



Mirror Sight (Green Rider)

By Kristen Britain

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Karigan G'ladheon is a Green Rider—a seasoned member of the elite messenger corps of King Zachary of Sacoridia. King Zachary sends Karigan and a contingent of Sacoridians beyond the edges of his nation, into the mysterious Blackveil Forest, which has been tainted with dark magic by a twisted immortal spirit named Mornhavon the Black.

At the end of *Blackveil*, in a magical confrontation against Mornhavon, Karigan is jolted out of Blackveil Forest and wakes in darkness. She's lying on smooth, cold stone, but as she reaches out, she realizes that the stone is not just beneath her, but above and around her as well. She's landed in a sealed stone sarcophagus, some unknown tomb, and the air is becoming thin.

Is this to be her end? If she escapes, where will she find herself? Is she still in the world she remembers, or has the magical explosion transported her somewhere completely different? To find out, she must first win free of her prison—before it becomes her grave. And should she succeed, will she be walking straight into a trap created by Mornhavon himself?

Mirror Sight is the highly-anticipated fifth installment of the *Green Rider* series.

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for the Green Rider series:

“*Green Rider* is a wonderfully captivating heroic fantasy adventure. Duty bound by a promise to a dying messenger, a young woman is caught up in a maelstrom of magic while being pursued by dark forces bent on seeing that the message and the reluctant messenger never reach the king. Kristen Britain’s likable heroine and fast-paced plot kept me eagerly turning pages. **This is the rarest of finds: a truly enjoyable read.**”
—Terry Goodkind

“*Green Rider* is a stunning first novel for what I hope will be a long career of story-telling and suspenseful intrigue. You’ve **a really talented new writer** here.” —Anne McCaffrey

“Britain **keeps the excitement high** from beginning to end, balancing epic magical battles with the humor and camaraderie of Karigan and her fellow riders.” —*Publishers Weekly*

“The author’s skill at worldbuilding and her feel for dramatic storytelling make this **first-rate fantasy.**”
—*Library Journal*

“The intermittent sense of foreboding is offset by **a healthy dose of old-fashioned adventure**—kidnappings, a noble thief, near drowning, divine visitations, ghosts, a visit to an upscale brothel, and some very bad knife throwing—that provides a satisfying temporary conclusion despite this being very much a middle novel with serious nastiness still looming.” —*Locus*

“The gifted Ms. Britain writes with ease and grace as she creates a **mesmerizing fantasy** ambiance and an appealing heroine quite free of normal clichés.” —*RT Reviews*

“This captivating fantasy is filled with adventure, action, and heroes. Karigan grows tremendously as a person and in the end finds her own place in this world. The characters, including minor ones, are well-developed and the plot is complex enough to get the reader thinking. **This is a real page-turner.**” —*VOYA*

About the Author

Kristen Britain is the author of the New York Times-bestselling Green Rider series. She lives in an adobe house in the high desert of the American Southwest beneath the big sky and among lizards, hummingbirds, and tumbleweeds. Kristen can be found online at kristenbritain.com.

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ENTOMBED

She lay entombed in stone and dark. Light did not exist here, the blackness snuffing out whatever memory of sunshine and moonglow she carried within her, as surely as the thinning air stole her breath and suffocated her. She kicked and pummeled the close walls of her prison again and again, heedless of causing even more harm to injuries she had suffered in Blackveil.

But no one heard her. No one came to her rescue and opened her tomb. Spent by her efforts, she fell limp and lay gasping in the dark.

Karigan G'ladheon wondered what she had done to deserve such a death. The last she remembered was having been in Blackveil—Castle Argenthyme. She'd shattered the looking mask to prevent Mornhavon the Black from possessing it and then dreamed or imagined she'd fallen through the heavens. Perhaps it had been no dream. Otherwise, how had she ended up here, wherever *here* was?

She found no difference in the darkness when she closed her eyes. She was tired, her mind dulled from lack of air, and she wished to just keep her eyes closed and sleep, but then she remembered her moonstone and pulled it out of her pocket. Its light was a dim, sputtering orange as if the darkness of her tomb were too great, was killing it, too. It cast just enough light to confirm what she felt and sensed: she was trapped in a rectangular stone box like a sarcophagus. She was seized by a new wave of panic that sent tremors coursing through her body, but this time she was too weak to kick or scream.

Instead, she grew listless in the wan glow of the moonstone, caring little about hands bloodied from pounding on unyielding stone, or that the arrow shafts that splinted her broken wrist had shifted in their bindings. Shards of silver protruding from her flesh and glinting in the light, the remnants of the looking mask, elicited only faint interest.

Her bonewood cane, she observed, had also made the journey with her, and lay beside her reminding her of how warriors were often buried with their weapons.

As she lay weakening and starved for breath, none of it seemed to matter anymore. Her hand fell slack and the moonstone rolled off her fingers, extinguishing immediately. She faded, faded away into darkness . . .

• • •

Crack.

Scrape, scrape.

Dirt showered Karigan's face. It was a distant sensation. She hadn't the energy to wipe it away.

Scrape, scrape.

Her nose tickled. A faint freshening of the air. Music seeped in, almost as if she were hearing it from under water. A graying of the dark, a crack forming around the lid of her tomb. The tip of a tool pried into the crack, widening it further.

"Help!" she cried, but it came out only as a harsh whisper. Someone must have heard her pounding, after all. She was going to be rescued. She would be free of this death box.

The tool nosed farther in, more light penetrating the dark, the brassy music growing louder. A second tool was shoved into the crack.

Karigan's heart thudded, and she tried to push up on the lid, but she hadn't the strength.

The tools paused their work and the music faded. Light shifted. "No," Karigan moaned. "Don't stop—keep going! Please . . ."

A thrum vibrated through the stone and rose in intensity until she realized it was drumming, a fast rolling rhythm.

