DURING THE NIGHT, Marianne was awakened by a steady drumming of rain, a muffled tattoo as from a thousand drumsticks on the flat porch roof, a splash and gurgle from the rainspout at the corner of the house outside Mrs. Winesap's window, bubbling its music in vain to ears which did not hear. "I hear," whispered Marianne, speaking to the night, the rain, the comer of the living room she could see from her bed. When she lay just so, the blanket drawn across her lips, the pillow crunched into an exact shape, she could see the amber glow of a lamp in the living room left on to light one corner of the reupholstered couch, the sheen of the carefully carpentered shelves above it, the responsive glow of the refinished table below, all in a kindly shine and haze of belonging there. "Mine," said Marianne to the room. The lamplight fell on the first corner of the apartment to be fully finished, and she left the light on so that she could see it if she woke, a reminder of what was possible, a promise that all the rooms would be reclaimed from dust and dilapidation. Soon the kitchen would be finished. Two more weeks at the extra work she was doing for the library and she'd have enough money for the bright Mexican tiles she had set her heart upon.

"Mine," she said again, shutting her eyes firmly against the

seductive glow. She had spent all Cloud-haired mama's jewelry on the house. The lower floor, more recently occupied and in a better state of repair, was rented out to Mrs. Winesap and Mr. Larken-whose relationship Marianne often speculated upon, varyingly, as open windows admitted sounds of argument or expostulation or as the walls transmitted the unmistakable rhythm of bedsprings-and the shimmy part was occupied by Marianne herself. "Not so slummy anymore," she hummed to herself in the darkness. "Not so damn slummy."

If she had been asked, she could not have said why it had been so important to have rooms of her own, rooms with softly glowing floorboards, rooms with carefully stripped woodwork painted a little darker than the walls, all in a mauvey, sunset glow, cool and spacious as a view of distant mountains, where there had been only cracked, stained plaster with bits of horsehair protruding from it to make her think for weary months that she was trying to make a home in the corpse of some great, defunct animal. At the time she had not known about old plaster, old stairs, old walls, nothing about splintered woodwork and senile plumbing-either balky or incontinent. Something in the old house had nagged at her. "Buy me, lady. You're poor. I'm poor. Buy me, and let us live together."

Perhaps it had been the grace of the curved, beveled glass lights above the front door and the upstairs windows. Perhaps it had been the high ceilings, cracked though they were, and

the gentle slope of the banisters leading to the second floor. Perhaps the dim, cavelike mystery of the third floor beneath the flat roof. Perhaps even the arch of branches in the tangled shrubbery which spoke of old, flowering things needing to be rescued from formlessness and thistle. "Sleeping Beauty," she had said more than once. "A hundred years asleep." Though it hadn't been a hundred years. Ten or fifteen, perhaps, since someone had put a new roof on it. Forty, perhaps, since anyone had painted or repaired otherwise. Both times someone, anyone had run out of money, or time, or interest, and had given up to let it stand half vacant, occupied on the lower floor by a succession of recluses who had let the vines cover the windows and the shrubs grow into a thicket.

Perhaps it hadn't been anything unique in this particular house except that it stood only a block from the campus. From her windows she could look across the lawns of the university to the avenue, across acres of orderly green setting off rose-ash walls of Georgian brick, a place of quiet and haven among the hard streets. "Damn Harvey," she hummed to herself, moving toward sleep. This was part of the daily litany: at least a decade of "mine's" and five or six "damn Harvey's."

It shouldn't have been necessary to sell all Mama's jewelry.

Harvey could have advanced her some of her own inheritance-even loaned it to her at interest. The past two years of niggling economies, the endless hours using the heat gun to strip paint until her ears rang with the howl of it and her hands turned numb.... "Carpal tunnel syndrome," the doctor had said. "Quit whatever your're doing with your hands and the swelling will stop. With what your papa left you, sweetie, what's this passion for doing your own carpentry?" Dr. Brown was an old friend-well, an old acquaintance-who believed his white hair gave him license to call her sweetie. Maybe he called all the people he had once delivered as babies sweetie, no matter how old they got, but the familiar, almost contemptuous way he said it didn't tempt her to explain.

"Look," she could have said. "Papa Zahmani was pure, old-country macho to the tips of his toes. He didn't leave his little girl anything. He left it all in half-brother Harvey's hands until little Marianne either gets married-in which case presumably her sensible husband will take care of it for her-or gets to be thirty years old. I guess he figured if Marianne wasn't safely married by thirty, she never would be and it would be safe to let such a hardened spinster handle her own affairs. Until men, however, Harvey controls the lot-half-brother Harvey who treats every dime of Marianne's money as though it were a drop of his own blood."

Anyhow, why explain? It wouldn't change anything. The truth was simply that she hadn't the money to pay anyone to

paint the walls or strip the woodwork or reupholster the furniture scrounged from secondhand shops. "Junk shops," she reminded herself. "Not so damn junky anymore...."

"You can live on what I allow you," Harvey had said, offhandedly. "If you get a cheap room somewhere. There's no earthly reason for you to go on to school. You are by no stretch of the imagination a serious student, and if you're determined to live the academic life-well, you'll have to work your way through. If you're determined to get a graduate degree-which will be useless to you-you'll spend most of your time on campus anyhow. You don't need a nice place to live. A little student squalor goes with the academic ambience."

Not that Harvey exposed himself to squalor of any kind. His six-room Boston apartment took up half the upper floor of a mellow old brownstone on Beacon Hill, and an endless skein of nubile, saponaceous Melissas and Randis and Cheryls replaced one another at eager intervals as unpaid housekeepers, cooks, and laundresses for Harvey S. Zahmani, professor of Oriental languages and sometime ethnologist, who had had the use of all his own inheritance and all of Marianne's since he was twenty-six. Papa hadn't believed that women should take up space in universities unless they "had to work," a fate ev-

idently worse than death and far, far worse than an unhappy marriage. "I do have to work," Marianne had said to Harvey more than once. "Do you really expect me to live on $500 a month? Come on, Harvey, that's poverty level minus and you know it."

"It's what Papa would have done." Bland, smiling, knowing she knew he didn't give a damn what Papa would have done, that he hadn't cared for Papa or Papa's opinions at all, giving her that twinge deep down in her stomach that said "no fury like a man scorned," and a kind of fear, too, that the man scorned would try something worse to get even.

"Hell, Harvey," she whispered to herself. "I was only thirteen and you were twenty-six. I don't care if you were drunk. You're my half-brother, for God's sake. What did you expect me to do, just lie there and let you use me for one of your Randis or Cheryls because I was convenient?" It had been a frightening scene, interrupted by the housekeeper. Neither of them had referred to it since, but Marianne remembered, and she thought Harvey did, too. Why else this nagging enmity, this procession of little annoyances?

"You give up this graduate degree business and do something more in keeping with your position, and I'll see about increasing your allowance...." He had sneered that polite, academic sneer, which could only remotely be interpreted as a threat. Marianne

hadn't been able to figure out what would have been more in keeping with her position. What position did a poverty-stricken heiress have? Great expectations? She had on occasion thought of raffling herself off on the basis of her Great Expectations. Perhaps temporary matrimony? No. She was too stubborn. Sue? It was possible, of course, but Marianne felt that going to the law to gain control of her money would involve her in more of a struggle with Harvey than she had the strength for. Nope. If Papa had been a chauvinistic Neanderthal, Marianne would play it out-all the way. But she would not do it in squalor, not even student-style squalor. The jewelry had been given to her when Cloud-haired mama had died. So far as anyone knew it was still in the safe-deposit box. Marianne had never worn it. Now it had gone for fifty percent of its value to pay for three stories of dilapidated Italianate brick across the street from the university, and Marianne spent every available hour with tools or paintbrushes in her hands. The worst of it was done. Even the scrappy little area out front had been sodded and fringed with daffodils for spring, with pulmonaria and bergenia to bloom later, and astilbe waiting in the wings for midsummer. Harvey, if he ever came to Virginia to visit her, which he never had, would find only what he could have expected-a decently refurbished apartment in an elderly house. Not even Mrs. Wine-

sap or Mr. Larkin knew she owned the place. "Mine," she said for the tenth time that day, sinking at last into sleep.

There had been a time, long before, when there had been gardens lit by daffodils fringing acres of lawn. There had been a time when there had been many rooms, large, airy rooms with light falling into them through gauzy curtains in misty colors of dusk and distance. Sometimes, on the verge of waking, Marianne thought of that long-ago place. There had been a plump cook Marianne had called Tooky, even when she was old enough to have learned to say "Mrs. Johnson." There had been an old Japanese man and his two sons who worked in the gardens. Marianne had trotted after them in the autumn, her pockets bulging with tulip bulbs, a bulb in each hand, fascinated by the round, solid promise of them, the polished wood feeling of their skins, the lovely mystery of the little graves the gardener dug-what was his name? Mr. Tanaka. And his sons. Not Bob, not Dick. Robert and Richard. Robert digging the round

holes, Marianne pitching in the handfuls of powdery bone-meal, Robert mixing it all into a soft bed, then taking the bulbs from her one by one to set them in an array. Then, filling in the hole, the hole so full of promise, knowing the promise would be kept. And then, in the spring, the clumps of green

stalks, the buds opening into great goblets of bloom. Marianne standing with Cloud-haired mama to peer into those blooms, into the bottoms of those glorious vases where bees made belligerent little noises of ownership against the yellow bases of the petals, a round sun glowing at the bottom of the flower to echo the great sun burning above them.

Marianne didn't even remember it, and yet when she had bought the garden supplies last fall, she had stood in the garden shop with her hand deep in the carton of tulip bulbs, not seeing them, unaware of her own silent presence there. When she had paid for the plants there had been tears running down her cheeks, and the sales clerk had stared at her in perplexity, for her voice had been as calm and cheerful as it usually was while the tears ran down her cheeks and dropped off her chin. Later, she looked into the mirror and saw the runnels from eyes to chin and could not think what might have caused them.

Cloud-haired mama had died when Marianne was thirteen. That was when Harvey had... well. No point in thinking about it. After that had been boarding schools, mostly. Papa Zahmani had sold the big house with the gardens. Holidays had been here, in this city, in the town house. Then, only a year later, Papa Zahmani had died. The headmistress had told her in the office at school and had helped her dress and pack and be ready for the car. Two funerals in less than a year, and no reason anyone could give for either one. No reason for Mama to have died. No reason for Papa to have died. Dr. Brown acted baffled

and strained, with his mouth clamped shut. After that was more school, and more school, and summer camps, and college, and more college. There had not been any home to return to, and the only career which occurred to her was the same one Harvey had entered-ethnology. Which might be another reason for his sniping at her. Harvey didn't like competition. As though Marianne would be competition-though someday perhaps, when she was decades older, if she became recognized in the field, and... Well. She tried not to think about it. It was better

not to think about Cloud-haired mama, or Papa Zahmani, or Harvey. It was easier to live if one were not angry, and it was easier not to be angry if she did not think about those things.

She woke in the morning to a world washed clean. Outside the window the white oak had dropped its burden of winter-dried leaves into the wind, littering them across the spring lawns which stretched away between swatches of crocus purple and ruby walls, a syrup of emeralds, deep as an ocean under the morning sun, glittering from every blade. Slate roofs glistened, walls shone, teary windows blinked the sun into her face as she leaned from the window to recite the roll call of the place. Mossy walks, present. Daffodils, granite steps, white columns, ivy slickly wet and tight as thatch, a distant blaze of early

rhododendrons. All bright and shiny-faced, pleased and yet dignified, as such a place should be, her own slender windows fronting on it so that she might soak it in, breathe it, count it over like beads. Yew hedge, present. Tulip tree, present. The multi-paned windows of the library across the way; the easy fall of lawn down the slope to the side walk and street at the comer.

The street. Marianne hastily glanced away, too late. A red bus farted away from the curb in pig-stubborn defiance of imminent collision. The shriek of crumpled metal came coincident with the library chimes, and a flurry of Me Donalds wrappers lifted from the gutter to skulk into the shrubbery. "Damn," she murmured, starting her daily scorecard in the endless battle between order and confusion. "Confusion, one; order, nothing." By her own complex rules, she could not count sameness for order points. There was nothing really new in the order of the campus, the buildings, the gardens-no lawn freshly mowed or tree newly planted. She made a face as she turned back to the room, hands busy unbraiding the thick, black plait which hung halfway down her back. The room, at least, would not contribute to confusion. Except for the Box.

It sat half under the coffee table where she had left it, unable to bear the thought of it lurking in the darkness of some closet or completely under the table where she could not keep an eye on it. Better to have it out where she could see it, know where

it was. "Damn Harvey," she said, starting the day's tally. If she took the Box to (he basement storage room, he might decide to come visit her. She believed, almost superstitiously, that the act of taking the Box out of her apartment and putting it somewhere else, no matter how safe a place that might be, would somehow stimulate a cosmic, reciprocal force. If his presence, more than merely symbolized by the Box, were removed, some galactic accountant might require him to be present in reality.

"Silly," she admonished herself, kicking the Box as she passed it. "Silly!" Still, she left it where it was, decided to ignore it, turned on the television set to drown out any thought of it. Despite the bus crash, the morning was full of favorable portents. No time to waste thinking of Professor Harvey S. Zahmani.

"... Zahmani," the television echoed in its cheerful-pedantic news voice. "M. A. Zahmani, Prime Minister of Alphenlicht, guest lecturer at several American universities this spring, prior to his scheduled appearance before the United Nations this week..."

This brought her to crouch before the tube, seeing a face altogether familiar. It was Harvey. No, it wasn't Harvey. It looked like Harvey, but not around the mouth or eyes. The

expression was totally different. Except for that, they could be Siamese twins. Except that Harvey was up in Boston and this man was here at the university to lecture... on what? On Alphenlicht, of course. She had read something about the current controversy over Alphenlicht and-what was that other tiny country? Lubovosk. There was a Newsweek thingy on it, and she burrowed under the table for the latest issue as the television began a breathless account of basketball scores and piggy-backed commercials in endless, morning babble.

"... Among the world's oldest principalities, the two tiny nations of Alphenlicht and Lubovosk were joined until the nineteenth century under a single, priestly house which traced its origins back to the semi-mythical Magi. A minor territorial skirmish in the mid-nineteenth century left the northern third of the minuscule country under Russian control. Renamed 'Lubovosk,' the separated third now asserts legal rights to the priestly throne of Alphenlicht, a claim stoutly opposed by Prime Minister of Alphenlicht, Makr Avehl Zahmani...."

There was a map showing two sausage-link-shaped territories carved out of the high mountains between Turkey and Iraq and an inset picture of a dark, hawk-eyed woman identified as the hereditary ruler of Lubovosk. Marianne examined the

woman with a good deal of interest. The face was very familiar. It was not precisely her own, but there was something about the expression which Marianne had seen in her mirror. The woman might be a cousin, perhaps. "Good lord," Marianne admonished the pictured face. "If you and Russia want it, why doesn't Russia just invade it the way they did Afghanistan?" Receiving no reply, she rose to get about the business of breakfast. "Zahmani," she mused. She had never met anyone with that name except Harvey and herself. In strange cities, she had always looked in the phone book to see whether there might be another Zahmani. Then, too, Alphenlicht was the storybook land which had always been featured in Cloud-haired mama's bedtime tales. Alphenlicht. Surprising, really. She had known it was a real place, but she had never thought of it as real until this moment. Alphenlicht. Zahmani. "This," she sang to herself as she scrambled eggs, "would be interesting to know more about."

When she left the apartment, her hair was knotted on her neck, she was dressed in a soft sweater and tweedy skirt, and the place was orderly behind her. She checked to see that she had her key, the Box nudging her foot while she ignored it, refused to see it. Instead, she shut her eyes, turned to face the room, then popped her eyes open. She did this every morning to convince herself that she had not dreamed the place, every morning doubting for a moment that it would be there. Was the paint still the dreamed-on color? Were the drapes still soft

around the windows, curtains moving just a little in the breeze? No rain today, so she left the window open an inch to let the spring in and find it there when she returned. "I love you, room," she whispered to it before leaving it. "I will bring you a pot of crocuses tonight." Purple ones. In a blue glazed pot. She could see them in her head, as though they were already on the window seat, surrounded by the cushions.

Back in the unremembered time, there had been a window seat with cushions where Marianne had nested like a fledgling bird. Cloud-haired mama had teased Harvey, sometimes, and urged him to sit on the window seat with them and listen to her stories. Marianne had been hiding in the cushions of the

window seat the day she had heard Mama speaking to Harvey in the exasperated voice she sometimes used. "Harvey, please, my dear, find yourself a nice girl your own age and stop this nonsense. I am deeply in love with your father, and I could not possibly be interested in a boy your age even if I were twenty again." Of course, there had only been seven years' difference in their ages, Marianne reminded herself. Though Papa had been forty-three, Mama had been only twenty-seven and Harvey had been twenty. Harvey had been different then; he had been handsome as a prince, and kind, and they had

sometimes gone riding together. She shut down the thought before it started. "Begone," she muttered to the memory. "Be burned, buried, gone." It was her own do-it-yourself enchantment, a kind of self-hypnosis, substitute for God knew how many thousand dollars worth of psychotherapy. It worked. The memory ducked its head and was gone, and as she left the room, she was humming.

At the confluence of three sidewalks, the library notice board was always good for one or two order points. The bulletin board was always rigorously correct; there were only current items upon it; matters of more than passing interest were decorously sleeved in plastic, even behind the sheltering glass, to avoid the appearance of having been handled or read. Marianne sometimes envisioned a crew of compulsive, tenured gnomes arriving each night to update the library bulletin board. Though she had worked at the library for five years now, she had never seen anyone prepare anything for the board or post it there. She preferred her own concept to the possible truth and did not ask about it.

"Order, one; confusion, one. Score, even," she said to herself. The bulletin board was in some respects an analogue of her own life as she sought to have it; neatly arranged, efficiently organized, ruthlessly protected. There were no sentimental posters left over from sweeter seasons, no cartoons savoring ephemeral causes, no self-serving announcements by unnec-

essary committees. There were only statements of facts in the fewest possible, well chosen words. She scrutinized it closely, finding no fault in it except that it was dull-a fact which she ignored. It was, in fact, so dull that she almost missed the announcement.

"Department of Anthropology: Spring Lecture Series, Journeys in Ethnography. M. A. Zahmani, Magian Survivals in Modern Alphenlicht. April 16,12:30 p.m.-2:00 p.m. Granville Lecture Hall."

She felt an immediate compulsion to call Harvey and tell him that a namesake of theirs was to give a lecture in three hours' time on a subject dear to Harvey's heart. Not only a namesake, but a Prime Minister. The impulse gave way at once to sober second thought. Harvey would be in class at the moment. Or, if not in class, he would be in his office persuading some nubile candidate for a postgraduate degree that her thesis would be immeasurably enhanced by experiencing a field trip for the summer in company with "Call Me Har" Zahmani. While he might be interested in learning of the visiting lecturer, he would certainly be annoyed at being interrupted. Whatever Harvey might be doing, he was always annoyed-as well she knew-at being interrupted. On the other hand, if she did not

tell him and he read about it, as he would, in some journal or other or even, heaven help her, in the daily paper, then she could expect one of those superior, unpleasant phone calls. "One would think, Marianne, that with no more on your mind than your own not very distinguished academic work, you might remember that it is my field...."

No. Far better to call his apartment and leave a lighthearted-sounding message on his machine. Then he would have been told and would not have palpable grounds for offense. Which did not mean he would not contrive some such grounds, but she wouldn't have made it easy for him. She lifted her head in unconscious dismissal. Thinking her way around her half brother often required that kind of dismissal. Meantime, should she or should she not go to the lecture herself? Alphenlicht wasn't her subject as it was Harvey's-he had traveled there the same summer Mama had died. He had talked about it since then, mockingly, and about the Cave of Light. Well. Flip mental coin. Rock back and forth on heels and toes. Bite lip. Why not, after all? She'd had a large breakfast; she'd simply skip lunch.

And with that it was back to the wars, the library stacks, the endless supply of books to be found, shelved, located, relocated, repaired, and otherwise dealt with. The work.did

not pay well, but it was steady and quiet; it did not require an extensive wardrobe or the expense of socializing. There were no men to be avoided, to be wary of, or suspicious of. No office parties. The head librarian did have the habit of indulging in endless, autobiographical monologues, sometimes of astonishing intimacy, in Marianne's hearing, but with practice they could be ignored. There were no collections for weddings or babies. In the library, Marianne was anonymous, virtually unseen. It was a cheap, calm place to work, and Marianne valued it for what it was.

At a quarter past noon she left her work, smoothing her sleeves over wrists still damp from a quick wash up. Granville was a small lecture hall, which meant they did not expect a crowd. She moved through the clots of people on the steps, dodging clouds of cigarette smoke, to find a place near the front of the hushed hall. The speaker came in with several other people, probably people from the Anthropology Department. His face was turned away, the outline of his head giving Marianne a queer, skittish feeling, as the department spokesman mounted the podium to mumble a few words of introduction, sotto voce, like a troubled bee. Then the speaker turned to mount the platform and she thought in revulsive panic, "My God, it is Harvey! They got the initials wrong!" Only to see that no, it was someone else after all. Her heart began to slow. The choked, suffocated feeling began to fade. The first words

assured her that it was someone else. Harvey's voice was brittle, sharp, full of small cutting edges and sly humors. This man's voice covered the audience like brocade, rich and glittering.

"My name is Makr Avehl Zahmani. In my small country, which you Westerners call Alphenlicht because of an innocent mistake made by an eighteenth-century German geographer, I am what you would call a Prime Minister. In a country so small as Alphenlicht, this is no great office, though it is an honorable one which has been hereditary to my family for almost seventeen centuries..."

Hereditary Prime Minister, thought Marianne, and so like my half brother they could have been clones. Look at him. The same hair. The same eyes. If Alphenlicht is indeed the old country from which we came, then you are of the line from which we sprang. Harvey wouldn't believe this. I don't think

I'll try to tell him. She looked down at the notes her hand had taken automatically, reading "Hereditary for seventeen centuries ..." Ah, surely that was an exaggeration, she thought, looking up to see his eyes upon her, as startled as hers had been to see him first. Then his lips bent upward in interested surprise and went on speaking even as his look fastened her to her seat and told her not to move until there was time to settle

this thing, this thing he had recognized.

"There is possibly only one force in human society which could have bound one family to so lengthy a course of public service. I speak, of course, of religion, and it is of the religion of Alphenlicht, the religion of our people, that I have been asked to speak to you today..."

Marianne's score between order and chaos was almost even for the week, and Marianne considered this among other things as she went on taking notes without thinking about it. If this man who looked so much like Harvey were like Harvey, then any further attention paid to him would push the confusion scores for the week-for the month-beyond any hope of recouping. However. She looked down to see her handwriting and to underline the word. However! The amusement she was hearing was not Harvey's kind of mockery. This man had a gentler mind, perhaps? He would not delight in tying knots in one just for the fun of it? Flip coin, she told herself, but not just yet. He's got some time to talk before I have to decide whether to run.

"Our people serve the god of time and space. Our name for this deity is Zurvan, One-Who-Includes-Everything. My own family name, Zahman, means 'space.' In the early centuries, B.C., during the height of the Persian Empire, our people were centered in the lands north of Ecbatana, among the Medes. We were known as the Magi..."

So this is a Magus? Black hair, a little long, flowing over his impeccable shirt collar. Narrow face, imperious nose, high arching, very mobile brows. Sensual mouth, she thought, followed at once by the enchantment words, buried, burned, gone. She would not think about sensual mouths. She wrote 'Magi,' underlined it twice, then looked up to find his eyes eagerly upon her again. His chin was paler than the rest of his face, as though he had recently shaved a beard. She narrowed her eyes to imagine him with a beard, and a picture flashed-glittering robes, tall hat, beard in oiled ringlets. She shook her head to rid it of this We-Three-Kings stuff. Beard, she wrote, question mark. Why did he go on looking at her like that?

Because, said the internal monitor, the one Marianne called old sexless-logical, just as you recognize a family likeness in him, he recognizes one in you. Obviously.

Obviously, she wrote, listening.

"Our religion is monotheistic, though not sexist, for Zurvan is both male and female. In our own language, we have pronouns which convey this omni-sexuality (I say 'omni' to allow for the possible discovery of some extra terrestrial race which needs more than two)"-polite laughter from audience-"but in your language you must make allowances when I say 'from

his womb'..."

Wombmates, she wrote busily, then scratched it out. Allowing for the difference in sex, it was possible he recognized her in the same way she had recognized him. Same eyes, nose, hair, eyebrows. Same mouth.

"We recognized many attributes of this divine unity, but there was a tendency for this recognition to be corrupted into mere idolatry or a pervasive dualism. This was convenient for kings who needed to incorporate all the little godlets of the conquered into the state religion. There began to be priests and prophets, some even calling themselves Magi, who turned away from the pure, historic religion."

He's about forty, she thought. Maybe a few years older than that. The same age as Harvey. Who should have remained an only child. Who would have remained an only child except that Papa Zahmani fell for my Cloud-haired mama and the two of them went off into eternity, unfortunately leaving me behind. From Harvey's point of view. Not that he had ever actually said anything of the kind.

"In the third century A.D. there were widespread charges of heresy brought by one Karder, a priest serving the current Sassanid king. Karder espoused a more liberal faith, one which could incorporate any number of political realities. He and the king found the Zurvanian Magi difficult to... ah, manipulate. The charges of heresy were made first, on the grounds that the king's religion was the correct one, and the persecutions came

after. My people fled north, into the mountains..."

He was turning to the map on the easel, putting on glasses to peer at it a little nearsightedly, taking them off to twiddle them, like Professor Frank in ethno-geography. Like old Williams. Lord, he could be any teacher, any professor. Why did she feel this fascination?

"The area is now called Kurdistan, near what was Armenia. The borders of many modern nations twist themselves together in this region-Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, the U.S.S.R.-of which I will have more to say later. In the midst of this tangled, inaccessible region, my people established a theocracy a millenium and three quarters ago. There were no roads into the country then. There is one entering our country now, from the vicinity of Van, in Turkey. There is another, not so good, from the area around Lake Urmia in Iran. We have no airport, though we have improved the road during the last decades, to accommodate those who seek the Cave of Light..."

If he talks about the Cave of Light as endlessly as Harvey talks about the Cave of Light, I will simply get up in a dignified manner and leave, she thought. As though I have to get to class. As though I were late for an appointment with the dean. He went on talking about the Cave of Light, and she didn't

move. Her hand went on taking notes, quietly, automatically, while she sat there and let the words flow through. Harvey called the Cave of Light a kind of historic Ouija board. Makr Avehl Zahmani obviously thought it was more than that-a good deal more than that. I can't be taking this seriously, she thought. Magi, for God's sake. Magians, magicians, magic. Lord.

"Several generations ago the czars of Russia extended their borders in several areas. One such extension cut our small country into two parts. The northern third of it was gobbled up into Russia and renamed Lubovosk. The Magi who live in Lubovosk are still our people, our separated people. They now have their own charges of heresy to contend with. In seventeen hundred years not that much has changed. Now, I have used my allotted time. If any of you have questions, please feel free to come forward and ask them of me."

She did not move during the light, appreciative applause. He had been a good speaker. The hall emptied. A half-dozen argumentative students went forward to pick at details of his talk. She sat. Even when the arguers went away and the speaker came toward her, she sat as he scanned her face quarter inch by quarter inch, shivering between smile and frown.

"My dear young woman," he said, "I believe we must be related."

She could not afterward remember quite how it happened that she accompanied him to the only good restaurant nearby and found herself drinking a third or fourth glass of wine as she finished her dessert. She seemed to have been listening to him for hours as he sparkled and glittered, telling her marvelous things about marvelous places and people. Something he said made her comment on her game of muddle versus order and her lifetime cumulative score.

"Confusion is winning," she admitted. "Not so far ahead that one gives up all hope, but far enough to make me very anxious. It uses up a lot of energy."

"Ah," he said, wiping his lips with his napkin before reaching out to touch her hand. "Do your rules allow transfer of points?"

"I don't understand. What do you mean, transfer?"

"Well, my own lifetime cumulative score is somewhat better than yours. I have several thousand points ahead for order. Of course, I have an advantage because of the Cave of Light- no. Don't say that you don't believe in it, or that it's all terribly interesting, but.... All that isn't really relevant. I simply want to know if your rules allow transfer of points, because, if they do, I will transfer a thousand points to you. This will take off the immediate pressure, and perhaps you can strengthen your

position sufficiently to mount a counterattack."

If there had been any hint of amusement in his voice, even of a teasing sort, she would have laughed politely and-what? Accepted? Rejected? Said something about one having to play one's own hand? The surface Marianne, well educated in the superficial social graces, could have handled that. However, this did not sound like a social offer. The tone was that of an arms control negotiator placing before the assembly the position of his government. It reminded her that she was speaking with a Prime Minister, all too seriously, and yet how wonderful to be ahead for a while. A gift of such magnitude, however, might carry an obligation. Begone, buried, she whispered to herself.

"It's too much," she whispered to him, completely serious. "I might not be able to repay."

"Kinswoman," he said, laying his hand upon hers, the tingle of that contact moving into her like a small lightning stroke, shocking and intimate. "Kinswoman, there is no obligation. Believe me. If you know nothing else of me, if we do not meet again, know this of me. There is no obligation."

"But-a thousand. So much?"

"It is important to me that my kinswoman win her battles, that she be decisively ahead. That she be winning and know

herself to be winning."

"But it wouldn't be me who was winning."

"Nonsense. If a gunner at the top of a hill uses all his ammunition and an ally rushes ammunition to him at a critical time, it is still the gunner who wins if he keeps his head and uses all his skill. He has merely been reinforced. We are kinsmen, therefore allies. You will forgive me if I do not say 'kinspersons.' I learned my English in a more elegant setting, in a more elegant time. However, you need not decide at this moment. Merely remember that it is important to me that you win. There is no obligation beyond that. You would favor me by accepting." And he left the subject, to talk instead of Alphenlicht, of his boyhood there, being light and gracious.

When they parted, it was like waking from a dream. Fragments of their conversation fled across her mind only to dissipate. The lecture hall, the restaurant assumed dream scale and color. When she turned to see the restaurant still behind her, solid and ordinary as any other building on the street, it was with a sense of detached unreality. She attended a class, took notes, entered into the discussion, and did not remember it five minutes later. She went to her apartment, stopping on the way to shop for food and milk, and stood inside it holding the paper sack without knowing where she was. It was a square, white envelope on the carpet that brought her to herself at last, her name written on it in a quick, powerful hand. The message read, "I have transferred one thousand order points to you. If

you do not wish to receive them, you may return them to me. May I have the pleasure of your company at dinner on Thursday night? I will call you tomorrow. Makr Avehl."

When she touched the envelope, she received the same tingling shock she had felt from his hand, but as she read the words, most of the cloudy confusion vanished.

"He did give me a thousand points," she told herself, knowing with certainty that it was true. "I've got them, I can tell I have," knowing that she not only had them but had accepted them. If she had not had them, she would have been too confused to accept them. Now that she had them, she knew she would keep them. "It's like an anti-depressant," she said to herself, caroling, doing a little jig on the carpet so that the groceries ripped their way through the bottom of the brown bag and rolled about on the rug, oranges and lemons and brown-and-serve rolls. "Before you take it, you're too depressed to want it. After you take it, you know it was what you needed."

There was, of course, one small confusion. Her door had been tightly locked. No one had a key except herself. How, then, had the square white envelope come to rest in the middle of the carpet, where she could not fail to see it but where no one could possibly have put it?

Magus, she hummed. Magi, Magian, Magician.

THERE WAS A knock at the door. Someone turned the knob and Marianne heard Mrs. Winesap's voice.

"Girl? I heard you coming in. Someone brought you a pretty." Mrs. Winesap was addicted to slightly regional speech, the region in question varying from day to day so that Marianne was never sure whether the woman was from the South, West, or New England states. On occasion, Mrs. Winesap's speech approached an Elizabethan richness, and Marianne thought the true source of her changing accent might be overdoses of BBC period imports.

"Mrs. Winesap. Come on in. What is it?"

"Crocuses," the woman replied. "In a pretty pot. A man brought them. I was out front, and he came along looking lost, so I asked him who he was looking for. After he told me they were for you, we got to talking. I thought at first he might be your brother, there being a family resemblance and my eyes not being that good. Then I knew that was silly, your brother being the kind of person he is and all."

Marianne had never discussed Harvey with Mrs. Winesap that she could recall, and her attention was so fixed on the gift

that she completely missed the implications of this statement. Mrs. Winesap often seemed to know a great deal about Harvey or, perhaps more accurately, knew a great deal about people and things that affected Marianne.

"The man who brought these is... he's a kind of cousin, I guess, Mrs. Winesap. I met him today. It was nice of him to be so thoughtful." The crocuses were precisely as she had visualized them, purple ones, in a glazed pot of deepest, persian blue."Same name as yours, so I guessed he was some kind of kin," commented Mrs. Winesap. "Anyhow, he left the flowers with me after he made me promise six times I'd see you got them as soon as you got home. Seemed like a very determined sort of person. You got something cold to drink, Marianne? I been moving that dirt out back, and it's hotter'n Hades for April."

Marianne hid a smile as she went to the refrigerator. It was true that Mrs. Winesap was a bit dirt-smeared, and also true that she was largely responsible for the emerging order in the garden, but it was not even warm for April, much less hot. Mrs. Winesap simply wanted to talk.

"Larkin bought an edger at the flea market. Paid a dollar and a half for it. Want to go halfies?" This was rhetorical. Mr. Larkin would present Marianne with a written bill for

seventy-five cents, which Marianne would pay without demur. Sometimes Marianne believed that the two downstairs tenants suspected Marianne owned the place and were playing a game with her. Other times she was sure they had no idea. Whatever their suspicions or lack thereof, they had decided that garden maintenance was to be their particular responsibility, and that the upstairs tenant should pay what they delighted in calling "halfies." Since the expenditures never exceeded two or three dollars at a time, Marianne managed to cope.

"An edger?" she asked.

"You know. A flat blade on a handle, to cut the grass straight where it comes along the flower garden. It was all rusty is how come he got it so cheap. You know Larkin. Give him something rusty and he's happy as a clam all day cleaning it up. Does your brother know this cousin of yours?"

As usual with Mrs. Winesap's more personal inquiries, the question caught Marianne completely by surprise and she answered it before she thought. "No. I just met him today myself."

"Ah," said Mrs. Winesap with deep satisfaction. "So you'll have to call your brother and tell him about it. About meeting a new relative and all."

The emotion Marianne felt was the usual one, half laughter,

half indignation. Her response was also the usual one: dignified, slightly cool. "Yes, as a matter of fact, I was just going to call Harvey, Mrs. Winesap. Take that soda along with you. I do need to catch him before he leaves for the evening...." Polite, firmly shutting door behind her visitor, Marianne fought down the urge to peer through the keyhole at the landing in fear she might see Mrs. Winesap's eye peering back at her. Instead she went to the phone, moved both by her assertion and the need to leave some kind of message.

Harvey always considered it an intrusion for Marianne to tell him anything. Nonetheless, he would deeply resent not being told. A quick message on his machine would be the least risky way of informing him, and if she avoided answering the phone for a while after that, he might see Makr Avehl Zahmani's name on the news and realize that Marianne was, in fact, only telling him the truth. It was part of Harvey's usual treatment of her to accuse her of making up stories, as though she were still seven years old, and once committed to the assertion that she was fabricating it would be hard for him to back off. She encouraged herself to take a deep breath and do it, managing to make the message sound calm and good-humored. She unplugged the phone with a sense of relief. She didn't want to hear it ring if he called her back.

"I am ahead on points," she told herself. "Well ahead, and I have no intention of ever getting behind again." She tried the

pot of crocuses in various places, finally putting them on the window seat as she had originally intended, then threw together a few scrappy bites of supper. When she had finished, she started to take the dishes into the kitchen, stumbling unexpectedly over something which was not supposed to be there.

The Box.

It was at the edge of the kitchen counter, where she could not avoid stepping over it, where she must have already stepped over it while preparing her meal without seeing it, without remembering. She stared at it in confusion. That morning-yes, that morning it had been in the living room under the coffee table. Who could have moved it? Mrs. Winesap? Perhaps out of some desire to help, some instinct to tidy up? With a grimace of actual pain she lifted it back to the place she last remembered it being, half under the table, possessed in that moment by a completely superstitious awe and fear.

The Box was a symbolic embodyment of Harvey-ness. If she gave him cause for disturbance up in Boston, then the Box would take it out on her down here in Virginia. She knew this was ridiculous but was as firmly convinced of it as she was of her own name. Her mood of valiant contentment destroyed, she went about her evening chores in a mood of dogged irri-

tation. Sounds bothered her. Traffic. Mrs. Winesap rattling the trash cans. Doors closing. A phone ringing. Mrs. Winesap laboring up the stairs and a repetition of that firm, brook-no-nonsense knock, the knob turning, her voice.

"Girl, your brother called our phone. Says he's been trying to reach you and can't get an answer." Broad face poked around the edge of the door, eyes frankly curious as the face was frankly friendly.

"Oh-shit," said Marianne, breaking her own rules concerning language and behavior.

Mrs. Winesap pulled a parody of shock over her face. She had heard Marianne's lecture on scatology directed more than once at Mr. Larkin. "Got the phone unplugged, haven't you?"

Marianne nodded in dismal annoyance. "How did he know to call you? He's never been here. He's never even met you."

"Yes, he did. Came by one day about two weeks ago. Told me he was your brother. Introduced himself. Course, I introduced myself back. We talked some."

"You... talked some."

"I told him it was a nice day," she reported with dignity, "and I told him you weren't in your apartment but I'd be glad to take a message. He pumped me all about you, and I let him know I was blind in both eyes and couldn't hear out of either ear. Did tell him my name, though, and I'm in the book."

"You never told me."

"No reason to. Why upset you? I didn't like him, so I figured

you probably didn't either. He was all over sparkle like a merry-go-round horse, expecting anyone with a-with breasts to fall down and play dead."

"Oh." This was precisely Marianne's view of Harvey, but she had not thought it generally shared. This explained why Mrs. Winesap had at first thought Makr Avehl was her brother. "So, he knew your name and looked you up in the book."

"Most likely. Anyhow, just now I told him the reason you didn't answer was you weren't in and I'd be glad to leave a message for you to call him. Consider message delivered. OK? Seemed best."

"Thanks, Mrs. Winesap."

