderful place, with a huge diorama two stories high as a backdrop. It looked like a movie set of a wharf scene, but the numbered flags on poles betrayed its real purpose. It was an indoor miniature golf course. "Treasure Island," Michael said, peering around her shoulder. "Pirates, see?" It was pirates. The diorama featured a mural painted on the far wall of the broad building, a marvelously realistic mural with a volcano in the background. Painted smoke and little neon lights for sparks showed that it was erupting. There was also a mammoth storm in the painted sky, and forked lightning that really flashed. At the bottom of the mural, just behind the golf course itself, two dinghies were landing on some fiberglass rocks. One boat was painted, with a pirate in an eye patch and hat, a lace cravat, and boots. The other boat was real, with Tom and Zach. Jenny touched her mouth. Then she was running. There weren't any words for what she felt next. When she'd been separated from Tom in the paper house, it had been for hours. This time it had been days. She was exhausted, overstressed, starving, on the verge of collapse-and she'd never been so happy in her life. Just the sight of him brought back everything that was good and homelike to her mind. It was like coming back to her own room after being away a long time with strangers. It was where she belonged. She threw her arms around him. And then she just held on, her heart pounding and pounding. "Watch out, Jenny. He was here just a minute ago." And Jenny, who had for so long associated Tom with protection, with safety and security and coziness, found herself feeling passionately protective of Tom. As if he were Summer. Looking into his dear face, handsome and rather brooding just now, and his wonderful green-flecked eyes, she said, "Don't worry. I'll take care of you." "Just let me out, please," Tom said sharply, and then gave up and kissed her back. Jenny's solicitous feelings had thrown her into a perfect spasm of love for him, and it felt so good to kiss him again. "If you two could tear yourself apart for just a minute . . ." Zach's voice

white at all, it was red, red as rubies, red as blood.

"Nothing can stop us from taking her-unless someone else is willing to go in her place."

It took Jenny several heartbeats to get her mind around that. She wasn't thinking properly anymore. Then she remembered-her grandfather. They'd said exactly the same thing to him. A life for a life. Someone must go in her place. And her grandfather had, and now Jenny had rescued him and broken the bargain, and brought everything back to the starting place.

And meanwhile the terrible silence went on and on and on.

Then she heard a voice, a voice that was quite calm and devil-may-care-and human.

"I'll go."

Tom had stepped forward. His dark brown hair was neat and short and his smile was rakish. He said it as if he were offering to go out and get pizza for the baseball team.

And he looked wonderful. Somehow he managed to make his rumpled and frost-touched clothes look like the latest fashion. He stood casually, and there wasn't a trace of fear in his expression.

For a moment, without thinking of anything else, Jenny was simply proud of him. Fiercely, passionately proud that a human, a seventeen-year-old who hadn't even heard of the Shadow Men until a month ago, could stand up to them like this. Could conceal his terror and smile that way and offer to die. That's how I want to die, Jenny thought, and a strange serenity came over her. I want to do it well-since it has to be done. And I hope I have the courage, and I think-I really do think-that I just might. We'll see.

Because of course there was no possibility of letting them take Tom. She would never allow that.

Before she could say so, though, there was a short, wild laugh. Dee was beside Tom, her head thrown back, her eyes flashing like a jaguar's. She was as beautiful as some goddess of the night-some warrior goddess who'd just sprung up to defend her people. And she was grinning, the old barbaric grin that contrasted so oddly with her delicate features. The grin that Jenny hadn't seen since Audrey had gotten hurt.

"No," she said to Tom. "You won't go. I will." She was breathing very quickly, and laughing-she seemed almost exuberant. "Jenny needs you, you jerk. She'd never let you do it. I'll go."

"Just back off, Dee," Tom said softly. His eyes were oddly tranquil, even dreamy, but there was something frightening in his voice. At any other time, Jenny thought, Dee would have backed off.

Now she just laughed. She looked like Dee- reckless, warlike, and unconditionally loyal-but she looked like more than herself, too. A greater Dee.

"It's my choice," she said. "I know what I'm getting into."

And then, as Jenny listened in disbelief, other voices joined in.

"She's my cousin," Zach said. His face was sharp as a blade, and there was an intense, clear light in his gray eyes. He moved to stand sword-straight beside Dee. "I'm her blood relative. If anyone goes, it should be me."

Audrey and Michael had been whispering hastily together; now they stepped forward. Audrey's burnished copper hair was loose on her shoulders, and with her white clothing she looked like some kind of virgin sacrifice. Not elegant but exquisite, and holding herself with pride. Her skin was camellia-pale, and her voice was cool and steady.

"If everybody else is going to be a hero, then we can, too," she said. "The truth is that Jenny's worth more than any of us, and we all know it. So, now. You can take your pick." She looked at the Shadow Men. She very nearly, Jenny thought, tossed her head.

"Yeah," Michael said. "The only thing is, we figure we'll go together, her and me. You know, for company, right?" He gave a No Big Deal shrug, and then his mouth trembled violently, and he grabbed for Audrey's hand. He looked for a moment as if he were going to be sick, but then he wiped his mouth and stood

"Get out of the way! We need to close the door!" Dee was shouting. Everything was confusion. The leg under Jenny moved and she saw Audrey crawling away. She tried to crawl, too, dragging Julian. Tom picked up the telephone table and threw it over her head toward the living room. Dee kicked the door shut just as the storm reached it.