The tools went back to work, the crack widening and widening until the lid teetered on one edge and then scraped over the side, thudding to the ground. Karigan wiped grit out of her eyes and took a deep breath, relieved at no longer having to strain to fill her lungs. The drums silenced and an expectant hush suffused the air. A pair of shadowed faces peered into her tomb, then jerked away as if startled.

Guess they weren't expecting me.

Another deep inhalation took in a mixture of scents—soil, horses, sweat, smoke, cooked foods . . . She sat up, head spinning, and was blinded by light that beamed into her face. She heard a collective gasp from a large crowd of people surrounding her, but at a distance. She groped after her moonstone, and with the aid of the bonewood cane, she stood. Screams and murmurs greeted her rising.

Definitely not expecting me.

She squinted against the light, held her hand up to shade her eyes, but discerned little, only that she seemed to be in the middle of a sort of arena, with many people seated around its circumference.

"Behold the marvels of the underworld!" a man's voice boomed. "The dead walk again!" The announcement was followed by stuttered applause, which grew into thunderous approval.

Where am I? Karigan wondered again.

The brassy music started up once more and the light swept away revealing men in white face and motley, tumbling, juggling and battling one another with wobbly swords. One rose up from the ground, arms stretched out before him, walking as if asleep or aroused from the dead. Mimicking her? Their antics were met with clapping and laughter by the audience.

Clowns? A circus? Karigan was trying to put together the notion of a circus with her tomblike entrapment—and when she glanced behind herself she saw it was indeed a sarcophagus with a weathered crescent moon and some script on its side—into some coherent form, when both of her arms were grabbed by a pair of strong clowns with snarling demon visages on their faces. Maybe she was actually dead and this was one of the five hells.

The clowns hauled her across the arena and through a curtain into the back. She cried out in pain as they pushed and shoved her, jarring her injuries. She grayed out, and they dragged her. She barely perceived gaudy performers warming up, a prancing white horse, rigging, platforms, and balance beams cluttering the space.

The clowns threw her into an alcove formed by trunks and crates. Before she could get her bearings and sit up, a third man thrust his way between the clowns and glared at her. He pointed a riding crop in her face. "Who are you?" he demanded. "Who put you up to this?"

He was a small, round man in dark business attire, though in a cut she had not seen before, and his hair carefully trimmed. His cheeks and nose flushed pink.

Karigan rose to her elbow. “Where am—?”

The crop snapped down at her. She raised her arm just in time to avoid being struck across her face. It was her broken wrist that caught the blow. The splint mostly protected her, but pain burned up her forearm and she cried out.

“I ask the questions. Was it Josston who put you up to this? Hmm? He is ever wanting to ruin me, embarrass me.”

“Dunno, boss,” one of the clowns said. “Crowd liked it. Walking dead and all.”

“Thanks to the ringmaster’s quick thinking,” the man growled. He turned his anger back on Karigan. “What did you do with the goodies inside—keep ’em for yourself, eh?”

Goodies? What was he talking about? With a great deal of effort, she rose to her feet. The man raised the crop again.

“You should not assault a king’s messen—”

This time when the crop descended, she broke the blow with the bonewood.

“Try that again and you shall be sorry,” Karigan said, hoping it would be enough.

“Insolence! I will not have it!”

She pressed the trigger embedded in the shaft of the bonewood and extended it from cane length to staff length with a shake. When the crop lashed at her again, she thrust the butt of her staff into the man’s belly. The wind *oofed* out of him and he crumpled away. The clowns caught his arms before he hit the ground. Karigan took her chance and shoved by them, looking for the nearest way out.

“Stop her!” the man cried.

In her condition, she’d never outrun the man’s henchmen. Henchclowns? She kicked over a bucket of soapy water behind her and pulled down a tower of empty packing crates. The soapy water merely soaked into the dirt and sawdust floor, but the crates impeded them. She rushed for an opening in the tent as fast as her limping gait allowed, dashing past a bear attached to a chain, and a contortionist bent over backward, watching Karigan from between her knees.

Karigan shook her muddled head and escaped into the dark of night.

EXCAVATIONS

Karigan fled from the big tent, her injured leg slowing her little in her desperation. She passed smaller, billowing tents, and cages filled with roaring lions. She dodged past performers and lingerers, and veered away from tough looking circus jacks and roustabouts. When she left the circus behind, she found herself skittering down unfamiliar streets of flagstone and brick paving, walled by faceless, brick buildings that rose sharply into the night sky.

Where am I? she wondered not for the first time.

The circus boss had sounded Sacoridian, but she did not recognize this place. Steady, bright light welled beneath plain, wrought iron lampposts—much brighter than what she was accustomed to in her own Sacor City. She avoided the light, pausing in an alleyway to rest and think.

The air she inhaled tasted acrid, smoky, leaving an ache in the back of her throat. The moon above the tall buildings looked smudged by soot. She had not seen the moon since the eve of the spring equinox, before she and her companions had crossed over the D'Yer Wall and into Blackveil—unless one counted the silver full moon that had hung over Castle Argenthyme back through a piece of time.

And her companions, what of them? Had they survived the shattering of the looking mask? She prayed it was so, refused to consider the alternative. If they indeed survived, had the force of the mask's destruction cast them from Blackveil, or did they remain, even now, in the nexus of Castle Argenthyme wondering where she was?

Her body trembled in exhaustion. If her friends had ended up here, wherever here was, she needed to help herself before she could help them. She did not know how much longer she could go on. In fact, taking a nap in the alley did not sound unappealing.

No, need help. Need to find out where I am.

She peered out into the street and when she saw no clowns in pursuit, she limped away from the alley. The only sign of life she spotted was a pale cat darting down another street. No lights shone in the tiny, regular windows lining the brick walls. She was alone.

She turned down another street. Each ran straight and precise—she'd never encountered anything like it, and it was a sharp contrast to the winding ways of the Eletian roads she'd so recently wandered along in the ruins of Argenthyme. This street ended at a smaller building, constructed not of brick but of clapboard, light spilling from windows and a pair of doors left open and welcoming.