"One of these days, girl, you'll get tired of calling me 'Mrs. Winesap,' and the name 'Letitia' will just slip out. I won't mind, whenever that is." She shut the door firmly behind her, leaving Marianne in some limbo between laughter and tears.

The door opened again to allow Mrs. Winesap to deliver herself of an utterance.

"Marianne, whatever it is you don't like about that man, brother or not, you got a right. Don't you sit up here feeling guilty because you don't like him."

This time tears won.

Oh, yes, she did feel guilty about it. The only family she had left, the only kin, and she frequently wanted him gone. "Begone, burned, buried," she chanted quietly. If there was any actual guilt, it was Harvey's, not Marianne's, but knowing this didn't seem to make the horrid nagging weight of it any easier. She often tried to reduce the whole conflict to one of disparate personalities. "He is domineering," she told herself, "and authoritarian. He relishes power, and he uses it, but he is not some all-devouring monster." Saying this did not convince her this time any more than it had before.

"So, I'll return his call," she told herself, plugging in the phone and tapping his number with hesitant fingers.

"Harvey? Returning your call?" She listened with suppressed, seething warmth as he complained that she had not been in earlier, that she should not leave messages on his machine unless she would be available to take a call, that-.

"Harvey, I am sorry. I didn't intend that you should have to take the trouble to call me. I just wanted you to know about the Zahmani Prime Minister from Alphenlicht. I thought you'd be interested."

Oily sweet, the voice she hated. "Bitsy? Are you playing one of those infantile 'let's pretend' games again?"

She heard her own voice replying, "Harvey, hold on a moment, will you? Someone's at the door." She took a deep breath, strode to the door, opened it, closed it, mumbled to herself, struck the wall with her hand. Her usual response to him under like circumstances would have been something full of self-doubt, something cringing. Harvey, I don't think so. He really did look as though he was related. He really did say...

She returned to the phone. "Harve. Someone has come and I have to go now. If you catch the news tonight or tomorrow, you'll probably see the Prime Minister on it. He's here to speak at the U.N. Sorry I have to run." And hung up on Harvey S. Zahmani without waiting for permission.

He would not want to appear foolish, not even to her. Give him time to find out that what she had told him was the simple truth, and he'd be less likely to take some irrevocably punitive decision about money matters-always his last argument when others failed. She unplugged the phone again, resolving not to connect herself to the world again until morning. "One more point for order," she sighed. "Score for order, for the day, one thousand and one."

In the morning, she forgot to connect the phone. When she got home, it was ringing. There was no time to think who? How? She knew it was Makr Avehl and answered it without a qualm. "Thank you for the flowers," she said, her voice slipping sideways into childlike pleasure.

"You said you intended to shop for some," he replied, "but I knew you wouldn't have time yesterday if you were in class. I took most of your afternoon, so it was only proper to repay." His voice was enthusiastic, warm. It changed suddenly. "I was in New York today, at the U.N. I met your brother. He's very like you in appearance."

"Harvey's in Boston," she said. "Not at the U.N. You can't have-"

"Sorry," he laughed. "I didn't lead up to it. A woman named Madame Delubovoska and I are on opposite sides of a very small international issue. Madame and I are related. Madame, it turns out, is your half-brother's aunt, his mother's much younger sister. Today, in New York, your half-brother was visiting his aunt and I met him. Is that somewhat more clear? I said he much resembled you."

"It's you he resembles, actually. When I first saw you, I thought you were Harvey."

"That's true. You even said so." There was a long silence, a calculating silence. "Marianne, may I come see you?"

"You're in New York."

"No. I was in New York. I'm about two blocks from you, in a phone booth."

"Well, of course. Yes. Can you find the house-oh, you've already been here once."

"I'll find you." Dry-voiced, humorous, amused at her confusion. She put her hands against her flaming face. It took practice to behave with calm and poise around men like Makr Avehl-around men at all. Marianne had not practiced, had no intention of practicing, for she had decided not to need such skill. She told herself that just now her concerns were housewifely. She hadn't dusted, hadn't vacuumed since the weekend. Well, it didn't look cluttered, except for the Box. Better leave it, even if he noticed it.

There was nothing in the house to offer him except some sherry and cheese and crackers. Well, he couldn't complain, dropping in unexpectedly this way. Quick look in the mirror, quick wash up of hands and face. No time for makeup. No need with that hectic flush on lips and cheeks. "Lord," she thought, "one would think I had never had anyone drop in before." A moment's thought would have told her the truth of this. There had been no one to drop in. Except for Mrs. Winesap. And the plumber. And the phone man. And people of that ilk. The stairs creaked outside her door.

He stood there in a soft shirt and jeans, not at all like a Prime Minister, perhaps more like her childhood dream of a fairy tale prince.

"You didn't bring your horse and lance," she said, caught up in the fantasy.

"The joust isn't until later," he replied, "unless you have a dragon you want skewered in the next half hour?" She was so involved in the story she was telling herself that it did not seem in the least remarkable that he had read her mind. Laughing, she waved him in.

They drank sherry and ate cheese. Makr Avehl sprawled on the window seat and waved his finger in her face as he lectured on the day's events. "I made my speech. Madame made her speech. Neither of us convinced the other. I will now bore you greatly by telling you what the dispute is about?" There was an interrogative silence, not long, for she was happy to let him carry the burden of their conversation. "Madame and I are cousins, of the same lineage, you understand. When our land was cut into two parts in the last century-as the result of some minor Czarist expansion or other, utterly unimportant and long forgotten except to those of us directly involved-Tahiti's great-grandfather was in the northern piece of the country and my great-grandfather was in the southern part. They were brothers. You heard my little speech the other day, so you know that Alphenlicht is a theocracy." He bit a cracker noisily, examining her face. "Don't wrinkle your nose so. There are nice theocracies, and ours is one. We are not reactionary or au-

thoritarian; we do not insist upon conformity or observation of taboos." He raised one triangular brow at her, giving her a brilliant smile, and she felt herself turning to hot liquid from her navel to her knees as her face flamed.

She rose, made unnecessary trips with glasses, ran cold water over her wrists in the kitchen.

He went on. "At any rate, in the southern half of Alphenlicht, things went on very much as they had for a very long time. We did begin sending some of our young people out of the country to be educated, and we did begin to import some engineers to do modem things like building roads and bridges. We also imported a few motor vehicles, though certain of the Kavi, that is, members of the priesthood, questioned that much innovation."

"I thought you said you were not reactionary?" She managed to sound matter-of-fact rather than sultry, with some effort.

"Oh, it wasn't a question of religion. It was a question of aesthetics. Some members of the Council simply felt that cars and trucks smelled very bad. There were long arguments concerning utility versus aesthetics. I've read them. Very dull.

"To continue with my tale: The narrow pass which connected Alphenlicht and Lubovosk was controlled by Russian border

guards. Over the past hundred years interaction between the two parts of the country has been very much restricted. Access to the Cave of Light has been almost impossible for people from the north. Since they had been accustomed to using the cave, they evolved their own substitutes. People do find ways to get answers to important questions. Theirs involved a heavy admixture of shamanistic influences."

"I thought shamans were from-oh, the far north."

"Some are. Some are found in Turkey. The black shamans who came to Lubovosk did happen to be from the far north. Well, at this point we may make a long story short. Four generations after the separation, a group of people in Lubovosk, supported by the U.S.S.R. for obvious reasons, has decided that Lubovosk, not Alphenlicht, is the true heir to the religious leadership of both countries. They base this on the fact that Madame's great-grandfather was my great-grandfather's older brother. They conveniently ignore the fact that after several generations of re-education and shamanistic influences, there's no one in Lubovosk who even pretends to believe in religion, a prerequisite, one would think, if a theocracy is to work. The U.S. State Department supports us, of course. Russia supports Lubovosk's ridiculous claim. No one else cares. So we have gone through this charade. When it was all over, some of the delegates woke up and went on with their business. Everyone was very bored. The only two people present who took it

seriously were Madame and I. Do you know Tahiti? She is named, by the way, for the fire goddess of our ancestors. Not inappropriately."

"Madame Delubovoska? No. I never knew she existed until a few days ago."

"As I told you, she is a kind of back side kin of yours. You can imagine how surprised I was when she introduced Professor Zahmani to me. I knew at once who he was, of course, for you had told me about him."

"Not too much, I hope," she said in astonishment. "I certainly never thought you'd meet him...."

"Ah. Well, it turned out fortuitously. I had just invited Madame to the country place we have taken here when she introduced me to your brother. So I invited him as well, intending that you, also, should be my guest."

"Oh. With... Harvey? I don't..." She did not know what to say. The thought stunned and horrified her, and her voice betrayed the emotions. There was a strained silence.

"I see I have made a mistake," he said with obvious discomfort and an expression almost of dismay. "There is something awkward? You do not like him?"

"I-I'm probably very childish. It's just-he's quite a bit

older than I. He was left rather in charge of my affairs when Papa Zahmani died. He is not..."

"Not sympathetic."

"No. No, you may truthfully say that he is not sympathetic. Not where his little sister is concerned."

"But it's more than that? Even when I said I had met him, there was a certain quality in your silence. It is something which makes you reluctant to meet him at all?"

"It is awkward," she admitted. "Sometimes I interpret things he does and says as-threatening. He may not intend them in that way. And yet..."

He was looking at her in a curiously intent way, not intimately, more as though he found her a fascinating item of study. The perusal did not make her feel insulted or invaded, as men's thoughtful glances sometimes did, but she felt the questing pressure of his gaze as an urgent interest, impossible to ignore. It was suddenly important that he know how she felt... and why. Particularly why.

She reached down and tugged the Box from beneath the table, pushing it toward him so that it rested against his well polished shoes. "Look in that. Everything in there is something Harvey has given me over the last several years. Presents. Together with suggestions as to where to display them. I couldn't... couldn't bring myself to put them out, not here, so I've kept them in this box."

He put down his glass. She had not sealed the Box, but had

merely closed the cardboard carton by folding the top together. He opened it and drew out the two framed prints which lay on top, setting them side by side against the table and regarding them with the same intent gaze he had focused on her.

To the right was a cheaply framed print of an Escher lithograph, an endless ribbon of black fishes and white birds swimming in space, at one end the black figures emerging, at the other the white, coming forward from two dimensions into three, from shadow shapes into breathing reality, one white bird flying free of the pattern only to be cruelly killed by the devilish fangs of the metallic black fish.

"It bothered me when he gave it to me. So, one day at the library, I looked it up," she said, trying to be unemotional. Everything in her screamed anger at the black fish, but she was so long experienced in swallowing her anger that she believed it did not show. "The artist wrote that the bird was all innocence, doomed to destruction. Not exactly cheerful, but by itself it shouldn't have made me feel as unpleasant as I did. Then I got the other one..."

He turned his attention to the other print, this one of a painting. "Paul Delvaux," murmured Makr Avehl. "Titled Chrysis. Well."

A naked girl stood on a lonely platform at the edge of an abandoned town, a blonde, her scanty pubic hair scarcely shadowing her crotch, eyes downcast, lacy robe draped behind her as though just fallen from her shoulders, right hand holding a lighted candle. To the left of the picture a floodlight threw hard shadows against a dark building. On a distant siding, a freight car crouched, red lights on it gleaming like hungry, feral eyes in the dark.

"She's like the white bird in the other picture," Marianne said. "All alone. Totally vulnerable. She has no protection at all. Nothing. Someone horrible is coming. You can tell she knows it. She is trying to pretend that she is dreaming, but she isn't."

"Ah," he said. "Is there more?"

She reached into the bottom of the Box to pull out the little carvings of ivory, basalt, soaps tone. Eskimo and Bantu and old, old oriental. Strange, hulked shapes, little demons. Another black fish. A white skull-faced ghost. An ebony devil. A small ornamented bag made of stained and tattered skin with some dry, whispery material inside. "I don't know what's in it," she said, apologetically. "I didn't want to open it. Harvey said it was a witch bag. Something from Siberia? I think his card said it belonged to a shaman."

"Yes," said Makr Avehl soberly. "I should think it probably did. And should never have left Siberia. It is black shamans from there who have come to Lubovosk."

"All these things are interesting, in a way. Even the little bag, colored and patterned the way it is. I feel a little guilty to be so ungrateful for them. It's just-Harvey had never given me gifts before. Not even cards on my birthday. And then, suddenly, to give me such strange things, which make me feel so odd...."

"What did he suggest you do with them?" Makr Avehl's voice had a curious flatness, almost a repressed distaste, as though he smelled something rotten but was too polite to say anything about it.

"When he gave me the picture of the fish and the birds, he told me to hang it on the wall in my bedroom-he hadn't been here, but I told him I had a one bedroom apartment. Then, later, when he gave me the other one, he said to hang it in the living room. The other things were to be put on my desk or bookshelves. Of course, since he hadn't been here, he didn't really know what it's like...."

"It's a very pleasant apartment," he commented, looking about him as he packed the things back into the Box. "You've done most of it yourself, haven't you?"

"How did you know? Does it look that amateurish?"

"Not in that sense. Amateur in the sense of one who loves something, yes. I was a student in this country for a while, and I know what the usual kind of apartments available to students are like. They are not like this."

She flushed. "I guess I do love it. I hadn't had any place of my own since Clou-since Mother died. It was important to me."

"You started to call her something else."

"Just-a kind of fairy tale name." Ordinarily, Marianne did not confide in people, certainly not on short acquaintance, but the focused, intent quality in his interest wiped away her reticence. "I always called her Cloud-haired mama, and she called me Mist Princess. It was only a kind of story telling, role playing, I guess. We were alone a lot of the time. Papa was away. Harvey was at school, mostly. Lately I have remembered that she was only four or five years older than I am now, and yet I still feel like such a child most of the time. So-she wasn't too old for fairy tales, even then."

"Ah. But despite your enjoyment of fairy tales, you do not like the pictures and these little carvings."

"I don't. They make me feel-oh, slimy. Does that make sense to you? I felt it, but didn't understand it."

"Oh, yes." Flat voice. "It makes sense. Of a kind. Would you mind terribly if I took these away with me? I'll return them, or something like them. Something you'll be more comfortable with. Since your brother does not visit you, he is unlikely to care. The sense of his gifts will be maintained." He closed the Box firmly on its contents. "Now, what are we going to do about the weekend?"

She smiled, made a little, helpless gesture. "I don't want to seem stubborn or childish, really, but I think it might be better if I didn't accept your invitation."

"That makes me sad. It's obvious to me that I've made a miscalculation. Tahiti and I are old adversaries, and her I invited out of bravado. My own sister, Ellat, will be peeved with me. She often tells me my desire for bravura effect will get me in trouble, and she is often right. Whenever I am full of pride, I am brought low. What is your proverb-Pride goeth before a fall? Well, so I am fallen upon grievous times. Because I had invited her, I invited him, because I wanted you. I will now have a guest I did not much want in the place of one I had very much wanted, for I know you would enjoy it. Can I beg you? Importune you?"

Curiosity and apprehension were strangely mingled, and yet her habitual caution could not be so easily overcome. The thought of spending a weekend in Harvey's company, among strangers. Strangers. She reminded herself firmly that the man sitting so intimately opposite her was a stranger. Charming,

yes. So could Harvey be. Seemingly interested in her as a reality, not merely as an adjunct to himself-but then, how could one tell? "I-I'd like to think about it. Perhaps I could give you an answer later in the week?"

He had the courtesy to look disappointed but not accusing and to convey by a tilted smile that he knew the difference. "Of course you may. And you must not feel any pressure of courtesy to agree if it will make you more uncomfortable than the pleasure the visit might afford you. Everything is a balance, isn't that so?" He stood up, shifted his shoulders as though readying them for some weighty burden, toed the box at his feet."Now, there are things I must do. We do have a dinner date tomorrow, and I will return your belongings then. Someone told me of a place nearby where there is a native delicacy served. Something called a soft crab?"

"Soft-shelled crabs," she laughed. "You must mean Willard's. It's famous all up and down the coast."

"I shall find them very strange and quite edible," he announced. "Until tomorrow." At the door he touched her cheek with his lips, no more than an avuncular caress, a kind of parent to child kiss. Her skin flinched away from him, her face flamed, and she gave thanks for the darkness of the hall and

for the fact that he picked up the Box and left, not turning to look back at her as she shut the door between them.

She did not see him set the Box down on the stair and wipe his hands fastidiously on his handkerchief. Sweat beaded his upper lip, and he shook his head, mouth working, as though to spit away some foul taste. For a moment, when he had opened the Box, he had felt as though astray in nightmare. One did not expect to smell such corruption in the pleasant apartment of an innocent-oh, yes, make no mistake about that-innocent young woman. Yet he had smelled it, tasted it. Makr Avehl Zahmani had some experience with wickedness. As a leader of his people, it was part of his duty to diagnose evil and protect against it. What he felt rising from the Box had a skulking obscenity of purpose, a stench of decay. His face sheened with sweat at the self-control it took to lift the Box and carry it. He drew a pen from his pocket, used it to jot a quick shorthand of symbols and letters on each of the six faces of the Box. Then he picked it up once more, a bit more easily, throwing a quick glance over his shoulder at the door at the top of the stairs.

Behind that door, Marianne was conscious of nothing but shame and fear, shame at the feel of hard nipples pressing against her blouse, shame at the brooding, liquid heat in her groin, fear at the greedy demands of a desire which had ambushed her out of nowhere and was swallowing her into some

endless gut of hungry sensation.

She clung to the door, cringing under a lash of memory. There had been Cloud-haired mama dead in the next room, cold and white and forever gone. How did she die, Marianne had demanded, over and over. She was young! She wasn't sick! How could she have died? There had been no answers, not from Papa Zahmani, not from Harvey who had only looked at her strangely, expressionlessly, as though he did not know her. There had been whispering, shouts from behind closed doors, Dr. Brown saying, "I would have said she died of suffocation, Haurvatat. I can't explain it. I don't know why. Sometimes hearts just fail." And Marianne crying, crying endlessly, finally seeking Harvey out and throwing herself into his arms in the late, dark night.... And then had come the frightening thing. And after the housekeeper had come in and interrupted him, he had hissed at her, "Bitch princess. You're as soft and usable as your mad mama was...."

She leaned against the door, digging her nails into her palms. "I'm not like that!" she screamed at herself silently. "I'm not like that at all." Demon voices in her mind hissed, "Soft, usable, bitch!" An obscene heat enveloped her, and she was back in the old house, returned to Harvey's holding her, touch-

ing her, starting to undress her with fingers busy under her clothes, and herself responding to him in a kind of dazed frenzy which had no thought in it, no perception except of a hoped-for forgetfulness, a much desired unconsciousness. And then he had been interrupted, and the shame had come, the shame of his using Mama's name, defiling her death, defiling her child- and Mama's child involved in the defilement, cooperating in it. "No, no, no," she screamed now as she had then. "I am not like that. Mama wasn't like that. I won't, won't, won't!"

Somewhere inside herself she found the calmer voices. "This man is not Harvey. This man is someone else. He has Harvey's face, but he has not Harvey's sins. He is attractive, you are attracted, but this hot shame is only memory, Marianne. It is not now, not real, only memory. And you, Marianne, you are well enough alone. So. Stay alone, Marianne, and do not remember that time. And perhaps, someday, you will find it is forgotten."

She took her chastened self into the shower and then out

for a long, exhausting walk to weary even her tireless brain, a brain which kept trying by an exercise of pure persistence to make her wounds heal by cutting them deeper. For, of course, among all the other monsters was the monster of guilt, guilt

which said that she herself had been responsible, not the grown man but herself, the child, the woman who should have known better, for are not women supposed to know better? And if the twelve-year-old Marianne did not know better, then best for the twenty-five-year-old Marianne to work in the quiet library and attend the endless classes and have no male friends at all, for she, too, might not know better if put to the test. She would not go for the weekend, would not allow this feeling to take hold of her, would not allow her calm to be destroyed.

"Of course," her internal self reminded her, "you are not always so calm, Marianne. Sometimes in the deep night, you waken. Sometimes when the sheets are sensuously soft against your newly bathed skin. Sometimes in the midst of a TV show, when the young man and the young woman look at each other in that way-that way-then you are not so calm."

"Begone," she said wearily. "Burned, buried, begone." Usually the litany or the long walk let her sleep, but tonight she lay wakeful, dozing from time to time only to start awake again, until she gave up at last and took two of the little red pills Dr. Brown had given her. Her sleep was dark, dreamless, empty, and when morning came she was able to convince herself that the night's turmoil had been unreal and that she had not been mired in it at all.

She could not feel anticipation for the evening. Each time she thought of it, it loomed at the end of her day like a road marker, pointing to some unknown destination, evoking an

apprehension not so much for the destination itself as for the unfamiliar and possibly tedious journey it would take to reach it. She was familiar with the feeling, one which had served in the past to limit her society to the few, the necessary, and she felt ashamed of it without in any way being able to defeat it. Only when she came into her apartment at the end of the day to see the pot of crocuses on the window seat and feel the absence of the Box did she begin to feel a slight warming, a willingness to be graceful within the confines of her appre-

tension-perhaps even a willingness to move outside it toward pleasure if she could find a way.

"So, Marianne," she instructed herself, "you will not give him a dinner partner to shame him. He has done nothing at all to deserve that." It was a sense of pride which took her through the routines of bam and makeup, hairdress and clothing, and finally to the examination of self in the mirror. The dress had belonged to her mother, a simple, timeless gather of flowing silk, jade green in one light, twilight blue in another, utterly plain. The only dressy clothes she had were things salvaged from among Cloud-haired mama's things, trunks Papa had put in storage in her name, "Because you may want them someday, or may simply want to have them to remember her by." Some

had been too fashionable then to be useful now, but there were a few things like this-blouses and shirts, ageless skirts, a topcoat which might have been illustrated in the morning paper, a wonderful sweep of lacy wool stole which would serve as a wrap. The only clothes Marianne had purchased in the last four years had been underwear and two pairs of shoes. Everything else was left over from undergraduate days or made over from Mama's trunks. If it came to a choice between clothing and the tiles for the kitchen.... She smiled. There was no choice.

She looked good, she decided. Not marvelous or glorious or glamorous, but good. Clean, neat, attractive, and by no means shabby. So.

Turning then from the mirror, she saw the line of light run down the silk from the curve of her breast, the flush of red mounting to her cheeks. Her hands trembled as she tugged the softly rounded neckline a little higher on her shoulders. She hadn't chosen this dress to be... hadn't... had. "Didn't," she said defiantly. "Did not." She reached for the closet door to pick something thicker, less clinging, less...

Too late. She heard him coming up the stairs, the firm knock on the door. Put the best face on it possible.

He made it no easier for her. He stood back, obviously admiring her, his eyes lighting up. "You look wonderful, a water nymph-what is it? A naiad. The color suits you. It makes you glow as though you had candles lit inside." He

smiled, not knowing that the emotion he had roused in her was

a quiet anger, at him, at herself. "I've brought your box back."

Her mood of acceptance was waning, but he gave her no time to fret, placing the box on the table and opening it as he talked. "One Escher print," he said, busy unpacking. "One print of a Delvaux painting. One Eskimo carving, one Bantu carving, one bit of oriental charmery. One medicine pouch." He set them out for her as she stared.

The Escher print was of a fish rising to the top of still water where leaves rested on the ripples and bare trees laid their shattered reflections. The Delvaux painting was of two young women walking in a well-lit street, clothed in high-necked white dresses, lamps all about, a nearby house streaming with light from windows and doors. The Eskimo carving was of a bird, a confluence of curving lines which said nest, rest, peace. The ebony carving was of a happy frog, and the oriental bit was of two mice chewing their way through a nut. He laid a medicine pouch beside the pot of crocuses, a bit of fluffy ermine skin, eagle feathers tied to it with turquoise beads and bits of coral. "American Indian," he said. "How does this collection of things suit you?"

She considered them. Each of them separately was pleasant,

unremarkable. Together-together they seemed to reach toward her with welcoming arms. "Safe," she offered at last. "Everything seems very natural and contented."

"I like the young women in the Delvaux painting." He made a vast, smoothing gesture, as though wiping away the darkness. "Busy at lighting up their world. Light is a very powerful symbol in our religion, of course." He stood back from the picture and admired it. "Ah! I meant to hang them for you, but it will have to be when we return. Our reservation is for eight o'clock, and if we make a careful hurry, we will get there on time. The maitre d' to whom I spoke was most forthright. We must be on time or our table will be given away to those less foresighted but more prompt. Nothing would sway him, not even appeals to justice and the American Way. So. Your wrap? Lovely. Your purse? That is all you are carrying? Well, the young are the only ones who may travel so unencumbered. We go."

She had no opportunity to tell him he need not hang the pictures, no opportunity to change her dress, no time to remember she had wanted to change it. She was swept down the stairs-past Mrs. Winesap in the entryway, pretending to be much involved with her mailbox-and into the car before she

could think of anything, already laughing somewhat helplessly at his nonsense.

"Most cars available for rent," he announced, shutting her door, "are too large to be amusing or too small to be safe. I will not, however, join nine-tenths of your countrymen in the daily game they play with their lives. To meet my sense of prudence, you are required to ride in some ostentatious luxury, though I know you would prefer simplicity, being the kind of person you obviously are."

She sank back into the seat, surrounded by velvet surfaces and leather smell. "I didn't know one could rent cars like this."

"One cannot," he said with some satisfaction. "However, one can appear to be a potential buyer, with unimpeachable references, of course, thus gaining the temporary ownership of such a vehicle. One may even be a potential buyer, though I am uncertain whether the roads of Alphenlicht are wide enough for such extravagance."

"You do have roads?" she asked in wide-eyed innocence.

"You mock. Quite rightly. You will remember, however, that I told you we are beginning to build such things. We have even recently completed a hydroelectric plant, and there is an Alphenlicht radio station by which means the people may be informed of matters of mutual interest. Avalanche warnings. Things of that kind." He negotiated a tricky turn at the avenue with casual mastery, darting up the entrance ramp to fit them between two hurtling truck behemoths without seeming to no-

tice he had done so. Marianne, who had braked in reflex, leaned back and relaxed. He was not going to kill them both. So much was obvious. "I rather like it," he purred, patting the dashboard with proprietary interest. "Do you think it appropriate for a Prime Minister?"

She considered this judiciously. "Well, it is a little ostentatious. But a Prime Minister should be, at least a little."

"It will acquire importance when Aghrehond drives it. Aghrehond does my driving; he is also my friend, first factotum of the republic, and the guardian Nestor of my youth. He will be enormously pleased with this machine. It will contribute to his already overpowering dignity."

"You're going to buy it, then?"

He cocked his head, considering. "If it continues to behave well. Have you noticed the tendency of some things to behave well at first, as though knowing they are on trial, only to turn recalcitrant and balky when they believe they have been accepted?"

Marianne flushed in the darkness. He had not been speaking of her, but she applied his words to her own case. She had behaved well when they had first met, an interesting experience, a previously unknown relative, no troubling overtones,

and she had felt free to be herself. Now she knew she was turning balky, for good reason, but he would not know that. Well, one could be balky without letting it appear on the surface. She commanded herself to be charming. He would find her charming. Her citadel might keep its portcullis down, but she would not be obvious about it. So she seduced herself with promises and turned her attention back to him with a newly kindled radiance.

"I had a typewriter like that once," she said. "The only time it ever worked was in the repair shop where I bought it, and in the repair shop when I took it back-every time I took it back."

He laughed. "I had a Jaguar XKE-you know the one? It has twelve cylinders and a complexity of electrical system beside which the space probes are models of simplicity. Whenever it went more than fifty kilometers from the garage where its mechanic waited, it had an electrical tantrum and stopped running. It was so very pretty, even standing still-which is what it mostly did-that I left it for a very long time in the garage, simply to look at it now and then. However, since it had not been purchased as sculpture, it seemed unwise to continue giving it house room. I then put a curse upon the engineers who had designed it, and British Leyland went bankrupt soon thereafter."

"You claim responsibility for that?" she asked, uncertain

whether he was serious or not.

"Absolutely." His voice was utterly serious. Then he turned

and she saw his eyes. "Marianne, you are a good audience for my silliness. You are young enough almost to believe me."

"No," she protested. "I didn't, really."

"No," he echoed, "you almost did." Then his voice changed. "I could have done it, Marianne. A Magus could do such a thing. But it would be self-indulgent, and a Magus does not build his powers-or even retain them-by being self-indulgent. Those who do so go by other names."

She was surprised at this abrupt change of tone, evidence that something was on his mind other than the evening. However, he gave her no time to brood over it, but reached across to the glove compartment to tug out a map which he dropped into her lap, stroking her knee with his hand. "Here, see if you can find where we are, and then tell me the exit number. I looked it up this afternoon, but I have forgotten it." His voice was a caress, as his touch had been, and she drew her stole around her, over her knees and thighs, all too aware of the place his hand had touched. Face flaming, she bent over the map, not noticing he had leaned to one side to see her face in the rear view mirror. He smiled, a smile of pleasure, but with

something hungry and predatory in it.

She searched the map for some time, calming herself with it. When she could trace their route, she found the exit number for him. "I've only been there once before," she said. "An old friend of my father's invited me to dinner there with his wife and daughter."

"Were they good people? Did you enjoy it?"

"I did. Yes. They had known my parents, and that was nice. My parents were wonderful people, and I like to remember them..."

"Happily," he suggested. "You like to remember them happily."

"That's it. I usually have to remember them in some context of money or property because of Harvey, you know. And that isn't the same. It's certainly not happy."

"Your affairs were left in his hands, you said."

"I was only a schoolgirl. My mother's estate-rather a big one, from her father-was in papa's hands during his lifetime, but then it came to me. Except Harvey was executor. Oh, there's some man in a bank in Boston, and an attorney I've never seen, but Harvey is really the one who says yes or no. The others simply do what he tells them."

"Ah," said Makr Avehl, in a strange voice. "They simply ... give consent."

"Yes. And whenever Harvey says anything, he always says it is what Papa would have wanted. Which means it is what Harvey wants." She fell silent, flushing. "I feel very disloyal, talking about him this way."

Makr Avehl, thinking of the contents of the box he had taken from her apartment, contented himself with silence. At that moment the hungry, predatory part of him withdrew, and a more thoughtful self examined Marianne's face with a quick, sideways look. "Blood is not always thicker than water, Marianne. Only when the ties of blood are equally strong on both sides is there any true kinship. Kinship can never be a one-way thing."

"That's what Mrs. Winesap says. She says if I don't like him, I simply don't like him, and I shouldn't feel guilty about that."

"I couldn't agree more. Mrs. Winesap is an eminently sensible woman. Also, she has your welfare at heart, and that makes her kin to you in a real way." He swung the car onto the exit ramp, then beneath the highway and onto a shore-bound road between budding trees fretted against the dusk. Lights faded around them, dwindling from hectic commercial to amber residential, soft among the knotted branches. It was quiet in the car, all traffic left behind them. Reflected in the waters of a little bay was the discreet sign in pink neon, "Wil-

lard's." He parked the car and looked quickly at his watch. "On time. There will be no excuse to have given our table to anyone else."

He took her from the car and into the place by her elbow, gently held. Their table was waiting, and Marianne gained the impression it would have been waiting had they not arrived until midnight. Makr Avehl waved the maitre d' away and seated her himself, his hands lingering on her shoulders as he arranged the stole on the back of her chair. She resolutely focused herself on the reflections in the water, on the candlelit interior, on anything else.

When he had seated himself across from her, he said, "Shall we dispense with the usually obligatory cocktail? Do you know the origin of the word? It dates, I am told, from the early years of the nineteenth century in New Orleans where cognac was mixed with bitters using an old-style egg cup-called a coquetier-to measure the ingredients. From cah-cuh-tyay to cock-tay to cock-tail would have required only the slovenly enunciation of a half generation. Does that interest you? Not greatly." He grinned at her and pretended an interest in the menu. The meal had already been arranged for.

When he had ordered for both of them, he leaned back and

stared around him, a little arrogantly. "This ordering for one's guest is no longer an American custom, I know. But it is a custom I enjoy. So I command outrageous viands from kitchens across the breadth of the world if only to see how my companions will approach them. If what I have ordered does not appeal to you, now is the time to chastise me."

"It sounds delicious," she said. "I don't mind at all. It's precisely what Papa always did."

"And Harvey?"

"I've never eaten in public with Harvey," she said stiffly. "I imagine he would be more... more showy about it."

"I can hear him now," said Makr Avehl, putting on a pompous expression. " "The lady will have breaded cockscomb with the sauce of infant eel.' Then an aside to his companion: 'You'll love it, Juliet. I remember having it in Paris, during the International Conference of the Institute of Anthropology.' Like that?"

"Like that," she agreed. "And then he'd watch her like a hawk to be sure she pretended to enjoy it."

"Which she would do?" He nodded at the hovering wine steward.

"Which they seem to do," she agreed. "I've never been able to figure out why."

Across the table from her, he glittered with gentle laughter. The explosion of light seemed so real that Marianne actually

blinked to avoid being blinded, then opened her eyes wide, astonished at her own childishness. It was only the blaze of something flambe' behind him, being made a great show of in a chafing dish. An obsequious waiter slipped behind her chair to place two additional wine glasses beside her plate,

while the wine steward poured an inch of ruby light into Makr Avehl's glass. He sipped it, nodded, and Marianne's own glass dropped red jewels of light onto the table cloth.

She sipped, smiled, sipped again. It had been a long time since she had had good wine. She had drunk it as a child, at Papa's side, learning to taste. Then she had gone away to school, and there had been no wine then or since. Her slender budget would not stretch to such indulgence, and she sipped again, lost in a haze of happy memory. A plate of pate appeared before her, almost magically, smelling succulently of herbs and shallots. She began to eat hungrily, not noticing his expression as he watched her. It was the expression of a lion about to pounce.

But behind that expression a dialogue had begun, a familiar dialogue to Makr Avehl, one between the man and the Magus, with a word or two from that entity he called "the intruder." It began with the man saying, "I want this woman!" He said

it impatiently. The man did not equivocate. He did not apologize.

"You will conduct yourself appropriately," replied the Magus. 'This is a kinswoman. Even if she were not, there are indulgences inappropriate to a Magus!"

And another voice, sibilant, hissing, "This is a complication we do not need at this time. This is foolishness, kinswoman or not. Be done."

"She is fair," sang the man to himself, not listening to the voices. The wine was diluting their message, blurring their advice. "Fair. Lithe and lovely, dark of hair and pale of skin, curved as a warrior's bow is curved, straight as his arrow is straight. A warrior's trophy! A warrior's prize!"

"A brigand's booty. A robber's spoils," threatened the Magus."A poacher's trap," hissed the voice of dissent.

"A lover's prize," the man amended, bending over his plate in a sudden access of warmth. He had not meant to say that. He had not used the word to himself for almost twenty years, not since he was nineteen and thought himself dying because someone else had died, died untimely, unforgiveably. He shut down the voices, apprehensive of the end of their colloquy. The food gave him something else to think about, but it led

him into the trap once more. He looked up to see Marianne's lips curved to accept the edge of the glass, curved as though in a kiss, and his hands trembled.

"Come now, Makr Avehl," he said to himself. "You are not a schoolboy any longer. You are not a lascivious youth, carried willy-nilly on naive curiosity's back, like Europa on the bull, tormented by lust into abandonment of all sense. Come, come. Let us talk of something else."

"Did you really like the pictures I brought you?" he asked, seeing a well-trained hand slip the empty plate away from before him to replace it with another, noticing also that Marianne's glass was being refilled. His own was almost untouched.

She did not answer at once, being occupied with napkin and glass. "That was duck," she said happily. "Lovely duck. All bits and pieces with swadges of truffle. I didn't know Willard's . was capable of that...."

He did not tell her that the pate had been provided earlier, that Willard's was not capable of that, that no restaurant within five hundred miles was capable of that except the one which had provided the pate to his order. "The pictures?" he prompted.

"The pictures. Well, the one of the fish is marvelous. One has a sense of the fish rising, and because the air above and the water below are all one, it is almost as though it could go on rising upward, forever. Like a balloon."

Makr Avehl, who had not thought of this, was much taken with the feeling. "Exaltation?"

"Yes. The feeling that one could go on up and up forever, but one would not need to. The surface is very nice, too. Well, I liked that one. The other one was more difficult. The young women are in the street, alone, but they are not threatened at all. There are lights around, in the house-which must be the house they live in-where people are waiting for them. Nothing horrible is coming. It's a special evening, and the girls are setting lights along the streets. They do that in Mexico, don't they? Set lights along the streets? Candles, in bags of sand? A kind of ritual in which the safe, lighted way is shown, I think. And that's the way it feels, a safe, lighted way."

"Luminous," he suggested.

She considered this over a spoonful of lobster bisque, turning the idea with the other flavors on her tongue. "Not so much luminous as illuminated. Things which could be threatening or frightening are lighted up, made harmless, perhaps even shown to be attractive. That's what one wants, after all, to have the monsters shown to be nothing but paper cutouts, or shadows, or humped bushes which the light will show to be full of flowers."

He nodded. "It's unfortunate the other group of things had such an unpleasant feel to it. Certain groupings can have that

quality of foreboding or threat. I remember a particular place in the forest of Alphenlicht, trees, stones, some large leafed plants with waxy blooms. Taken individually, the trees are only trees. The stones are interesting shapes, taken each by each, and the plants are found in many boggy parts of the mountains. Taken as a whole, however, this particular clearing among the stones with the trees brooding above has a quality of menace."

He shook his head, keeping to himself the question as to what kind of knowledge or study would have stimulated a person-any person-to have chosen the particular group of things he had found in the box. The knowledge was one matter but, in addition, what motivation would one have had? These questions were not merely interesting but compelling. He was most curious about the sly vileness in which he had given her the things one at a time, singly, so that her spirit would be led to accept them individually rather than take warning at the cumulative effect.

Nonetheless, she had taken warning. Which told him something more about her to make his lustful self pause. There was heritage here, the heritage of the Magi. "With whom," advised the Magus within, "it is wise not to trifle."

He pursued this question. "You didn't like the things Harvey gave you. Did you tell me why?"

She shrugged, spooning up the last of her bisque, sorry

there was not more of it, so relaxed by the wine that she did not mind answering. "They made me feel slimy. Dirty. Not clean dirt, but sewer dirt. I've never been in a sewer, but I can imagine." She put her spoon down with regret. "The naked girl was the worst. That one made me angry. She was so... sacrificial."

"Anger," he mused, nodding once more to the hovering waiter. "I have often wondered why anger is considered by some Western religions to be a sin. It is such a marvelous protection against evil." He examined her face, thinking of an old proverb of his people, often used to define perspicacity of a certain type: He can recognize the devil by his breathing. He thought it interesting that Marianne could recognize the devil by its breathing, and he wondered who the devil was. Well, he should not be too quick to identify.