"What about the circle?" Michael screamed. "Where's a knife? Where's a knife?" Jenny knew she had a knife, but she couldn't move fast enough. Michael grabbed up something from the floor. It was a felt pen, the pen Jenny had used to sketch the rune circle. With a slashing motion, he crossed the circle out. The cross looked like a slanting X, like the rune Nauthiz. The rune of restraint. "You don't need to do that," Julian said, and his voice was very distant. Powerless. "They won't come after you. They don't have a claim anymore." He was lying on his back, eyes looking at the ceiling. He was holding his chest, as if the Shadow Men had cut out his heart instead of his name. Jenny took his cold hands in hers.

So cold. As if he were a figure carved out of ice. His face was that pale, too, and his beauty was like a distant fire reflected in an icicle. And it was strange, but at that moment Jenny seemed to see in him all the different ways he had looked before. All his many guises. The boy in the More Games shop playing acid house music too loud. The Erlking, in white leather tunic and breeches. The Cyber-Hunter, in sleek body armor, with a blue triangle tattooed on his cheek. The masked dancer at the prom, in a black tuxedo and shirt.

It was as if each were a facet of a crystal reflecting back at her-and only now could she see the entire crystal for what it was. Julian stepping out of the shadows, soft as a shadow himself. Julian wearing Zach's clothing, threatening her with the bees. Julian slipping the gold ring on her finger, sealing the bargain with a kiss. Julian leaning over her as she slept. Julian in the mining cave, his eyes dilated, his gaze shattering. And she had never really found the right description for the color of those eyes. At times it had seemed close to this color or that color, but when you got down to it, words really failed. It wasn't like anything except itself. Right now she thought she could see something flickering far back in his eyes, like a twisting blue flame in their depths.

"You can't die," she said, and she was surprised by how calm and matter-of-fact her voice was.

And Julian, although his eyes were looking somewhere past her, and his voice was weak, was equally calm. He almost seemed to be smiling.

"The law can't be changed," he said.

"You can't die," Jenny said. Her fingers were very tight on his, but they only seemed to be getting colder.

Everyone else had moved away. Jenny wanted to tell them that they didn't need to, that everything was going to be all right. But somehow she knew better.

"Did you know that Gebo isn't just the rune of sacrifice?" Julian said.

"I don't care."

"It means a gift, too. You gave me a gift, you know."

"I don't care," Jenny said and began to cry.

"You showed me what it was like to love. What the universe could be like, if."

Jenny put her free hand to her mouth. She was sobbing without a sound.

"This is my gift to you now, and you can't help but take it. You're free, Jenny. They won't come after you again."

"You can't die," Jenny whispered raggedly around the tears. "There must be something to do. You can't just go out- "

Julian was smiling.

"No, I'll dream another dream," he said. "I've made up so many things, now I'll just go into one. I'll be part of it."

"All right," Jenny whispered. She suddenly knew that there was nothing to be done, nothing except to help him all she could. There was something in his face that told her-a peace that was already gathering. She wouldn't disturb that peace now. "You go into the dream, Julian."

Or maybe she had.

"The cab's here," Michael said. "Okay, so first we have to go to the doctor. . . ." He stared at a scribbled list.

"No, first we go to the Western Union office, then the doctor," Audrey said, taking the list from him. "Then--"

"Then we eat," Michael said.

"Après vous," Dee said, gesturing them through the door. When Audrey hiked a copper eyebrow at her, she grinned. "I can throw those fancy words around, too. Bonjour. O solo mio. Gesundheit."

"D'accord," Audrey said and grinned back at her.

Zach and Summer went out. Jenny stopped for just an instant on the threshold, long enough to look back.

The hallway was empty, the door to the basement was shut. That was good. If any adults would listen to Jenny, she would have them make sure that door was never opened again.

She turned and went outside.

As they headed for the cab, Michael said the kind of thing that only Michael could say. The kind of thing that came from having a science fiction author as a dad.

"Look. What if-someday-somebody carved Julian's name back onto that runestave?" he said.

Tom stopped dead on the lush green grass for a moment. Then he started walking again, as Jenny put an arm through his. "Don't even talk about it," he said.

"It'll never happen."

"No, I guess not. Just as well."

And Jenny, her arm entwined with Tom's, agreed -but, deep inside, some tiny part of her wondered.

She couldn't give in to the twinge of wistful sorrow she felt-she had a life to build. Things to consider. She couldn't just follow Tom to college now. She had to find out what she wanted to do with herself.

What do I like? she thought. Swimming. Computers. Cats. Helping people. Kids. Flowers.

She didn't know how she was going to put all those together-she'd have to find a way. After all, she was Jenny Thornton, her only master.

But just before she got into the cab, she looked up at the Pennsylvania sky.

It was so blue-a bluer blue than California skies ever were in the morning. A beautiful, luminous color that seemed filled with promise.

If, someday, Julian should be reborn, she wished him well.