Karigan proceeded cautiously. This city was strange, and not knowing the customs of the people here, she did not wish to rush headlong into trouble. Leaning heavily on the bonewood, she limped toward the lit building. As she approached, she heard voices within, mostly that of one man droning on and on. When Karigan reached the doors, she peered inside. On the far end a man stood on a stage pointing at a large map with a long slender stick. On a table next to him were a number of jumbled, dirt-encrusted items, including a rusty longsword and a cracked earthenware pitcher. There were several smaller objects she could not identify.

An audience of ladies and gentlemen filled the chairs in the large room watching the man intently. A few gentlemen stood along the walls, also watching. Like the circus boss, their clothing was of an unfamiliar cut, and mostly in conservative darks and grays. Arms and necks were not left bare. Most of the men wore beards, some with long drooping mustaches and bushy side whiskers. The ladies wore their hair tucked beneath hats and bonnets, and, most startling, gauzy veils draped their faces.

"So we have initiated our excavations in quadrant seven," the man on the stage said in his monotonous voice as he tapped the map, "which has shown much promise."

A man in the audience raised his hand.

"Yes?"

"It seems to me you shall only find more minor burials."

“But there is much to learn from even minor burials about—”

“Like you learned from the Big Mounds?”

There was some snickering in the audience. The man on stage frowned, then jabbed his pointer at the map again. “We excavated those mounds east of the Old City to put to rest all speculation they were not the burial sites of ancient kings, but simply deposits of sand and gravel shaped by the glaciers thousands of years ago. We have wanted nothing but to be exacting in our methods.”

Could it be he was talking about the Scangly Mounds? Karigan wondered. She peered harder at the map. The bright hissing lamps helped her make out the lines and shadings. The landforms looked vaguely like the area around Sacor City, and the Big Mounds he pointed out certainly corresponded to where one would find the Scangly Mounds upon which she’d so enjoyed riding her Condor. The landmass in the center of the map, divided into a grid by precise intersecting lines, could very well be Sacor City, but . . .

Then a gentleman along the wall caught her eye. He stared at her. Karigan’s heart leaped. She realized she’d been drawn almost across the threshold of the building, to get a better view of the map, and could be plainly seen by anyone who bothered to look.

The gentleman, whose gray-speckled brown hair swept luxuriantly across his brow, twitched his mouth, which wiggled his bushy mustache. He had full side whiskers, too. He touched the shoulder of a younger man beside him. When the second man turned to look, Karigan ducked from the lit doorway, shaking.

She did not know these people, this place. She was not ready to trust anyone until she learned more. She ran—limped away. Did she hear footsteps running after her, or was it her own that echoed against the canyons of brick walls?

She turned into another alley, breathing hard, sweat slicking down her sides. She decided to call on her fading ability, and in this way she could survey the city, town, or whatever this place was, without being observed. But when she touched the winged horse brooch clasped to her greatcoat, she felt no change. She glanced at her hands and down at her body. She remained solid—she had not faded out. She tried again, and nothing.

“What . . . ?” What had the looking mask done to her?

A scent of putrid, decaying matter wafted to her. She glanced down the alley. She thought she detected movement, but the alley was too shrouded in darkness. Hesitating but a moment, she withdrew her moonstone from her pocket, but it emitted only a weak, dying glow as it had in the sarcophagus.

Magic does not work here, Karigan thought. At least not much.

The moonstone emitted enough light to sketch out a heap of rubbish at the other end of the alley. There was more movement. A cat? An oversized rat looking for food scraps?

But then the heap stood and the low gleam of the moonstone caught in the whites of its—his—eyes . . . and on the metallic sheen of a knife.

Karigan gasped and pocketed her moonstone, intending to flee, but when she turned, her escape was blocked by two hulking figures.

She found herself wishing, absurdly, she was back in Blackveil. She raised the bonewood staff to a defensive position, thankful it had made the journey with her, but regretting the loss of her saber, which had served her

so well since she became a Green Rider, and F'ryan Coblebay before her. Lost forever, she suspected, in the deeps of Castle Argenthyme.

Even as the two at the open end of the alley rushed her, so did the one with the knife from behind. Karigan did not think, she moved. With her right hand all but useless, she swept the staff at the two forward assailants relying on the strength of her left. She smashed the closest one in the chin. As he staggered away, she rammed the butt of the staff backward catching the knife-bearing assailant in the gut. He fell back with a grunt of pain.

She thrust the staff forward again, battering the metal handle into the bridge of the third assailant's nose. She felt warm splatters across her face, and he reeled away clutching at his bleeding nose.

Not bad, Karigan thought, for being one-handed and pretty much one-legged.

She made to retreat from the alley, only to find half a dozen more figures blocking her way.

MORPHIA

Karigan backed away as the thugs advanced on her. One of her original assailants recovered enough to grab her from behind. She smashed the heel of her boot into his instep, and he hopped away howling. The others paused as one as if reassessing their prey, indistinct in their ragged cloaks. She held her staff in a defensive position, keeping an ear open to anyone creeping up on her from behind. Mostly she heard whimpering from that quarter.

Her limbs quivered from having expended so much of her energy in Blackveil, as well as in the streets of this nameless city. Her mauled leg was likely to give out at any time now, and truly she wanted nothing more than to drop where she stood, but that would mean worse consequences.

"Put down yer stick, girlie," one of the thugs said, "and we won't hurt ya. Real gentlemen we are, ain't we, boys?"

The others answered with affirmative grunts.

"Let me go, and I won't hurt *you*," she said, her dry throat making her voice harsh.

"Got ya some sass, eh? There's them that'd pay good for the likes of you."

Karigan did not wait for them to make the first move. She charged into them with a guttural yell, staff humming as the metal handle thudded into the leader's skull. She had hoped they'd scatter after that, but they grabbed for her, their rags rancid with filth. The staff became entangled in their arms, and when one kicked her injured leg, she sank with a moan, and they descended on her as predators on wounded prey.