"The reason you found them unpleasant probably doesn't matter. We've taken care of it. It's likely that your brother would not even know the difference between the things he gave you and the substitutions I have made. He would undoubtedly be distressed to learn he had caused you a moment's apprehension. There is certainly no reason to mention it to him."

Marianne had had no intention of mentioning it. "You think

I felt as I did about the things merely because Harvey gave them to me? That seems a little simplistic."

"It's probably as good an explanation as we are going to get." He laughed with a good pretense of humor, watching as the second set of wine glasses were refilled. They would continue with the Trockenbeerenauslese until dessert. He had chosen it for her, thinking she would prefer it, and was now regretful that he had not realized she would appreciate something better. Still, it was a very fine wine, if not a preeminent one, and her glass was being refilled for the third time. Her face was flushed and happy, and she played idly with her fork, waiting for the salad. He went on, putting an end to the subject, "I suggest any further presents from your half brother be put in storage somewhere. Often we wish to be exorcised of demons we ourselves have allowed house room. That is an Alphenlicht saying, one my sister is very fond of."

"I suppose she means demons of memory," said Marianne in an untroubled voice. "Of guilt, of vengeance. Things we dwell on instead of forgetting." In that moment, she felt she would not be bothered by such things again.

He cursed at himself, not letting it show. The box had been no minor assault. She should be warned. Who was he to give her these platitudes instead of the harsh warning which was probably required? If he were to be true to his own conscience, he would explore the root of that corruption, find the cause,

help her arrange a defense against it rather than deal her a few proverbs to placate her sense of danger. However, there was no way to do that without frightening her, and tonight was not the time, not the place, not with her glowing face across from him, candlelit, soft and accepting. When he knew her a little better-when he found out who was responsible. He did not believe it was her brother. The shallow, puffed-up ego which had looked at him out of Harvey S. Zahmani's eyes would not have been capable of the singleminded study necessary to select those individual gifts to make up such a synergistic power of evil. Well. It would wait. He would not destroy her pleasure tonight.

Neither would he destroy his own planned pleasure for the weekend. He returned to his purpose.

"Do you ride, Marianne?"

"It was my passion once, if twelve-year-old girls may be allowed to have passions. I had a wonderful horse, Rustam. I loved him above all things. When he was sold, after Papa died, I cried for days. I never could tell it if was for Papa, or for Rustam. I think it was for Rustam, though. I had already cried for Papa."

"That was at your home?"

"Yes." She picked at the edges of her salad, a spiraling

rosette of unfamiliar vegetables, intricately arranged. "I was just learning to jump. Rustam already knew how, of course, and he took great care to keep me on his back. I was always afraid I was in his way, hindering him."

"Is it something you want to do again someday?"

"Something I dream about. I would love to ride again, if I haven't forgotten how."

"There is some particular affinity, I am told, between adolescent girls and horses. Some girls, I should say."

"Some, yes. I was very conscious of being... well, what can one say? Not weaker, exactly, but less able to force myself upon the unimpressionable world. Less able, that is, than Papa, or Harvey. Mama didn't seem to care. There were things the men did which I simply couldn't understand. And yet, when I rode Rustam, the barriers were gone. I felt I could go anywhere, through anything, over anything. That I would be carried, as on wings."

The look she turned on him was full of such adoring memory that he clenched both fists in his lap, fighting down the urge to make some poetic outburst: "Oh, I would be your steed, lady. I would carry you to such places you have not dreamed of...." Instead, he hid his face behind his napkin, managed

to say something in a half-choked voice about Pegasus, leaving the poetry unsaid though the words sang in him like the after-sound of a plucked string, reverberating, summoning sympathetic vibrations from his loins.

"I asked," he said in a voice deliberately dry, "because the house which we have leased while we are in the country has attached to it an excellent stable. The people who own it are vacationing in the Far East, and they left us in complete possession of their own riding horses-that is, once they learned that we are not barbarians." He choked back a laugh, remembering the oblique correspondence which had finally established this fact to the satisfaction of the Van Horsts. "I do not want you to miss the opportunity to ride with us this weekend, Marianne. I do not want to miss the opportunity to ride with you. I have invited other people, good friends, people you would enjoy. You would not need to be in the company of your brother at all. I will beg you, importune you, please. Be my guest."

She could not refuse him. Whether it was the wine, or the thought of the horses, or the candlelight, or his own face, so full of an expression which she refused to read but could not deny, she murmured, "If you're quite sure it won't be awkward for you if Harvey behaves oddly toward me. Perhaps he won't. I know I'm a little silly about him, sometimes."

"Do you think he will be unpleasant company for my other

guests?"

"He can be charming," she said offhandedly. "I think he is only really unpleasant to me."

"Do you know why?"

She flushed, a quick flowing of red from brow to chin which suffused her face with tension. He saw it, snarled at himself for walking with such heavy feet where he did not know the way, did not give her time to reply.

"Ah, here come the crabs. Now we shall see if this is indeed a delicacy or merely one of those regional eccentricities which litter the pathways of a true gourmet."

"Gourmand," she said, relieved that the subject had been changed. "I think a gourmet would not eat soft-shelled crab. They are supposed to be an addictive indulgence, like popcorn."

"I wasn't warned," he said in mock horror.

"Be warned. I will fight you for them."

Makr Avehl could not have said whether he liked the dish or not. He ate it. More of it than he would have eaten if alone. He drank little wine, afraid of it for the first time in his life, of what he might say unwarily, having already said the wrong thing several times over, afraid of what he might do that would frighten his quarry.

"Quarry?" boomed the Magus, deep inside. "I warn you again, Makr Avehl. Kinswoman." He heard it as an echo of her own voice, "Be warned."

Marianne had not expected the wine, was not guarded against it, did not notice as it flowed around the controls she had set upon herself, washed away the little dikes and walls of the resolutions she had made, let her forget it was to have been an evening of politeness only, without future, without over-tones. She felt herself beginning to glitter, did nothing at all to stop it, simply let it go on as though she were twelve once more, at the dinner table with Cloud-haired mama and Papa and their guests, full of happy questions and reasonably polite behavior, ready to be charmed and charming. 'Tell me about Alphenlicht," she demanded. "All about it. Not the politics, but how it smells and tastes. What it is like to live there."

"Shall I be scholarly and give you the history? Or do you want a travelogue?" Gods but she is beautiful. In this light, her skin is like pearl.

"Don't tell me how it got that way. Just tell me how it is." She licked her lips un-self-consciously, and he felt them on his own. He turned to look out the window and summon his wits.

"Well, then. Alphenlicht is a small country. You know that. It is a mountainous one. There is no capital, as such. Instead, there are many small towns and villages gathered around the fortresses built by our ancestors, many of them on the sites of older fortresses built by the Urartians centuries before. Hilltop

fortresses, mostly, with high stone walls topped by ragged battlements. They march along the flanks and edges of the mountains as though they had been built by nature rather than by man, gray and lichened, looking as old as forever.

"Outside the walls, the towns straggle down the hillsides, narrow streets winding among clumps of walled buildings, half stable, part barn, part dwelling. We came from Median stock, remember. The Medes could never do without horses, and their houses were always surrounded by stableyards."

"Hies," commented Marianne. "There would be lots of flies."

"No," he objected. "We are not primitive. The litter from our stables enriches our farmland. Then, too, there is a constant smoky wind in Alphenlicht. We say it is possible to stand on the southern border of our country and know what is being cooked for supper on the northern edge. You asked what the country smells like, and that is it. Woodsmoke, as I have smelled here in autumn when the leaves are being burned; a smell as nostalgic among men as any I know of. A primitive smell, evoking the campfires of our most ancient ancestors." He thought about this, knowing it for a new-old truth.

"Our houses are of stone, for the most part. We are self-consciously protective about our traditions, so we have a fond-

ness still for glazed tile and many wooden pillars supporting ornate, carved capitals, often in the shapes of horses or bulls or mythical beasts. There is plaster over the stone, making the rooms white. The walls are thick, both for winter warmth and for summer cool, so windows are set deep and covered with wood screens which break the light, throwing a lace of shadow into our rooms. Floors are of stone for summer cool, but in winter we cover them with rugs, mostly from Turkey or Iran. Our people have never been great rug makers.

"Ceilings are often vaulted, with wind scoops at the ends, to bring in the summer winds. In winter we cover them with stout shutters which seldom fit as well as they should. We say of an oddly assorted couple that they fit like scoop shutters, meaning that they do not..." He fell silent, musing, seeing his homeland through her eyes and his own words, as though newly.

"What do you eat?" she asked, taking the last bite of her final crab. "I am not hungry any longer, but I love to hear about food."

"Lamb and mutton. Chicken. Wild game. I have a particular fondness for wild fowl. Then, let me see, there are all the usual vegetables and grains. There are sheltered orchards along the

foot of the snows where we grow apricots and peaches. We have berries and apples. There are lemon and orange trees in the conservatory at the Residence, but most citrus fruits are imported. We are able to import what we need, buying with the gems from our mines."

"But no soft-shelled crab," she mourned. "No fish."

"Indeed, fish. Trout from our streams and pools. For heaven's sake, Marianne. How can you talk about food?"

"What did you order for dessert?" she asked, finishing her wine.

He nodded to the waiter once more. "Crepes, into which will be put slivers of miraculously creamy cheese from the Alphenlicht mountains, served with a sauce of fresh raspberries flamed in Himbeergeist and doused with raspberry syrup."

"That sounds lovely." She sighed in anticipation.

"It is lovely." He made a wry mouth, mimed exasperation. "Also unavailable here. We're having an orange souffle which is available here, which has been recommended by several people with ordinary, people-type appetites. Try a little of this sweet wine. It has a smell of mangoes, or so they say. I like the aroma, but I confess that the similarity escapes me."

They finished the meal with inconsequential talk, together with more wine, with brandy. They had been at the table for almost four hours when they left, coming out into a chilly, clear evening with a gibbous moon rising above the bay to

send long, broken ladders of light across the water.

"I am at the middle of the whole world," Marianne hummed. "See how all the lights come to me."

They stood at the center of the radiating lights, town lights on the point stretching to the north and east, island lights from small, clustered prominences to the east and south, the light of the moon.

"If you can pull yourself out of the center of things," he said tenderly, "I'll take you home."

The drive back was almost silent. Marianne was deeply content, more than a little drunk without knowing it, warmed by the wine, unsuspecting of danger. As for him, he was no less moved than he had been hours earlier, but that early impetuous anticipation had turned to something deeper and more bittersweet, something like the pain of a mortal wound gained in honorable battle by a fanatical warrior. Heaven was guaranteed to such a sufferer, but a kind of death was the only gateway. "Death of what?" he fretted, "of what? I have never been one to attach great esoteric significance to such matters!" He refused to answer his own question. Such metaphors were merely the results of wine-loquacity, a kind of symbolic babble. He concentrated on driving.

When they arrived, he took her to the door and entered after her, saying "I'll hang those pictures before I leave you. No! Don't object, Marianne. I want to do it," riding over her weak protests to come close to her, making a long business of the stick-on hangers, standing back to see whether the pictures were straight, putting them where those others had been meant to go, one in her living room, the other by her bed. And she there, watching, bemused, almost unconscious, eyes fixed on the picture of the maidens setting out their lights, stroking her own face with the fluffy eagle feather tassle of the medicine bag he had brought her, as a child might stroke its face with the comer of a loved blanket, her whole expression dreamy and remote as though she merely looked in on mis present place from some distant and infinitely superior existence. Then she turned to him, and her eyes were aware, and desirous, and soft....

He groaned, the man part breaking through his self-imposed barriers, groaned and took her into his arms, putting his mouth on hers, feeling her half-surprise, then the glorious liquid warmth of her pressed against him in all that silken flow as she returned the kiss. He dropped his lips to the hollow of her throat, heard her gasp as he pressed the silk away with his mouth to follow the swelling curve of her breast....

And heard her cry as from some great distance, "Oh... not that way... chaos will win... all my battles lost.... Oh, to-morrow I will want to die."

The words fell like ice, immediately chilling, making a crystalline shell into which he recoiled, immobilized, the Magus within him seeing her face, the mouth drawn up into a rictus which could equally have been passion or pain, so evenly and indiscriminately mixed that he could not foretell the consequence of the feeling it represented.

So then it was Magus, cold, drawing upon all his powers of voice and command, who took the feathers from her hand and drew them across her eyes, forcing the lids closed, chanting in his hypnotic voice, "Sleep, sleep. Dream. It is only a dream. A little, lustful dream. It will be forgotten in the morning. Order rules. Your battles will all be won. Makr Avehl is your friend, your champion, your warrior to fight your battles beside you. Sleep...." All the time afraid that the voice would fail him, that his man self had so undermined his Magus self as to make his powers impotent.

But they were not. She slumped toward him, and he caught her as she fell, placing her upon her bed. When he left her a few moments later it was with a feeling of baffled frustration and disoriented anger, not at her, not even much at himself, but at whatever it was, whoever it was who set this barrier between them. He mouthed words he seldom used, castigated

himself. "Fool. You knew there was something troubling her, something you have no knowledge of, but you tramp about with your great bullock's feet, treading out her very heart's blood...." For there had been that quality in her voice which had in it nothing of coquetry but only anguish. "Idiot. Get out of here before you do any more damage."

But he could not leave until he had written her a note, folding it carefully. When he shut the door behind him, he turned to push it under the door, as though he had returned after leaving her. She would not remember anything of his-of his impor-tunate assault. He had never felt so like a rapist for so little reason, and his sense of humor began to reassert itself as he went down the stairs. She might accuse herself in the morning, but it would only be of drinking a bit too much. She could accuse herself, or him, of nothing else.

"And I will find out, will find out what it is makes her act like this."

A voice hissed deep within. "Of course, it may be she simply does not find you attractive."

"Be still. It isn't that. It isn't that at all. What it is is a threat. Desire-sex-a threat. Not merely the usual kind of threat which any intimacy makes to one's individuality, to one's integrity, no. More than that. Something real is threatening her,

and I am walking around the edges of it."

He sat for a long time with his head resting on the wheel, continuing the mood of part castigation, part determination. At last, when he was more calm, he drove away. Behind him in the lower window of the house, Mrs. Winesap twitched the curtain back into place, an expression of sadness on her face. She had been sure that this man would not have stayed so short a time.

IF IT HAD not been a working day, she would have slept until noon. Since it was a working day, she struggled awake at the sound of the alarm, conscientiously set before she left her room the evening before. There was something hazy, misty in her mind, the lost feeling one sometimes gets when a recent dream departs, leaving a vacancy. She shook her head, trying to remember. There had been a good deal of amusement and laughter the night before, a good many soft-shelled crabs, pate", wine ... oh yes, wine. Her head ached a little, not badly, as though she might have slept with her neck twisted. She rubbed at it, noticing for the first time that she was naked among the sheets. Good lord, there must have been a lot of wine. Her clothing was laid across the chair. At least she had had the wits to

undress. She couldn't remember anything about it. Wrapping herself in a robe, ignoring the protest of bare feet on the cold bathroom floor, she brushed her teeth, drenched her face in a hot towel, pulled a brush through her hair. Thus fortified, she had the courage to look at herself in trepidation. The feared bleary eyes and reddened nose were not in evidence. Well then, perhaps she had only been what Cloud-haired mama was wont to call "being a little tiddly."

She was still half asleep when she went to the front window to begin her daily monitoring of conditions of order and disruption. The white square on the carpet brought her fully awake.

Marianne, my dear: 1 forgot to tell you that my driver, Aghrehond, will pick you up on Saturday morning, about 9:00. My sister, Ellat, conveys her delight that you will be with us. She will be your chaperone and constant companion. No one will be given any excuse to criticize. All will be very proper. If you do not have riding clothes, Ellat can provide them. I look forward to the weekend with much pleasure. Thank you for a lovely evening.

She read this twice, confused. So she had agreed to spend the weekend in Wanderly after all. How could his sister have known, if he had left this note just last night? Last night? She

shook her head again, so confused that she did not see the last word on his note. He had thought long before adding it, not truly sure that he meant it. He would have been much discomfitted to know she did not even see it. She crumpled the note. Lord. Riding clothes. Of course, she did have Mama's. And riding clothes didn't change from generation to generation. She would have to do some washing-and then there would be dinner. They would undoubtedly dress for dinner-if not formally, at least up. Could she wear the silk again? She stood, lost in thought, only reluctantly realizing that the phone was ringing.

"Marianne?" Harvey at his most charming. Everything within her leapt up and assumed a posture of defense. "I wanted to thank you for telling me about Zahmani. I knew my aunt, that is, Madame Delubovoska, was in the States, but I had no idea that anyone would be here from Alphenlicht. I went down to New York to see her yesterday, and I met him. Evidently he's taken a country place not far from you while he's here in the U.S. I've been invited for the weekend." The voice was gloating a little, oleaginous.

"Yes," she stumbled slightly. "I know."

Silence. Then, "Oh? How did you know?"

"I've been invited as well. Did you accept the invitation?" Dangerous ground. She could feel his attention hardening as he fixed it on her. Until this conversation she had never heard

him mention his aunt from Lubovosk. The silence stretched,

almost twanging with strain. "I'm going, of course," she said, more to break the silence than for any other reason.

"Marianne, you're obviously not awake. I dislike it when you sound muddled. I think you should take a few minutes to discuss this."

She was honestly dumbfounded. "What is there to discuss? I've already accepted the invitation. It was very nice of him to ask me."

"We have to discuss," he said in a voice of ice, "whether it's appropriate for you to go at all."

Ordinarily, I would come unhinged at this point, .she thought, but this is not ordinarily. I am 1001 points ahead. I had a lovely evening. The girls in the picture on my wall are setting lights in the street. I have a real medicine bag full of good influences protecting my home. "I'm sorry you have any concern about it," she said in a voice that sounded unflustered. "I've accepted. Please don't be disturbed on my account, Harvey. His sister is staying with him, and he assures me that it will be quite proper."

Silence.

Silence.

Oh, Lord, she thought. I've really done it. He will be so

angry he'll cut off my allowance altogether and tell me to give up school entirely. Whoops, there goes the graduate degree.

Ice voice. "I'm sure it will be quite proper. I'll look forward to seeing you there, Marianne. Try to dress appropriately. I hate it when you embarrass me." Gentle return of the phone to the cradle, buzz on the line, Marianne sitting up in bed, staring at the wall.

"Harvey, if you do anything mean about my money, I'll go directly to the head of your department at the university and tell him you tried to rape me when I was thirteen." She said this to the wall, almost meaning it. She did not know where the idea had come from. She had not thought of any such reprisal before. "Blackmail Harvey?" she wondered at herself. "I suppose I could try it. Would he tell the world it was all my fault?"

Well, let him tell the world it was all the fault of a thirteen-year-old girl. Ten years ago people might have believed that. Ten years ago people actually wrote that fathers and older brothers weren't to blame for sexually abusing six-year-olds

because the little girls were "seductive." Public opinion on the subject of rape and child abuse and incest had changed a lot in the last ten years. She considered. One could make quite a

case. His succession of Cheryls and Randis were very, very young. An occasional one might be under eighteen. The question could be asked. It would stir up quite a storm. On the other hand, Harvey would probably devote all his resources to proving that she, Marianne, was a maladjusted, possibly neurotic spinster with an overactive imagination.

"Oh, Lord," she said. "I don't want to do that."

"You don't want to drop out of school, either," her inner self replied. "One more semester, and the doctorate is yours, Mist Princess. One more semester, and you can go hunting for a teaching job somewhere. Out in public. With people."

As always, when she reached that point in her rumination, she stopped thinking about it entirely. It was one thing to get the degree; it was something else to figure out what she was going to do with it. That was what Harvey always meant when he said she was not a serious student. She didn't really want to teach, or write, or do research. What she really wanted to do was work with horses, or maybe with animals in general. When she had been twelve, she had been sure that she would be a veterinarian. It had been all she could talk about, all she planned for.

"What am I going to do with a degree in ethnology?" There was no answer. "One day at a time," she said. "Just take it one day at a time." This day, for example. A Friday. Which passed, as such days do, interminably but inevitably.

When Makr Avehl's driver, a pleasantly round man, arrived

on Saturday morning, she gave him her suitcase and followed him to the big car somewhat apprehensively. She had repudiated the blackmail idea, reflecting that she was almost certainly not strong enough to see it through, and she was feeling the lack of any effective strategy to protect herself against Harvey during the weekend. On the other hand, driven by his nastiness on the phone, she had taken most of the money carefully saved for the new kitchen tile and blown it on the two new outfits in her suitcase, both extremely becoming. After all, Makr Avehl had said there would be a lot of other people around, and Harvey might not be able to do to her in public what he invariably did

in private. She did not have long to dwell on these various concerns before she was distracted from her worries by the man named Aghrehond.

"You may sit in the back in lonely privacy, miss," he said to her gravely. "Or you may sit in front with me. I shall ask you very many impertinent questions to improve my English, which as you can tell is already very good, and you shall reprove me."She was amused, as he had intended. "Why should I reprove you?"

"I have a curiosity unbecoming a person of lower rank. Here in America they pretend there is no rank, so I can indulge

myself with-what is the word I want?-impunity. Faultless-ness. Correct? It will give me bad habits, however, when I return to the land of the Kavi. Where you call Alphenlicht."

He looked at her hopefully, and Marianne gestured at the front seat, indicating she would share it with him.

When they had reached the highway and were headed south at a conservative speed, he said, "You may call me Green. This is what part of my name means, and it is much easier to say than Ah-Gray-Hond. Green sounds almost English. Just as Makr Avehl sounds very Scottish when it is said quickly. Mac-ravail. That is a good name for a chieftain, isn't it? Green is a good name for a butler. I am also a butler and secretary and man who does a little of everything. What you would call..."

"A handyman," she suggested.

He shook his head. "No. That is one who does repairing of tilings. I mean something else. I am not good at repairing things. If this car should stop itself, we would be quite forsaken until someone came to help us. A tiny nail, even, I will hit my thumb instead."

"Me, too," she confessed. "I'm always stopping up my garbage disposer. I can't make staplers work for any length of time. They always jam."

"Ah. That surprises me. I think perhaps you have been victim of an adverse enchantment, a small annoyance spell perhaps, nothing very dangerous. For me, mechanical things

work well, always, it is only I am clumsy with my hands. You, now, will not have such trouble in future. I am sure our Varuna will take care of this."

"Your-who?"

"Ah. Makr Avehl. The-Prime Minister, they say. Mis-ter-Zah-man-ee. In the land of Kavi we say 'Sir' or 'the Zahmani.' 'Varuna' is like-oh, a powerful priest. Very mighty, and a great man. Good to listen to. But I beat him playing cribbage. He is what you would call a very lousy cribbage player."

"I don't play cribbage," Marianne admitted.

"I will teach you," he said with enormous satisfaction, turning off the highway as he did so. They were traveling between tree-lined fields, white-fenced, velvet green and decorated with horses. "When you come to Alphenlicht, there are long winter times with nothing to do. Then we will play cribbage."

"Am I to come to Alphenlicht?"

"Most assuredly. You are one of the Kavi. One has only to look in your face to see that. Do not all the Kavi come to their own land? Most certainly. Makr Avehl will see to it."

She was still amused. "What if I don't want to go?"

"You will want to go. The Kavi always want to go."

"Is that woman-Madame Delubovoska-is she one of the

Kavi?" she asked, unprepared for his response to this more or less innocent question.

He screeched the car to a halt, wiped his face repeatedly with a handkerchief. "Listen," he said at last, "the Varuna has asked her to come to him for the weekend. This is a very dangerous thing. He knows this, now, maybe too late. That woman, she is... there is a word. Someone who does not care about anyone? Who takes other people and... uses them up? There is a word?"

"A psychopath? A sociopath?" offered Marianne, doubting that this was what he meant. It evidently was exactly what he meant, for he nodded repeatedly, still mopping his face and neck.

"That is it. Listen to me. Makr Avehl is wise, oh, very wise and great. Truly a Varuna for his people. So wise. But not smart sometimes, I think. Sometimes I think I am smarter. He says so, too. When I win at cribbage, he says so. So, it may be this woman is a Kavi. One time certainly her people were so. Now, is she? Or has she done forbidden things so not to be called Kavi anymore? Makr Avehl, he must know, he says. So, he asks her to come spend the weekend, so he can talk to her, listen to her, find out. Now, listen. I do not think it is

smart to have you come at the same time. Not a smart move. So, you be careful. Do not ask any questions where she can hear you. Be a simple, pretty little kinswoman except when you are alone with Makr Avehl. Or me, of course."

He had frightened her rather badly, and she huddled in her corner of the front seat while he pulled the car back onto the road and continued their journey. They had entered a forest, and the light splashed through the windshield at them, broken by leaf lace into glimmering spatters. "What do you mean, forbidden things?" she asked at last.

He shook his head. "Do you know Zurvan?"

She told him what she had heard at the lecture. "That's all I know. Zurvan is your god."

"More than that. Both male and female is Zurvan. Both dark and light. Both pain and joy. One who includes all. In balance. Now, if somebody tried to upset the balance, to make more dark than light, that would be forbidden. That person would not be Kavi. When you are alone with Makr Avehl, you ask about the shamans. You know that word?"

She nodded, amazed at this tack and scarcely believing that she was listening to this odd talk.

"Russia has lots of black shamans," he said. "In places where the government does not go. There are places like that, even in Russia. Forests, deep chasms in wooded places. So, now Lubovosk has shamans, too. They say they don't need any religion there, you know. Not in Russia, no." He laughed

as though this were very funny. "But still, they brought those black shamans to Lubovosk. To learn, do you suppose? Or to teach. Or, maybe, just to make a great confusion. Anyhow, you be a quiet inconspicuous person and don't make that woman pay much attention to you." They drove on for a time in silence.

"Can the Kavi-can Makr Avehl do tricks? I mean," she said hastily, seeing his expression of disapproval, "can he do-supernatural things?"

"What sort of things? Kavi can do many very wonderful things, certainly."

"Could he-oh, could he deliver a letter into a locked room? Could he make a phone hook itself up so that he could call someone?"

Aghrehond laughed. "Oh, these are only little things. Of course. Any Kavi could do simple things like these. What is it, after all, but moving something very small?" He went on chuckling to himself, and she could not tell if he were teasing her or not. He drove for a few miles in silence, then pointed away to the right. "There is the house we have rented for this season. Not so beautiful as the Residence in Alphenlicht, but very nice."

It glowed gently in the morning sun, white-columned over

its rose brick, gentled with ivy, stretching along the curve of the hill in wide, welcoming wings. Makr Avehl had not yet returned from his business in New York, she was told, but she felt no lack of welcome as Aghrehond introduced her to Ellat Zahmani, Makr Avehl's sister, a stout middle-aged woman with a charming smile who offered her a second breakfast, a sun-drenched library, a brief expedition on horseback, or a walk around the gardens. Laughing, Marianne accepted the second breakfast and a walk in the gardens. It was there that Makr Avehl found them.

He kissed Ellat on the cheek, then Marianne, in precisely the same way, so quickly that she could not take alarm. "Agh-rehond has gone to the train to meet your brother," he said. 'Tahiti will arrive later this afternoon. I think we will not call her Tahiti, however. We will be very dignified, very political, very correct. We will all say Madame Delubovoska."

"I will keep very quiet," Marianne said. "Your cribbage partner suggested it."

"You see!" Ellat's voice was serious. She shook her head. "Makr Avehl, I'm not alone in thinking this is a mistake. Bad enough to invite her, but to have the child here-forgive me, Marianne, I know you're not a child, but anyone younger than I am gets called a child when I am feeling motherly-to have the child here may stir her up. She's not likely to enjoy the idea of reinforcements. An American Kavi? She'll hate the

idea."

"What is a Kavi?" demanded Marianne. "Green used that word. Am I one? How did I get to be one?"

"Ah, well," Makr Avehl drew them together. "Your father, dear Marianne, was a Kavi. Almost certainly. I'm not absolutely sure, can't be until I check the library at home, but I think he was a cousin whose family left Alphenlicht some fifty years ago. They came to America with a few relatives. There may have been some intermarriage. Now, I am sure who your mother was. She was the daughter of an official in the Alphenlicht embassy in Washington. All of these people were-or could have been-Kavi, which is simply our name for the hereditary family which governs Alphenlicht. Some consider it a kind of dynasty, others a kind of priesthood, but it means no more than you wish it to in your case. It was what I had in mind when I called you a kinswoman. Do you mind?"

"Is Harvey one?"

Makr Avehl shook his head. "We generally think of lineage as coming through the mother. When we use the word Kavi, we don't only mean bloodlines, we mean other things, too-matters of belief and behavior. No; I much doubt your half brother could be Kavi."

Ellat obviously thought this might have upset Marianne, and she started to explain. "In Lubovosk, after the separation, there was a good deal of racial mixing with another line."

"Shamans?" nodded Marianne.

"There," exclaimed Ellat. "Aghrehond talks too much, Makr Avehl. He can't learn to keep his mouth shut."

"I think I'm the culprit, Ellat. Marianne and I had occasion to discuss shamans in another context. Yes. Black shamans, devil worshipers. We don't use the word 'Kavi' for any of that line. I suppose Aghrehond told you to be prudently quiet about all this with Tahiti here?"

"Yes, he told me. The problem is, I don't know how you're going to avoid the subject. Devil worship, shamanism and similar things happen to be Harvey's favorite professional topic, and he'll be after it like a cat after a mouse."

"Is that so? I hadn't considered that. I knew, of course, that he has written on the subject of Alphenlicht-I've read some of it. But I hadn't thought that his interest extended to Lubovoskan cultural attributes... .Well, of course it would. His kinfolk are there! I wonder how old he was when he first met them? When he first learned of them? How old was he when his mother died?"

"It seems to me he was ten or eleven. Old enough to resent Papa Zahmani marrying again so soon, only a year later. I

know Harvey went to Lubovosk or somewhere over there when he was twenty-one or -two." He had been back only briefly when Mama had died. She would not forget that. "The trip was a graduation present from Papa. Then, I know he went again, that same year, just before Papa died."

"Well then, he will be well up on the subject, and we may expect him to raise issues which we would prefer not to discuss in the company we will have. I'll take him in hand at lunch. Ellat, you'll have to manage him tonight. Divert him."

"If you have any very pretty guests," suggested Marianne, "that might do it."

Ellat shook her head, frowning. "The Winston-Forbeses are coming to dinner tonight. Their daughter is very attractive, but very young."

"He'll like that," said Marianne, without thinking and without seeing the odd, distracted look which Makr Avehl fixed on her. "The younger, the better."

It seemed for a time that she might have been concerned about nothing. Harvey arrived in the big car, chatting with Aghrehond as though they were old friends. He greeted Makr Avehl with courtesy, Ellat with gallantry, Marianne with a proper peck on the cheek and a smile which only she could have recognized as ominous.

Marianne took a deep breath and put herself out to be pleas-

ant. "How was the trip down, Harvey? Is there a station near?"

"About half an hour away. It was a very pleasant trip. Very kind of you to have asked me and my little sister down, sir. As a sometime student, Marianne does not often get this kind of treat." Charming smile. Guileless voice. Sometime student. Marianne fumed impotently.

"You're most welcome, Professor Zahmani," Ellat being equally charming. "Your sister honors our home, and you we welcome because of your interest in our part of the world. Do come in. You have just time to erase the stains of travel before lunch."

"I'll show him in, Ellat. Professor, I wanted to talk with you about that paper you did in the Journal of Archaeology-last June was it?-comparing the Cave of Light with the barsom prophecies of the Medes...." And Makr Avehl led Harvey away into the upper reaches of the house, still talking.

Ellat squeezed her arm. "Don't worry. We have two other couples as luncheon guests."

"Tahiti?"

"Not until much later this afternoon. She is driving down. Now we will enjoy our lunch. Makr Avehl has told me his impulsive invitation to your brother-no, it is a half brother,

only, isn't it?-well, that this invitation brings us a guest who turns out to be unwelcome. I am glad you overcame your dislike of him enough to come. We will stay well apart from him, and Makr Avehl will keep him occupied."

And he did keep him occupied all during lunch, Harvey so far forgetting himself at times as to let his voice rise in temperamental disagreement. Makr Avehl received these expostulations gravely, nodding, commenting, smiling. Harvey was certainly not getting the better of the argument, but the sound of his sharp-edged voice made Marianne shift uncomfortably in her chair.

Ellat nudged her knee. "Don't worry about it. So far they haven't gotten past the fifth century A.D. They're still talking about King Khosrow's persecution of the heretics."

"How can you tell?"

"It's what Makr Avehl always talks about when he doesn't want to talk about something else," she smiled. "Even Prime Ministers and High Priests are men, and men are somewhat predictable, you know. Besides, he lectures. He has this dreadful habit of pontificating at great length about things others don't care about. Hadn't you noticed?"

"He does a little," Marianne admitted, "but I don't really mind. The things he has to say are interesting."

"Even if you were not interested, he would still wave his finger at you and tell you all about it. I tell him, 'Makr Avehl,

try to listen sometimes. When you cease talking and there is only silence, it is because you have ended all conversation.' He only laughs at me. Sometimes, I think, he tries to do better, but he forgets. I tell myself it is because he is shy."

"Shy? The Prime Minister? Shy?"

Ellat gave her a conspiratorial look. "Yes. Shy. He talks at such great length about impersonal things to avoid worrying about people. Oh, I have seen him spend great hours thinking up tortuous reasons why people behave as they do, all because he will not admit they are simply ignorant, or silly, or tired. He is a great one for explanations, Makr Avehl, but only when he must. Most times he would rather not think about people. They confuse him."

This was a new thought for Marianne, and she glanced at Makr Avehl, catching the brilliant three-cornered smile he threw her way and feeling her face flushing as it seemed to do each time she looked at him. Shy. Well. It was an explanation, though not one she was sure she believed. Perhaps Ellat was only teasing her.

She turned to the guest on her other side and smiled monosyllabic responses to a long, one-sided conversation about politics, turning back to Ellat in relief a little while later. "That

poor woman on Makr Avehl's other side isn't getting into the conversation much." She was watching the woman covertly, a quiet woman with a quiet, impressionable face.

"That poor woman is the LaPlante Professor of Archaeology at the University of Ankara. I wouldn't worry about her. She will probably write some paper in one of the journals taking issue with your half brother on some abstruse academic subject."

"Good Lord! Does Harvey know who she is?"

"I doubt it. Makr Avehl introduced her as Madame Andami. That's her husband across the table from you. He's very deaf and makes no attempt at conversation, but he enjoys food very much. I like them a good deal. She is interesting and he is restful. However, Madame Andami is not the name she uses professionally."

"So Harvey has been set up to make a fool of himself. Do I get the impression you all do not like my brother much?"

Ellat looked shocked. "What would make you say such a thing? I think Makr Avehl knows that you do not like him very much. He knows this so well that he spent most of an hour on the phone with me yesterday, talking of you, and of your half brother. Very serious talk. So I cannot tell you not to take him seriously, as I might tell some other young thing. A gentle warning, you know the kind of thing? No, to you I say something else again. He may seem to be invulnerable and very strong. Sometimes he is very strong indeed, but he is not

invulnerable." She gave Marianne a meaningful look which

confused her enormously, then giggled, unexpectedly, an almost shocking sound coming from that dignified person. "So, even if we are sympathetic to your side of whatever problem brews, we have done nothing Professor Zahmani could complain of. If he is not civil enough to converse across the table and find out what his luncheon partner does-well, what occurs thereafter must be his fault, no?"

Marianne, being human, found the thought of Harvey's discomfiture very pleasant indeed.

After lunch, Makr Avehl suggested that they all go riding. Harvey had not brought riding clothes. He demurred, explaining that he would be happy spending a few quiet hours in the library. The others left him there with Ellat while they went into the afternoon sun and the freshness of spring. Madame Andami cast aside her quiet, listening pose and rode like a centaur, laughing when Marianne complimented her on her seat. "I have ridden donkeys, mules, camels, even elephants. You have not a bad seat yourself, young woman."

"I haven't really ridden in years. Before my mother died we lived in the country, and I had my own horse. I still miss him."

"Ah, horses are a very great love to many girls of that age. I have been told it is something very Freudian."

"I don't think so," laughed Marianne. "I think it is at that age that boys begin to grow so much bigger and stronger, and we girls feel left out. On the back of a horse, one ignores the fact that one is female."

"You dislike being female?"

"Not really. It just makes... complications."

In midafternoon they were met at the end of a curving lane by Aghrehond, splendid in a plaid waistcoat, who offered them champagne and fruit from the tailgate of a station wagon before they returned by a more direct route, Makr Avehl riding at Marianne's side.

"I did not wish to appear to monopolize your attentions earlier," he said. "But now, we have only a little way back to the house, and I can have you all to myself while the others go on ahead in such impatience. You got on very well with Madame Andami."

"I like her. She was telling me about her work in Iran,

before everything there went up in smoke. The places have such wonderful names. Persepolis. Ecbatana. Susa. I read about them in school, of course, though it's not an area of the world

I have done any reading on recently."

"They have about them something of the fictional, isn't that so? They were real, nonetheless. To us it does not seem that long ago, possibly because our children hear stories told around the fire of things which happened fifteen centuries back. Such stories carry an immediacy one does not get from books...."

"Which is why some countries carry such old grudges," offered Marianne. "What children learn at their grandmas' knees, they act upon as though it happened yesterday."

He nodded gravely, even sadly. "Perhaps that is true. Those who have an oral tradition full of old wrongs and old revenge do seem to fight the same battles forever. If the Irish were not forever singing of their ancient wrongs-or writing poetry about it... well, we see the result in every morning's news-papers,"

"Is that the kind of thing between Alphenlicht and Lubo-vosk? Or would you rather not talk about it?"

"Stories told at my grandma's knee? Oh, yes, Marianne. For my grandma remembered it happening. The country was always like the two halves of an hourglass, connected with a narrow waist, a high mountain pass which was difficult in the best of times. To separate us, Russia had only to take that pass. Then the northern bit became a 'protectorate.' The general's name was Lubovosk-thus the name of the country. Later, of course, it became a 'people's republic.' Under either name it

was high, and remote, and difficult to reach. Grandmother told me that at first we paid no attention. We continued to go back and forth from north and south, but we had to go over the mountain instead of across the pass. Then there began to be changes in Lubovosk. The visitors who came from there came to stay. Visitors from Alphenlicht who went there didn't return. There were whispers, rumors of evil."

"Aghrehond said I could ask you about shamans, but not when others were about."

The expression on his face was one of embarrassment, almost shame. "Yes. I am ashamed to say it. Black shamans, from the land of the Tungus. Dealers in necromancy. People who would trifle with the great arts. Dealers in sorcery. Ah. You don't believe in any of this, do you?"

"It's not... it's not anything I've ever thought about except as... as..."

"As a part of the superstitions of primitive peoples? Perhaps as survivals in the modern world? Little unquestioned things we learn as children? Fairy tales? No, you needn't apologize. Let me explain it to you in a way you will understand.

"Let us say a woman is driving a car. There is an accident, and her child is pinned beneath that car. She is a little woman,

but she lifts that car and frees her child. You know of such things happening, yes? Well, let us suppose that before she lifted the car, she danced widdershins around the spare tire and called upon the spirits of the internal combustion engine, then raised up the car to rescue her child. Do you follow what I say?"

"You mean the first thing is unusual, but natural. The second thing we would call magic?"

He beamed at her. "Precisely. The same thing happened in both cases, but only in one would we call it magic. There is much of which man is capable, much he is unaware of, all very natural. The worshipers of Zurvan, the Magi, are scholars of this knowledge. The shamans, too, are scholars, but they use the knowledge in a different way. They teach that the power comes through the ritual, through dancing around the spare tire. They teach, when they teach at all-which is not often, for they prefer to be mysterious-that the power comes through demons, godlings, devils. They teach that in order to obtain the power, it is necessary to propitiate these devils. Followers of Zurvan teach that the power is simply there. We may use rituals to help us focus our thoughts, but we know they are simply devices, not necessary functions. Am I making any sense to you at all?"

"You mean that their demons and devils don't really ex-ist. ..."

He shook his head, reached over to touch her hands where

they lay loosely gripping the reins, his face dappled with sunlight as he leaned toward her. "Would not exist, Marianne, except for them. The act of worship, of invocation, can bring

things into being which did not exist of their own volition-temporary demons, momentary gods."

His intensity made her uncomfortable. "Isn't it all more or less harmless?" she said, trying to minimize the whole matter. "Mere superstition? Regrettable, but not... not..."

"Not dangerous? When the ritual demands blood, or maiming, or death, or binding forever?" His voice had become austere, his expression forbidding and remote. "The difference between a true religion-and there are many which share aspects of truth-and a dangerous cult is only this: In the one the individual is freed to grow and live and learn; in the other the individual is subordinated to the will of a hierarchy, enslaved to the purposes of that hierarchy, forbidden to learn except what the cult would teach. You have only to look at the rules which govern the servants of a religion to know whether its god is God indeed, or devil!" He passed his hand across his face, then laughed unsteadily. "Listen how I preach. Aghrehond should not have told you to question me about this. My anxiety is too close to my skin. Come, we will ride up to the others and think

no more of it."

But when they rode into the gravel courtyard near the stables, Marianne thought of it again, for a long black car stood there, the black and red diplomatic flag of Lubovosk fluttering over its hood.

"I had not expected her for several hours yet," said Makr Avehl. Then, as he sat there, looking at the flag, he was struck with a comprehension so violent that he swayed in the saddle. Tabiti. Madame Delubovoska. Harvey's aunt, his kinswoman. Why had he not made this simple connection before? If Harvey had not had the wit to pick out the things he had given to Marianne, if someone else had done so, someone sly, vile, deeply schooled in all the black arts-why, it would have been Tabiti.

"Lord of Light," he thought, terrified. "Of course it would have been Tabiti, and I have brought Marianne here, like bringing a lamb into a cave of wolverines." They had been so casual with one another when he'd met them in New York, he hadn't realized that they were not merely related, not merely acquaintances, but actually akin, sympathetic. He turned to Marianne

with some urgency, knuckles white where they gripped the reins. "Wait," he warned himself. "Do not jump too quickly.

You are not sure that this is true." But he was sure, so sure that his face was ten years older, drawn with concentration, when he turned to take Marianne's hand.

"Kinswoman, I will ask you in advance to forgive me if I pay you little attention for the next several hours. Now that I have learned a bit more about your half brother and his relationship to Lubovosk, I think it was a foolish mistake to invite him into my house, a foolish mistake to invite Tabiti here. The dimensions of my foolhardiness were unclear. I could not be more sorry. Will you forgive me?"

She managed to create a smile, eager to give him whatever help she could. "I'll pay no attention at all."

"Stay with Ellat," he counseled. "Stick to her like a leech."

"Ellat may get rather bored with that."

"Ellat will prefer it," he grated.

They went into the house, to all appearances a cheerful, chattering group, through the open doors of the library where Ellat awaited them, her face slightly drawn with strain. As Marianne entered the room, she saw nothing but the two figures across it, Harvey and the Madame, faces alike as twins, eager with some strange avidity she could not identify, eyes hungry and glittering. They were staring only at Marianne, and she felt their eyes like a blow.

Harvey came to take her by the hand, his own palm wet and sticky as though he had been working in the sun. "Well,

little sister. Back from the ride? Come meet a relative of ours."

She nodded, murmuring "of course" as he drew her from Makr Avehl's side across the room into a cold, threatening space where it was all she could do to smile between tight lips in acknowledgment of the introduction. Madame's eyes were like those of a bird of prey; they seemed to Whirl like wheels of fire, and her voice had serrated edges to it, a kind of velvet file rasping in her head.

"I'm so pleased to get to meet you at last, my dear. My nephew has mentioned you so often, told me so much about you. How is the school going? Did I understand you had had some academic difficulties?"

Marianne tried to deny this, tried to say that she had had no difficulty, except in carrying a heavy load of course work in addition to working full time, but the words stuck in her throat.

She heard Harvey's voice as though through a pool of thick water, thick, cold water, gelid, about to crystallize into ice making a thunder in her ears. "Oh, I don't think Marianne lets that worry her. She isn't that serious about her work."

Again Marianne tried to protest, realizing in panic that she could not breathe. She was suffocating. Then Ellat was beside

her, saying something about Marianne's having promised to look at the orchids in the conservatory, and she was drawn away from them and was in another room, leaning against a wall, gasping for breath.

"What... how..." she gasped. "What happened?"

"It is an amusement for her," said Ellat angrily. "It's something she does. For fun, I think. She tried it on me, but Makr Avehl had warned me. I will show you how to prevent its happening again. Also, I've had your things moved out of the guest wing and into my room. It's a large room with two beds, and we will share it. I think it will be safer if you are not alone. We'll go there now." And the two of them sneaked away upstairs like naughty children, though Ellat continued her angry muttering the while. Once behind the closed door, Ellat washed Marianne's face with a cool washcloth, as though she had, indeed, been a child.

"It's frightening, isn't it? I could see your face turning red, as though you couldn't get your breath."

"What did you mean, it's something she does? I don't understand what's going on."

"Have you ever heard of telepathy?"

"I've heard of it. I don't believe in it."

"Well, then don't believe in it if you don't want to, Marianne, but listen to me anyhow. That woman down there, that-Lubovoskan," she spat the word as though it had been a curse. "That woman made a very strong telepathic suggestion to you

that you could not breathe, that you were suffocating. As I said, she tried it on me earlier, but Makr Avehl had warned me. Now, if you aren't comfortable with the idea of telepathy, that's fine. Call it subliminal suggestion or something. Or pretend she has a transmitter in her pocket that blocks your brain waves. Whatever. She can do it, and you.felt it."

"I don't believe this," Marianne protested. "Things like this aren't possible."

"Well," said Ellat, "you felt it. Was it false? A result of riding too long, perhaps? Coming into a warm room out of the air? Dizzyness? Perhaps something to do with the menstrual cycle-that's always a good explanation for such things. Hysteria?" She waited angrily for Marianne's denial, which did not come. "No. It was none of these things. It was an unworthy exercise of certain abilities which should never be used in such a way. It is a kind of seduction, one of several kinds they use. Well, we knew she could do such things. We did not know she would do them; particularly, we did not think of her doing them here or to you. So you must either run or confound her. Which is it to be?"

"I will confound her," pledged Marianne, revulsed by the memory of Harvey's hungry, prurient eyes. It had been Ellat's

use of the word "seduction" which had decided her. Of course it was a kind of seduction. A kind very like the one Harvey had been trying on her for years, a seduction of power, of oppression, of dominance. "I will confound her if I can, but she makes me feel like Harvey does. I can feel her peeling me, taking my skin off to look inside, layer by layer. I feel flayed when she looks at me. She scares me."

"That one scares Makr Avehl himself, girl. But I think we can manage to get through the evening." She began to clear the top of her dressing table, beckoning Marianne to a place before the mirror where she could see her own frightened face above Ellat's busy hands.

"This," said Ellat, making a specific shape with her left hand, "we call the 'tower of iron.' Make this shape with your hand. No. Look, at it more closely. That's right. Now this we call the 'wall which cannot be moved.' I will tell you about these...." So the lesson began.

Hours later Marianne sat before the mirror once more, dressed in one of the new outfits, a glittering silver sheath, hair piled high in a simple, dramatic style which one of Ellat's maids had done for her. She breathed deeply, setting her own center of being high and balanced. "You will not get me again, Harvey," she said. "Not you or your aunt." The woman in the

mirror could be afraid of nothing. I am a tower of iron, she sang quietly to herself in the litany Ellat had taught her, moving her hand in the proper sign. / am a fortress of strength, a wall which cannot be moved.

Ellat was running a brush across her shining head, patting the full knot which she wore low upon her neck. "Remember to think reflection. Visualize lightning striking a mirror and being reflected back. Remember."

Marianne shut her eyes, fastening her sparkling necklace with its shining pendants. She glittered all over, a gemmy wand,' bending and swaying, the necklace flashing. "I remember, El-lat. I'm trying to remember everything you've said."

"I'll be right beside you. There's the dinner gong. Shall we go down?"

Marianne took a deep breath, nodded, began to breathe slowly, calmly, focusing her thought upon strength and will. They went into the library as though for a stroll in the gardens, setting themselves like adamant against the will of Madame, against the hot curiosity in Harvey's avid eyes. Was it only her imagination, thought Marianne, or did he seem disappointed? What did that questioning look to Madame mean? Perhaps they had not expected her to be able to come down to dinner at all. She gritted mental teeth and smiled, visualizing lightning with every fiber in her brain. I am a tower of iron.

Madame came toward her at once, Harvey trailing behind, making Marianne think irreverently of a mother goose with one gosling, Madame's expression being very much a looking-down-the-beak one. She laid a hand on Marianne's shoulder and Marianne stepped back, out of her reach. Madame's eyes glittered at this and she said, "Harvey and I were just discussing what you might enjoy seeing when you come to Lubovosk with your brother."

I am afire which cannot be put out, she thought. "Really?" she said aloud. "I have not contemplated such a trip, and it's unlikely I could travel so far any time soon."

"Oh, Bitsy, anything is possible," said Harvey, smiling, sipping at his cocktail, lips wet and avid in the soft light of the room, sucking lips, vampire lips.

"Not for me, I'm afraid," she said, smiling in return. / am a tower of iron. "Besides," she turned a spiteful reposte, "if I traveled to that part of the world, it would be to my mother's people-to Alphenlicht." Had she put that slight emphasis on my, my mother's people? Yes. The air boiled around her and she felt Madame's fury like a blow.

"There is really very little there to interest you, my child," the woman said. "Very little of interest to anyone. It is a country

of peasants and priests."

"Do I hear my name being taken in vain?" asked Makr Avehl, offering Marianne a glass and taking her elbow in his hand to turn her away toward other guests. "What is this about peasants and priests? Are you talking shop again, Tahiti?" Marianne felt his fingers tremble on her arm, knew that he was almost as sunk in rage as Madame herself, felt herself adrift in these vicious currents which spun around her. / am a fortress of strength, she told herself, moving away to be introduced to other guests, Ellat close beside her.

At dinner, she was at the far end of a long table from Harvey and Madame, and she was able to ignore them for moments at a time. After dinner, they came close to her again, the thrust of their intention as clear as though they had struck at her with a blade. Makr Avehl spoke to her only casually, as to any other guest. Ellat stayed close.

/ am a fortress of diamond, Marianne told herself, concentrating upon reflecting their intentions back upon themselves. She moved her hand into the configurations Ellat had shown her, then thought about them, internalized them. A mountain of stone. Making a hard fist with her right hand. / cannot be moved or changed. I am the fire which cannot be put out. Flicker of first and second finger of the right hand, a trill of movement, secretive.

"Hey, Bitsy," Harvey called. "How are you getting back to town tomorrow?"

/ am diamond, Marianne told herself. "I hadn't thought about it, Harvey." Quietly asserting the while, / am iron. Left forefinger raised, pressed against cheek.

"Then you must let me drive you back." Madame, gaily importunate. "Your brother has already consented to accompany me, and your home is on our way."

"Marianne." Makr Avehl, laughing. "I am crushed! Had you forgotten so soon that you promised I could drive you back? I have those papers to pick up which your librarian so kindly offered to lend to me."

/ am iron. I an adamant. Smiling, turning to him with a little moue of forgetfulness. "I did promise. Of course. I'm sorry, Madame. Another time, perhaps." / am the fire which cannot be put out.

"Oh, I am disappointed. Yes, we will certainly make another occasion. I have not had opportunity to get to know you nearly as well as I should like." Gentle, caressing, infinitely threatening.

We are like Siamese fighting fish, thought Marianne. We circle, our fins engorged with blood, ready to die if need be, caught up in our dance. She flinched nervously as Ellat touched her on the arm.

"Would you like to go up? You said you wanted to ride early in the morning."

Taking this lead, Marianne nodded gratefully. "Thank you, Ellat. Yes. I am a little tired. The ride this afternoon was a longer one than I've had in years. Good night, Madame, Harvey. Madame Andami, I enjoyed your company today. Mr. Williams, Betty. I enjoyed our discussion at dinner. Mrs. Williams. Mr. Winston-Forbes, Harriet, Stephany. Good night, Your Excellency. It has been a very pleasant day." To walk away, back straight, face calm, up the stairs. I am a tower of adamant, I cannot be moved. Down the hall with Ellat, into the room, to collapse across the bed, bent tight around a stomach which heaved and squirmed within her.

"You did very well," said Ellat, giving her a glass of something sweet and powerful which melted warmth through her and stopped the heaving.

"Nothing happened," Marianne whispered. "If you'd taken a movie of it, you wouldn't have seen anything. Nothing happened at all. But I kept feeling them."

"Nothing seemed to happen; very much was happening. Your half brother has made an alliance. He has done it very suddenly it seems. Did he know her before?"

"I never heard him mention her name until a day or so ago. I didn't know he had relatives in Lubovosk."

"He writes mockingly of the Cave of Light. That is a typical Lubovoskan attitude."

"I only know what I told you earlier. I think he went there twice. Once shortly before Mama died. Once, later, before Papa Zahmani died. When each of them died, Harvey had... had..."

"Had only recently returned?"

"Had only recently returned," she agreed in a dead voice, remembering Dr. Brown's words, heard through a closed door when she had been only twelve: "I would have said she died of suffocation, Haurvatat." Suffocation. Not being able to breathe. A thing Madame did to people for fun. Had Madame been able to teach that skill to Harvey? Harvey, who had been rejected by Cloud-haired mama and told to go find a nice girl his own age? Or had Madame herself come to confront Cloud-haired mama when no one else was there to see, to remember?

"There may be no connection at all," said Ellat firmly, undoing the tiny buttons at the back of Marianne's gown. "Go in there and have a nice, hot shower and put on your robe. Makr Avehl will come up here before he goes to bed. After a good night's sleep, nothing will look so ominous."

"I'm afraid I won't sleep," she confessed, the vision of Mama and Madame in intimate confrontation still oppressing her.

"Another glass of what I gave you before, and you will sleep."

Makr Avehl's light tap at the door came late, when the party downstairs had broken up and the sound of voices calling good-night to one another had fallen into silence, when lights had begun to go out in upstairs windows that Marianne could see in the opposite wing. He entered quietly, embraced Ellat, then sat on the edge of Marianne's bed. "Isn't this ridiculous?" he asked. "I invite a lovely young woman for a weekend's visit, all quite properly chaperoned by my sister. I invite her brother, too, because I am curious, and an old antagonist of mine, because I am proud, and suddenly all turns to slime and wickedness. You find it difficult to believe, don't you? Well, so do I, and I have less excuse than you do. Marianne, my dear, will you rise at dawn, please, and go down to the stables where Aghrehond will meet you and take you away from here. Leave your bags. I will bring them when I meet you later in the day to drive you home, as promised. There are too many currents here, too many eddies of greed and passion. Tell me, Marianne, would... would your half brother benefit in any material way if harm came to you?"

Her throat went dry, harsh as sandpaper. She had had those

thoughts, had banished them, had put them down, "buried, begone" in her own litany, but they lunged upward now like corpses long drowned and broken free of some weight to rise hideously through slimed water to the surface. She cried out at the horror of it, all at once weeping in a steady flow. Ellat took her into her arms and held her, saying "Shh, shh. He shouldn't have asked it so abruptly like that. But you don't protest, Marianne. You don't protest?"

"No," she cried. "I can't protest, Ellat. I've thought it too many times. I thought I was wicked to think such a thing, only a wicked, angry child. But, oh, if I died, he would get all that Mama left me-it's all tied up in Papa Zahmani's estate, and my share of Papa's estate, too. It's a lot. More than I ever wanted or expected. More than anyone could need."

"Ah," said Makr Avehl. "So he has a reason. Now, what is her reason?"

Ellat shushed him and gave Marianne something which sent her into sleep, all at once, like falling into velvet darkness. She was still fuzzy at the edges of her mind when they put her into Aghrehond's care at dawn in the stableyard, among the horses clattering out of the place for exercise and the grooms chattering as they headed for the wooded roads.

"Come, pretty lady," said Aghrehond. "We must be away from here."

"Won't they think I'm terribly rude," she asked, "leaving the party unannounced this way?"

He made a conspiratorial face with much scrunching of eyebrows and mouth. "Ellat will say you have gone for an early ride. This is strictly true. She will not say 'horseback,' though they may think so. Others may also desire to ride. So, that is fine, and Makr Avehl will go with them. It is a large place, is is not? There are many miles of pleasant roads around it. Who is to wonder if you are not seen by anyone until noon? By then, you will be elsewhere. Tsk. Stop frowning. You make your face all frilled, like a cabbage leaf."

She stopped frilling her face and let the day happen. They stopped for breakfast in a small, seaside town. They shopped for antiques along the winding streets. They drove through a national monument. They returned to the small town a little after noon to find Makr Avehl waiting for them with Marianne's bags in his car.

"There is a buffet luncheon going on back at the house," he said to Aghrehond. "Some are eating now, others will have luncheon when they return from riding. Some friends of Ellat's will come in to swell the numbers. We will not be missed for some time, which is fortunate." His face was set, grim, and he made a covert sign to Aghrehond which Marianne saw from the corner of one eye. "When someone asks-and not until

then-you may say to Ellat in the hearing of the rest that I have driven Marianne back early in order to go on to Washington for an early meeting at the State Department."

"What happened?" she demanded. "Something happened. What was it?"

He barked a short expletive, chopped off, as a curse half spoken. "A pack of feral dogs," he said, "came out of nowhere, according to the grooms. Madame Andami was bitten on the leg. Superb rider, of course, and she stayed up. We've sent her to a physician up in Charlottesville. One of the horses is cut up a bit. The vet is there now. Someone riding alone-someone not as fine a rider as Madame Andami, someone out of practice, for example-might have been seriously injured." They stood for a moment considering this. "The head groom works for the people who own the place, of course, as do all the servants except for Ellat's maids and my secretary. He says he has never known it to happen before. It's horse country. A pack of feral dogs that would attack horses? It wouldn't be tolerated for a day! They would have been hunted down."

Marianne did not ask the questions which tumbled into her mind. Did someone think the dogs were set upon the riders? Was it an accident? Makr Avehl's face had the look of one who did not wish to talk, to guess, to theorize, the look of a man rigidly but barely under control. He waved Aghrehond back to the big car as he ushered her into the smaller one. Over her

shoulder, she saw the large car turn back toward Wanderly and the house. She remained quiet, let time and miles pass, watched

Ms face until it began to relax slightly, then asked, "You think they were after me?"

"I'm sorry, Marianne. I do think so. Yes."

"You think that's possible? To stir up dogs that way? Make them attack horses?"

He made an odd, aborted stroking motion toward his chin. "I could do it. It wouldn't even be difficult. I know that she can do it, because I can, and whatever I may think about Tahiti, she's strong. Lord, she's strong. And I am weakened by being angry at myself. No-don't shush me. I am angry at myself. Before I invited you here, I never thought to ask about your true relationship with your brother. I knew you didn't like him, I knew things were not good between you, but I never tried to get at the bottom of it. I should have considered it more fully. Instead I lulled you. I lulled myself.

"Marianne, he means you ill. Not merely in the slightly jealous way one sibling may cordially detest another-which, Lord help me, was what I had considered. No, he means you real destruction as surely as this road leads to your home. He means you ill and he has made some kind of alliance with

Madame to that end-if, indeed, she is not a primary mover in this matter. And I, who foolishly exposed you to this, must find a way to protect you."

Marianne laughed bitterly, and when he turned an astonished face on her, she laughed again. "Makr Avehl, you don't know how relieved I was last night to hear you say that. For years, I've thought that Harvey hated me, or resented me. For years I've fought against his patronizing me, destroying me. Whenever I got my head up, he'd do his best to knock it down. The only things I could be sure of succeeding at were things he didn't find out about. Always with that hating face, that superior smile. But nothing I could prove. Nothing anyone else could see.. So I felt guilty, wicked. I felt I didn't have the right to hate him. After all, Papa left him in charge, left him to take care of me. Now you say he's trying to harm me-really. For money. For Papa Zahmani's money. I suppose it's true. Harvey likes money. He never has enough, though what he inherited should have been enough for anyone. But I get more, of course, when I'm thirty, because a lot of it was my mother's. My mother's, not Harvey's mother's. But Papa was old country,

through and through. Couldn't see leaving it to me until I was a matron. Girls had no real status with Papa. He loved me,

but that was different."

"That may be true, but I think it more likely he saw you as a little girl and he saw Harvey as a grown man. Perhaps he only wanted to protect you. How old was Harvey?"

"Oh, twenty-five or -six. That may have been it. I was only thirteen. I wish I could feel that was it."

"Your papa had no reason to mistrust his son?"

"No. Harvey was never... he was never strange until Mama died. When I was a little girl, I thought he was Prince Charming. Really. He was so handsome, so gallant. He brought little presents. He... he courted us, Mama and me. Then, when Mama died, he changed, all at once. He became something ... something horrible."

"I think it possible that he did not understand the reality of the property division between your parents. I don't think he realized quite what part of the family fortunes were yours, Marianne. Perhaps he began to be a bit strange when he visited Lubovosk. I'm sure that he was given weapons there he should not have had, and now I must defend you against them. You must be very brave, and very strong. There are certain things black shamans can do-and certain things people trained by them can do. You've seen a sample already....

"There are worse things: transport into the false worlds, into the dream borders, binding forever in places which exist within the mind and have virtually no exits to the outside world....

"But to do any of these things, the shaman believes that his

ritual demands consent. Listen to me, Marianne."

"I'm listening. You said the ritual demands consent."

"Remember it. The shamans believe the ritual is necessary to the effect, and they believe that consent is necessary to the ritual. The shaman says to his victim, 'Will you have some tea?' And the victim says, 'Yes, thank you.' That is consent. In my own library, your brother said to you, 'Come, let me introduce you to...' and you nodded yes. That was consent. So she then struck at you."

"Did the people who went riding consent? If so, to what?"

"More likely, Madame went down to the stables before going to bed last night, taking a few lumps of sugar with her. 'Here, old boy, have a lump of sugar,' and the horse nods his head, taking the sugar. He has consented then, and they can use him. So also with dogs, with birds, with anything they can get to take food from their hands. The true victim was to be the horse, whatever horse you might be riding or anyone else might be riding. They are not over scrupulous."

"What are you trying to tell me?"

"I am saying, for a time, do not consent to anything your brother proposes. If he says on the phone 'isn't it a nice day,' say 'no, it is not.' If he says 'wouldn't you like to go to Mexico

for your vacation,' say 'no, I'd rather go somewhere else.' Be disagreeable. Better yet, do not talk to him at all."

"Forever? That may be difficult."

"Only for a few days, until I can get a few of the Kavi together to make a protection for you. Until we can teach you to protect yourself. I don't even want to take you home, to leave you there alone, except that anything else would make them more determined, more dangerous. As it is, they may not know we suspect them."

"The thing Ellat taught me won't work?"

"You're not schooled enough in its use. You haven't the discipline. I hate to leave you, even for tonight."

"They can't be in that much of a hurry," she said nervously, disturbed by his intensity. "I don't inherit for another four years, for heaven's sake. Harvey isn't going to do anything precipitous."

"I suppose you're right. Once one begins to feel this menace, this gathering force, it is like hearing a thunderstorm in one's head. Space and time are lost in it. One is at the center of fury." He reached to take her hand in his, utterly unprepared for the reaction his words would bring. "Marianne, I could stay with you tonight."

Her hand whipped away from him, without volition. Her mouth bent into an oval of rejection, horror. "I'm not like that," she said, the words coming from deep within, words she did

not usually say aloud but were now aloud, between them, harsh and ugly. "Not like that." She shuddered once, again, muttered words under her breath, like a litany, got control of herself, tried to make light of it, did not succeed. His face was white, blank.

"I've offended you," he said at last. "I meant nothing dishonorable. Please. It was only to offer protection. You're probably right. There is not that much hurry. They aren't mind readers, after all. They cannot know how thoroughly I am alerted to the danger they pose. We will comfort ourselves with that thought. If your brother calls, you will be light, and cheerful, and contrary. Please remember to be contrary, Marianne."

She agreed to do so, not hearing him, too caught up in the internal maelstrom he had unleashed, wanting only to be out of the car and behind a door, her own door, shut against the world. "Not like that," the hissing demon voices inside kept saying. "Harvey was wrong. I'm not like that."

He left her at the door, seeing on her face that he should not offer to come in. She went in to disconnect phone, to sit for an hour in her window while the sun went down and the stars began to peek over the roofs and chimneys. The buds of the oak outside her window had begun to unfurl into tiny, curled

hands of innocent pink, and her mind squirmed in guilt and confusion at the fact that now, even now, she lusted after him, wanted him, and all the years of not wanting did not seem to have immunized her at all.

At last she set to work building mental towers of adamant and walls of iron. She put herself to sleep with the litany Ellat had taught her. She awakened to her clock radio, news of combat and death, so ordinary and distant as to be undisturbing. She was almost ready for class when the doorbell rang, and she saw the delivery man's hat through the peephole, knew that it must be some little gift from Makr Avehl, felt again that combined guilt, lust and self-loathing. She opened the door to receive the package, accept the the proffered pencil.

"You have to sign for it. Where the X is on the line."

"Yes," said Marianne, "I will." Only to see the glitter of eyes as the uniformed person's head came up, dark, hawk-faced, mouth curved in a cry of victory. She had only time to think that she had given consent and to say, "Madame Delu-bovoska," before all went dark around her.

IT WAS DARK by the time Makr Avehl arrived in Washington after miles of driving through country he did not see, traffic he did not consider, in a state of mind best described, he told

himself, as unnerved and astonished. While his mouth had been busy saying words which meant, in whatever language he was thinking, "Gods in heaven, what ails the wench!" his center of being was saying in another tone, perhaps another language entirely, "Oh, my dear, my very dear." This colloquy was over in the moment which it occupied, leaving his political self shaken before the sweet longing of that inner voice: "Oh, my very dear." And that was when he knew, absolutely and without any remaining doubt. Not earlier, when he had seen her at dinner, a sparkling baton of willow flesh, bending but not breaking before her brother's assault; not on horseback, face eager as a child's, with tendrils of hair wet on her forehead from the sun; not as he had seen her in the car, first laughing then crying to know that all her world was arrayed against her but that she was not insane.

So. So what was he to do now? She had rejected him and he had left her, left her there alone, and he could not go back to force himself upon her, for in such forcing might end all that he now in one instant hoped and longed for, without warning or premonition. Well, no matter the reason, if any. If she had rejected him, she had not rejected Ellat, and what Ellat could not find out was not worth the finding. So he drove like

a maniac to reach his hotel and a phone so that Ellat might be enlisted in his sudden cause. He was convinced of danger, smelled it, felt it breathing hotly on his neck, a scent of blood and damnation. She must accept help from Ellat.

Oncoming headlights speared toward his eyes, and he came to himself as a horn shrieked beside him, dopplering by and away into darkness with a howl of fury. This sobered him. He would call Ellat as soon as he arrived in Washington. Until then, he would try to behave more sensibly and think of other things.

In which he was only partially successful. Ellat was eager enough to help Marianne. "Of course I'll stay with her. We got along quite nicely. If you really feel...." But her desire to help did not allay Makr Avehl's concern.

"I really feel," he said grimly, "that there's something more than merely wicked going on here."

"I can't figure what they're playing at," fussed Ellat. "Madame using her cocktail party magic tricks here, in this house, against one of your people."

"I think Madame sees Marianne as one of her people, or one of Harvey's people, which amounts to the same thing. Can you be here by lunch time tomorrow?"

Lunch time, she said, yes. Yes, the guests had all departed. Yes, the horse which had been bitten seemed to be healing and a dog they had captured was being tested for rabies. Yes, he could turn in the little car to the rental agency, they would use

the big one. Yes, the servants were packing so that they might leave. "I'm tired of all this, Makr Avehl. I want to go home."

"Just as soon as we do something about Marianne, Ellat. I promise."

Something in his voice said more than he had intended, for there was a waiting silence at the other end of the line, a silence which invited him to say more than he was ready to say. When he did not fill it, she said, "Take her with us. That's the sensible thing to do."

"It's called kidnaping, Ellat. The Americans don't find it socially acceptable. They have laws against it."

Ellat only snorted. "Tomorrow. At lunch time."

On which note he found himself sitting on the side of his bed, holding the phone in one hand as it buzzed a long, agitated complaint. Should he call Marianne? What could he say? No. Better leave it. Drop in with Ellat tomorrow, about five in the afternoon, when Marianne got home from work. Gritting his teeth, he turned from the phone to his briefcase to spend two dull hours going over the material he would use in his meeting the following morning.

And when that meeting was over, he felt it had all been an exercise in futility, a kind of diplomatic danse macabre in which

he and Madame had shaken skeletons at one another like children at a Halloween party. And yet the woman had seemed strangely satisfied, as though she had won whatever game she was playing.

"The undersecretary of state assures me that we may depend upon the status quo," he said to Ellat over the lunch table.

"Which means precisely what?" asked Ellat, not interrupting her concentration on a plethora of oysters.

"Which means exactly nothing," he admitted. "The U.S. has spoken for us in the U.N. and that's it. They don't take the matter seriously, and I'm beginning to think they're right. This has all been a charade. Madame is up to something else, and this has all been misdirection, probably for my benefit."

"Marianne said that."

"She said what?"

"Marianne said that if the Lubovoskans really intended to take us over, they'd invade."

"Well, of course they have tried that," he said.

"She would have no way of knowing that, Makr Avehl. I repeat what I said earlier. If you want to keep the child safe and away from that horrible brother of hers, take her with us."

He did not reply. The food did not tempt him, and he was waiting impatiently for Ellat's affair with the oysters to run its course. He dared not agree with her, for she would take it as a promise, but emotionally he had begun to believe only the

course she had suggested would satisfy him-to take Marianne with him when he left.

"Eat your oysters, Ellat," he said. "It may be your last opportunity to do so. Aghrehond will be here with the car in twenty minutes."

They approached Marianne's tall house just at sunset. The door into the front hall stood open and on the tiny turfed area between the steps and the iron fence, Mrs. Winesap leaned on a lawn edger, intent upon the clean line separating daffodils from grass. She looked up in frank curiosity, staring at Makr Avehl and Ellat from her broad, open face, mouth a little open, rather gnomelike with her cutoff jeans and baggy shirt. "I don't think Marianne's here," she told them. "The door's open, though, so she must have run out just for a minute."

Makr Avehl acknowledged this information with a pleasant nod, stood back to let Ellat precede him into the hallway and halfway up the stairs. Then he saw Marianne's jacket, obviously trodden upon where it lay half on the upper step, then the clipboard of papers with her signature scrawled and running off one edge. The door to her apartment was open. On the window seat the purple crocuses wilted in the close heat, and a fly buzzed in frustration against the closed window.

He stepped back into the hall to pick up the clipboard, knowing as he did so what had happened. It could all be read in the signs; the track of the beast could be seen. The world began to turn red inside his eyes, and he realized he was holding his breath. Released air burst from his lungs, and he sat down abruptly. "She's gone. Oh, damn me for a fool, Ellat. Damn me for an arrogant, irresponsible fool. We're too late. She's gone."

Ellat was already going down the stairs, out into the tiny front yard. "You must be Mrs. Winesap? I thought so. Marianne has told me all about you. She's so grateful for your help with the lawn. I wonder, did you happen to notice anyone coming or going this morning? I had sent a package, and I wondered ..."

Sympathetic, warm expression saying what a nice woman she was to have sent a package. "I saw him leaving. Went out of here like a cat with his tail on fire. Must have left his delivery truck around the comer, because he went off down the block in the time it took me to say 'Good morning.' I hate it when people are so bad-tempered they don't even respond to a simple

time of day. I said, 'Good morning,' loud and cheerful, and I didn't even get a grunt from him."

"That would have been about what time?"

"Oh, let me see. What did I come outside for? I'd had breakfast, and Larkin was doing the dishes, and I'd written a letter to my sister-that was it-and I'd come out to put it in the mailbox for the postman. So it wasn't time for 'Donahue' yet, or I'd have been watching him. About 8:30, I'd say, give a little take a little." She laughed heartily. "I always say don't be too sure, and nobody can call you a liar."

He was holding onto the banister when Ellat came back up the stairs. "I heard," he said. "Then Marianne wasn't taken." He turned back into the room. On the window seat the Delvaux print of the young women setting lights in the street was broken in two, splintered ends of frame protruding like broken bones. He went through to the bedroom. Nothing. Orderly. She had made the bed. The bathroom was a little messy, towel dropped rather than folded. "She was here when the doorbell rang," he said to Ellat, turning to make a helpless gesture to Aghrehond who had just come up the stairs. "Doorbell rang, she went to the door. The person there said something about signing for a package, and Marianne said 'of course' or 'sure' or something of the kind-without thinking. She didn't even have time to be afraid." Oh, God, he thought, why did she pull away from me with that revulsion? I should have been here. I should have been the one to answer that door, confront that monster.

"If it is that Lubovosk woman, she flips her finger at you," said Aghrehond. "She sneers like a boy in the street, nyaa,

nyaa, nyaa. She makes an insult, a provocation. Why?"

"Perhaps," said Ellat, "because she has had the wits to see that Makr Avehl cares for the girl. Bait. Bait in a trap."

With horror, Makr Avehl thought of the white bird and the black, demon fish; thought of the naked girl carrying her little light into the darkness while trying to pretend that she was dreaming. He came to himself staring at his own face in the mirror, haggard and terrified.

"Why is the picture broken?"

"I gave it to her," he replied woodenly. 'To replace a very unpleasant one her brother had given her. If Harvey saw it- if Madame saw it, they would know in an instant that someone was intervening in Marianne's affairs."

"But she wasn't taken," said Ellat. "Whoever it was didn't take her."

"Sent," Makr Avehl growled. "Not taken, sent." So, wherever she was now, among the false worlds, somewhere in the endless borderlands where no maps existed and the shortest distance between any two points was never a straight line, she was at least together, body and soul. He had seen bodies sundered from their souls. He had experienced souls sundered in that way, too. Better not, far better not. If he had had to choose

between two horrors, it would have been this, at least. That she was in one place. One. Somewhere.

"I must go into Madame's limbo after her, into whatever borderland place she has been sent."

"Makr Avehl! Think of the danger!" Ellat laid a hand upon his arm. "Think!"

"I am thinking," he muttered. "You, too. Think of her. Somewhere alone. Lost. Frightened. Perhaps without memory. Certainly without friends. In a dream world, a lost world, a world in which dark is light and evil is good, perhaps. You think, Ellat. What else can we do?"

"From here?"

"Yes. From here. Water those flowers, will you? She wouldn't have left them like that. Open the window. She would have done that." Oh, God Zurvan, he prayed, let me undo the harm I have done. I was the one not to tell her what pit of evil I sensed in that box of hers. I was the one who begged her to come to Wanderly, not valuing her own instincts which bade her stay far from her so-called kin. I was the one who considered the threat not urgent, not imminent. God.

Where would one like Madame send one like Marianne? What kind of world would she construct, of her own soul, of her own being? Where would one like Marianne be sent? Into what place? Into which of the myriad borderlands? How constrained, how held? He lay down upon Marianne's bed, quietly,

quietly, letting what he knew of Tahiti possess him until it became more real than himself. Where? Where? Where?

Ellat came to the door of the room, apparently unsurprised to see him lying there. "Can you tell me what you are going to do?"

He reached out a hand to her, clasping her own, begging her trust and indulgence. She released him, sighing.

How could he describe to her the almost instinctive tasting of ambience, the intuitive sorting through of words and ideas and pictures? Marianne had been sent, and that sending had had to be, by its very nature, within the structure of Marianne's relationship to Madame, within the ambience of their milieu. He had only to feel his way into that vicinage, into what was already there; he had only to seek that faintly diplomatic tinge, the flavor of embassies and foreign places, the sourness of artifice, the stink of deception, the thin, beery scent of solitude and cold rooms, the presence of children-no! The presence of the childlike. The shadow of malevolence hovering. Within that, something being built, constructed, changed, for Marianne's own persona would demand that. Courage. There would be courage. Stubbornness. A kind of relentless perseverance in survival.

Withal, there would power, Madame's power, Madame's control, hidden, perhaps, or disguised, but there nonetheless. Madame's colors, ebony and blood. Marianne's colors, mauve and plum and misty blue found rarely if at all. Would there be anything there of Harvey? Unlikely. Though he might think of himself as an important part of this challenge, in reality he was no more to Madame than was Marianne herself, a part of the bait.He lay there, breathing his way into the precincts of illusion, finding the border of dream as he would have found the spoor of a deer in the forest of Alphenlicht, slowly, with infinite caution, summoning it, moving breath by breath so as not to shatter the silence or betray his presence, disguising his own form, changing to blend into the place he would find himself, that otherwhere, that hinterland where he would find her, find her, find her....