Karigan momentarily blanked out beneath their vile stench as they tore at her greatcoat, tried to force the staff from her hand, groped her. It would be so easy to let go, to give up. . . .

In another moment they were inexplicably off her. She shook her head, the air freshened around her. The predators scattered as a new presence swung a club and threw them aside.

She couldn't move. She lay on the paving only able to watch as the last thug loped away, the one who had fought them off looming over her, a man, she observed, from the silhouette of his profile. The shadows of his

hood obscured his features, but she felt his gaze upon her. Was he her savior or a new danger?

He tossed the club aside, and it clattered loudly on the paving. He knelt beside her and helped her sit up. He produced a nondescript cloak from nowhere and tossed it around her shoulders.

"It is foolish to be out here at this hour unescorted," he said.

"Who are you?" she asked.

He did not answer but helped her to stand. She'd kept a death grip on her staff and did not loosen it now.

"Can you walk?" he asked.

"Not very well."

"Lean on me, then."

She did not. "Who are you, and where are we going?"

He made an impatient noise from beneath his hood. "I am the one who drove off your attackers. I am taking you to safety."

Karigan wanted to trust him, to pass the responsibility of her safety on to someone else, but could she trust this man? Really, at this point, how much of a choice did she have? With all her injuries, the lapse in her ability to fade, and not knowing this city and its ways, her choices had diminished significantly. So far the man had only aided her. Coming to a decision, she allowed him to put his arm around her so he could bear some of her weight. At least he did not smell offensive.

He led her toward the alley's outlet and paused to peer both ways down the street. He hissed and suddenly pulled her back into the concealment of the shadows.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Shhh. You ask too many questions."

She had a sharp retort on her tongue but held it when she heard footsteps out on the street and a curious metallic *click-click-click* sound. When the footsteps paused so did the clicking, which was replaced by an odd purring hum. Light flowed down the alley, but Karigan and her rescuer were pressed hard enough against the brick wall that the light did not touch them. It focused on a trio of thugs left moaning on the pavement.

"What is it?" a man's voice asked.

"Dregs is all," another answered. "Rubbish collectors'll pick 'em up later. C'mon."

The footsteps continued on, and there was an odd toot, and the *click-click-click* started again.

Her rescuer waited at length before peeling away from the wall.

"Who were they?" she demanded.

The man sighed in irritation. "Inspectors. Now come. We don't want to be caught out."

Inspectors? she wondered. What were they inspecting? They had not cared about the men lying in the alley, and her rescuer certainly did not like them.

Karigan hated relying on this stranger's strength. He was not gentle, she thought, as they moved out into the empty street. It wasn't, she suspected, that he was intentionally being rough, but that he was being more vigilant of their surroundings than of her comfort. And perhaps he did not realize the extent of her various hurts.

"Ow!" she cried, when he bumped her bad leg.

"Silence," he whispered. "There could be more thugs about, or Inspectors."

"Then be more careful," she said.

"I am very sorry, but I've a job to do."

Karigan halted, planted herself on the street. If he wanted to move forward, he'd have to drag her.

"What do you mean job?" she asked, darkening with suspicion. "Are you one of those clowns?"

"What? Clowns?" His voice held a tone of incredulity. She still could not see his face beneath the shadow of his hood, but his eyes glinted in the lamplight.

"Then who are you? Where in the name of the gods am I? You sound Sacoridian, but this is like no place in Sacordia I've ever seen."

He did not answer, just stared at her.

"I'm very sorry," he said finally, "but you do ask too many questions, and this is not the time or place."

Before Karigan could reply, he withdrew a cloth from beneath his cloak and thrust it into her face, pressing it over her mouth and nose, overpowering her with its sickly sweet stench. At first she fought, but he held her fast, and her strength, the little that remained to her, leaked out of her. Her knees gave way, the stranger supporting her as she spiraled into oblivion.

The face belonged to a balding man who peered down at her out of the haze. "Well, hello there, young lady. How are we feeling?"

At first she felt numb, but all her various pains were intensifying with every moment. She appeared to be, however, comfortably situated in a huge bed with a downy mattress and warm blankets pulled up to her chest.

"Who are you? Where am I?" It seemed to take a great deal of strength just to speak.

"I am Mender Samuels, and you are safe and sound in your uncle's house."

"*Uncle?* What uncle?"

Mender Samuels turned away to address someone behind him. "A little disorientation is not unusual, considering what you said about her time in the asylum, which must have been most distressing."

Asylum? Karigan's heart thudded. She tried to sit up, but the pain took her breath away, and she fell back

into her pillows.

“There, there, young lady,” the mender cooed. “We’ve reset your broken wrist, pulled shards of a mirror from your flesh, and tended the ghastly wounds on your leg. You have been through quite an ordeal, it seems, and now you can rest.” To someone else he said, “The syringe, please.”

An assistant in the shadows handed him a long, sharp needle, which protruded from a glass tube filled with fluid.

This could not be good. “What—what is that?” Karigan asked, feeling like a trapped animal. She glanced around the dim room—too many people hovering in the shadows and standing between her and the door.

“It is only morphia,” the mender said. “It shall ease your pain and help you rest.” He pressed a plunger on the end of the tube and a small amount of fluid squirted out of the tip of the needle.

Karigan had to get away. She threw her blankets aside and lunged forward to leap out of bed, but she was caught by strong hands that pressed her back into the pillows and did not let her go. The needle descended and stabbed into the meat of her upper arm. She yelped.

“Why?” she asked plaintively. “Why are you doing this to me?”

“Do not worry, my dear,” the mender replied with a shadowed smile. “It is for your own good.”

BRANDY

The morphia had been, Karigan thought, really quite pleasant, vanquishing her pain for the first time in what felt like forever. One never really knew just how taxing pain was till one was free of it and could feel the difference. She’d given herself over to the lulling, floating quality of the morphia and slept, slept the sleep of tombs, vacant of dreams and visions.