Ellat, watching, saw him sink into trance, fade before her eyes into an effigy, lifeless as stone, betrayed only by the shallow, infrequent breaths which misted the mirror she held before his lips. A grunt from the doorway made her turn. Aghrehond stood there, eyes wide, mouth open, panting as though he had run for miles. "I will go with him," he said.

"Hondi. He did not ask-"

"Ellat, he does not ask. I will go with him. He may need someone. He may need someone to stay in there when he comes back, for he cannot stay. That is what she wants, that Lubovoskan. She wants him lost in the false worlds, but he is too wise for that. I will go. Shush now." And he went back into the living room to lie down there, hands folded on his chest, sinking at once into a sleep both as profound and as disturbing as that which held Makr Avehl.

Deep into the night the light glowed in the upper window as Ellat's figure passed and passed again and the search went on.

MARIANNE, LIKE THE others in the pensione, made daily visits to the embassy. It was only a short walk, through the carnival ground and the phantom zoo, along the city wall to the Gates of Darius-not cleaned yet, though the scaffolding had been rigged against the ruddy stones for several seasons, and teams of dwarves were brought in from time to time to swarm up the ladders and peck away at the archway-then onto the Avenue of Lanterns. She thought that they must keep changing the avenue. When she had first visited the embassy, she remembered the avenue as quite broad and straight, the lanterns honest constructions of amber glass and bronze. Now the way curved

to make room for the new tiled pool they were building, and the lights had been replaced with scattered braziers which left much of the roadway in darkness, the footing treacherous among chips of marble, chisels, mallets, and discarded cola cans the masons had left. Of course, reaching the embassy in the morning light was only a matter of watching one's step, but the return always seemed to occur after darkness had fallen, which made the return trip difficult though not, Marianne reminded herself constantly, impossible. Marianne went to the embassy

at least every other day, religiously, in the constant hope that some message would have arrived concerning her, or some quota would have been changed to allow her an exit visa. Everyone at the pensione, of course, existed in the same hope.

The woman who could have come from Lubovosk had pointed out, with laughter, what a vain hope that was. "Those of us from Lubovosk already have our visas," she had said, fixing Marianne with her cold, imperious eye in which that taint of mad laughter always hung like a pale moon over a cemetery. "Those of us who know the rales know the way. Those of us in favor with the ambassador. You, on the other hand, are unlikely to receive permission to leave. You are obviously a native, a borderlander." The way she said it was a venomous

revelation to Marianne, a metempiric bombshell which seemed to make the matter certain forever. Of course they would not help her at the embassy. Of course the quota would not include her. Of course they would be moved to neither pity nor mercy. Not for a borderlander, a creature of quiet-gray, still-dun ghostness.

She had thought to apologize to the woman who could have come from Lubovosk, but the words caught in her throat, so she had put her glass of Madeira on the harpsichord (worrying later that it might have left a ring) and let herself out of the crowded apartment. Behind her the surf of conversation ebbed and flowed, falling into silence as she climbed the echoing stairs to her own room. It had been a mistake to go to the reception. Probably they had meant to invite someone else, and the invitation had been put under her door by mistake.

Her room was cold, the dirty casements opened wide to a view of the nearer roofs and the farther towers. Sun lay upon the streets, rare as laughter, enough to start a ridiculous upwelling of hope, like a seeping spring under ashes. She snatched up her coat to drag it over her arms as she ran down the clattering stairs of the pensione, past the landing where they had found the old man dead, his pockets stuffed with appeals to the ambassador, past the room where the woman who could have come from Lubovosk and her guests still talked, into the frigid entrance hall with its lofty ceiling and frosty mirrors, and out into the bright, dusty streets where the children from

everywhere gathered to play. She wondered, as she had before,

why they gathered in this street rather than some other. They broke before her like drops of mercury, only to flow together behind her and go on with their games, a fevered intensity of play. She could feel their impatience, their hot ardor, sizzling in the dust.

She wondered which of them, if any of them, had been born here in the borderland? Surely none. No one remembered being born here. There were no natives to this place, despite what the woman who could have come from Lubovosk had said. They had come, all of them, as Marianne had come, interlopers, strangers, unacclimatized to this place or this time. Marianne knew there must have been somewhere else. "Cibola," she chanted to herself. "Rhees. New York. Camelot. Broceliande. Persepolis. Alphenlicht." All of these were places beyond the border. "I could have come from there," she whispered rebelliously. "I could. I know I could."

Hands thrust deep into her pockets, she started down toward the river wharves, toward a place full of light and the complaint of gulls. If the sun were an omen, if hope were not dead, if there were still reason to go on-well, then Macravail might be there. Perhaps they would go to the phantom zoo, feed

dream shreds to the tame ghosts. Perhaps he would give her another present from the flea market, perhaps a book with stories about other places. Perhaps he would not. One never knew with Macravail.

She found him sitting, as he often did, upon a bollard, perched like some ungainly bird, thin to the point of ropiness, every corner of him busy with bones. She gentle-voiced him, knowing his horror of shrillness, and he turned in one flowing motion to stare at her from huge, lightless eyes which seemed to see only shadows where she saw light and light where she saw shadows. "Marianne," his voice caressed her. "Will you share my sun?"

The question she answered was not the one he had just asked. Squatting beside him on the wharf, she said, "I don't think I'll go to the embassy anymore." He had suggested to her again and again that it was a waste of time, gently, persistently. "I keep thinking of the old man."

"What old man was that?"

"The old man who died in the place I live. He'd been going to the embassy forever. He never got out. The woman from Lubovosk says I'll never get out."

"But she urges you to go to the embassy."

"Yes." Marianne was unable to consider the fundamental dilemma this implied. It was true. The woman who could have come from Lubovosk urged everyone to go to the embassy. Always. The thought led her into a gray, fuzzy area which itched at the edges and hurt in the middle. She could not think of it, even though she knew Macravail would be disappointed. She changed the subject. "Did you take your dog to the witch wife?"

"It did no good at all." Macravail's voice was grave and sorrowful, the edges of his mouth under the white moustache turned down. "I thought at first it had helped. For a time he seemed better, and we even walked to Leather Street and bought a new leash, but last night while we slept all his hair fell out. He is bald now, like a wineskin." He pointed to the shadows where a bloated shape murfled to itself, shiny and hard as a soccer ball.

Marianne sighed. They had spent half their substance for several seasons-surely it had been several seasons-on Macravail's dog, yet the poor beast seemed no better. She could not bear to see Macravail grieve over him. "Why don't we plant on him?" she suggested desperately. "Mixed grasses. We'll tie the seeds on with gauze and water him night and morning."

So that is what they did that day while the sun dribbled into the streets in shiny puddles and processions wound about on the city walls and heralds rode toward the gates making brassy

sounds of challenge. When they had planted Macravail's dog-more complicated than she had thought it would be, for the gauze tended to slip-they went to the phantom zoo, but it was too late to feed the ghosts and they ended up eating the dream shreds themselves.

When he left her at the door, he reminded her of the morning's resolution. "You promised not to consent to go to the embassy anymore." She asked him why he cared, knowing he could not, or would not, tell her. He did not, merely sniffed remotely and chewed on the corners of his moustache while the dog snuffled wearily at the end of the gilded leash. "I hope your dog will grow grass, Macravail," she wished him at last.

He had forbidden her to say goodbye to him, which made leavetaking somewhat tenuous. She was never quite sure when he would go or if he would go at all. When she laid her hand upon the doorlatch, however, he went away, leaving her to climb the four long flights to the cold room and the sagging bed. Evidently the reception was long over, for no sounds came from the woman's apartment. Sometimes Marianne did not see her for days, many long days, and she felt somehow that the woman had somewhere else to go from time to time, unlike the rest of them.

The next morning, however, it was the woman from Lubovosk who woke her, tapping on the door, calling, "Marianne, get up, get dressed. They're doing something new at the embassy today." Marianne almost refused to answer, almost kept her word to Macravail, but then decided that any hope was better than none. She agreed to go with them after breakfast, remembering from some misty past a voice telling her she was contrary-or was it to be contrary?-asserting her independence by refusing to hurry from the dining room even though the others were shifting impatiently in the hall. The red-faced woman was there, and the two sons of the duchess. The little old woman who swept the hallways was with them as well, her eyes frightened and soft beneath the swath of veiling on her hat. Marianne had never seen her in anything but apron and dusty skirt, a tattered shawl around her shoulders, but today she wore mittens and carried a parasol above the silly hat.

"It's a pretty parasol," offered Marianne, sorry now to have kept the old thing waiting,

"Everyone ought to have something," the old woman said. "Don't you think so?"

The five of them moved off under the sardonic gaze of the woman who could have come from Lubovosk. Marianne expected to hear her laugh behind them at any moment, almost as though she remembered the laughter. When she looked back from the edge of the carnival ground, however, the woman was gone. In the zoo the phantoms moved restlessly in their

cages, but only Marianne glanced at the spectral arms thrust through the bars, begging for food. The twin sons of the duchess strode along side by side, their arms around one another's waists to hide the fact they were joined at the lower body. When they

arrived at the embassy, a fussy clerk sent them all to various rooms and told them to wait. Marianne sat in the empty office, listening to the hopelessly frustrated buzzing of a fly against the gray glass, dirty from a hundred rains and a hundred dust storms, admitting light only through the accidental fact that the filth was not perfectly evenly distributed. Outside lay the famed gardens of the ambassador, but Marianne could not see them. A very long time went by before one of the consular staff entered the room, a bundle of forms under one arm, to sit at the desk and begin the questions. The woman from Lubovosk had been right. The procedure was different, and yet Marianne had a feeling of horrid familiarity, as though in some other place or time she had experienced it all before.

"Have you ever healed warts?"

Marianne could not remember having done so. "I don't think so," she replied, trying to keep her voice interested but unemotional. One never knew. Perhaps the tone of voice one used would make a difference.

"Have you ever visited the Cave of Light or any similar tourist attraction?"

"No. I'm sure I haven't. Should I have?"

The person stared at her coldly. "It isn't a question of should. It's a question of the quota being changed-definitions. Regulations. You know. The new system will make all that possible. Now. Do the following mean anything to you at all? Stop me if they do. Shamans? The onocratic dyad? The Cave of Light?" There was an invitational pause, but it meant nothing to Marianne. "Banshees? Sybils? Crabbigreen? Ah, that strikes a chord, does it?"

Marianne thought it had something to Jo with lawns, but she wasn't sure. Still, the person nodded encouragingly and continued with the list. "Ethnography? Harvey? Lubovosk?"

"Yes," Marianne said into the silence. "There's a woman in my pensione from there."

"Tell me what you know about it," he said, silky-voiced, all at once very interested.

"She's from there. You'd have to ask her. I don't know anything about it at all."

"Umm. Let's see. That's schedule 42-A. Ah, here it is. Now, this will be a little different. You just tell me what comes

to mind when I say each word. Drat. This pen is out of ink. Wait a bit. I'll be right back...." The person left the room, the door shutting behind with a swish full of finality and finish, the sound a branch makes falling from the top of a tree, falling, falling, then done, not to fall anymore because it has reached the place beneath which there is no more down at all.

"Swish," said Marianne to herself sadly. She did not expect the person to return. The little light which had come through the dirty glass was already fading. Time in the embassy was different from time on the outside. It was almost night, and outside in the hall the little old woman had set her parasol against the wall and was busy sweeping the floors.

"I thought, since I was here already..." the woman began.

"We might as well go on back," said Marianne. "Perhaps we'll come again tomorrow."

Macravail was waiting for her in the street, ropy arms folded across his narrow chest, mouth puckered in reproach. "I thought you weren't coming here anymore." She stared at her feet, unable to answer him. "The seeds sprouted," he said, pointing at the end of the leash where a fuzzy, green ball clicked along on short legs, beady eyes peering at her from beneath grassy ears. The dog barked, a husky, friendly, convalescent sound.

"I'm glad, Macravail. It makes him look so much more comfortable. I'm sure he feels better."

"I thought we'd take him to the fountain," said Macravail.

"He needs watering. Then we could buy some fruit jellies and watch the fireworks,"

Marianne could not help the slow tears which began to well from her eyes, the harsh lump which choked her. Under the curious eyes of the little old woman, she wept noisily. Macravail made no effort to comfort her, merely chewed the ends of his moustache and spoke soothing words to the dog.

"What's it all for?" she cried. "What good is it all? We'll eat fruit jellies and watch fireworks and tomorrow it will all be the same. The embassy will change procedures again, but they still won't give me a visa. I'll grow old here, and die, and then they'll put me in the phantom zoo with the other ghosts, and I'll be hungry all the time. Oh, Macravail, I just want out..."

The little old woman turned pale at this and tottered away, tap-tapping with her parasol. Marianne fumbled through her coat pocket to find some tissues, a little sticky and shredded, but whole enough to dry her eyes and stop her dripping nose. When she came to herself again, the old woman was gone, and Macravail was crouched against the curbing as the grassy dog peed against the lamppost.

"If you'll stop going to the embassy," he whispered, "I can

get you out. Without a visa. If you really want to get out."

"You can? Why haven't you said anything before? You know I want out. More than anything."

"People say that," he went on whispering, "when they don't really mean it. The little old woman who was just here, she'd say it, but she'd be terrified of it. Here is familiar, always changing, but familiar. Here is almost forever. Here is custom and endless circles turning. Here is nothing truly strange. There is nothing here but what is here, Marianne, and the only way out is out, no guarantees, no safety. Some are better off here, Marianne."

"How can you say that? Nothing ever happens here! Nothing ever changes!"

"New fountains along the avenue. New carvings on the gate."

"But as soon as they're finished, they'll change it again. They do that. Everything is always changed, but nothing is ever different. I want it to be different. I want you to get me out.""If you really want to," he said with an intensity she had not heard from him before, "I can't advise it, or urge it. It has to be your decision."

"I want to," she said firmly, thrusting the soggy tissues back into her pocket. "I want to. What do I have to do?"

"Just tell me where you want to go. That's all. You tell me, and I'll take you there."

"I want to cross the border."

"Where do you want to cross? Into where? There's a crossing in a pasture just outside the walls. There's a crossing under the wharf we sat on yesterday. There's a crossing where the dwarves come in, and one where the heralds go out. Where do you want to cross?"

"Does it matter?"

"You have to choose and consent, Marianne. You can move, change, get from this place to another place, so long as you choose and consent. Each place has rules of its own. That's the rule here. I can only help you if you choose and consent."

She chewed her lip, felt the hard lump rising in her throat once more. "Won't you decide for me, Macravail?"

He shook his head slowly, a pendulum slowly ticking, a mechanical motion as though he had been wound up. She could almost hear the slow toc-toc-toc as his head went from side to side. "No. I can't do that. And if you talk to anyone about it, I can't help you at all. You tell me where you want to cross, and I'll take you there, but you must tell me."

She fumbled with the soggy tissue again, and when she looked up it was to see Macravail and the dog disappearing around the corner far down the avenue, near the new pool. Loud into the dusk came the sound of hammers, dhang, dhang,

dhang, echoing from the high walls along the street. The sound grew louder as she moved toward home, and when she went beneath the arch of the gate a chip of stone fell into her collar, scratching her neck. The dwarves were at work in the flaring light of a hundred torches as the fireworks burst above them in showers of multicolored sparks. She could still hear the sounds of the hammers when she lay in her bed, trying to breathe quietly, trying not to think, trying to sleep.

Then, in the morning, she tried not to sleep, tried to cast off an overwhelming lassitude which paralyzed her will. Below her window the children played in the dusty street in a fever of intensity. Their game seemed to revolve around a small group of slightly older children, children perhaps eleven or twelve- perhaps even a little older than that, for the loose shirt which one of them wore clung occasionally to the swell of budding breasts. That one, a cloud of dark hair and wild, black eyes, was at the center of every evolution of the game, a desperate concentration upon her face. After a time of watching them, Marianne put on her old coat and went down the stairs, through the cold hall and onto the shallow steps which fronted the pensione. There she sat, nibbling a cuticle, watching. Each turn in the game brought the central group somewhat nearer. Finally, when the sun was almost overhead, the cloud-haired girl was so close that Marianne could have touched her. Instead,

moved by some urge she could not have identified, she said, "If someone told you they could get you out without a visa, what would you think of that?"

The girl turned on her with a fiery look. "So what? Any of us can do that."

"You know where the crossing places are?"

"Hah." It was a whispered sneer. "Since I was^here. Since I could walk. I know them all, even the ones that haven't been used in a hundred years. All the kids do."

"Then why don't you-emigrate?"

The girl stared at her insolently. For a time Marianne thought she would not answer, but at last her expression softened and she put out a hand to touch Marianne's face. "You're all misty in the head, aren't you? Younger than I am, for all you seem older. They change, you know. A place might be a good gate for a while, then it would become a bad gate. You get through a bad gate, you might not be able to play your way out, you know? You have to work it out, play it out. That's what we're doing. Playing the gates. Patterning them. When the right pattern comes, then I'm next. I can tell you because I'm next, and I won't be here much longer." Seeing the incomprehension in Marianne's face, she continued. "There aren't any good gates for grown-ups. Only for kids. That's why I have to get out

right away, before... you know. Don't tell!" For a moment the voice was that of someone Marianne knew, then the voice of an anguished child, then the dark-haired girl was swung back into the frenzy of the game. Marianne returned to her room, thinking she should wash her face before lunch. Bent over the basin she heard a shout go up from the children, but when she hastened to the window there was nothing to see.

The cloud-haired girl was gone, but she could have gone home for lunch. Marianne held that thought resolutely through the noon meal, through her afternoon nap, through the pre-dinner cocktail hour which the woman from Lubovosk insisted all the residents attend, and which she herself attended, today full of some obscure fury which Marianne made no effort to identify. After dinner the children were still hard at play, but the cloud-haired girl was not among them. Marianne went to her room to put a pack of tissues in her pocket with her comb and, after some thought, the little book of stories Macravail had given her. She had not read many of the stories nor understood those she had read. "Something," she whispered to herself. "Everyone should have something."

She went into the evening and to the river. Macravail was there. Beside him the grassy dog was digging wildly into a

crevasse between two stones, whurffling as he did so. Marianne sat down beside Macravail and watched the dog until it gave up the search and lay down with a bursting sigh beside them. "Tell me where all the crossings are," she said. "Tell me where they all are, Macravail." Then, as he did so, she wrote each one down on a page of the book, each on a different page. When she had finished, the stars had come out. Taking a deep breath, she opened the book at random. The nearest lights were in the carnival ground, dim and distant. She made it out with difficulty. "The alley behind the bird market. Let's go there now, Macravail."

They went the long way 'round, skirting the fruit market and the street of the metal workers. They passed the back wall of the embassy, hearing over the wall the clatter of dishes and the unmistakable sound of laughter-the woman from Lubovosk's laughter. The alley behind the bird market was a narrow one, lit by a single gaslight. When they stood at the end of it, Marianne could see the door clearly, though she thought it had not been there when they entered the alley.

"Through there," said Macravail. She turned to see his face drawn up in an expression part pain, part hope, part despair. "Through there."

"I have to go," she pleaded. "You do understand, Macravail? I can't stay. I can't go on forever like the little old woman, like the sons of the duchess. I have to have a difference, Macravail. Come with me."

"No," he said unaccountably. "You're safer alone. They may not even know you're gone for a while. But give me something-something to remember by...."

The only thing she had was the book. The words came out piteously, unforgiveably, before she thought. "Everyone ought to have something...."

"Ahhh.... She had not heard Macravail wail in that way before, so lost, so lonely. "Give me, and I'll give you." She felt the dog's leash thrust into her hands, felt the grassy beast pressing tight against her legs as the book was withdrawn from her hand. Then there was only the crossing to elsewhere, and the difference came without warning.

Makr Avehl lay on Marianne's bed, unmoving, eyes closed. On the table beside him a brazier burned. From time to time, Ellat dropped a pinch of fragrant resin into it to make a pungent smoke. Between such times she moved about, making no unnecessary noise but not trying to be silent. Aghrehond had been stretched out on the living room floor until a few moments before. One moment he had been there, as quiet as Makr Avehl, the next moment he was gone. Ellat had found her eyes brimming with tears. Aghrehond was like a brother, like a bumptious,

loving son. As Marianne had been sent, so had Aghrehond been sent. Except, of course, that he had volunteered to go.

She moved back and forth between the two rooms, being sure, tidying up. Makr Avehl would not be disturbed by her activities; she had begun to wonder if he could be aroused by anything at all. Outside the drawn curtains the evening bloomed violet with dusk, mild and springlike.

"Ellat?" She heard the indrawn breath.

"Here, Makr Avehl. Hold still. I've kept tea hot for you." She slipped her arm beneath his head and brought the steaming cup to his lips as he sipped and sipped again, breathing deeply as from some great exertion.

"I found her."

"I knew you would, if anyone could. Was it as you thought, in some borderland world of Madame's?"

"Yes. A black world, of Black Madame. Oh, Ellat, but I will have vengeance on that one. Marianne is nothing to her, nothing at all, but she took her up like a boy picking an apple, only to throw it away after one bite. Bait. Using her to bait me. She hopes to throw me off balance. To make me commit foolishness, risk my people, risk the Cave. She plays a deep and dangerous game, that one."

"She tried our defenses once before. I do not think she is eager to try them soon again. She mocks at the Cave, but she could not break its protection."

"No. She prefers to bait me with my innocent kinswoman. Well, she was ignorant of much, was Madame. Certainly she did not think I knew Marianne well enough to follow where she had sent Marianne, to follow and let her out of Madame's place into one of her own. Madame may learn soon that Marianne is gone from her limbo, but she will not know where. We start even, then, neither of us knowing where she is." He laughed harshly before sipping again at the tea, swung his feet over the side of the bed and rose. "I must try to make a call to Alphenlicht."

"Everything will be packed by now. We can go tonight."

"I wish we could go. I need the Cave of Light, Ellat. I need the Cave and our people. But if I am ever to find Marianne, it has to be from here."

"Aghrehond?"

"I sent him after her. Poor thing. Everything is twisted where she is, names and people and places and times. All moves as in disguise, strangely warped. In this world of Madame's the pitiable emigre's have no memory of what they were, or only fragments. All has been wiped away. Nothing could wipe her character, of course, and the courage shines through like a little star. Still, she suffers under it."

"You say Aghrehond is with her. Where?"

He laughed, a short bark of vicious laughter, at her, at himself, at the world. "Lord of Light, Ellat, that's why I need the Cave. I don't know where she has gone. The only way out from the border worlds is into one's own world. She went into her own place, one of her own places-I don't know how many there may be. If she was a woman of some imagination, there might be thousands. Or perhaps only one. Whichever it may be, I must find her. / must find her."

"What will you do?" She was hushed before his vehemence, a little awed by it, thinking she had not seen him like this before, not over a woman.

He sighed. "I will eat something, if you can find something here or bring something from that place on the boulevard. I'll take a shower. That place made me feel slimy. I'll call-who? Who would be best? Nalavi? Cyram? Since I can't go to the Cave, they must do it for me. I'll call some of our people at the embassy and set them on Harvey's trail, and on Tahiti's. I want to know where they are in this world, if they are here at all. And then I'll try to think what to do next."

Outside Marianne's window the pink leaves of the oak un-curled like tiny baby hands, gesturing helplessly at the world

beyond. The curtains remained closed. Downstairs, Mrs. Winesap turned in her half sleep, sat up suddenly to say to Mr. Larkin, "Did you hear that? What was that?" To be answered only by a snore, a riffle of wind. Unsatisfied, she lay back down to sleep. There was the sound of a car driving away, then returning. Feet moved restlessly over their heads. Then silence, only silence. The house was still, still, as though waiting.

MARIANNE'S DESK WAS on an upper level of the library as were those of the assistant librarians, but not, as theirs were, upon the balcony itself. There a contentious writhing of brass made a lacoonish barrier between the desks and the gloomy gulf of air extending more than four stories from the intricate mosaics of the lobby floor to the green skylight far above. Marianne's space was sequestered in a trough of subaqueous shadow at the deep end of an aisle of shelves, the only natural light leaking grudgingly upon her from between splintered louvers of the curved window set some distance above her head. This eye-shaped orifice looked neither in nor out, but Marianne often glanced up at it in the fancy it had just blinked to let in some tantalizing glimmer from outside. To this wholly inadequate illumination she had added a lamp discovered in one of the

vacant basement rooms, a composition of leaden lavender and grayed green in the form of an imaginative flower. Such light as it allowed to escape outward was livid and inauspicious, but that which fell on the desk top puddled a welcoming amber reminiscent of hearth fires or brick kilns, comforting and industrious. By this liquid glow she found her way to and from

her desk at night when all the balcony was dark, the aisles of books blacker tunnels yet, and the only movement except for her own the evanescent ghosts reflected through the wide glass doors from the windshields of passing cars.

After making an effort to leave the library every night for some little time, she had resolved not to try to leave for a while. The attempts had become increasingly frustrating, and she felt it might be easier to give up the effort, at least temporarily. She resolved to accept the necessity of washing out her underwear and collar in the staff washroom. She made a brief prayer of thanks that her appetite had never been large and was now easily placated by a few of the stale biscuits kept in the staff tea room. These biscuits never seemed to grow more or less stale, and their quantity remained constant in the slant-topped jar. When the jar was turned in a certain fashion, the tin lid caught light falling from street lamps through the high

window to reflect it upon the dusty couch where she slept.

During the first several evenings, Marianne had turned on the lights in the basement room, flooding it with a harsh, uncompromising emptiness more threatening than the dark. The light brought persons to gather mothlike at the window where they crouched on the ground to peer down at her and whisper of books; the stealing of books, the destruction of books. When she turned off the lights, they went away, or so she thought, for the whispers ended and no shadows moved at the barred window. Thereafter, she used the lights only in the washroom, which had no windows, or upon her desk, so deeply hidden among the corridors of volumes that no ray could have betrayed her to watchers.

On each of the first several afternoons, rather late, Marianne had been sent on an errand of one kind or another: to take books to a room in the sub-basement; to find books in the fourth floor annex; to take papers to the special collection room on the mezzanine-all of them places difficult to find or return from. She had been at first surprised and later angered to find all the staff gone when she returned, the doors locked tight, the outside visible only through the vast, chill slabs of glass in the main entry. Each evening at this time it rained, glossing the pavements and translating the sounds of cars into sinister hisses which combined with the tangle of brass railings to make

her think of feculent pits aswarm with serpents. It was better to go back to her desk, to that single warm light, to work there until weariness made it impossible to work any longer, than to stay in the chilly chasm of the lobby beside those transparent but impassable doors.

When both darkness and weariness overcame her, she felt her way down the wide marble flight, carefully centered in order not to touch the railings, around the comer to the small door-discouragingly labeled "Authorized Personnel Only"- then down the pit-black funnel of the basement stairs to the washroom and light. From there it was only a step or two to the tea room where panties and collar could be laid wet upon the table, wrinkles smoothed; where a handful of biscuits could serve for supper, washed down by a mouthful of cold tea; where the tin-topped jar could be turned to beam its pale blot onto the place she would sleep; and to dream of dusty wings beating against glass. She always folded her trousers over the back of a chair, thankful for the plain, dark uniform which did not show dirt or wrinkles.

At first light she wakened, terrified that she might have overslept and be about to be caught in semi-nakedness, rem-nants of dream catching at her to drag her back into sleep. After washing and dressing herself she became calmer, able to hide in the washroom and emerge when others arrived, as

though she herself had just come to work. Some member of the staff always brought rolls, sometimes fruit, though whether this was done spontaneously or by arrangement Marianne never knew. The provender made up the larger part of her day's food, and she had learned to sneak an extra roll or second orange to hide in her desk. At 8:50 the assistant librarians reported to the head librarian, a single line of them neatly clad in the same white-collared uniform which cost Marianne so much anxiety. Many shadowy figures, Marianne among them, watched this assembly from above while the roll was called to the accompaniment of dignified banter suitable to the profession, and finally to the clang and thwock of bolts withdrawn from the top and bottom of the main doors.

Usually one or more patrons waited outside, strolling about on the brick paved portico or leaning against the glass to peer within through cupped hands at the lobby clock. Then the staff members trooped upstairs to their desks, the doors began swinging as patrons entered, and the day began.

Though none of the staff ever spoke to her directly, Marianne was not conscious of any ostracism. There was such indirection in the affairs of the library that she believed no one really spoke to anyone else, ever. Information seemed always to be con-

veyed in passive statements. "The door to the muniments room needs to have a hinge repaired" rather than "Mr. Gerald, please repair the hinge." This inherent passivity had much to do with the fact, thought Marianne, that the door to the muniments room was not repaired for days although its need for repair had been plaintively stated half a dozen times. Thus, Marianne might be given some task by a half-aborted gesture from an assistant librarian directing her attention to a small pile of books while a statement was directed somewhere over her left shoulder, "Those should be in the sub-basement storage area," or "There's space in the shelves of the Alchemy stacks for those." Mr. Gerald, an insouciant figure who arrived occasionally to have long, confidential talks with the head librarian or the doorman, seemed oblivious to these gentle requests. Marianne wondered why she, almost alone among the staff, always acted upon these indirect requirements when virtually all the others seemed able to ignore them completely.

She also asked herself what the staff did all day. Though there was a constant movement to and fro, a flutter of paper and a wheeling of carts about, no one ever seemed to bring books in or take them out. She thought at first it might be the kind of library which was devoted to research on the premises, full of important works and rare volumes. This thought would have been comforting, but she could not reconcile the idea with the actual subject matter of many of the books on the shelves.

Some were of an obscenity she found shocking; others lacked sense; some had pictures so vile that she had to cover the pages while working away with her mending tape and glue. There were always loose backs to be fastened on securely, notes to be erased from margins, pages to be mended, labels to be lettered and affixed. Each morning a cart of such work awaited her arrival at her desk, and each afternoon the cart disappeared, taken away by one of the porters, she supposed, though she had never actually seen it happen. Upon this constant main-

tenance work were imposed the errands, obliquely stated. "Some periodicals in the Sorcery section need to go to storage." "They need a binder clamp up in Thaumaturgy." The same diffidence which undoubtedly prevented the assistant librarian from directly ordering Marianne to do these things also prevented Marianne from questioning them. Once she woke late at night with the words, "Where in hell am I to find a binder clamp!" upon her tongue, only to flush and curl more tightly into herself upon the couch. To have spoken those words aloud would have been to break some fragile pretense upon which the library and Marianne's whole existence depended.

She spent much time carrying books away to the sub-basements, adding them to the endless, tottery stacks which filled

corridor after corridor of rooms. When books were sent to storage, they had faded almost to monochrome, page and print alike in yellowed tan, the print a mere shadow of fading lines. She never found the bottommost of the sub-basements. Her imagination told her that the rooms of faded books ranked downward forever, into infinity. Some of the rooms nearer ground level held a clutter of miscellany which might have been left over from a time when some other occupant had used the building.

In one room a line of dress forms stood along a wall, voluptuous bosoms thrust in various directions like the snouts of questing animals, turtles perhaps, hunting food in the dim underwater light. Another room held cases of stuffed birds, parrots and lyre birds and toucans, and still another was almost filled with broken furniture. In this room she found a dusty blue blanket which looked almost unused. She beat it free of dust before carrying it to her couch, sighing with contentment. While the room was warm enough, there had been something indecent and dangerous about sleeping half naked with no cover. The blanket became her walls and doors at once. She ate her biscuits while stroking it and curled up beneath it early in the evening to savor the scratchy security of it next to her face. That night she slept without waking, and when she did waken, much later than usual, it was with the dream clear in her memory. She had been collecting butterflies, huge, brilliant insects which fluttered away before her net only to be captured and thrust

into her collection jar where they beat their wings against the

confining glass, shedding the delicate powder from their wings, breaking the membranes, becoming motionless. Then she had been in the jar with them, feeling the feathery blows of those wings as they beat and beat against the glass, seeing the rainbow dust which fell from them onto her own bare arms and shoulders and breasts so that she became as brilliantly colored as they. She lay for a long time thinking of this dream, slow tears gathering beneath her eyelids.

Eventually, she rose, folded the blanket lengthwise, and hid it beneath the cushions. Several times during the day she went to the tea room to see if it was still there. She slept with it close around her every night thereafter.

Some time after this one of the assistant librarians spoke to the air across Marianne's shoulder saying that Mr. Grassi would be researching certain literature in the small reading room later in the day. Later the same person, still speaking to the vacant and unresponsive air, said that Mr.Grassi would need the books reserved for him in the thaumaturgy section. Marianne understood this to mean that she should find the books in Thaumaturgy and deliver them to Reading. As was the case with most locations in the building, both Thaumaturgy and Reading

were uncertain. She was sometimes amazed that she always seemed to be able to get to any place indicated by these oblique instructions. This time she referred to the large chart hanging behind the head librarian's desk and was able to puzzle out a route to and from. She was approaching the small reading room when she heard the doorman say behind her, "Good afternoon, Mr. Grassi," and was able to follow the strange hunched figure thus addressed as it moved between two stacks and through the half hidden door. She caught the door as it closed and entered.

He was seated at the round table set in an arc of window, peering through the one transparent pane at the narrow view of the garden outside. Tattered lilies bloomed there under the lash of a cold wind, and the man's head nodded in time with their nodding as though the wind blew him as well. When she put the books at his elbow, he turned to look directly into her eyes. "The books I ordered?" he asked.

Tears spilled down her cheeks before she was aware of them,

pouring across her face in forked runnels, wetting the sides of her nose, the corners of her mouth, dripping untidily from her chin. She fumbled for a tissue, blotting her face, apologizing while Mr. Grass! engaged in a strange little dance of compas-

sion which he wove about her out of pats and pokes and jigging steps.

"I'm sorry," she said angrily. "I don't know what got into me."He had pulled out a chair for her, bumping it into her legs from behind with such vigor that she fell into it. "My dear, my dear," he said, emphasizing each word with another pat of his pawlike little hands. "Please don't cry, my dear."

Marianne wiped away another freshet, confused by the troubled face before her. His mouth was open, the tip of his tongue showing at one side of it in an expression of such comical and doggy concern that she almost laughed. "You looked directly at me," she sobbed. "They don't do that here. They don't see me." And having said this she was aware for the first time of its truth. Indeed. They did not see her; they did not see one another. They lived, if this was living, and worked and were without true knowledge of one another, acting at every moment in the faith, perhaps only the hope, that others were there, but without the evidence of it. Perhaps it was only that things did, eventually, happen in response to their expressed hopes or needs which made them believe that others were present, that others heard, saw, felt, did. "They don't see me!" she asserted again, "But you did. It made me cry!"

Unaware of her revelation, he attempted comfort which she did not need. Their mutual incomprehension straggled into silence. He sat looking at her, tongue still caught between his

teeth as though it were too long to be completely withdrawn. Marianne blotted herself dry and said, "The people here at the library do not look at one. I realize now that they can't. But it's nerve-wracking never to be noticed, seen. So, when you did, I was so grateful to know that I'm actually here."

He shook his head, not in confusion or negation, but as though in commiseration. "But of course you are here, my dear. That's the whole thing, isn't it. You are here, and we don't want you here at all." They both subsided after this. She did not feel she had explained, and she had not understood what he had just said, but they were convinced of one another's good will.

"May I get you anything else?" she asked, suddenly conscious of her position as staff.

"Not at all. We have the two I asked for: Doing and Undoing, and here is Macravail's To Hold Forever. Macravail is the authority on malign enchantment, of course." He tipped his head to one side so that his eyes were almost above one another as he regarded her from this strange angle. "Can I do anything for you?" This offer, the last word whispered in an intensely confidential tone, caught her so by surprise that she shook her head, saying, no, no, not at all, before she realized she could

have said, yes, of course, you can help me escape. But the moment had passed, he had turned to the books and was now reading while one finger tap-tapped at the page. The picture on the page was familiar, and Marianne stared at it for a long time over his shoulder before creeping out and away to her own place to work there while the light from the window swung slowly from right to left as the morning gave way to late afternoon. The inevitable errand materialized to take her to the fourth mezzanine just before the doors were locked, but afterward she did not go either to her desk or to the tea room.

Instead, moved by some obscure impulse she could not have explained, she went back to the reading room where Mr. Grassi had spent the day. The room was empty, the books lying on the table. She took up the one titled To Hold Forever, thinking to take it to her own desk for a while. Through the single transparent pane of the window she saw persons gathering in the garden, pushing through the shrubbery to crowd at the side of the building to lie down there with their heads and shoulders hidden. She knew then that the staff tea room lay immediately below this room and that the persons gathered outside were those who peered so greedily in upon her if she was unwary enough to leave the lights on. From above they looked ominous, bulky and amorphous, as though constructed of shadows. She did not attract their attention as she took the book away.

At her own desk she turned the pages one by one but was unable to find the familiar picture. Faces stared at her from the

pages, demon faces, ordinary faces, bulky forms like those in the garden, long pages of incomprehensible words. She left the book in the reading room before she went downstairs. Evidently the page she sought was one only Mr. Grassi could find. She did not find this idea at all surprising.

She was waiting for him when he arrived the next day as she had somehow known he would. She blocked the aisle leading to the reading room, giving him no room to walk around her, ready for the question she had known he would ask. "Is there anything I can do for you?" to which she replied, "Will you open the book for me, please?" It was not quite what she had planned to say, but it was close enough.

He led her into the room, opened the book upon the table, holding it with one hand as he guided her own to the heavy pages. "It won't stay open unless you hold it," he said. He waited patiently for her to refuse or ask other questions, but she had done what she planned to do and could think of nothing else. He left her then, and she sat in his place at the table to examine the picture of herself, seated on the couch in the tea room, the light falling dimly through the high, barred window. The text on the facing page began, "Her desk was on an upper level of the library, as were those of the assistant librarians,

but not, as theirs were, upon the balcony itself..." It went on, ending at the bottom of the page, "But she had done what she planned to do and could think of nothing else."

She could not believe what she had read, dared not close the book or turn the page. She read it again and yet again, not needing to have read it at all.

She was brought to her sense of time by a scratching at the window which proved to be one of the shadowy peerers, evidently balanced upon the shoulders of one of his fellows to press half his face against the transparent glass and stare in at her, mouth making fish motions, words she could not lip read and wanted not to hear. Holding the book carefully open with one hand, Marianne turned out the light. A muttering outside the window became a crashing sound and a louder shouting then with tones of anger. The peerer-in had fallen. She sat for a long time without being able to make up her mind whether to take the book to her own desk or to carry it down to her couch or leave it where it was. In the end she did none of these, merely sat where she was, staring blankly at the wall until she fell asleep sitting upright to wake in the dim gray of morning now knowing where she was. When Mr. Grassi came in, much later, to take the book from her, she was so cramped

she could hardly stand.

This time she was completely ready for his question, an almost hysterical readiness hi which her answer nearly preceded his question. "Can I do anything for you?" was uttered almost simultaneously with "Help me! For God's sake, help me!"

"MY DEAR," HE SAID, "I will, of course, if I may."

Much later Marianne was to wonder at his choice of words, his saying "If I may," rather than "If I can." At the moment, she heard only the "I will, of course," and let herself fall upon these words as a starving animal upon food, ravenous and unheeding of any other thing. She hung upon his arm while he patted at her, still panting, tongue protruding at the corner of his mouth, eyes full of seemingly uncomprehending concern.

It was this expression which told her he did not know what she needed or wanted, and that she must go further than she had gone in imagination or all her efforts would be lost. She must define the inexplicable, demand assistance for a condition which she could not define. "I am not mad," she said tentatively. "Truly, I am not mad."

No, his expression seemed to say, of course not. You are distressed, only distressed. It was not enough.

"I cannot get out of the library," she said. "I can't get out.

Please, do not think I'm crazy when I tell you this. It's true. I cannot escape. Help me." There, it was said, and nothing she could add to it or take from it would make it clearer.

He moved away from her, his dancing little feet carrying him in short, jigging steps to the window and, from it, to the bookshelves and, from them, to the mantlepiece-the reading room had a large and ornate mantle stretching elegant gilt and inlays above a mingy gas fire-and from it, warbling a little aggrieved sound, like a frustrated cricket caught in a dilemma of its own making. At last he came to rest in the bowed window, bent forward a little to peer through the one clear pane, hands behind him as he rocked upon his heels and toes, up and down again, like some children's toy sent into ceaseless motion by a restless hand.

"The answers to everything are in the books," he said to her. "It is in knowing which books, of course, and where to look. Most of the people in this city cannot get into the library, you understand that?" He cast her a sharp, questioning look, began to warble again.

"I read the book you opened for me," she said stubbornly, wondering if he were testing her or would question her upon the contents of that book. "I did read it."

"Of course. And I'm sure the answer is there. Would you like for me to open it again?" He turned to meet her silence, her baffled quiet which hid bursting volcanos of weary rebellion and panic.

"It wasn't," she whispered. 'Truly it wasn't. It was only my story. Mine. And I already know it."

'Tsk. Well, we often say we know things when we are only familiar with them, you know. My dear, I have spent all the time today that is safe. Let me give you my card. When you have read again, I'm sure you'll find it useful. You will find me there any morning. It may be dangerous to be on the streets after noon. Let me open the book for you again and settle you comfortably, so. Now I must run."

And she was seated once again as she had been for a day and a night, the light of the brass table lamp upon the picture of her own face staring up from the basement room. She could see every detail of that room; the couch, the floor, the high barred window with the faces in it, the tea urn, the jar of stale biscuits. Even on the page their staleness was manifest, part of the design intended by the artist, part of the story. The

staleness was intentional, as was the dust, the stuffed birds in

the basement, the writhing railings beside the stairway. Under her fingers was the card he had given her. Cani Grassi, Consultant, Eight Manticore Street. The card was very heavy, more like metal than paper, with a design embossed upon its back. She ran her fingers over it, feeling a glow, a warm tingling which grew as she pressed the card to her face then thrust it down her neck, safe beneath a strap. Gradually the warmth died, though she could feel the pressure of the card against her skin, the sharp demarcation of comers beside her breast bone.

She sat until dark, staring at the window, caught in a timeless eddy of despair which allowed no movement or thought. Then the faces pressed against the pane in the window drew her attention and sent her into a spasm of weary revulsion. She turned out the light and made her way to the washroom, the book still open in her hands. She sat in one of the cubicles, her trousers around her knees, to read the story again and again. There was nothing new in it. When her eyes were so heavy she could not keep them focused, she struggled through a final sentence: "She was sometimes amazed that she always seemed to be able to get to any place indicated by these oblique instructions." Then there was only wakefulness enough left to get to her couch and stretch out upon it, the book open beneath the cushions and herself wrapped into the timeless security of her blanket.

When she woke, it was to remember the last thing she had

read. Her first act was to recover the book and read the sentence once again. She was sometimes amazed that she always seemed to be able to get to any place indicated by these oblique instructions. The solution was clear in her mind, including all the tortuous steps she would need to go through to accomplish it. Someone in the library must be induced to tell her that something-some book, some paper, some item of equipment was needed outside. Outside!

But first she had to eat, to drink, to wash herself and comb her hair, to be ordinary, customary. Even if they could not truly see her, there must be nothing in the atmosphere at all different. "I must be an ordinary ghost," she said with some cheer. "A usual ghost, giving no evidence of untoward haunting beyond the acceptable routine." When all did, indeed, go as usual during the day, she was made confident enough to approach the chart which hung behind the head librarian's desk.

The portico was on the chart. The areaway where deliveries were made was shown. The small, walled courtyard outside the board room was labeled. The garden outside the reading room where she had met Cani Grassi did not appear on the chart. She had looked out at that garden, at the swath of lawn, the ragged edging of shrubbery. There was no wall, no fence,

and it was not upon the chart. Marianne took comfort from this. What was not on the chart would not be a pan of the library, no matter how close it lay.

And a place which did not lie on the chart would not be mentioned by any of the assistant librarians. Not today, she thought, nor tomorrow. But later-yes. Later, someone would mention it.

That night she sat in the reading room until dark, her message carefully prepared on a sheet of paper, the light on to attract the peerers. When she heard the first sound of them, she moved to the window to hold her message against the clear pane where they could not fail to see it. "If you will put a sign out there saying NEW STORAGE AREA, I will bring you some books." There was a confused mumbling from outside. She thought she heard the words of her message repeated in a rumbling voice, then again in a higher tone with fringes of hysteria. A confused chattering preceded a tap at the window. She moved her own paper away to see a message pressed against the pane from outside. "One book first. Book name Eternal Blood. Put out coal chute."

She did not know the book or where it could be found nor, for that matter, where the coal chute was. Still, if they were in the building, presumably they could be found. She wrote on the back of her paper, pressed it to the pane: "I'll try." Outside was only silence. When she looked through the window, there were only the shadows thrown by the street lamps

and passing cars, nothing else. Throughout all the days, weeks-perhaps longer-that she had worked in the library, she had discovered no system of indexing, no catalogue listing titles or authors. She knew that finding the book would have to occur in the way everything in the library happened, by indirection and repetition. Though she had little confidence in the attempt, having seen nothing communicated in writing heretofore, she left notes on various desks saying that Eternal Blood needed to be taken to the reading room. She replaced these notes at intervals, for they vanished even from desks at which no one was observed working.

She had had no great hopes for this in any case. Her best efforts went into repetition. Whenever she found herself within the hearing of some other library employee, she would say in a plaintive voice that the book Eternal Blood was needed in the reading room. She set herself the goal of saying this one hundred times during the first three days, and when she went to her rest each night it was with an honest weariness coming from much running about during the day to put herself within hearing of shadowy figures which seemed to dissolve from one place to another in a most unsteadying fashion. The days followed one another. Had she not observed the great length of

time it took for messages to be received and acted upon, she would have despaired, but she had estimated it would take at least seven or eight days for anything at all to happen. Thus it was with some degree of surprise that she found the book in the reading room on the fifth day after Mr. Grassi's last visit.

It lay atop the books Mr. Grassi had requested, massive, covered in black leather with lettering in red. Marianne opened it only once before shutting it with a shudder which recurred all afternoon. It was a book devoted to the subject of torment. Marianne did not ask herself what the peerers might want with it, knowing that conscience might rise out of her confusion to attack her if she thought about it. It was enough that the book was the one named, the one which might buy her a way out.

Finding the coal chute had been an easy thing in comparison, a matter of prowling the dim corridors of the sub-basement in search of a furnace and finding a monstrous iron octopus at last which bellowed and roared at her as she passed, emitting agonized groans and fitful breaths of fiery heat. She had crept by it fearfully, crouching under its widespread tentacles which reached out through the walls and upward into the flesh of the place.

As she ducked beneath one of these great, hollow arms, she heard from within it a distant, mocking chuckle carried down through heaven knew what floors and annexes and lofty mez-

zanines from some high, remote place where someone laughed. It was a derisory laugh. Had it been repeated, Marianne felt she would not have had the courage to go on, but the sound did not come again. In a little room behind the furnace she found the coal chute, too high for her to reach until she fetched a broken chair from the room of furniture and mounted it unsteadily to open the corroded hatch, thrust the book through, and then, half losing her balance, let the hatch fall with a dull, hideous clang like the lid of a coffin or vault.

The building fell silent, as though listening. The furnace did not roar or breathe. When Marianne crept up the stairs and into the lobby, it was into this same ominous silence. At every desk heads were cocked, eyes staring as though each one waited for motion, any motion, to identify who had been responsible for the sound. She did not move, merely crouched beside the door, as silent and unmoving as they, until someone coughed and the spell was broken. She had not been perceived, she told herself, thankful for the first time that they simply did not see her. She went to her couch that night with a sense of fruition. The next step waited on those outside, and she listened in the dark quiet to know whether they had found the book or not. It had not been dark long when she heard them cheering, a species of rejoicing with overtones of hysteria and despair. Then

a flickering light came through the window and she knew they had lighted a fire. From her place she could see shadows as leaping figures capered and gamboled. Were they burning the book? She was more pleased than otherwise to think they might have disposed of it, and with it whatever damage it might have done. A daytime view of the garden affirmed her assumption, for the scars of fire were there as well as scraps of black which she could identify as bits of the binding, some with lines of red lettering still visible. She paid little attention to these, for the signboard drew her eyes, a nicely varnished board supported by two uprights, lettered in black and gold as though by a professional sign painter: NEW STORAGE AREA. Very well. She planned the next step.

But all her plans were delayed by a bustle in the library, a boiling, a throbbing of purpose as it was announced by the head librarian that a meeting of the Library Board of Trustees was to take place within hours, short hours, perhaps on the morrow. The morning lineup of assistant librarians was thrown into confusion by this proclamation, and the usual plaintive statement gained an immediacy of effect which Marianne had not seen before. The large double doors to the Board Room were opened for the first time she could remember. Books and

papers which had cluttered the approach to this room were carried away. Even Mr. Gerald arrived unannounced and was seen to carry a pile of volumes away to some other place. The room was cleaned and the windows opened to air it out; a fire was laid upon the hearth, one surmounted by an overmantle of such complexity to make the one in the reading room seem simple in comparison. The activity took most of the day, during which time everyone's attention was fixed and could not have been diverted.

The meeting was held in the late afternoon, after all the staff had gone except the head librarian. The usual shadowy figures which Marianne equated with porters or janitors were nowhere to be seen. She herself had considered hiding in the washroom or the tea room, in some empty room of a sub-basement, perhaps in a hidey hole hollowed out among the broken furniture, but the thought of being hidden while this strange, new activity went on was outweighed by her need to see and know what would occur. The juxtaposition of this meeting and the destruction of the book which she, Marianne, had put out the coal chute was significant to her. A book had been burned; a meeting had been called-both notable events and perhaps not unconnected. At last she decided to cache herself in a far front corner of the third mezzanine, a pocket of shadow above the light of the shaded chandelier which hung one level below this to wet the lobby floor with its weak, watery light. From this vantage point she could see the members as

they arrived, see them obsequiously, even cravenly greeted by the head librarian. The chairman arrived last of all, and Marianne heard the head librarian say, "Good evening, Madame Delubovoska..."

The drawling voice which answered filled the lobby, ascended to the green skylight far above, moved inexorably outward from the place of utterance to the balcony edges, thrust through the banisters to flow into the aisles of books, soaking each volume in turn so that the very bindings became redolent with that sound, not echoing but vibrating nonetheless in a reverberating hum larger than the building itself, a seeking pressure which left no corner unexplored. The words did not matter, could not be heard. The voice mattered, for it took possession of all it touched, penetrated and amalgamated into itself all that it reached.

Marianne saw the voice, saw the shudder of it go forth through the structure, a tremorous wave as in a sheet shaken by the wind, the returning vibration trembling through the coiled railings. She felt the shudder in the same instant she felt Mr. Grassi's card begin to burn upon her shoulder with a pervasive heat which covered her and radiated from her. Her hand lay upon the railing; she felt the lash as the brazen circlets uncoiled

to reveal flat, triangular serpents' heads, mouths gaping with fangs extended, striking from among the knots of bronze acanthus to shed venom like rain upon the stacks below. One serpent struck a hands width from her hand, and on the lobby floor beneath she could see the serpents gliding in their tangled thousands.

The warmth which came from the card at her shoulder surrounded her, close as the blanket she had found, so that she looked out upon madness from the security of her own impenetrable shell, as marvelous as it was unexpected. In all that lofty, ramified building there was only this one flaw in the fabric of the place, this one error in calculation of resonances, this one gap in the fatal architecture of the building to allow a small sphere of warm protection where the voice did not reach. She saw the serpents strike and strike again while the woman walked with the head librarian through the doors of the Board Room, saw them coil again into those baroque tangles from which they had emerged, and knew that she had been reprieved, saved, by some intent she had known nothing of. Had that voice fallen on unprotected ears she would have been bitten, poisoned, dead.

When the members of the board had shut the great doors behind them, Marianne stayed where she was, not daring to move so much as an inch to the right or left, as sure of her safety in that one place as she had ever been sure of anything

and as sure of her jeopardy if she moved as she was sure she had heard nemesis in the voice of Madame Delubovoska.

The meeting was not long, barely long enough to offer an excuse for the assembly to have met at all. When they had gone, truly gone, she came down from her perch at last, slowly, sniffing the air as for fire or some odorous beast. All was as usual to the eyes, to the nose, to the ears, but she knew that something had sought to smoke her out, and she knew that every previous threat had been multiplied a hundredfold; every previous shadow folded upon itself to a deeper opacity; every mystery stirred into menace and jelled. Only the remaining tingle of Mr. Grassi's card against her skin, only the sound of whisperers at the windows demanding books, books she had promised, brought her to full determination again.

From that time on, whenever books were mentioned, Marianne would say, "You said the New Storage Area, didn't you, Librarian?" Whenever she was within hearing range of any 'figure, she would say, "Those books should be taken to the New Storage Area." So it went, day by day by day. She had become so accustomed to failure that success almost eluded her. Almost she missed the assistant librarian's gesture toward the pile of books on her desk. Almost she missed the figure's

quiet voice saying in the usual indirect manner, "These books belong in the New Storage Area."

Marianne gathered them up. There were six or seven, not a heavy load. She had kept the two books Mr. Grassi had asked for on her desk for days, for it was her intention to take these as well. If they were useful inside the library, they would be doubly useful outside, or so she reasoned. She added them to the pile and started for the door, sure someone would stop her. The doorman ignored her. She leaned against the glassy slab, feeling it move reluctantly before her slight weight, stepped through onto the portico. She trembled as she went down the steps and around the comer to the garden, to the sign. The shrubbery was full of shadows and eyes. Those who had danced, cheered, whispered through high windows were there, just out of sight, watching her through the foliage with greedy intensity. She dropped all the books but her two and fled back to the sidewalk, hearing them scrambling behind her. One of them came after her, not threatening, merely following; she could hear the scrape of shoes.

Against her skin was the card Mr. Grassi had given her. Behind her in the library was only an enormous quiet. Behind her on the sidewalk the muffled steps came on, hesitant but

determined, giving notice they would go wherever she chose to go.

SHE HAD BEEN so intent upon leaving the library that she had spent little time planning what to do once she had escaped. She would, of course, find her way to Number Eight Manticore Street. She assumed that she would be able to ask directions, that conditions outside the library would be somehow different from conditions inside it. However, there was no one to ask. The footsteps behind her, persistent though they were, did not indicate a visible person to whom a question could be directed. She found herself walking through a neighborhood of narrow-fronted houses which stared nearsightedly at her over high stoops and scraps of entryway relieved only by tattered yews and spectral cypresses. An iron-fenced square centered this area, a stretch of weedy grass around a dilapidated bandstand where shreds of paint flickered like pennants in the light wind. She went on walking. The houses gave way to massive, windowless warehouses, every wall plastered with colored posters, layer on layer, variously tattered, all showing human figures, the irregular tearing and layering offering odd, sometimes obscene juxtapositions of hands, breasts, groins, and mouths. Occasionally a figure was untorn, almost whole, and all of

these seemed to be fleeing from her as though she saw them from the back, though faces were sometimes turned over shoulders in expressions of terror. Soon the warehouses gave way to smaller buildings, dirt-fronted and surrounded by bits of rusty machinery, and then came open country stretching in a featureless plain to a distant wall which ran endlessly upon the horizon.

In all this way there had been no person, no living thing, no sound except for the hesitant steps far behind her. Sighing, she turned to her left for a few blocks before returning on a course parallel to her original one. She began to see shops on the side streets, some of them overhanging the street in the archaic manner of fairy tale illustrations. The buildings here were plastered with the same type of paper posters she had seen on the warehouses. A little farther on the shops invaded the street she walked upon; a news kiosk, papers arrayed on the counter, caught her eye. The headline displayed on the paper said LIBRARY BOARD DISCUSSES THEFT, VANDALISM. The story beneath told of a minor clerical employee who had taken and wantonly destroyed some books. Desecration, said the paper. Citizens were alerted to apprehend, observe, notify.

Her panic could have been observable a block away, she knew. How had there been time to print anything about her escape? It had only just happened. They must have known her plans before she herself was aware of their fruition. Or-it was someone else, not herself that they sought. And how could they seek her? They had never seen her. The story named the person: Mildred Cobb.

Nonsense, thought Marianne. I am not Mildred Cobb. I am Marianne... Marianne... someone. Fear spoke within, self speaking to self. "How do you know? Could you prove this? Would they believe you? You are carrying stolen books. You are wearing the library uniform."

There was no one around her, no one to see her, and yet she felt eyes running upon her skin like insect feet. A bookstore stood behind the kiosk, its interior a well of dusky emptiness. When she entered it the bell gave a strangled jingle rapidly drowned in the oing, oing, oing of the spring on which it hung, a tinny whine. She crept to the rear of the store, pulled ancient

books from shelves undisturbed for years, sneezing in the miasmic cloud which rose as she thrust the books and her collar into hiding. There. She could find them again, but no one else would. She started to leave, freezing hi place as heavy footsteps

crossed the floor above her and a deep voice called.

"Somebody? You want something?"

She gasped, managed to choke out, "A map of the city? You have a city map?"

"Behind the counter. You want it, leave the money." The footsteps crossed over her once more; the creak of springs capitalized the silence which followed, a statement of condition.There was no Manticore Street on the map. When she returned to the street, she went on as she had been, noting the signpost at the corner so that she could find the place again, chanting it to herself as she went, "Billings and Twelfth. Billings and Twelfth." She had gone a dozen blocks more before she saw the first person. Then there were several, a woman with a dog, two men talking, then tens of them.

There was a grocery store, cartons of fruit and vegetables on the sidewalk, jicama and artichokes, thrilps and fresh fennel. Here a pharmacy, an alchemist's, a coffee shop with a sign in the window, "Dishwasher wanted." Here a church from which solemn music oozed like rendered fat. Here an augurer's post, a dealer in leather goods, a feticheur. She moved among these places as though dreaming, surrounded by life and smells and sound, acutely aware of weariness and hunger. When this busy center ended hi vacant streets once more, she turned to walk through it again, stopping at the coffee shop. She had no money. She needed food.

"Dishwasher?" she asked the stout woman with her sleeves

rolled to her shoulders. "The job as dishwasher?"

"Last dishwasher I had the Inquisitors took two days ago. The one before that drank. You drink?"

Marianne shook her head, confused. "Not-not what you mean, no. I'd drink something now, though. I haven't had anything all day."

"Ah. On Manticore Street, are you? Well, I've been there more than once. You got a place to stay? No. Well, bunk on the cot in the storeroom until you find a place. Get yourself some food in the kitchen, then you can start in on those pans."

The bowl of soup was half gone before the woman's words made sense to Marianne. "Manticore Street, are you?" Well, then, it was a known place. She thought of it as she ate, as she scrubbed pots, smelling the fatty soap smell of the sink, the good meat smell of the kitchen. When darkness came, the woman, Helen, shut the door and got ready to leave. Marianne asked, "Why do you say, 'on Manticore Street'? Is it a real street?"

"When you haven't got any money, that's being on Manticore Street," Helen said. "Because that's where the poorhouse and the debtor's prison are, on Twelfth Street, where the Manticore is. You're a stranger here, aren't you? No, don't tell me

anything. I don't want to know. Just remember, don't ask questions of strangers, and don't stay on the streets any time on shut-down day. Do that, and you might last. God knows there's enough time to last in." She left the place with a bitter little laugh which sounded spare and edgy from so large a woman.

"On Twelfth Street, where the Manticore is," said Marianne to herself. She would find it soon, perhaps tomorrow. Her hands were sore from the hot water, her feet and back ached from bending over the sink. Still, she felt closer to freedom than she had ever felt in the library. There was even a blanket on the cot to hug her with the same scratchy protection the blue one had provided.

It was several days before she could look for Manticore Street. She did not want to go out in the library uniform, and it took a little time to earn the coins necessary to buy a bright scarf from the pushcart man, an old, warm cape from the used clothes woman, a pair of stockings to replace the ragged ones she had worn in the library. She watched the women in the place as they walked past. They were dressed as though in motley, bits and pieces of this and that, some carelessly, others with a touch of defiant flair. Still, it was apparent that any old thing would do well enough.

She returned from her foray for stockings to find Helen reading the paper. Everyone in the city read the paper-copies of it littered the gutters and blew along the building fronts.

"Tomorrow's shut-down day," said Helen, folding the paper into a club with which she beat the countertop in a steady thud,

thud, thud. "Shut-down day. I won't be in."

"Shut-down day?"

"Don't be on the street after noon, girl. I mean it. There's plenty to eat back there in the kitchen, plenty of cleaning to do to keep you busy. Stay in. That's all. No-don't ask me. I told you. Don't ask questions."

"You said not to ask strangers."

"We're all strangers, girl. Just do what I tell you."

That evening there was a tap on the window, and she looked out half fearfully to see a black, hunched form against the glass and knew it for that persistent follower who had come after her from the library. The watcher tapped on the window, refused to give up when she attempted to ignore him, but went on with the slow tap, tap, tap, not threatening, merely continuous until she could bear the sound no longer. Almost fearfully she went to the window to see a message thrust against the glass. "Not all who are here are Manticore meat! Will you join us?" She did not know what this meant and did not want to encourage the watcher, but neither did it seem wise to anger him. She wrote upon a napkin the word "perhaps" and held it to the

pane. This seemed to satisfy him, for he scribbled, "I'll come back another time," showed it to her briefly, then disappeared into the wind-scattered shadows of the street. Though Marianne sat in the dark, watching the window for some time, he did not return. ____

Marianne told herself she would retrieve her books and look for Number Eight Manticore Street very early in the morning, only for an hour or two, returning to the shop well before noon. She left just at first light, wearing her cape, scarf tied over her head. The markets were closed. There were only a few people on the streets. Those who moved about did so furtively, scurrying short distances from this place to that like mice in a strange place. The odd looks directed at her made Marianne walk close to the buildings, staring behind her at odd moments, hurrying her steps. She went south on Billings, counting the blocks: First, Second, Third.... By the time she had come to Seventh the walks were completely empty. Tattered posters glared at her from the walls, full of reaching arms and frightened eyes. A hand showed briefly at a window, flicking a curtain into place.

When she crossed Twelfth, she was almost running. The blinds were drawn in the bookstore, but the door was not

locked. She eased it open, tiptoed to the back of the store to fumble out the books she had hidden there, then hurried back to the street, the door swinging closed behind her with its insistent oing, oing, oing. She turned back to Twelfth, turned right at the comer, searching for the numbers. Eleven. Thirteen. Odd numbers. The light around her was beginning to dim, to pulse, to waver before her eyes. She ran across the street. Number Six. Number Ten. No Number Eight. Panicky, she huddled in a doorway, seeing the street crawl before her as though seen through moving air or flawed glass. It couldn't be noon yet. Helen had said stay off the streets after noon.

No, she cried to herself. Helen had said stay in! Her feeling of panic was growing. Number Six. Number Ten. East. East! She scurried from the doorway, turned right, pattering down the sidewalk with the heavy books clutched to her chest, gasping as though she had run miles, across Billings Street where the numbers began again, only to stop, transfixed.

The corner shop was Number Four, a taxidermy shop, so labeled in golden script which slanted across the window in which the Manticore poised, rampant, claws extended and teeth bared in glass-eyed fury, huge and horrible. The beard of the Manticore seemed to rustle with evil life; the eyes seemed to see her. The eyes were dark and familiar, glaring at her, staring into her, transfixing her until she trembled against the glass, hypnotized as a bird is said to be by a snake, poised between surrender and fear.

Fear won, barely. She broke away from the window, ran past a vacant store to a narrow door numbered eight at the foot of equally narrow stairs. Behind her, as she fled up this flight, came a crash of breaking glass, a hideous scream of rage, a palpable wave of fury which thrust her before it up the last few steps and through the opened door where Mr. Grassi caught her, pushed her aside and leaned his whole weight against the door. It gave slowly, slowly to close against the sounds below.

"My dear," he said, panting, "you cut it close, very close. Another moment would have been too late."

She staggered after him as he went to the window where he pulled the curtains together to peek through them at the street below. It was hard to see the street. It boiled with shadows, ran with flickering. Thicknesses of air transgressed upon sight. Things shifted, were there, were not there. Clouds of tiny beings came and went, a slightly darker surge in the general flow. Striding through it all, pace on pace of its lion feet, tail arched high above its giant man-head, came the Manticore, scorpion tail lashing as the beast followed its own manic howl along the dream-wrapped street.

"There will be others," whispered Cani Grassi. 'Troops of mandrakes, legions of Greasy Girls. The Manticore will lead

them, and woe to those abroad upon the streets."

"She said noon!" complained Marianne. "Noon! It was hours yet to noon."

"One of the conditions of this city is that time changes, speeds, slows, does what they want it to do. In this case, they speeded it. A trap for the unwary."

"They? They who? Why do they care? Why do they care about me? Who am I that they should care?"

"Oh, Lords of Light," he fretted. "I hoped you knew. Truly? Oh, that makes it so much more difficult. I know you are someone very important, but I have forgotten just who. Just now it seems you are something less than that." He took her chapped hands tenderly in his own. "Cleaning lady, is it?"

"Dishwasher," she replied absently. "What am I doing here?"

"Ah. Why, you are suffering a malign enchantment. That much I am sure of. I thought you might have guessed."

She collapsed into one of the chairs beside the window, staring out blindly at the raging street below. "I hadn't guessed anything. Except that it was odd I couldn't remember anything before the library."

"Many people here are like that," he said. "They have forgotten, or been forced to forget. Even I, even I have forgotten some things I am sure are very important. Some people can remember nothing. Particularly those in the library."

"So many? And all enchanted?"

"An accumulation, I believe. Some have been here for a very long time. Not only those enchanted by her!"

"Why? Who is she?"

Cani Grassi shook his head, tilted it, thrust his tongue out at the comer of his mouth. "I kept only a little information

when I came after you, only the tiniest bit, to be sneaked through, so as not to attract attention, you understand. Too much would have alerted them, her. But a little bit, well, Macravail thought it would be safe enough. When he sent me, that is. To rescue you, whoever you are."

She scarcely heard this, for her eyes had been caught by a fleeing figure in the street below. "Helen," she cried. "It's Helen. I must go let her in...." And she ran toward the door, only to be caught in Grassi's arms and held fast, struggling.

"Not anyone real," he shook her. "Not real. Don't be so quick, Marianne. Look out the window. Look!"

The woman fled toward them; behind her the Manticore pursued with a roaring howl of madness, tail flicking steaming drops of venom onto the pavement where she ran, her hair streaming behind her and her face distorted in fear. As she ran past, she dwindled, became two-dimensional as though made of paper, a fluttering tissue which then appeared whole once

more as it ran away from them down the endless street.

Then the papery figure turned its head, stared over its own shoulder, neck folding oddly, pleating upon itself. The figure swerved close to the wall across the street, opened its mouth to scream once more and collided with the wall to hang there, a pasted-up poster figure, mouth forever open, arms forever outstretched, dress forever twisted and hiked up by the act of running. Marianne heard her own voice crying and found herself held tight against Grassi's shoulder as he patted her back, murmuring, "My dear, my dear. Shh. Shhh. They aren't real. Not in the way you suppose they are. Shh, now. Shh."

"It was Helen. Truly Helen."

"I know. I know," he said. "But you must not give way like this. You must watch and learn and understand. Otherwise, how are we to rescue you from anything? How are we to send word to Macravail? Come now."

"How are we to rescue me? Gods, Mr. Grassi, how would I know? And you don't seem to know any more than I! What is this hopeless place we have come to? Why are we here?"

"My dear pretty lady, do think, do. This is no minor enchantment, no trifling play of an apprentice witch. This is an ensorcelment majeur, a chief work! Oh, these false worlds cluster about limbo thick as grapes upon a vine, great pendulous

masses of them upon the dry stick of the place we came from. Oh, I grow eloquent! Each world a grape, each grape with a juice and flavor of its own, individual, unique. Each world with its own laws, its own systems. Each a prison with its own gate. Each a door with its own lock. So, so, what do we do until we know where the gate is? Where the lock is? Ha? We sneak, we sly, we peer, we pry-think child, do! We appear as nothing, negligible, not worth the notice of the powers of this place. So, who comes to help you? Ha? The tiniest spy, the weakest servant, the least noticeable familiar. Me. Cani Grassi." He turned himself about for her inspection, making a pouting face and wiggling his hips. "I brought no baggage, carried no sacks full of spells of protection, no witch bags, not an amulet even! No, no, in this place we are stronger the weaker they think we are."

Mouth open, she stared at him, disbelieving these tumbled words, this babbling nonsense. "Who sent you?" she asked, thinking it was a question she should have asked hours ago.

"Macravail," he replied unhesitatingly. "The arch mage, Macravail."

"And who," she asked, "or what, is he?"

"A kinsman of yours, I think, pretty one. You do not remember him, but then, you do not remember much. One of the laws of this place."

"Then how do you remember him?"

"Because I am not suffering a malign enchantment and you are. So. Let us think together. You do not know who you are, and neither do I. If Macravail did not send that information with me, we must believe it is for your protection, or mine, or perhaps both. However, I do remember Macravail, and his words to me. 'Greendog,' he said, 'send me word where I may find you.'"

"Greendog? What kind of a name is that?"

"My name," he said doubtfully, "or perhaps what he called me at the time. Who knows?" More cheerfully, "Perhaps he made a joke. Whatever. We must figure out a way to send him word."

He fell silent for a long time, so long it became uncomfortable and Marianne fidgeted, saying, "What else?"

He shook his head. "I was thinking there is very little else."

"Didn't this Macravail give you instructions?"

"To find you, Marianne. 'Find Marianne,' he said. The rest he left to my native cunning and natural self-effacement."

She sighed. It was evident there was no quick, sweet-hot solution. There was only tedium and talk, fear and what courage one could bring to it. So. If that was the way it was, then that was the way it must be.

"Well, if you have nothing to tell me, I do have something to tell you," she said and she told him about the peerers-in, the stolen books, the burned book, the visit to the library of the woman in black. "I don't know what it all means," she confessed, "what it meant when I put the book out the coal chute. Do you have any idea?"

He nodded, nodded, chewing his pursed lips in concentration. "Oh, yes, pretty lady. For everyone in this city there is a book. There is a book in that place for you, and for me, and for Helen, your boss, and for everyone. We are bound to our books. And when you put the book outside and it was burned, then someone escaped from this city. That is why they cheered. But there was only one book, only one. That is why they despaired. But listen, there is more.

"Here in the city, the Manticore. There in the library, books. And as the Manticore chases our images onto the walls of the city, I think the books grow dim and faded and we grow dim and thin and shadowy as well, until they cannot be read any longer. What does one do with them then?"

"With the old, faded books? They are taken to the sub-basements and stacked there. Room after room of them. Huge, mountainous piles of them."

He nodded somberly. "And no chance then of escape. Only to fall into slow rot, to disappear into dust over an eternity of storage." Sadly shaking his head, sighing. "We will not con-

sider that. No. Before that time is near, we will have found a way to send for Macravail, or he will have found a way to us. That is why we have our books, of course, yours and mine."

"We have them?"

"Surely. You brought them. They are here. Was not your own story in the book?"

"But there were thousands of others, too, more stories than I could count...."

"Well. Yes. Most of our books have others' stories in them, though we are often unaware of that. It is no matter, pretty lady. You have your book and you must read in it again, to find what we must do next."

"My story again?"

"Is it not your story we seek to unravel? Your story, of course."

So she sat down away from the window in order not to be distracted by the recurrent return of the Manticore, by the continuing flight of the paper figures, the miragelike wavering of the street, to read her own story, beginning with "... She found herself walking through a neighborhood where narrow-fronted houses stared nearsightedly at her over high stoops and scraps of entryway relieved only by tattered yews..." and

ending with "Is it not your story we seek to unravel? Your story, of course." It was all as familiar to her as ten minutes ago. Even the picture was of her in her bright scarf, cape around her shoulders, clutching the books to her chest as she fled past the corner taxidermy shop where the Manticore raged in the window. "I shall read it again," she said in a tired voice, "and again, and again."

She did not relish reading the story a dozen times, as she had had to do before, but she began without a murmur while Grass! brought her bread and cheese and tea. It did not take as long this time as she had expected.

"Here," she said to him. "I think this may be it: "That evening there was a tap on the window, and she looked out half fearfully to see a black, hunched form against the glass and knew it for that persistent follower who had come after her from the library. The watcher tapped on the window.... Almost fearfully she went to the window to see a message thrust against the glass. Not all who are here are Manticore meat! Will you join us? She wrote upon a napkin the word perhaps and held it to the pane. This seemed to satisfy him, for he scribbled, I'll come back another time....'"

"What do you think?" he asked. "A kind of underground, perhaps?"

"Something like that."

"Against what? Who?"

She shrugged. "Against whoever runs things, manages the

library, keeps the books. If someone escaped-that's the word you used-then it means people are being kept here, imprisoned here. And someone is opposed to it, some resistance movement."

"How effective, I wonder?"

"Who knows? It is at least something. I'll put a note in the window of the restaurant when I get back. Helen won't mind as long as it isn't conspicuous."

"And I," he said, doing a little dance step on the carpet, twirling and bowing to himself, "I must continue the minuet, the slow dance of finding out. Bow, advance, bow, retreat. Slow and easy, so they don't catch me."

"Whoever they are." She laughed, a weary laugh echoed from the street where the Manticore raged past as evening fell. "Find out who that woman is who came to the library, Mr. Grassi. If we find out who she is, it may tell me who I am."

He shook his head at her, tongue protruding between his teeth. "I won't spend time doing that, pretty lady. No. I will do what Macravail told me to do-send him a message. He will come like the wind, like a storm, if only we can figure out how to tell him where we are...."

"I hope you will be able to do that soon," she comforted

him, privately thinking that it sounded no less mad than anything else in the place. "But just in case no one can save us from outside, we must try to figure out how to save ourselves." When he reached to pat her shoulder, she patted his in return. "It's all right. I'll be careful."

They watched together until the Manticore returned to its window and people appeared on the streets once more, few and furtive, but moving about nonetheless. Then she left him to return to her work, wondering as the wind blew sharp bits of cinder into her eyes whether it was truly enchantment or dream or a horrible reality from which there would never be any escape.

Makr Avehl had been on the phone for half an hour, speaking first to someone calling via satellite, an enigmatic conversation which involved much note-taking and short, monosyllabic questions. The later calls were to the people he had sent to Boston, and when he had finished them all he merely sat where

he was, staring at the carpet between his feet. After twenty minutes of this, Ellat cleared her throat to attract his attention. They had spent two days in this sitting about. He had not left Marianne's apartment even for a moment.

"What word?" she asked.

"Harvey Zahmani is not in Boston. No one knows where he is. He did not announce his departure, which he usually does if he is going on some expedition. Besides, he's supposed to be teaching, and he hasn't shown up since last week."

"So you think-"

"I think he went after her, after Marianne. Or, probably, she drew him into the world to which she has gone. Actually, that's much more likely. He would be no more able than I to find her, so she must have drawn him in."

"Why? Fearful of him as she was?"

"Because when we are in our own dream worlds, we people them with others who are important to us, whether we love or hate them. Her world would have Harvey in it, because he tied himself to her in some way so that she could not or would not simply dismiss him."

"But you are not tied to her? Not with her?"

"Oh, Ellat. I know it. I wasn't important enough to her, though I much longed to be."

"She liked you."

"She liked most people. She liked Mrs. Winesap, down-stairs, and Mr. Larkin, and the people in the library. But they weren't important to her. No. Likely they are not in her world either. But I have to find a way to get there, wherever she is."

"If you go into her world, Makr Avehl, won't it have to be

in the form which she assigns you? As she sees you or thinks of you? Are you prepared for that?"

The face he turned to her was blank with surprise. He had obviously not thought of it, or had thought of it and refused to consider it further. He started to shake his head impatiently, but she stopped him with a gesture. "No. Makr Avehl. Think. I twitted you down at Wanderly, twitted you with lecturing at the girl rather than talking with her. If you had talked with her, you would not have risked her life as it has been risked. I told her that such pontificating was your way, and she said she didn't mind, that she found you interesting. So she is good-

natured. We both know that. But you know nothing about her. Suppose-oh, take an impossible example-suppose she sees you as some monster? If you follow her into her world, it will be as that monster. I know that's not possible, but...." Her voice trailed away at seeing the expression on his face.

Makr Avehl was remembering Marianne's hand recoiling from his own, her face knitted up in that expression of unwilling revulsion. Ellat, seeing him stricken, took his limp hands in her own. "Tell me. Did I hit upon an unwelcome truth? Makr Avehl, tell me! You need my help."

"You hit upon something, Sister. Something. I-I offered

to stay with her Sunday night. I was afraid of her being alone. I meant nothing at all improper, nothing lubricious. I thought, after all, that she is an American girl, in her twenties, not some adolescent daughter of Third World aristocrats who has had virginity developed into an art form. I offered to stay with her, meaning nothing dishonorable, and she recoiled from me as though I had been a serpent. She said something-what was it? Something about not being like that, and then she muttered under her breath 'begone, burned, buried'-an invocation or curse. I was so surprised I could say nothing. I apologized. I left her. Zurvan knows how she sees me. If you had not reminded me of that instance, I would have thought she regarded me well enough."