But when the pain began to nag at her again, she found herself surfacing from the depths of slumber. Perhaps in the wakening world she’d find more morphia to once again release her from the pain that ached throughout her body with growing intensity.

Her eyes cracked open to an amber glow, like the dawning light that filtered through her window at Rider barracks and onto the wooden floor.

Rider barracks. Was she there? Was she home after some seriously awful adventures? The barracks burning down and everything that had followed, could they have been dreams?

A shifting inside her. A dislocation. Nothing had really changed, not the light, her pain, the bed. But a brief lightheadedness spun her round and when it settled, she knew she was not home, that this was not Rider barracks. Barracks was gone forever, had been gone for some time, just ashes and ruins. A tear formed in the corner of her eye, the grief fresh all over again.

I am not supposed to be here, she thought, though she still did not know where “here” was.

She heard soft footsteps on floorboards—someone was in the room with her. A young woman folding sheets, her back toward Karigan. Her long skirts rustled as she worked. She wore a scarf about her head, concealing her hair. One last sheet was folded, and the young woman, who must be a household maid, placed the sheets

in a cabinet. She cast a quick glance at Karigan, who closed her eyes and pretended to still sleep. The maid then strode from the room, softly clicking the door shut behind her.

Karigan lay there, feeling the full brunt of returning pain. Her wrist especially, and when she lifted it, it felt much heavier than it should. She discovered it was immobilized in a hardened plaster. Much more clever, she thought, than the wood and linen affairs the menders at home used. Those tended to loosen and slip, and often bones did not knit back together properly. Wherever she was, the menders here were much more advanced.

Gazing beneath her blankets, she inspected herself further and found she'd been garbed in a very fine linen sleeping gown; so tightly and perfectly woven that she'd never seen anything of like quality, which was saying something for a textile merchant's daughter. And the sheets, too. Her attention moved to her mauled leg and dozens of smaller wounds—from the shattered looking mask? All had been bandaged. However she had gotten here, by her own will or not, she'd been well tended.

Her room was large and airy with a high ceiling. The furnishings, though spare of ornamentation, appeared to her merchant's eye to have been crafted by masters, and they gleamed with a high polish. On the walls, paintings of bowls of fruit broke up the busy, flowery pattern of wall coverings.

She found a hand bell on her bedside table. If she rang it, she supposed someone would attend her, perhaps bring food and drink, which was tempting because she was hungry and thirsty. She could also demand answers from whomever answered her summons. But first things first. She eased out of bed, her body trembling and weak, and pulled a chamber pot out from beneath the bed.

That necessity accomplished, she crossed the room to peer out the only window, espying dull sunlight and the brick wall of a neighboring building. She began to explore her room further and, to her dismay, found no sign of her uniform or the bonewood. She limped over to a wardrobe but found nothing inside except for a lonely shawl. Not only had she been disarmed, but they, whoever *they* were, possessed her brooch and moonstone. It did not matter her magic was not working here, those items were important to her and not intended for the idle hands of others.

She wanted her things back. She needed answers. She returned to the wardrobe and removed the shawl of soft lamb's wool and placed it around her shoulders. Then she went to the door, cracked it open, and listened. The tones of male voices in heated discussion drifted to her from somewhere else in the house.

She peered out into the corridor and, upon seeing no one, she stepped out onto a plush runner with an intricate floral pattern, which muted her limping footsteps. She crept past imposing behemoths of mismatched furniture—a few Second Age pieces and several lesser examples from the Third; and busts on pillars, portraits of stern personages in garb of unknown style, and statuettes of young shepherds and milkmaids cast in gaudy gilt. Definitely not to her own taste. There appeared to be no set scheme to the décor, and it had more the look of the jumbled accumulation of a collector who lacked focus. Or discernment.

She came to the top of a curving flight of stairs with a handsome banister of deep mahogany. Under different circumstances she'd enjoy sliding down it to the bright foyer at the bottom. The voices came to her more loudly now, and one she immediately recognized as the circus boss. He must have figured out she was here. As she could not see either of the speakers, she determined they must be meeting in a room—a parlor, perhaps?—just off the foyer.

"I want you to keep your nose out of my business," the circus boss declared. "No more hoaxes."

"I am sure I've no idea of what you are talking about," replied the other man in a milder tone. "You have come into my home accusing me of the most ridiculous—"

"I've five hundred witnesses who saw it, some girl, a *live* girl, stepped out of the sarcophagus."

"I am still mystified as to why you believe I've anything to do with this."

"Who put her in there?" the circus boss demanded. "Eh, Professor? Who put her in there? You are the one constantly attacking me with your libelous detractions."

"I do not care for your tone, sir," the one referred to as the professor replied, "or your accusations."

"I want to know where the coffin is, and the old bones that were supposed to be in it. I want them back and with all the goodies intact."

There was a moment of heavy silence before the professor responded. "Mr. Hadley, I had no part in this hoax of yours. Perhaps you should speak to your *supplier* before heaping groundless accusations upon me." Karigan detected the distaste in the professor's voice.

"Groundless? You are the one always speaking against me, calling me a desecrator. How is that any different from you, hmm?"

"I do not open the resting places of the dead for entertainment, and then sell their burial goods for profit."

"They're dead," Mr. Hadley said, "and they don't care. What you do is not so different, opening tombs for your own audiences. Why shouldn't I profit from it, too?"

"My audience, as you call it, consists of other archeologists and scientists. We do so to study our ancestors, and in dignity, not to entertain the crass multitudes."

Mr. Hadley laughed. "Sure, sure, whatever you say."

"I think this interview is quite over, Mr. Hadley, and I will thank you not to return. You are not welcome here. If you've any commentary to make, take it to my solicitor. Grott! See Mr. Hadley out, please."