"It might not have been you at all," said Ellat comfortingly. "It might have been a conditioned thing, her usual response to any thought of intimacy. In which case, since we have met her brother, perhaps we can guess? I can guess. You are perhaps too nice-minded."

"Her half brother? Do you mean that she-"

"I mean that he probably tried something with her when she was quite young, and by 'quite young' I mean emotionally, not necessarily in years. She is still 'quite young' in many ways. It would explain much. It would explain her attitude toward your offer to stay with her. You do look like him."

"What do you mean, 'tried something'? Do you mean to tell me that he tried to force her? Or did force her?"

"Possibly. It would explain many things about her. And, since he is the kind of man he is, he probably followed the failure or success of his attempt with an equally forceful attempt to make her feel responsible for it. She is carrying some burden regarding him, Makr Avehl, and I wish that Zurvan had prompted you to pay attention to her instead of to the impression you were making."

"You're brutal, Ellat."

"Only occasionally," she said with a fond embrace of his shoulders. "Only when I am distressed beyond measure. Now, what did the Kavi say?"

"I asked them to read the Cave for me, as you know. I asked for three readings. Cyram did one, Nalavi did one, and the third was by that young cousin of Cyram's, the one with the scary eyes..."

"Therat. She doesn't have scary eyes. She's a bit intense."

"She has eyes like a hawk protecting its nest, ready to tear out your gizzard. Oh, God, Ellat, what difference what kind of eyes she has? They took the readings. I asked for guidance to Marianne. That's all. Aghrehond will be helping all he can, concentrating, fishing about and stirring up the waters. Well...."

"So. The message?"

"Books and what Cyram describes as 'a paper person.' Nalavi saw a building, and a city. The young one-"

"Therat."

"Therat saw a manticore. Nothing else; just a manticore."

"I didn't know there was a manticore in the Cave."

"Neither did anyone else. It's there. Carved in the seventh or eighth century, Cyram thinks, near the floor, half hidden behind a stalagmite. The light fell on it clean and clear, Therat said, but he didn't believe her until he took a lantern in there and looked for it. It wasn't even in the lectionary."

"Without the lectionary..."

"Anybody's guess. No history of lessons. No previous citations. No precedents. Cyram says that the girl-"

"Therat," she said patiently.

"Therat. Cyram says that she feels it means just what it is. A manticore. Oh, one more thing. Cyram also saw an onion." He laughed without amusement. "Of course, I have a lectionary with me and I'll start by looking up the references that are in it.""Makr," she said, eyes half shut as she stared at the street light glow through the hazy curtains. "Makr. It makes me think of something. Paper people, and onions. A thing she said. What was it? Shhh, now, let me think." And she leaned her

head in her hands rocking to and fro while the wind moved the branches on the curtain, changing their shadow pattern with each flicker. "Something she said about peeling away... being peeled away... about Harvey doing that to her-peeling her away..."

"Like a snake shedding its skin?" he whispered. "Papery skin, peeling away? Like that?"

"Think," she said in a vague voice. "Of onions, one layer inside another, inside another, all the way to the heart of it and nothingness. She said Harvey made her feel that way. Flayed. Skinned. Perhaps an onion is not a bad symbol for that."

"Books?" he asked. "Books. A building. A city."

"Books and a building. She worked in a library, Makr Avehl, you told me that yourself. Think! You don't know her well enough, that's all. You should have listened to her. You should have stopped talking and listened to her."

He knelt on the floor before her and bowed his head into her lap. "Beat me, Ellat. Beat me as you did when I was five and tried to drown the white cat. Beat me, but then forgive me and help me. I'm a beast, but forgive me."

She shook her head. "A library, Makr Avehl. People being peeled like onions. A manticore. A manticore is a monster. That's all. Look in the lectionary, if you like, but it will not tell you more than that. To learn more than that, you must look at this place and listen to it as you did not listen to her."

He began to walk around the room, laying his hands on the walls, on the windowsills, on the satiny surfaces of the refinished furniture, on the shelves, the countertops, the carefully laid tile. He began to breathe in the scent of the place, to inhale it, the mixture of lemon oil and potpourri and the fragile smell of Marianne herself, faintly spicy, faintly musky. He began to see the colors, each on each and together, until he knew her thought and intention as she had put each thing in its place, each brushstroke on each surface. He felt the texture of the fabric on the chairs, the dry whiskery push of it into his palm, like a cat's face. He turned on the lamp, noticed the way the light lay on the wood, on the paint, on the fabric. "She lay on the bed in there," he whispered. "She saw it just like this, this corner." He went into the bedroom, lay down on the bed, turned until he saw it as he knew she had seen it, the blanket warm and soft beneath his cheek. Under the lamplight the happy frog he had brought her glowed quietly.

What kind of world would one like this carry in her soul? What would its geography be, its climate and culture? He lay quietly, letting what he knew of her possess him until it became more real than himself. Where? Where? Where?

Ellat came to the door of the room. "Makr Avehl. Remem-

ber, in her world you may not have a form or presence which will please you. Remember, it may not be of her own doing. It may be merely something old and wounding which will not let her see you as you are."

"I know, Ellat," he said. "If anyone can be prepared, I am prepared. Wait here for me."

"Oh, my dear," she said. "Of course I will wait for you."

"WHO AM I when I don't know who I am?" She was leaning across a table, trying to post her inconspicuous notice in the corner of the coffee shop window, speaking partly to herself. Helen was behind the counter, wiping it with a moist cloth and humming around the toothpick between her teeth. She interrupted the hum to make a short, interrogative snort and put her hands on her hips. Marianne got the notice propped to her satisfaction. It said, "I wish to meet with those who said they would return.""

Helen thought this over. "Who are you? You're whoever you were, except you don't remember it."

"Then I can't be who I was. Memories are part of who a person is, and I don't have any. Right now, I remember the library and getting out of it. That's almost all I am. There's no one here to tell me whether I was good, or bad, or really evil.

I don't know whether I helped people or hurt them."

"You're pretty young to have done very much of either."

"I'm old enough to have started. I don't know whether people loved me or hated me. Or-not really. Except that someone hated me enough to get rid of me."

Privately, Marianne felt that the answer to this question was not as important as some superficial and conventional attitudes made it seem. In this sunless place, with its walled horizon and enclosed universe, there was still regard among the inhabitants for a kind of wary politeness, a conventional courtesy. There was an accepted discrimination between good and evil, based largely upon the Manticore as a defining limit of the one and opposition to him as the expression of the other. In this place, Marianne was good because she opposed evil. What she might have been elsewhere, what sins she might have committed, could only be pale and irrelevant in this world, and it was only a traditional concern which made her voice the question-and of what tradition she would have been hard pressed to say.

"Someone else cares enough about you to try and come after you. You told me about the fellow, the one with the books."

"And that tells me that I wasn't completely... you know,

neutral. I didn't think I was neutral, anyhow. I don't look like a neutral person, do I, Helen?"

Helen shook her head, almost smiling. Since Marianne had told her about Cani Grassi and her narrow escape from the Manticore, Helen seemed a little more trusting, more personal, less shut up within herself. "You don't look neutral, girl. You look exactly like some of the people in the place I come from. You could be a cousin to them."

"Where was that?"

"I lived in Alphenlicht. Ever heard of it?"

Marianne felt a tingle, a tiny shock running from ear to ear across the top of her head, a kind of sparkling behind the eyes, which came for an instant and was gone.

"It's a tiny, old country," Helen went on. "Squeezed in at the comer of some bigger, more important countries, mountains all around. A little backward, I guess you'd say. We had a schoolteacher used to say that. 'A little backward in a nice way,' she'd say. Lots of horses on the farms and little wagons in the streets. Only a few cars, and those only to take the high-ups away when they needed to fly somewhere or buy something we didn't have. A slow little country, slow and peaceful. Never was any war in Alphenlicht as long as anyone could remember.

Some said we were too little. Others said it was because of the Cave of Light."

"The Cave of Light?" A tingle, wanning, warning.

"In the Holy Mountain, right in the middle of the country. See, there was this mountain, like a big sponge, all full of holes and tunnels, little ones and big ones, and all the holes lined with this shiny glass-rock, what do you call it? Eisen-what?"

"Isinglass? You mean mica?"

"That stuff. Yes. Well, all these holes go down into the mountain into a cave there. A big cave. Round like a melon. Flat floor. Pillars of stone and all these little holes reflecting light down into it. Well, back when the Kavi first came .to Alphenlicht, they began to make carvings and drawings in the cave. After a few hundred years, the whole cave was covered with carvings, all over the inside."

"What kind of carvings? People? Gods? What?"

"Everything. Trees, animals, flowers, people, books, words-everything you can imagine and a few you can't. So, people had noticed that the light comes down through the mountain, down all those funny shiny tubes and holes, and falls on some of the carvings. Not much to that, hmm? Well, somebody had noticed that the light never seemed to fall the same way twice. Say you go in there today at sunrise, and the light falls one place on the carving of a tree and another place on an old man eating a rabbit. Then somebody else comes in midmorning,

and the light falls on a picture of a boat and the word sthran-dunas. And at noon something else, and midafternoon some-thing else, and tomorrow morning something else again."

"But it would have to be the same sometimes. Say, every 14th of June at six a.m."

"It isn't," said Helen triumphantly. "They kept records, and it isn't. Never the same way twice. They finally figured out it was because of the way the trees grow on the mountain, or the deer graze, or the hunters move, or whatever. No two people ever see the light the same. No one person ever sees it the same twice. Just like fingerprints, all different...."

"Well, then it didn't take long for people to decide it was like a kind of oracle. You have a problem, you go into the Cave and see where the light falls, and that makes a message for you. If you can't figure it out, then there are Kavi there who figure it out for you. They even have a book telling what all the signs and carvings mean."

"Like an oracle," mused Marianne, "the oracle of Delphi," not realizing she had no idea what "Delphi" meant.

"Some call it that," said Helen. "Some call it the oracle cave. There are those who say that's why we never had a war, because the Cave showed us how to keep our borders closed.

There must have been something to that, coo, come to think of it." She fell silent, thinking.

"Why was that, Helen?"

"Oh, it was something my husband, David, said once about people from the neighboring country trying to get in. He was a border guard, my David, when he was younger."

"Tell me about him, about you. How did you get here?"

The large woman stared out the window, ticking the tooth-pick between her teeth, a little tapping, like woodbeetle or some kind of infinitesimal code transmission. For a time Mari-anne thought she would not answer, but at last she said, "Well, why not?

"We lived near the Prime Minister's house, not his town house, you know, for when the Council met, but his country house, the Residence. David kept the grounds at the place, him and two or three young fellows and a couple of women in the kitchen garden. Didn't like the insides of places, David didn't. Liked the sun in his face and getting his hands dirty. Well, we got along well enough. Never had any children, which was sad for us, but otherwise it was a good life. Come one spring, David was doing some cutting along the drive, and around noon I took him his lunch. I remember walking down the road. There were birds singing, and the grass was smelling the way it does, fresh. The house was shining up on its hill, walls all silver rose in the sun. Well, I saw this big, black car come

down the hill from the Residence, raising up dust, and I knew it was her."

Silence stretched, Helen's eyes fixed on something distant in time and place, voice fallen into a murmur. Marianne waited for a time, then nudged into the quiet. "Who was she, Helen?"

"Ah. Who? Oh, her. Well, she was some nobility or other. From Lubovosk. It was a country over the mountain used to be part of us but separated off a long time ago. That's the only time we ever talked war in Alphenlicht, when Lubovosk was mentioned. Our teacher called it a place of some unkindness, I remember. This woman was there, come to try and marry herself off to our Prime Minister. We called her the Black Countess because she always wore black, and she had this nephew came with her. We called him Prince Teeth because he was always behind her with his teeth showing like a dog about to bite, pretty much of an age with her, too....

"Well, this car comes down the hill and into the woods. I heard it coming, the roar of it along the road like some animal growling among the trees. Then it stopped. I came round a corner and saw David had a little tree down across the road where he'd cut it. He was bowing and tugging his hat brim and saying he'd have it out of the way in a moment, real polite.

He was always polite, David...."

"Yes," whispered Marianne. "What happened?"

"Well, she came out from that car, Prince Teeth right behind her, eyes glittering like a wolf in torchlight, and she pointed a finger at David, one hand pointing and the other hand up in the air twisting and twisting like somebody opening a great spigot of something, and she cries, 'Who delays me, I delay. Who holds me, I hold forever. Fool, begone!' Suddenly, David's gone, there's nothing there, and I scream, and she turns on me with that hand still out and the other twisting and twisting, and she smiles-oh, it was a cruel smile-and says, 'And you to some other place, slut?' Well, I was quiet. I fell down with my face in the dirt and I was quiet. I heard the car go on its way, out to the main road and away north. It was her saying 'some other place' made me quiet. Wherever David went, that's where I would go to find him, not some other place."

"Find him? Where? How?"

"Come nightfall, I went up to the house and asked to see the Prime Minister, Archmage Makr Avehl. All the people in the house were relatives of mine. They let me in to see him."

"Macravail! I know that name. Card Grassi told me that name!"

"Ah. Well, then, maybe you're another she's sent here. Like my David. Not a follower, like me."

"I don't understand what you mean, follower?"

"I told the Archmage what had happened. Hard-faced he was, sitting there by the fire, and I knew that woman from Lubovosk had made him terribly angry. I told him what had happened, what David did and said, what she did, and the motions she made and the things she said, and he told me he couldn't get David out without risking the land and all its people, but he could send me in after him, into the false worlds. And if I found David, I could be strong with him until the time Makr Avehl could get us all out. So I followed David in here."

"How long? How long has it been?"

"How can you measure how long? Long enough for me to take over this place, long enough to find David, long enough for the two of us to know there aren't any trees here, aren't any mountains, to know there's only this city and the Manticore. The damned Manticore."

"So you did find him?"

"Oh, yes. I found him. For all the good that was." She fell silent for a long time, chewing her lips, wiping the counter in an endless circle. "He didn't know me, you see. Didn't remember me. Wasn't interested. That's one thing about this place, you know. There's no love here. No desire. Everything muted and put down of that kind. I've thought about it many a night, lying in my room, knowing he was just down the hall

in another room, not caring. Not that I care either, much, but 1 can remember caring. He can't even remember that."

Marianne was instantly uncomfortable with this line of thought. She did not want to think of caring, not in the way Helen meant it, though she knew well enough what Helen meant. Caring was like trees and mountains, something she knew of, had known of, which did not exist in this world even though she believed that somewhere such things existed. She changed the subject. "What does David do?"

"He plots, girl. He plots and sneaks about. Ever since I told him about her, he follows her whenever she comes here. Oh, she comes here, in that same long, black car. I've seen her going into the library."

"Madame Delubovoska? Her?"

Helen put a finger to her lips, shook her head in a tiny tremor, side to side, the gesture saying be still about it, silly girl, don't say names. "When he isn't following her, he's plotting to kill the Manticore."

"Helen, will you come with me when I go to see my friend next time? The one who lives on Manticore Street?"

Helen shuddered. "I'd as soon not. Better stay as far from the Manticore as possible."

"I was there. It didn't hurt me."

"You stay here long enough, you'll see yourself out there being chased by the Manticore. Pictures of you. Flickery things that look just like you. Like your skin peeled off you, layer on layer, your skin and your soul. I've seen them, big paper cut-outs of me, running and screaming and running, and ending up stuck up on the walls of the city, everywhere. After a while, every place you look, there you are, stuck to the walls, bits and shreds of you peeled away to hold up the walls as though the walls were made of people. I can feel it at night, feel the skin coming off me in the dark, tiny bit by tiny bit, around me like a shroud, then floating off to hang in the shadows until the Manticore walks. And we see ourselves running and screaming, and that reminds us to be afraid again."

Marianne did not reply, but she carried the thought with her through the day. "Is that all any of us are?" she wondered. "Part of the fabric of whatever place we are in, whatever time we are in, a brick, a stone, a carved piece at the top of some pedestal? Is it we or the place which has urgency and importance? And if it is the place which has importance, why do we resist it so? Running and screaming and hating the bits of us which are blown about and lost upon the walls of the world? Are we dwindled thereby?" Helen did not look dwindled, but she had an air of having retreated to some last redoubt within herself from which she peered out upon the world, weary but

indomitable.

At noon, which was simply midway through the lighted period in this sunless place, Marianne felt someone watching her, turned from her pan washing to find a dark, bulky man staring from a corner table through the kitchen hatch at her and knew at once that this was one of the peerers who had made her life so miserable when she had been in the library. She went back to her work with the uneasy feeling that his eyes remained fixed upon her.

Helen whispered, "Marianne, that man watching you is my David. It must be because of that note in the window." Then she went back to ladling stew and buttering bread, watching the man with such ill-concealed longing that Marianne felt guilt for having brought him there. He was a big man, with a strong face and gray-streaked moustache, and his face was full of angry purpose.

When he had finished his meal, he came by the hatch and dropped a folded piece of paper through it. Marianne put the paper to one side and kept on with the washing. She had wanted this contact, had planned for it, and yet was now uncertain that she could deal with this man's needs and purposes, possibly very different from her own. It was only after the customers

had gone and the two of them had the place to themselves that she dried her hands and unfolded the paper, reading it before she handed it to Helen, who had not tried to disguise her interest.

If you want to join us, come-to the church tonight, when the bells ring.

Marianne regarded this thoughtfully. The dolorous ringing of the bells did not normally begin until late, after most customers had left the restaurant, sometimes not until after Helen herself had gone, after the evening rain had fallen, at the time the Greasy Girls were parading and others avoided the walks.

"You don't mind?" she said. "I really want to find out...."

Helen shrugged. "I'll come with you. We'll both find out."

They closed the restaurant and went down the busy street while there was still light in the sky, guiding themselves by the signal tower. There was in the center of the town a tower, tall only in relationship to the squatty buildings which surrounded it, for it had no graceful height to commend it as a building of interest or aesthetic value. It was simply slightly taller than other buildings, and if one scanned the circumference of the city, one might become aware that it was the highest point within that place, not by much, but by the smallest increment which would allow it to surmount all other roofs. The conical roof of this tower was tiled in red so that it appeared as an

inflamed carbuncle upon the horizon of the city. The place was called by everyone throughout the city the signal tower. Who signaled from it, or when, or for what purpose was never mentioned. The church crouched near it, half in its shadow.

They hid themselves behind the thick pillars of the church porch to await the coming of darkness. While it was still dusk, the Greasy Girls began to come out of their houses, heads shaved clean, bodies almost naked, all skin surfaces annointed with some ointment which made them shine in the shadows like slime-wet frogs. A few started walking down the street, were joined by others, then still others, no sound accompanying them but the shuffle of their feet. When some fifty of (hem had assembled, they marched up the church steps and into the building. Helen and Marianne slipped around the corner of the porch to avoid them, and entered the church from an unlit side door. They were oppressed by an unfamiliar smell which aroused a kind of quasi-memory which both of them felt they should be able to identify. The music oozing from the place was deadly solemn, almost lugubrious, and the congregation bathed in this watery sound with expressions of drowned lassitude. Other than the Greasy Girls there were only a dozen or so people scattered individually among the massive stone benches. David gestured to them from behind a pillar, and they came to sit in front of him while the sad music went on and on and the hierarch sat

drowsing in his high chair on the podium. David leaned forward as though to say something just as the music trailed away into inconsequent stillness and the hierarch began to speak.

"Tomorrow we will walk with the Manticore once more. Rejoice to walk with the Manticore, for it is the Manticore who saves us from the horrible librarians. In that dread library our books are kept, and we know that others may read our lives, take us into their power.... If it were not for the Manticore, we would have no future except to live upon those shelves forever. But the Manticore peels us away, layer by layer, places us upon the walls of the city where we may become part of the city itself, strong as its walls, eternal as its stones. As we are peeled away by the Manticore, our books dim and fade, and we pass out of the power of the librarians and into the light. Oh, rejoice to walk with the Manticore-rejoice and sing."

The singing began again, awful music, deep as an ocean and as black, lightless as the terrible depths of the sea. A curtain at the back of the podium swayed briefly in some errant gust of air, and Marianne caught a glimpse of the singers behind it, women, naked and oiled, shaved and shining, singing in hard, hornlike voices with only their flabby dugs testifying to fe-

maleness.

David whispered, "Follow me when we go out," which after a time they did, waiting until the procession of Greasy Girls had departed and then trailing him as he led them down dark side streets and into an area of high, blank-faced warehouses with railway sidings where little red lights gleamed like hungry eyes and a floodlamp blared threat against a wall alive with hunted figures, swarming with fearful faces and pleading hands. He took them into an alleyway, through a hidden door at the base of some black, featureless building. They heard voices before they came into the room, a room which reminded Marianne of the sub-basement rooms of the library, half full of discarded junk, the other half-filled by the dozen people sitting around an old table. Marianne had only a moment to hear the voices before she was grabbed by harsh hands and thrust violently against a wall.

"I took them to church," David said to the assembly. "There's just the two of them. Nobody followed them. This one is Helen. She says she was married to me once. The other one is the one from the library."

"Let go of me," Marianne snarled, almost weeping. "I am not from the library. My name is Marianne, and I'm not from the library." Two of the conspirators had risen to take Helen's arms, keeping her from interfering. Helen wrestled with them angrily, but they held her fast.

"Is that so?" asked a white-haired man with a beard down to his belly, wild eyes under tufts of spiky brows staring at her. "We know that no one comes from there. And yet there are always people there, and you are the only one who has ever escaped."

"Don't be silly," she hissed. "People left there every night." A hard, leaden anger was forming inside her, spinning like a flywheel.

"Really? Did you have the impression that others of the library staff left there at night?"

"They went home at night," she said. "Of course they did."

"Ah. You say they went home at night. Those of us outside never saw anyone leave, did you knew that?"

"But I was always alone at night. Absolutely alone!"

"And yet no one left. Believe me, that is true. Though, to lend credence to what you say, it is also true that you were the only one we could see at night, though we could see others from time to time in the day. Interesting. Did you know that since you have come, the Manticore walks more frequently than before?"

"I-I didn't know. I'm sure it has nothing to do with me...."

As she said this, she knew it was not true, and the heavy who

within spun a little faster.

"That is unlikely. Before you came to the library, the Manticore walked one day in ten....

"One day in ten. We considered it a kind of measure of the malignity of the place, not decently hidden under a cloak of sickness or a robe of age, but ourselves, peeling away layer by layer, visible on every side, confronted at every turning, our own eyes peering at us from the walls, our own mouths pleading with us, our own arms flung out to evoke our pity. What was malign about the city, we thought, is that the Manticore walked one day in ten, a beastly decimator, herding before him our own mortality.

"Well, there are those-in this room-who will not bear it, who will trap the Manticore and kill him rather than be torn off in this fashion, sheet by sheet, as a calendar is torn. We had begun to make plans....

"But since you have come, the Manticore walks more often. He walks one day in seven, one day in five. Soon, perhaps, every day?"

"Are you asking me?" Her voice trembled with threat.

"No. I am telling you. Explaining why we sought you out. Since you came, the fury of the place is doubled, and we demand to know why."

"We will know why," shrilled a tall, cloud-haired woman who struck the table with her fist, raising a cloud of dust. "We will know why. We saw you outside the Manticore's window.

We saw you looking at it long, eye to eye. We believe you know the Manticore! We believe you know who, or what, he is, and how he may be conquered. We believe you are some kin of his!"

Within her the wheel sped once again, making a hum which filled her blood, set it singing. "How would I know the Manticore's name? Why would it be kin of mine?"

They looked uncertainly at one another, confused by her tone. Though they held her against the wall, she blazed at them from among their constraining arms. They could only repeat themselves.

"We believe you know the Manticore, know what it is, who it is. How, or why, or when-those are not important questions. You looked at the Manticore as though you recognized him, as though you knew his name."

"I do not know its name. I don't know anything about this place. I have no memory of what I was before. If you are doing something to get away, I will help you or go with you, but if you go on asking me questions like this, I can't help you."

She felt hot, a^-ry tears, swallowed them, let herself snarl. "Why am I here? Why are you here?"

The white-bearded one nodded, almost in satisfaction. "You

have seen the Greasy Girls. They walk where the Manticore walks. Bald, shaven, naked, lean as leather, oiled to a brighter gloss than finished marble, walking and chanting before the Manticore, worshiping the Manticore. The Manticore laughs at them, kills one occasionally, lets them march and posture as they will. We are their antithesis. We will not accept, will not resign ourselves, will not permit, will not believe. We will resist! We will find a way to get into the library and bum it. We will find a way to kill the Manticore. We will find a way out of here.

"And we will make you help us, one way or another. We don't believe you when you tell us you do not know the Manticore-though you may not realize that you lie to us. Still, this is enough for tonight. Tomorrow, the Manticore walks. Soon after that, we will meet again." They let go of her and turned away, and Helen took her arm, perhaps in comfort, perhaps for comfort.

David took them out of the place, the silence behind them breaking into confused expostulation as they went through the door into the night. Helen angrily rubbed her arms where she had been held. "Damn it, David," she snarled. "That was a rotten thing to do."

He nibbed his wrist across his moustache, face as hard and determined as it had been since they had seen him at noon. "If we were once married, woman, if we were, then you would forgive me, knowing that what I do is necessary. If we were not, then it is of no concern of mine what you think of me. You may have resigned yourself to this place. I have not. What the Leader said is true. We will kill the Manticore or die, but we will not merely live here to see our souls pasted upon the walls of this place...."

He left them with that, with no farewell, without a wave of hand or a gesture, and Helen began to cry silently, tears running down her strong face without a sound. "We're going to Mr. Grassi's place," Marianne said. "He has a book I have to use."

Helen, busy wiping her eyes, did not answer, but neither did she object. Though it took them some time to find where they were and determine in which direction Manticore Street would be found, Helen said nothing in all that time.

In the second floor apartment, Mr. Grassi was unsurprised at their arrival. Marianne went directly to the shelf where her book, To Hold Forever, was found.

"Oh, my dear pretty lady," said Grassi. "Are you looking for more answers to other questions yet?"

"One question only," she said briefly. "Which we should have asked when I was here last, Mr. Grassi. We should not have waited, should not have delayed. We should have asked

the book then how to send the message you wondered about. How do we call for help, Mr. Grassi? We must know, for this last day has convinced me we must have help or be here forever."

She let Helen tell him what had occurred as she sat down with the heavy book in her lap. Marianne paid no attention. She had begun to read at the place in the story which began with Grassi's question, "What do you think? A kind of underground, perhaps?" and went on through that day and the day following to the present time. She read broodingly, with deep attention, undistracted by the movements about her or the smell of the food they were preparing. Outside the windows darkness rested upon the city and only the sound of mysterious cars moving through distant streets came through the window. She read and read, finally placing her hand upon the page and reading aloud.

""They closed the restaurant and went down the busy street while there was still light in the sky, guiding themselves by the signal tower. There was in the center of the town a tower.... It was simply slightly taller than the things around it, and if one scanned the circumference of the city, one might become aware that it was the highest point within that place.... The

conical roof of this tower was tiled in red so that it appeared as an inflamed carbuncle upon the horizon of the city. The place was called by everyone throughout the city the signal tower. Who signaled from it, or when, or for what purpose was never mentioned.'"

She thumped the book with her hand. "There is a signal tower, Mr. Grass!. A place to signal from or why else is it called by that name? So, let us signal from it."

"My dear ladies-now? In the dark? When dawn may come at any time and with it the Manticore? Oh, surely another time, a better time...."

The wheel within her hummed, a rising pitch of fury. "Mr. Grassi. You are fluttering, and it is unlike you. Think of your native cunning. Think of your natural guile. Think how clever we are, Mr. Grassi, and let us go. Who knows what another day in this place may do to us? I will not wait to be used by those plotters; I will not wait to be eaten by Madame; I will not wait to be pursued by the Manticore. Stay or go with us, Mr. Grassi, but we will go, won't we Helen?"

The woman nodded over her pot of broth, trying to straighten the kitcheny clutter with one hand even as she reached for her coat with the other.

"Oh, leave it," said Grassi, impatiently. "Leave it. Who knows. We may never see it again."

They went out into the silent streets, still wet from the dusk rain, lit by an occasional lamp into uncertain pools of visibility

which they swam between in the wet light, working their way back toward the church from which their evening's peregrinations had begun.

"I hear feet behind us," said Helen, almost whispering. "Following us."

"Probably David," said Marianne in a definite tone. "Or one of the others. Pay no attention, Helen. Of course they will follow us. Let them. Anyone who helps us helps them, though they may not know it."

"I hear cars moving."

"They always move at night," said Marianne. "When I was in the library, I used to listen to them at night, wondering where they came from, where they were going. I have never seen them in the daytime at all, but at night they come out after the rain, to make that wet, swishing sound throughout the night. Perhaps the rain brings them, like frogs. Perhaps they bring the rain and cannot move when the streets are dry. Pay no attention."

"There are bells ringing."

"They are ringing the bells in the church. Sometimes they do that at night. Whoever does it makes a very soft sound, though, not clamorous as in the day. Pay no attention, Helen.

It will help guide us where we are going."

And, indeed, the soft ringing of the bells did guide them through the wet streets while behind them in the city the sounds of cars and footsteps increased as though a skulking assembly gathered elsewhere and increased with each moment. They came at last to the church, passed before its bulbous pillars, and stood at the foot of the signal tower. In the church there was singing, sad as tears; the sound lapped them in anguished waves where they stood.

"I know," said Helen. "I will pay no attention to it."

Marianne smiled. Had she seen it, Helen would have been surprised at the cold efficiency of that smile.

The stairs wound up the outside of the tower for at least half its height then entered through an arched opening into a lightless interior. From where they stood the heavy tower roof lowered down at them like brows over the shadowed eye holes of the high arcade. Marianne set her foot upon the step and the singing behind her grew in intensity even as the bells began

ringing more loudly. Resolutely, she ignored this and went on, Helen and Mr. Grassi behind her, the sound growing moment by moment into a cacophony, a tumult, the swishing of the cars and the tread of many feet underlaying other sounds with

a constant susurrus as they climbed. Far away she thought she heard the crash of breaking glass and she turned to see the expression of surprise and fear on both faces behind her. "We would probably not be able to hear the Manticore's window breaking from here," she said. "Pay no attention."

They were not long in doubt, for the next sound they heard was the unmistakable roar of the Manticore, far off yet infinitely ominous. They hurried up the steps, curling around the squatty tower once, twice, three times widdershins. Before them the arched opening into darkness gaped like a mouth, and they stopped as if by common consent before entering it. Below them 011 the street, things gathered, vision swam, and a file of Greasy Girls began to assemble at the corner. There were bulky shadows at the base of the tower, and Marianne saw one or two of them start up the tower stair. "David is there," she told Helen. "With others. It seems we are together in this, whether or no."

They hesitated at the dark opening. There was no door, no sign that there had ever been a door, and yet the impression of a definite barrier within that opening was clear to each of them. "Shall we risk what waits within?" asked Marianne. "Or do you think we only imagine it?"

"Something there," said Helen.

Grassi nodded, put out a hand to feel of the darkness as though he measured velvet for a robe. "Yes," he said, "some-

thing there, and yet I do not think it menaces us."

"Then we gain nothing by standing," said Marianne, pushing her way through the opening and into the tower. There was no light inside, and they fumbled their way around the stone walls until they encountered the stairs once more and could fumble their way up that twisting, railless flight. Gradually their eyes became used to the darkness, became accustomed to the velvet shadow, and they saw draperies as of mist against the dark. Faces of smoke. Hands which reached foggy fingers toward them. Voices of vapor. Marianne stopped climbing, sat down with her back against the wall and her hands held before her to warn away whatever it was which shifted and swam at the edges of her sight.

"Ghosts...." whispered Helen.

"Peeled ones," corrected Grassi in an awed tone. "Those whom the Manticore has chased to the edges of oblivion."

A sigh ran among the shifting shapes. Marianne could see them more clearly now, forms of virtual transparency through which one might see the ghostly hearts beating slowly, the pulsing blood coursing through pale veins, translucent orbs of eyes staring at them through the darkness. Even as she watched, one of the figures threw up its gray arms and opened its mouth

in a long, silent scream which echoed down the tower in a single pulse of agony, then came apart into shreds before her eyes, fading into the gloom, into nothingness. Around this disappeared one was an agitation of ghosts, a turmoil of spirits and a soundless wailing which bit at them like the shriek of unoiled hinges on old vaults.

The anger within Marianne deepened, began to sing. "There is nothing we can do for them," she said to the others, beginning to climb once more. "We save them if we save ourselves. Otherwise, there is nothing for them or for us. Come, quickly. The Manticore is hunting through the streets."

Though the tower had not looked very tall from the street, from within it seemed to extend endlessly upward, and they turned around and around as they climbed, still widdershins, the world beginning to spin beneath them. At last they reached a flat platform and felt a ladder upon the wall. At the top of the ladder was a trapdoor, and it opened at their combined strength to let them out into the room at the top of the tower. The room was strewn with rubbish, with broken picture frames and trash and blown leaves from trees which had never existed in this place. In the center of the room was a fireplace without a chimney, simply a raised platform made up of large stones cemented together. Marianne did not wait. She began scavenging immediately among the broken frames, stripping a canvas away from its frame and piling the broken sticks upon the hearth. The picture had been of a naked girl carrying a light

in a dark, frightening street.

"I pray," she begged them, "that one of you has a match. Without it, I fear we're done."

"Always," said Helen, rummaging in her pockets. "One must never be without fire...."

Below them in the nearby street the roar of the Manticore became one with a roar from the crowd. Marianne heard a trumpet bray, somewhere, or a car horn, as she fidgeted while Helen searched. At last the woman found what she had looked for, half a dozen wooden matches, two of them broken. They crouched beside her, cutting off the wind, while she tried to light the broken frame with a kindling of dead leaves and scraps of paper. The first four matches went out, caught by vagrant wind, burned out without igniting anything but themselves. Marianne gulped, wiped her hands, let frustrated fury take her. "Burn," she commanded. "You will bum to summon help, because I need help. Burn." Still, there was only one match left when the leaves caught fire to send tentative tendrils of flame up between the bits of broken wood. Then the wood caught with a roar, the paint upon it bubbling and pouring out smoke. They found other trash in the place, heaped it upon the small fire until it became a beacon of leaping red and a column

of black, roiling smoke rising upward forever from the tower.

"Now," gasped Marianne, "should we call a name? Invoke a spirit? Call upon God?"

"Call upon Macravail," cried Grassi. "For if he hears you, he will bring God with him."

THE DUSK RAIN wakened Chimera, sogging the rough curls of his mane and running across Lion's closed eyes into the comers of the nostrils, making Lion sneeze. There was no sound to have awakened him, and he swiveled ears, trying to determine what quality of uneasiness it might have been which put an end to dream and brought him into this place. He rather thought it had been the sound of someone calling his name, but he could detect no echo of that summons now. He turned his heavy head, following the absence of sound, ears continuing to prick and twitch. This motion wakened Goat who shared the ears with Lion, centered as they were in the great arc of Goat's horns. Through slitted eyes Goat stared calmly along the shaggy hair of the backbone to the end of his back where the flat, scaled head of Snake rested-still asleep, forked tongue flick-ering unconsciously-and Snake's body curved away into Chi-mera's tail. Lion began pawing wetness away, and Goat caught a glimpse of the dark wall which towered just behind them,

arcing off into haze in either direction.

"Where are I," he mused in his throaty baah. "We? Where?"

"Outside something," rumbled Lion, washing the last of the

dusk rain from the deep wrinkles between his eyes. His head swiveled as he heard an ominous rattle from behind him, and he looked into the eyes of Snake, awake now, tail in sinuous motion with its tip a vibrating blur. "We should be inside it rather than outside it. I don't like being outside."

Goat turned to regard the wall, forcing Lion to look in the opposite direction. Two of the Chimera's faces were back to back, able to turn completely around, as an owl's head does, which allowed Lion to look forward while Goat looked back or vice versa on occasion. Lion contested the movement, turning the neck violently as he coughed with a guttural roar, and Goat stared down his own hairy backbone once more at Snake's head, now thoroughly awake, tongue flicking in and out as it tasted the air.

"Why are we here?" Goat asked, refusing to be annoyed by Lion's forceful behavior. "Why?"

"Sssummoned, no doubt," hissed Snake. "Ssseeking sssomeone. It would be better to ssstop all thisss ssseeking, all this waking in ssstrange locationsss." The rattle at the end of Snake's

tail gave a dry, uneasy buzz, a humming paranoia of sound that made Goat blink and Lion extend his claws to scar the ground.

"Who is it we are seeking?" asked Goat, almost as though he knew the answer already but was testing to see whether the other parts of himself were as aware as he.

"Marianne," roared Lion lustfully. "We are seeking Marianne."

"Sssilly girlsss," Snake hissed. "Running away and asssking to be ressscued."

"She didn't run away," Goat reminded him. "She was sent, Snake." The Chimera got to its feet, heavy lion ones in front and hooved goat ones at the back while a scaled serpent tail lashed at the ground. Snake always felt best when he was lying against the ground and belly scales were where belly scales belonged, while Lion preferred to face forward-and move in that direction.

"I, on the other hand," said Goat to himself in a philosophical manner, "find as much to comment upon looking back as I ever might looking forward. It is, perhaps, better that Lion usually does the forward looking. Lion is not overburdened

with scruple, with metaphysical consideration, with introspec-

tion. If it were up to Goat, Chimera might hover forever upon the brink of action without taking it. I, however, am much needed as a kind of balance, for if it were up to Lion or Snake alone, we would be embroiled in continual calamity."

This was more or less true. Lion had few doubts about his actions. As he had said on more than one occasion, "I may be wrong, but I am never in doubt." Goat, on the other hand, was seldom wrong but often in doubt about virtually everything. Snake did not care. Wrong or right, venom, spite, and suspicion met either condition.

"Have you ever speculated," began Goat, "on what a strange mosaic we are? I am continually amazed by the difference, the distinctions, the-"

"Arragh," roared Lion. "I am outside, Goat. I want to be inside. This is no time for lectures." He began to move them along the wall, pace on pace of lion feet, goat hooves trotting behind, snake tail lashing, rattling, a constant counterpoint to the heavy breath of the Chimera, the hot, fiery breath of the Chimera. "Can I bum this wall?" Lion roared, eager to make the attempt.

Mild-voiced Goat, remonstrating, urging whenever possible a less violent course of action. "That shouldn't be necessary. We see tracks. A vehicle has come this way, from out there in the haze toward this place." Goat saw two earth colored lines imposed upon the spongy gray-green of the plain, coming out

of a nothing haze into the reality of wherever they were, vaguely paralleling the wall, swerving to meet it far ahead.