A man in domestic livery stepped into the foyer with a brimmed, bowl-shaped hat in his hands and waited. Mr. Hadley, the circus boss, entered the foyer from the opposite direction, grabbed the hat from Grott, and clapped it on his head. He turned toward the room he'd just left. "If I discover you had anything to do with the other night, I will not be back, but I will send Inspectors in my stead and you can answer to *them*. Your solicitor be damned."

Grott opened the door, and Mr. Hadley stomped out into the glare of the street. The butler wasted no time in closing the door after him.

The professor emitted a long, thunderous sigh. "Grott," he said, "I need a brandy."

"Yes, sir." The butler left the foyer in measured steps.

Karigan watched in fascination as the man whose house this must be, the man who either sheltered her or held her prisoner, emerged in the foyer. She remembered him. She'd seen him in the . . . had it been a lecture? The one with the drooping mustache who had spotted her hovering on the building's threshold.

He paused before a mirror, fussing with his cravat and grumbling to himself about bloody-minded grave robbers, and then said to his reflected image, "A little early for brandy, old man, but Hadley does that to you, doesn't he." He chuckled, then patted his cravat and turned when Grott appeared with a glass on a silver tray.

Perhaps catching Karigan in the corner of his eye, or sensing her gaze on him, he glanced up the flight of stairs and found her. Karigan wanted to flee, for she'd become accustomed to running and hiding, but resolutely she held her ground and stared unflinchingly back at him. She would not be afraid, and she would demand answers.

"Grott," the professor said removing his brandy from the tray, his own gaze not leaving Karigan. "I believe we'll need another."

UNCLE

A door at the far end of the corridor burst open, making Karigan jump. An imposing woman, all swishing skirts and matronly bulk, charged through the doorway and down the corridor toward her. Karigan tensed to flee.

"Don't you trouble yourself, Professor," the woman boomed. "I'll deal with her."

Karigan glanced down at the professor, who held his brandy frozen halfway to his mouth, a bemused expression on his face.

Then, before Karigan could utter a protest, the woman swooped down on her, took hold of her good arm, and swept her down the corridor. "You should not be out of bed, missy."

"But—"

"Mender Samuels ordered bed rest, and bed rest it shall be."

"But—"

The woman's expression brooked no argument, and Karigan held her tongue. In moments they were back in her room, and the woman helped her into bed, her assistance gentle in contrast to her brusque manner. As Karigan sank into the mattress, she had to admit it was good to be off her bad leg.

"I don't know what they did to you at the asylum or why," the woman said, clucking as she observed Karigan's bandaged wounds. "One hears such horrid stories. But you are safe now, free of that wretched institution."

"But *where* am I?"

The woman paused with the covers in her hand and raised an eyebrow. Her hair, streaked with gray, was bundled on top of her head, and a monocle hung from a silver chain around her neck.

"Dear, dear," the woman said. "I thought you knew, but the mender said you'd be disoriented. You are in your uncle's house in Mill City. I am his housekeeper, Mirriam."

Karigan had never heard of Mill City, and why did they insist she had an uncle here? "Where are my things?"

“Things? What things?”

“That came with me.”

“I could not say.”

As Mirriam busied herself with tucking Karigan in, Karigan realized she was not likely to get much in the way of answers from the housekeeper. Either she did not know the answers, or she’d been ordered to reveal nothing. In that case, Karigan needed to see her “uncle,” whom she assumed to be the professor. That was another question: why would this stranger claim to be her uncle?

“Now, will you be needing more morphia?” Mirriam asked. “Mender Samuels showed me how to administer it.”

Karigan closed her eyes, remembering how the morphia had vanquished her pain, made everything so pleasant she did not care about where she was or why. She’d be able to rest without worry, allow her hurts to mend. She almost craved it. Yet she wished to remain alert, not muddle-brained, and discover exactly where she was and figure out how she was to get home and report to her king and the captain. There was much she wished to tell them about Blackveil, the most troubling being the return of Mornhavon. She hoped once more that her companions had not been harmed by the shattering of the looking mask and were making their way home even now. The morphia *was* a tempting escape, but she could not allow herself to be seduced by it. No, she needed answers first.

“No, no morphia,” she finally replied. Was that a look of approval on Mirriam’s face?

“Then tea with extract of willow ought to do you,” she replied. “Are you hungry? I can have breakfast brought up.”

Karigan was, but she said, “I’d like to see my—my uncle.”

“You will see him when he wishes you to,” Mirriam said, hands on hips. “He is a very busy man. Meanwhile I’ll send Lorine up with your breakfast.” She glanced under the bed. “And if you can walk, you can use the privy two doors down, eh? But don’t let me find you wandering the halls. Mender Samuels would not approve.”

Karigan nodded, and when Mirriam strode from the room, she exhaled in relief. Mirriam seemed to take up a lot of space and air.

Karigan would have to be patient and go along with whatever game these people were playing. They appeared to be concerned with her well-being, and the rest couldn’t but help her body, which had been so abused in Blackveil. Another point in their favor, at least in Mirriam’s, was that the morphia had not been forced upon her. Considering the lethargic quality it produced, it would be an easy way to control her. Instead, she’d simply been urged not to wander the hallways, an admonition she’d likely ignore if she wanted to learn more about this world and its people, and locate her belongings. She’d just have to make sure she wasn’t caught in the process. Mirriam did not strike her as a woman who would easily forgive disobedience.

She gazed at the sunlight falling through her window and wondered what her fellow Riders were up to, if anyone missed her. Specifically, she wondered if King Zachary noticed her absence, and then she shook her head in an effort to reject such painful, yearning thoughts.

Her door opened slowly as the maid she’d seen earlier backed in with a tray laden with covered dishes. In

contrast to Mirriam, the young woman moved softly. Her name, Mirriam had said, was Lorine. She brought the tray over and helped settle it across Karigan's lap.

"Your breakfast, miss."

Lorine removed the covers from the dishes and steam rose, the scents of bacon and eggs making Karigan's stomach rumble. And there was toast slathered with jam, a pot of tea, and a generous scoop of butter melting into a mound of fried potatoes.

"If you need anything else, miss, just ring the bell."

Karigan glanced up and noted that the headscarf did more than just cover Lorine's hair, it concealed scarring that puckered at her temple.

"Thank you," Karigan murmured. "I'm hungry enough that I may eat the dishes and tray, too."

But Lorine was already on her way out of the room. Karigan sighed and ate as she had not eaten since the equinox when she crossed the wall into Blackveil. Hardtack this was not.

As starved as she'd been, though, she did not even come close to eating the dishes or tray. She'd subsisted on so little for so long that it did not take much to fill her stomach. She gazed at the remaining food with regret, but did not think she could possibly handle another mouthful without bursting, so she rang the bell and sipped her tea.

It was not, to her surprise, Lorine, or even Mirriam, who answered her summons. When the door opened, it was the professor who peered in at her, then stepped inside. He was halfway across the room and looked like he was about to speak when Lorine appeared in the doorway behind him.

"Sir? I—" Lorine's eyes were wide and her voice quavered.

The professor turned to her. "Not to worry, my dear, I happened to be almost at the door when I heard the bell ring. You were very prompt."

Lorine curtsied, but looked flustered, especially when the professor handed Karigan's tray to her. It was clear the maid was not accustomed to her employer helping her.

"Do you require more tea?" he asked Karigan.

She shook her head.

"Very well. Off with you, Lorine. If we've need, we shall call."

Lorine bowed her way out of the room, tray in hand. The professor watched after her for a moment. "Poor thing is still nervous after all these years that she might make a mistake," he said. "She was a mill slave before I brought her here, you know, and mistakes aren't tolerated in the mills."

Karigan's mouth gaped open. Mill slaves? Slavery was outlawed in Sacordia. What a strange place this was, and what a horrifying institution it permitted. She wondered what was being milled that it required slave labor.

The professor dragged a chair to her bedside. Closer up, there was a wolfish aspect to his appearance, his coarse hair shot through with salt and pepper strands, his piercing eyes and direct gaze.

“Are you rested well enough for some company?” he asked.

“Yes!”

He smiled beneath his mustache at her emphatic answer. “I believe we’ve much to talk about, and it has not been easy waiting these three days as you slept.”

Three days, Karigan thought, glad that she had declined another dose of the morphia, though she thought the healing sleep had probably done her much good.

“Are you the one who is supposed to be my uncle?” she asked.

His smile grew even broader. “I am indeed your uncle,” he said, “at least for the purpose of keeping you safe.”

GOODGRAVE

“Allow me to introduce myself properly.” The professor rose and with a half-bow, said, “I am Bryce Lowell Josston, adjunct professor of licensed archeology to the Imperial University.” And he sat once again.

Archeology. The term was not well known in Karigan’s world, but she had visited enough museums to recognize it. “You dig up old things.”

“That is quite right, my dear, and study the artifacts so my colleagues and I may understand the past.”

“I’m afraid I have not heard of your Imperial University,” Karigan replied. “In fact, all I know about where I am is that this place is called Mill City.”

“What is your name and from where do you hail?” the professor asked, his gaze on her sharpening.

Karigan returned his gaze no less keenly. She wanted to trust but was not sure how much. Still, she was a Green Rider whose embassy made her a representative of the king, which meant she should not hide but declare herself, especially in the presence of someone who seemed intent on helping her.

“My name is Karigan G’ladheon. I am a king’s messenger, a Green Rider, from the realm of Sacoridia. I noticed you have some furnishings in your house that are from Sacoridia, which tells me you are not unfamiliar with my country.”

When she had said her name, he leaned forward staring right into her eyes, squinting as if to divine something about her, and then opened his mouth to speak. But instead, he clamped it shut and rose abruptly from his chair to pace as though deeply unsettled.

Karigan watched as he walked furrows across the floorboards, his hands clasped behind his back, his posture stooped. He spoke as if to himself. “Delusional. Delusional is the only rational explanation. But the objects. Those appear to be authentic.” He paused once more, pivoting toward her. “The objects. How did you come by them?”

“If you are referring to my belongings,” she replied, her irritation flaring, “the crystal I inherited from my mother, and the walking cane was a gift. I would like them back, please, and my uniform, too.”

“You do not claim the winged horse brooch?”

He could see it? Another indication magic was not working here. Rider brooches had spells of concealment on them so that only other Riders could see them.

“The brooch is my badge of office.”

He leaned over her, the friendly smile absent from his face. “Do not lie to me, girl. You are playing a very dangerous game. Where did you acquire those artifacts?”

“Who is the one playing games here, I wonder. I am telling you the truth.” If he actually reached out to shake her, which it looked like he wanted to do, she would break his nose. “I demand you return my belongings to me, and that you present me to an authority of your government.”

“You would not want me to do that,” he said, backing off without touching her. “Tell me,” he continued, “who is the king you serve?”

“Zachary Hillander.”

“Zachary the first, or the second?”

“There is only one Zachary.”

“And his queen?”

Karigan raised her eyebrow. Did he believe there was more than one Zachary, or was he testing her? “He is not married, though he is betrothed to Lady Estora Coutre.”

“Coutre,” the professor murmured, looking as if he might faint. Then he grew sharp and intense all over again. “Where did you learn this information? Who told you?”

“I am a Green Rider,” Karigan said through gritted teeth. “I serve Zachary, the king of Sacoridia. The betrothal is general knowledge.”

The professor slid weakly into his chair, all intensity vanishing. “My dear, King Zachary and Queen Estora have not reigned for one hundred and eighty-six years.”

Karigan’s mouth dropped open. “One hundred . . . ?”

“And eighty-six,” the professor supplied, nodding. “I can only conclude you are a very disturbed young woman, delusional as I said. But how you acquired information and artifacts of our history that are forbidden is another matter entirely.”