"Tracksss mean people," Snake whispered. "It isss bessst to ssstay away from people."

"Shhh," said Goat kindly. "We won't let them hurt you." Goat was watchful of Snake's feelings. Snake's fangs rested very near Goat's backbone, and Snake was not always logical in his feelings of persecution.

"They could not hurt me," roared Lion. "I am too powerful for them. Besides, why would they? Who would wish to wound anything as handsome as I? As elegantly virile? As marvelously strong? As-"

"Yes, yes," murmured Goat. "Quite right. Lion, we are veering away from the tracks. Cleave a bit more closely to their direction and we may come sooner to some break in the wall. Ah. We thought so. Let us turn our head a bit more- yes. See there. A gate!"

"People," warned Snake again, restlessly shifting his head from side to side upon its stubby neck. "Bessst to avoid. Why ssshould anyone go inssside?"

"Marianne," growled Lion. "I want her."

"Marianne," murmured Goat, "needs help."

"Marianne," hissed Snake, "should look out for hersself asss ssshe isss perfectly capable of doing. It isss dangerousss to go sssaving people."

The gate which they approached was hardly worthy of the name, being merely a shadowy interruption of the featureless plane of the wall, two penciled lines with a cross line above, and only the twin gullies of vehicle tracks leading to and under it signifying that something here might open. Lion scratched at it with his huge paws without effect.

"Let us try," urged Goat. "Horns are very good for this sort of thing." He turned the reluctant neck until Goat faced forward, lowered the head, thrust the huge, curling horns against the shadowy doorway and began to push, goat hooves and lion feet thrusting deep into the soil of the place as Chimera leaned into the effort. Slowly, complainingly, the door opened. Chimera moved into the wall, through the tunnel under the wall, and out onto bare earth which extended from the wall itself to the outskirts of a dark, silent city. Far in the center of that city a squat, ugly tower poured smoke into the gray sky and blazed with beacon light. Lion could hear the sound of a crowd and the manic scream of a Manticore.

"Manticore," hissed Snake. "Vicsssious, poisssonousss."

"No match for me," bellowed Lion. "I never saw a Manticore I couldn't tear up and eat for breakfast."

"We have seen very few Manticores, actually," said Goat. "One or two. Both of them, as I recall, were immature at the

time. Hardly a representative sample. Slowly, Lion, slowly."

Lion, not listening, bounded away toward the outskirts of the city and down the nearest empty street, Snake flying hideously behind. Goat sighed and began to brake the hind feet of Chimera, slowing their progress. Lion panted and growled, but Goat brought him to a halt.

"Slowly, Lion. If you want Marianne, it would be better to find her while both she and we are in one piece-so to speak. Let us not confront Manticore head on. Let us first see what the situation is."

"Ssspy it out," whispered Snake. "Sssneak about a little."

"Dishonorable," roared Lion. "Right always conquers. Right makes might!"

"Right makesss dead Lionsss, sssometimesss," hissed Snake. "Lisssten to Goat."

Snarling, but impotent to move Goat's hind feet any faster than Goat wished them to move, Lion abated his mad charge through the city streets and even allowed Goat to turn the neck about to allow Goat some say in which way they went. They continued moving toward the tower, but Goat chose dark ways which were free of traffic. He could hear the sounds of vehicles, always on other streets, and the roar of a mob, and these were

easy to avoid. It was less simple to avoid the vague, swimming light which pervaded some places, the feeling that millions of tiny beings hung about one making shadows and shifts in the fabric of the air. Still, Chimera made good progress toward the tower, and the flaming light from it came more clearly with each cross street they put behind them.

At last they seemed to be only one street away, and Goat urged Lion toward a fire escape which zigzagged up the side of a building near them. "Let's have a look from up there," he urged. "We should be able to see the tower and the street below it."Lion shook his massive head, making the rough curls of mane flick into Goat's eyes, and opened his mouth as though to roar, but was stopped in an instant by a curious pain in his back parts. He turned his head to see Snake's head poised over a flank, one fang barely inserted into the hairy hide of Chimera.

"Lisssten to Goat, Lion. If it is going to die sssenssslessly, might as well die here. Lisssten to Goat."

Goat slitted his eyes, wondering once again at the strangeness of life and being. Seldom did he feel Snake was an ally, but in this case the serpent part was willing to help Goat in the interest of discretion. He turned head front and tip-tapped hind feet up the stairs behind the pad-pad of lion feet. The roof was

flat, and they peered over a low parapet at the convocation below.

Greasy Girls were dancing in the street, before and around the Manticore who slashed at them, sending an occasional slick body flying to crash into a wall and slide to its base, resting there in limp, bloody clutter. On the outer stairs of the tower were many bulky forms, most with weapons of one kind or another, some with missiles which were being hurled at the Manticore to increase his fury. High in the square tower, a little above the place Chimera stood, firelight blazed from arcaded openings on all sides, lighting the street but leaving the outer stairs of the tower in virtual darkness. Chimera could see figures moving in this firelight, one man, two women, bringing more fuel for the fire. Before Goat could intervene, Lion roared, one shattering roar which sent pieces of the parapet flying into the street and shuddered the building beneath them. While Goat was still trying to decide what to do about this, Lion had them halfway down the fire escape once more, and by the time Goat had formulated his expostulation, Lion had them in the street, confronting the Manticore, roaring once more to make the street echo and thunder with the noise.

"Beast," challenged Lion. "Horrid monster! Ugly creature! Hideous malefactor! Stand and fight, monster!"

"Monster," screamed the Manticore, throwing back his dreadful head in a laugh which drowned the Lion's roar. "Mon-

ster. Old Crazy-Quilt! Old Bits-and-Pieces! Old Snake's Tail, Cat's Face! Look at the monster crying monster. Aha, ha, haroo, ha ha! Pot calls kettle black. Snake calls lizard low. Frog calls newt slimy. Chimera calls Manticore monster! Aha, ha, haroo, ha ha!"

This pejorative barrage would have stopped Goat in his tracks while he thought it out. Lion was not slowed by it, hardly heard it. Snake was already so infuriated by the noise and the disturbance that his fangs were fully extended and dripping with poison. Thus Goat was bypassed, left to think the matter over while Chimera went to battle. The first Manticore knew of it was that he found a huge wound slashed into his side by fangs while claws raked at his flanks and a needle strike told him Snake had managed to get in one bite in passing.

Manticore turned to look into the calm and considering eyes of Goat for one split moment before Chimera turned and he faced Lion once more. The look from Goat had been more wounding than the bites or slashes, for it had both recognized him and shown pity, an emotion with which Manticore was generally unfamiliar but knew to be lethal.

"Cat's Face, am I?" snarled Lion. "Feel my cat's teeth, then, monster." And he went by once more, slashing at the

other side. This time Manticore was ready for him, and the great scorpion tail came down to strike Goat's back in front of Snake's head.

"I am immune," remarked Goat to Manticore. "Though venom may give me some painful moments, it should be obvious to any sensible observer that immunity to any lasting effects of poison would be necessary for such a creature as I. While I am able, most of the time, to keep Snake's feelings of persecution ameliorated, from time to time even my eloquence and powers of persuasion are insufficient, and Snake expresses his feelings of powerlessness against the world in a sly and poisonous attack...."

These words were lost in the general confusion, though Goat went on to explain at some length the evolutionary attributes most necessary to the survival of Chimerae. Meantime, Manticore's venom was making him unusually irritable, and at last he fell silent, focused upon the sensations emanating from within.

The Manticore had fallen back, his screams betraying more pain and confusion than challenge. While Chimera was immune to venom, Manticore was not, and Snake's bite was beginning to tell upon the monster, weakening it and making it feeble. Around it the Greasy Girls drew away, murmuring to themselves, and from the steps of the church the hierarch beckoned to them. Sorrowful music, which had stopped at the height of the battle, resumed once more with a funereal sound which

seemed to affect the Manticore adversely for it screamed in agitation at the noise, an agonized bellowing.

High above, Marianne and Grassi watched from the tower as Helen continued fueling the signal fire. Though all three presumed that their help had already arrived, it had done so in such outlandish guise as to make them somewhat doubtful whether this was, in fact, all they were to expect. Thus by mutual and unspoken consent the fire had been kept burning in the hope that something else, something more acceptable and usual in appearance, might manifest itself. Now that the battle began to howl its way toward what appeared to be a final climax, they had begun to doubt that any further intervention would be afforded.

"Is that Macravail?" asked Marianne finally, having postponed asking the question out of deference to Grassi.

"I believe, pretty lady, that it is, though I cannot say with certainty and must admit to considerable surprise. It is not a creature I would have approached on the street with glad protestations of acquaintance. Still, there are familiar things about it.""Ah," said Marianne encouragingly.

Grassi nodded thoughtfully. "I recognize the pride in the roar. From time to time I seem to hear the goat part of it

commenting in scholarly fashion on something or other, and that, too, I recognize. While I hesitate to say so, even the hiss of the serpent part is somewhat familiar to me, though I am proud to say it evokes no general feeling of remembrance."

"If I may choose a part," said Marianne, "I will choose the goat part."

"Forgive me for disagreeing, pretty lady," Grassi interrupted her, "but in the current situation, it seems to me that the lion part is doing very well for our cause."

She assented to this, still regarding the great teeth of the lion with no less disfavor than she regarded the great teeth of the Manticore. Those teeth might be of differing shapes and arrangement, but both sets served the same purpose; both were hungry, powerful, forceful, and aggressive. She did not have time to comment on this, however, for a long black car had driven to the corner of the street where the battle raged, and she recognized all too well the figure which got out of it. "Madame Delubovoska," she sighed, a cold breath of danger going down her back which chilled even the heat of the fire.

"Who is this?" asked Helen. "Is it the same? Oh, by Zurvan the Timeless, it is the same woman who sent my David to this place." And she raised a heavy piece of broken furniture above her head and cast it with all her strength toward the woman in

the street below. The missile fell short, but it sufficed to attract Madame's attention to those who peered down at her from above. Madame's arm came up, pointing, and they heard her scream orders to the Manticore, orders which made that beast turn laboriously and tear his way through the few remaining Greasy Girls toward the bottom of the stair where he was met with other missiles flung by those of David's party. The Manticore cowered, bleated in a strangely sheep-like way, but was driven forward by Madame's screams to attempt the stairway.

Chimera had been momentarily ignored in this rearrangement of the battle, an oversight which Lion-too late restrained by Goat-rectified by an ear-shattering roar and a plunge toward the Manticore's backside.

"You'll go blind if that stinger hits your eyes," said Goat. "Your face will swell up, and you'll look terrible. You might lose your marvelous appearance forever. Careful, Lion. Prudence. A little prudence."

"He's attacking Marianne," roared Lion. "She's mine. He can't have her."

"He isn't yet near Marianne," said Goat. "That woman, on the other hand, is up to something and is very near to us."

Madame was pointing at Chimera with one hand while the other hand twisted high in the air, as though she turned a great spigot on some unseen keg to release a force against them.

Goat said again, so urgently that Lion turned to see the threat, "She is very near to us...."

Lion, as usual, did not wait on his decision but attacked the woman at once, causing her to abort the twisting motion and flee toward her car in a curiously arachnoid scramble, all arms and legs in a scurry of furious activity. From the car she cried an imperious summons to the Manticore. That beast backed down the stair, crying its pain from several wounds and then away down the street after the retreating car.

Chimera heard Marianne crying a trumpet call from the tower. "The library. She's going to the library. After her, every-one!" And in answer to that cry the Greasy Girls poured from the church, suddenly armed against what they had worshiped, the resistance fighters boiled away from the tower stairs, and Helen led the other two in a wild scramble down to the place

where the Chimera, confused by this sudden turn of events, awaited them.

"Marianne," growled Lion. "I have saved you."

"Marianne," murmured Goat, "it's good that you are not injured."

"Marianne," hissed Snake, "ssshould be assshamed to have ssstarted this messss."

"Macravail?" asked Grassi doubtfully. "Makr Avehl?"

The Chimera sat down, Lion licking the blood from his feet, making a face of revulsion. Goat managed to turn the head slightly so that he faced Grassi. "Aghrehond," he said. "The beacon was your work, I assume?"

"Actually, sir, it was Marianne's. She became very determined, all at once. Very wild, almost, taking no advice at all."

"Actually, it was I," agreed Marianne, coming forward to lay her hand upon Goat's muzzle, stroking. "I had reached the end of my patience. Though I didn't expect... you."

"What did you exssspect?" hissed Snake. "A prinssse in ssshining armor? On a white horssse?"

Marianne drew back, away from the weaving head of Snake, in so doing confronting Lion's lustfully adoring eyes. Lion shook his head, fluffing his great mane and posing for her, semi-rampant.

"Pat him," whispered Goat, "or we'll never get away from here."

"Away?" She was suddenly unsure, doubtful.

"My dear, surely you don't think the Manticore and the woman have gone forever? They have simply made a strategic retreat. It must be now, or never, don't you think? I am often accused of making unconscionable delays, but my sense of occasion is very strong and it tells me that now is the time of their defeat-or ours."

Marianne, hands sunk deep in Lion's mane, nodded to this.

"Where, where is Helen?" she asked, turning to take inventory of the little group.

"She went after them," said Grassi. "Waving a bludgeon of some sort and crying for blood. If we are to be part of this denouement, we had best follow."

"If you will ride, Marianne," said Goat, "we may get on a bit faster." And he crouched the back legs a little to let her get on Chimera's back, holding herself well forward by gripping Goat's horns. They set off at Lion's usual heedless pace, Mr. Grassi puffing along behind and Marianne holding on in deep dread of Snake's fangs, so close behind her. They fled down dark streets littered with bits of the posters which were shedding from the walls as leaves drop in the fall, a constant shower of fragments slipping from the walls to pile on the streets in a whispering mass. Here and there as they ran they saw lights coming on in upper windows. They came to a region of tall, narrow-fronted houses staring over their stoops, a littered park around a dilapidated band stand, shrubbery, a corner, and then the portico of the library itself, gray ghost light shining out at them from behind tall, glass .doors. Around this place the resistance had gathered, figures capering around bonfires and voices screaming defiance and threat. Marianne thought she

could see the Manticore inside the building, crouched on the great stairway, peering out at them, but she could not be sure. She dismounted, standing close to Chimera, one arm thrown around its neck, cheek close to Goat's lips.

"They are invulnerable in there," said Goat. "It is a redoubt, a fortress, bound about with enchantments and spells. From there they can strike at us when they will, and all we can do is bottle them up, perhaps, for a time. We cannot get at them to defeat them. It is not good enough merely to stay here forever, for then we might ask whether we hold them or they us.""If we were in Mr. Grassi's apartment," said Marianne, "I would take my book and read in it, as he has taught me to do, finding in my own story the thing I must do next. Since the book is not here, then I must simply remember what is in it."

"Can you do that?" asked Goat, curiously. "We find ourself unable to remember accurately things that have happened in the past. We often mis-remember them in order to make them more logical or more appropriate to their time or circumstance, or they become mis-remembered through too frequent repetition or not being remembered enough. To remember one's own story accurately is a talent too few creatures are capable of...."

"I will do it," said Marianne, "because it is necessary." She sat down on the ground, leaning on one of Lion's great front

legs with his massive head sheltering her from above, and put her face into her hands. The capering figures had put her in mind of the time she had seen them last, when their black shadows cavorted around the fire outside the basement room. They had been burning the book she had put out the coal chute. The coal chute. There had been a way out-for something. There could be a way in-for someone. "Mr. Grassi, find Helen, will you? Tell her to find David and bring him here. I have thought of a way to get in."

He came quickly, face smudged with torch soot, panting from the running, face no less hard-set against her than it had been when last she had seen him. "What now?" he demanded. "Have you decided to help us?"

"I was always willing to help you," she replied, "as you would have known if you had stopped accusing me and listened. Were you among those who asked that a book be put out the coal chute? When I was in the library?"

"He was, and I," cried the cloud-haired woman who stood just behind him. "We burned the book, and at least one of us got away."

"If I could put the book out, why couldn't some of us get in?" asked Marianne. "We could open the doors from inside."

There was a chorus of approbation at this, interrupted by Goat and Grassi, both speaking at once. "Dear pretty lady,

think, do! Could you open them from inside before?" and "If it were that simple, Marianne, I think they would have thought of it and set some guard against it."

"No, no," she exclaimed. "Of course I couldn't open them before, because I was under a malign enchantment. You told me that, Mr. Grassi. You also said that Macravail was the expert on malign enchantment, and is he not here, now? You said he was." She stood up, away from Chimera and looked at him with measuring eyes. "Are you, indeed, expert in malign enchantment? Can you undo whatever it is the Madame has done with that place?"

The question was meaningless to Lion. It meant much to Goat, much of a disturbing nature, making him believe that in some other place or time Chimera might have been otherwise than now presented to this mob. Malign enchantment. Ah. Now there was a question meriting some lengthy study. Unfortunately, there would be no time for lengthy study, or even for brief study, for the mob gathered 'round had it in mind to force some issue, whether or no, and to make something happen, for good or for ill, they seemed to care not. Still, Goat's curious mind told them that they were in some danger from this suggestion, and that if the occasion were to be saved, Goat must

do it.

"Marianne," he said, turning the neck so that he faced her and the crowd, "if we had much uninterrupted time, we might deal with Madame's enchantments. We have no time at all. Whatever we do must be done in the next moments, for she is a sly horror who will escape us if we give her time."

"Araagh," roared Marianne, sounding not unlike Lion in that moment, full of fury, the flywheel of anger within her spinning as though to fling its fragments upon all the world. "Either there is too much time or not enough, either we may act or we may not, we may remember or we may not, and all at her behest. Then if there is no time to do anything sly and guileful, be done! Let us burn the building down, and her within it!"Goat nodded. "Much though it pains me to say so, in this case-and in this case only, not to establish a precedent for future action-I believe you are right."

This was greeted with a louder roar of approval than before, augmented by Lion, who obviously considered the suggestion timely. He gave Goat no further time to talk, but leaped upon the portico and breathed flame upon the doors of the place. Inside, Manticore leaped back, bleating its odd, plaintive cry, so timid in comparison to the scream with which it had terrified the city. Still, it was a terror for no reason. Chimera's flames splashed against the great glass doors and did no more than darken them slightly.

"The building is brick," said Marianne. "It won't burn."

"Oh, it will bum," said David. "We have only to find the weak places. There are other doors, ones made of wood. There are window frames, also of wood. There are shingles, casements, porches, all of wood. Come, beast, let us find the way to kindle this fire...." And the mob swept away, leaving Grassi and Marianne to sit alone upon the curb.

"Well, lady, it seems we have made a great turmoil here.

You are suddenly so forceful, you have taken this world in a storm. Tsk. I was not even needed."

"Oh, you were," she hugged him briefly. "Certainly you were. It's just that I finally got tired of flopping about in this ridiculous world. I mean, why hadn't it occurred to us how silly it was to run from a stuffed Manticore? Had you thought of that? The thing is stuffed! It lives in a taxidermist's window!"

"Still, it rages lively enough," he objected.

"Well, yes. But so do... puppets. So do... machines. So do many things which are not really alive."

"Things which can kill one dead enough, pretty lady. Things which can do much evil, whether they are alive or no."

'True. Still, being afraid of them rather than of the power which moves them is not sensible, is it, Mr. Grassi? Or so I have told myself this night. Do you know what those resistance

people told me? They told me that I knew the Manticore, knew its name. Was kin to it. That made me very angry, Mr. Grassi. So angry I have forgotten to be afraid." And she sat steamily listening to the crash and roar of the crowd, the upwelling shouts as they found something vulnerable to their liking in the library. Her attention was drawn to the building by a flickering light which came through the front doors, firelight, dancing light from deep within the building. The Chimera had succeeded in setting the place on fire.

"All the books," she crowed, "free. All the people let go. No more Manticore."

She spoke too soon. There was a crash of glass, a crash exactly like that with which the Manticore announced his usual walk as the doors shattered in lethal shards and the great beast stood forth upon the porch, fur smoking, hair ablaze, driven into madness by pain and terror. Screaming its challenge the beast ran toward her, mouth gaping wide, slavering, teeth bared and claws extended as they tore into the ground. Chimera was behind the building. There was no place to hide. Sobbing, Grassi tried to get in front of Marianne only to have her thrust him away with the strength of ten women. She rose from the curb, rose, and went on rising, higher and higher, a giantess, looming in her height as tall as the tower they had left, growing greater with each moment, so blown up with rage that Grassi could not see her eyes where they looked down from the dark-

ness of that looming height, though he heard her voice thundering at them like continents colliding.

"Down, dog. Down, beast. Down you fat cat, you murdering monster from a child's dream; I have had enough of you. I have had enough of that suffocating murderess, your aunt. You have killed what was dear to me. It was you killed Cloud-haired mama, Harvey, you. I will have vengeance on you. Run now, cur, before I squash you as I would squash a beetle on this street."

There was silence, utter silence, and Grassi hid his head between his hands, expecting that the sky would fall. Nothing. Nothing. He peeked between his fingers to see her standing upon the curb, staring at the space where the Manticore had been. There was no Manticore. Before them the library burned briskly, sending great clouds of foul-smelling smoke into the general murk. There was cheering from the crowd. Chimera came around the corner of the building, paused when he saw the broken doors, and leaped toward them, roaring a challenge for Manticore. When this was not answered, he bounded about, repeating it. When it was still not answered, he came to Marianne and lay down at her feet, beginning to purr with enormous satisfaction.

She put her arms around his neck and stared away into space thoughtfully, while Goat nuzzled at her neck. Above them the sky began to lighten. The noise of the crowd grew soft, then softer still. The outlines of the city wavered, began to pulse, then dim. Grassi blinked, blinked again, and found himself seated beside Makr Avehl on a grassy bank beneath a flowering tree. Water leaping downward told him they were in mountainous country. There was no sign of Marianne.

THAT PART OF Makr Avehl Zahmani which was of a calm and considering nature was not surprised to find itself in the forests of Alphenlicht, within sight of the Holy Mountain which held the Cave of Light. That part of Aghrehond which was also of a calm and considering nature was not surprised to find Helen Navidi and her husband, David, on the slopes of the same mountain, evidently having lost their way during a mushroom hunting expedition. At least, so Helen said, shaking her head and giving every appearance of confusion. David was less sure and had the look about him of a man recovering from a serious illness. Since the couple had disappeared some four years before, Makr Avehl was of the opinion the illness was recent and largely illusory, but he said nothing of the kind to the couple. How they had moved from whatever place Madame had sent

David to Marianne's own world was a mystery which he had no time to solve at the moment, though he resolved to do it at a later time.

That part of Makr Avehl Zahmani which was impetuous and fiery was in a frenzy to find itself thousands of miles from the place it assumed Marianne Zahmani to be. That part of Makr

Avehl crossed miles of countryside in less time than good sense said it could be done to lead a panting Aghrehond into the Residence and to a telephone. Phone service into and out of Alphenlicht was always problematical. After too much time and some confusion, he was connected with Ellat, where he had known she would be, in Marianne's apartment in a city thousands of miles away.

"By Zurvan, Makr Avehl, where are you? The Residence? How? When? Why didn't you..."

To all of which he merely repeated what he had been saying since she answered the phone, "Is Marianne there, Ellat? Have you seen her?" receiving the same answer of incomprehension and at last, verbal confirmation.

"I haven't seen her. Makr Avehl, I haven't seen her. About an hour ago, a man came to the door who said he had just bought the house a week or so ago and was surprised to find

anyone in it. The people downstairs, Mrs. Winesap and her friend, have disappeared. It doesn't even look recently lived in down there. A piece of plaster fell off the wall in the front room a while ago. Something-Makr Avehl, something-"

He thought furiously, unable to think and yet forced to consider something, whatever thing it might be. Finally, full of passionate sorrow, he said, "Ellat. Pick up the things I gave her-the pictures, the little carvings, that medicine bag on the window seat. The pot of crocuses, Ellat. If you see anything else there that looks as though she treasured it, bring it. Then get out of there. The car is still there. Drive to a hotel. When you get there, call me. Don't linger, Ellat. I have a feeling about this...."

He let her go, feeling that to hold her longer on the phone might be to hold her in some position of danger. He walked about the Residence, moving here and there like a frustrated animal in a cage, moving, moving, not knowing where he went or what he did. Eventually he was called to the phone once more to hear Ellat's voice.

"There was nothing there, Makr Avehl. Nothing of hers at all. When I left, the walls were turning dingy. The curtains were all tattered. There was nothing in her closet, nothing in the drawers of her dressing table. Nothing in the bathroom medicine cabinet. Only the things you gave her, and I brought

them away. When I left, the place was all overgrown, as though no one had lived there for years, decades. It was frightening."

"Ah," he said. "Then she chose another world, somewhere else...."

"A false world, Makr Avehl? One of the false worlds?"

"I don't know. When I have rested, perhaps I will ask the Cave. Perhaps it is not one of the false worlds at all. Perhaps some other... well. Aghrehond says that at the end she was very strong, Ellat, a giantess. Nothing could stand against her. She was powerful, shattering. Still, she hugged me... I..."

He could say nothing more, and she asked him nothing more.

Later she called Aghrehond and learned that they had given Makr Avehl something to make him sleep, for he had been tearing at himself in his rage and frustration until they feared for him. "When will you be home, Mistress?" he asked. "We need you here."

"As soon as a plane can bring me. I'll have to come in to Van, in Turkey. Lake Urmia is out of the question with Iran behaving as it is. I'll come to Van, Hondi. I will send word when I leave. Send a car to meet me."

She came within the few days it took for Makr Avehl to resume the outward appearance of the calm, loquacious, humorous man he had been before, though there were shadows

in his eyes and he occasionally hissed in a powerless fury which only Aghrehond understood. He was, if anything, more inclined to lecture on any subject whatsoever, and it was obvious to those who knew him well that he was a man hovering at the edge of breakdown. Ellat, seeing him, was not relieved of anxiety.

"He must go to the Cave, Hondi. He must find an answer. He is eating himself up not having an answer."

"So I have urged him, Mistress. He will not go. He is afraid there is no answer, and he dares not let himself know that."

"No. If there is no answer, he must know that. He cannot begin to heal until he knows." And she set about the business of seeking the Cave on Makr Avehl's behalf.

He was not helpful-not resentful, not overly full of excuse or delay, simply not assisting in the process. He ate the ritual meal without comment and without enjoyment. He was dressed in the ritual robe at dawn, for Ellat had determined that a dawn reading would be most likely to produce results. He suffered himself to be driven to the foot of the mountain where the easy slope of the trail wound upward toward the entrance of the Cave, and to be urged from the car toward the ascent. Once on the path, however, it was only the pressure of Ellat's arm

on the one side and Aghrehond's on the other which forced him upward. Birds were twittering their pre-dawn exercises as they crossed one of the small streams which striped the mountain with silver sound. Far away cows were lowing in a meadow, and Aghrehond smiled, glad of the sound in the stillness of morning. They turned to wind their way back, then turned again and again, coming at last to the carven door which stood guard at the east portal of the Cave. There Nalavi and Cyram and the girl waited, the girl Makr Avehl thought had scary eyes. Therat. They lighted their way into the Cave, down the sandy, narrow cavern which opened into the great, round hall, there to group themselves around the altar, utter the proper words, and put out their lamps.

Darkness surrounded them. Only their breathing could be heard in the quiet. Outside the sun would be rising, spreading its rays upon the world, letting them fall upon the mountaintop to be reflected from millions of dancing leaves, from the liquid eyes of deer, from the barrels of a hunter's gun, from pools of dew and a half hundred leaping streams, down a hundred thousand tortuous tunnels and holes into the body of the mountain, some to be lost forever in that great pile, other rays to be reflected once, and again, and again, until they fell into the cavern where they could be seen, upon carvings put there when Rome was an empire, when Picts roamed in forests not yet ruled by Saxons, when Charlemagne ruled.... Ellat heard Makr Avehl sigh, sigh with a hopeless sound as he turned to see

where the light fell.

"A child," said Therat firmly. "The light falls on a child." Indeed, above their heads the light fell on a tiny carving of a child, a young girl, standing in a garden.

"A mother," said Nalavi. "The light falls on a mother." This carving was larger, older, partly obliterated by the slow drip of water over the centuries, but unmistakably a mother nursing a child.

"A knife," said Cyram. "The light falls upon a knife." And

that symbol, too, was clearly etched in the gray stone beneath the golden ray of light which leaked down on it through all the massive weight of the mountain above.

They waited, waited, but these rays held firm and no others broke the dark. At last Therat murmured the appropriate prayers, the lamps were lit, and they left the place.

At the portal, they stopped for a time to look upon Alphenlicht, bright in the dawn. It was the girl, Therat, who said, "Archmage, may a Kavi offer you assistance?"

"One might, Therat, except that I have found the signs easy to read. She has gone back into childhood, and I cannot go to her there. She has gone into her own time. I cannot go. No Kavi has ever gone."

"This is true, Archmage. And yet, if I were you, I would consider that time moves, and that her childhood was, but is not now." And Therat favored him with a sharp, challenging glance from her eagle's eyes before bowing deeply before him, as did Nalavi and Cyram, though ordinarily they would have been full of banter and nonsense. They took themselves away, leaving Ellat and Aghrehond with him on that high place.

"Childhood was, but is not now," mused Ellat. "Now what did she mean by that, Makr Avehl?"

"It means, dear Mistress," said Aghrehond, for Makr Avehl gave no evidence of having heard her, "that if the pretty lady, Marianne, went back to being a girl-child, she has had to grow up again."

"Exactly," said Makr Avehl, slapping his hands against his shoulders as though to wake himself from some bad dream or malevolent spell. "She has had to grow up again."

THEY SAT AT a table on the terrace overlooking acres of lawn on which a large machine surmounted by a small man with a gay umbrella over his head made undulating stripes and a smell of cut hay. The small man had a brown, round belly, an ancient straw hat, and a pipe. Makr Avehl thought he looked supremely contented atop the clattering machine and wished that he him-

self could share that contentment. Though his outer self gave the appearance of calm, inside he was a tempest of hope and desire and longing and half a dozen other emotions he had not taken trouble to identify. It had taken several days of concentrated effort to find this place and another week to obtain an invitation. The woman across the table from him knew nothing of this. She sipped from her tall glass, following his gaze out across the lawns.

"You are admiring Mr. Tanaka's stomach," she said. "I have thought of suggesting to him that he might wear a shut while running the mower-it is his newest and most glorious toy-but he enjoys the sun so. When he gets bored with the thing, he'll let one of his grandchildren run it. None of Robert's or Richard's children will care whether they wear shirts, either, though their fathers are very dignified." She laughed pleasantly, sipping from the tinkling glass once more. He examined her covertly, a slender, beautiful woman of almost fifty, hair escaping its loose bun to make a cloud around her face. "Haurvatat Zahmani, my husband, will be here momentarily. He will be so glad to meet you. He was so excited and pleased when you called."

Makr Avehl cocked his head curiously. "Haurvatat? Surely

that is a very old name among our people."

"According to my husband it is. Haurvatat and Ameretat, among the Medes the twin gods of health and immortality. I don't know what possessed his parents to give him and his sister such names except that it reminded them of Alphenlicht. I simply call him Harve. It's much easier. Of course, he insisted on passing the names on to his own children. I call his son Harve, too, and my daughter is Marianne. It isn't that far from Ameretat but it falls easier on American ears."

"Marianne," said Makr Avehl. "Yes. Oh, yes."

"You say you met my daughter at the university?"

"No. I did not meet her. I did see her, and was fascinated by the family likeness. She so resembled our family that I made inquiries-which led me to you and your charming husband. He was very kind on the phone, very hospitable to invite me down for the weekend." Actually, the process by which he had located them had been the reverse of this, from them to Marianne, but he had no intention of saying so.

"My husband speaks often of Alphenlicht, though he has not seen it since he was a child."

"You, ma'am-you remember it?"

"Well, not really. My father came here to the embassy when I was only seven. He returned home several times, but I never went with him. Then, just at the time I would have gone, I met Haurvatat." She laughed again. "He was a young girl's

dream, a bit older, and so good looking. I have never regretted marrying young."

"He had been married before?" Makr Avehl kept his voice casual. "You mentioned his son, but your daughter."

She nodded, a bit sadly he thought, and shook her glass so that it rang like little bells. "Yes. He had been married before. She died when young Harve was bom, young Haurvatat. Health.

That's what the word 'haurvatat' means, you know. So sad." She seemed about to go on, but at the moment they heard a voice inside the nearest room and a booming laugh. The laugh preceded the man, and Makr Avehl rose to shake the hand of the tall, splendid form with patriarchal beard and flowing locks. Makr Avehl thought of carved frescoes at Persepolis, magnificent and ancient forms going back through the centuries. Haurvatat Zahmani might well have been the sculptor's model for any of them.

"Well, here you are, my boy. And looking exactly as I had pictured you. We do run to family likeness, don't we, we Zahmanis. Did you notice, Arti? Of course you did. He looks just as young Harve would have.... Well," heartily changing the subject, "we are delighted to have you as our guest mis weekend. Are you here for some diplomatic reason? Or should

I ask?"

Makr Avehl shook his head modestly. "You may ask, of course. I am here for no sensitive reason. I am here to buy agricultural machinery." Such was the reason he had invented out of whole cloth the week before when he had found that Marianne was studying livestock management at an agricultural college. "I was interested in some demonstration projects at the university your daughter attends. Something to do with orchard production." What Makr Avehl did not know about orchard production would have filled a library, but he smiled calmly, visualizing apples.

"Ah!" Marianne's mother smiled enlightenment. "So that is where you met-not met? Merely saw? Ah, well, it is truly a family likeness. You saw her at the agricultural school. Such a profession for a woman! Her father was dead set against it...."

"Oh, now, now, Arti. Not dead set. Doubtful. Put it that way. Just a little doubtful."

"Doubtful." The woman made a sour mouth. "Full of fury and swearing and carrying on. Saw no reason for a woman to go to university at all. Well. He married me just out of high school. Possibly he thought someone would come along and carry Marianne off to the altar in the same way."

"Marianne disabused me of that notion." The man plopped himself down comfortably, stroking his wife's hair as he went

past her. "Said she'd many when she was ready and not before. I didn't believe it, thought it was all just youthful exuberance, thought she'd be tired of the work in a month. But she carried the day, convinced me. Very convincing young woman, my daughter. She did take a break in the middle of her education- traveled through your country, kinsman. Said she had always wanted to see it, know what it was like." He smiled hugely, very proud for all his protestations. "What do we call you, my boy, "'Your Excellency'? Just occurred to me that 'my boy' probably isn't de rigeur."

"My name is Makr Avehl. Macro vail. It has a meaning 'as old and esoteric as your own, but I ignore that. If you say it properly, it sounds vaguely Scottish and acceptable." He was hardly following the conversation. So Marianne had traveled in Alphenlicht. In what world, what time had that been? Her father, all unaware, boomed on.

"Ha. I like that. Scottish and acceptable, is it? Well, and what's unacceptable about Alphenlicht? Nothing I know of. Sorry I left the place, sometimes. Though, back then, the family thought there'd be conflict of some kind. You've done well, Prime Minister. Kept the villains at bay."

"We've had help," smiled Makr Avehl, not surprised that they both interpreted this to mean help from the U.S. Neither

of them had known anything of the Cave of Light, or of the real power of the Magi. Well, he hadn't expected that they would.

Both of them looked up, across the meadows, and he followed their eyes across the granite balustrade where a horse emerged from the wood and galloped toward them over the pastures, the rider so well seated that she seemed almost to be part of the animal. Mrs. Zahmani followed his glance, nodded.

"Marianne. I knew she'd be coming in soon. First thing when she gets here for the weekend is a ride, then next is a ride, then after that, a little ride...." She laughed. "That love of horses. I outgrew it myself, when I was about sixteen. Not so Marianne. Her love of horses has continued-despite everything." She shook her head, sad for some reason Makr Avehl was not privy to. "Well, she'll be surprised when I introduce you and tell her how you found us."

Makr Avehl was not sure of that. He was not sure of much at the moment, least of all what it was that Marianne would know, or be surprised at. He himself had not really been surprised to find her father and mother still alive, healthy, still living the life of grace and elegance which had been mourned by the Marianne he had known. He had started his search very

near this place, for Ellat had remembered what Marianne had said about her childhood home though he, Makr Avehl, had not. Having found the parents, it had not been difficult to find the daughter. After his lengthy conversations with Ellat and Aghrehond, he had not been really surprised by anything.

A whisper of sound drew his attention to the doors behind him, thrust open from inside and held while a wheelchair was pushed from the house onto a ramp and then down to the shaded lawn, a white-clad attendant moving beside it. Makr Avehl frowned. The woman saw his expression.

"Marianne's half brother," she whispered in explanation. "It was a great tragedy. In fact, I sometimes cannot understand Marianne still being so fond of horses."

"Paralyzed?" asked Makr Avehl. The shrouded figure made no movement except that Makr Avehl saw the eyes shift toward him, as though the person there had recognized his voice. Stunned, he looked full into that immobile face. He knew that face, knew it as well as he knew his own. Harvey Zahmani, who had tried so hard to kill Marianne. Who had killed the couple standing beside him-in another world, in another time.

"Completely paralyzed," the woman whispered. "He had just returned from a visit to your part of the world-the trip was a graduation gift from his father. He had visited an aunt in your neighboring country, Lubovosk. His mother came from there. He had been home less than a day when he and Marianne

went out riding..."

"Marianne told us it was a pack of wild dogs," said Haur-vatat Zahmani. "No one had ever seen them before. No one ever saw them after. They came out of nowhere. The first we knew was when Marianne came riding in. Her horse was all lathered, but she was steady as a rock even though she was only twelve at the time. Told us what had happened, where to find him. Thrown. His head and back must have hit a stone. He never walked again. Never spoke again." The man sighed deeply, reliving an old tragedy.

Makr Avehl did not answer. His eyes were utterly fixed upon the woman riding to the stairs he stood upon, fixed upon Marianne, his Marianne. His hungry, predatory soul reached for her in glad possession, his sagacious, ruminative self eager to learn of her, rejoice in her....

She looked up at him, smiling slightly, welcoming, as though she had expected him, something lightening in her eyes as if a shadow raised, a lusty gladness showing there which brought the blood to his cheeks.

Behind her on the lawn he could see what had been Harvey S. Zahmani in the wheelchair, motionless, powerless, unable to do any harm, to anyone... ever.

Deep inside, Snake whispered an unheeded warning.