“This is Sacoridia—the mask brought me forward,” Karigan said with a start but maybe less surprised than she might have been, for she had traveled in time before, though never this far forward. Considering the involvement of the looking mask in all this, she shouldn’t be surprised at all. Still, discovering oneself in a future time was a bit of a jolt. But how far forward had she come? When had the reign of Zachary ended relative to her entering Blackveil and smashing the looking mask?

“There was no mask among your items,” the professor said, “and how one would . . . *bring you forward* is a notion I do not understand.”

Karigan didn't understand it herself, but the mask had been an object of great power. She said no more of it, however, and would not speak of her ability to cross thresholds, to step into other times. He'd only think her more mad than he already did. If this future was without magic, then how would he believe her anyway? Not to mention, Rider abilities were not discussed outside the messenger service.

"You are correct," the professor continued. "This is Sacoridia, though it is no longer called such, and it would be best if you did not say any of these names to anyone. The land that was once called Sacoridia has been incorporated into the Serpentine Empire." His gaze searched her face. "I'd say you were a ghost, but you are all too real. I've seen the wounds of your flesh." He pointed at her plaster encased wrist. "Ghosts don't wear casts. You must be a scholar, then, of secret history, to know these things. Rare for a woman to be of a scholarly bent, but not unheard of. A scholar then, with a sickness of the mind. It appears my claim that I'd removed you from the asylum is rather apt."

There were times, Karigan thought, that she wouldn't argue with the idea that she'd a "sickness of the mind," but this was not one of them. "I want my things back," she said. And somehow she'd have to discover a way to return to her own time. Traveling to the future explained both the strangeness of this world and its similarities with her own, but it looked to be a dangerous future. And the empire? Did this mean Mornhavon had overcome all to conquer her homeland?

"I have placed your artifacts in safe keeping," the professor said. "It would not be prudent to leave them lying around. I am shocked no one found you before we did, otherwise you'd be in Inspector custody, or in the hands of Adherents." He shuddered. "Good thing about the asylum story. Now no one will take your ravings about Green Riders or the old realm seriously, though I warn you not to speak of it at all. The emperor forbids that aspect of history, and he has spies everywhere."

As Karigan tried to digest his words, another thought occurred to her. "You are not the person who stole me off the street."

"No, not personally, but a friend did so at my request," he replied. "And I'd rather not say *stole*, but brought to safety. I do have a reputation for helping unfortunates."

Especially those garbed in historic Green Rider uniforms, she thought. "I am not an . . . unfortunate, and I'd like to be released. You've no right to hold me here."

"Yes, I can see you are a proud one, but trust me, my dear, you do not wish to find yourself on the street again. We shall care for you as Mender Samuels has decreed. In the meantime, I hope you will tell me how you came by those artifacts and learned your history."

"I will leave of my own accord then," she said, tossing her covers aside to do just that.

"Where will you go attired in only your nightgown?"

"Darden!" she snapped.

The professor blinked in surprise, clearly not knowing what she was talking about, and shook his head.

"Please rest. Mirriam informed me you turned down a dose of morphia. Perhaps I should have her administer one anyway?"

Karigan heard the inherent threat in his words. "You'll find yourself seriously injured if you try," she said, tensing, ready to spring into action, but he did not move.

"I do not doubt it," he replied. "My friend said you'd fought admirably against those Dregs the other night, which is also curious. No genteel lady would have managed it, had the skill."

"I am no genteel lady. I am a Green Rider."

"So be it. I will not force you to stay, Karigan G'ladheon, or whatever your real name may be, but I hope my hospitality will suffice to keep you peaceably abed until your wounds heal. Just know that the outer world would not be so kind. But perhaps you are beginning to understand that." He rose and gave her a curt bow. "I've no wish to see you come to harm."

He strode across the room, but paused at the door. "Another thing. The name you have given me would incite too many questions from the wrong people. Do not speak it again. We shall use another name. Let us call you Kari Goodgrave. Several Goodgraves have married into the Josston family out east, so it makes sense my niece should be one, too."

After he left, Karigan stared at the door for a long time trying to digest it all. It was forbidden, at least dangerous, to speak of the past—her own present. What had been Sacoridia was now part of an empire, and she could only conclude that Mornhavon the Black had defeated her people. She needed to learn details about how this occurred so she could take word of it home and tell the king. Maybe some advantage could be gained in advance warning.

And just how would she get home? The looking mask had brought her forward, but she hadn't even the shards that had stuck in her flesh.

Her thoughts returned to the professor. If knowledge of the past was forbidden, or at least certain parts of it, then how had he acquired it, even as an archeologist? And how was it that archeology was permitted under such conditions in the first place? She did not understand the contradiction. In any case, she guessed that one reason for holding her here was to prevent her revealing his knowledge of this secret history to others, thus endangering him. And then there was the issue of her name. He had not wanted her to use it—her name was known in the forbidden history.

Why would the empire repress the true history, and what stories did it promote instead? No doubt those that glorified Mornhavon and made the queens and kings of Sacoridia's past appear terrible tyrants. Anything to ensure the populace saw their circumstances as better than what had come before.

She shook her head. Too many questions and too few answers. It was all giving her a headache.

Then she barked a laugh. "Goodgrave!" Of all the possible names. How very appropriate.

RUINS

Lhean Lifeson, child of leaf and wind, born beneath the verdant eaves of the *Vane-ealdar*, the forest of Eletia, now found himself curled in a crevice of tumbled rock and earth. A shaft of daylight plunged through the narrow opening overhead. It occurred to him that this must be what the graves of the mortal dead were like—deep, desolate, though infinitely darker than this.

How did the mortal humans stand it, knowing their lives were so short, spanning but a mere breath of an Eletian's eternal life? That this was where it would end for them, deep in the earth, fodder for worms? And how they struggled to fill that brief life with all the passions humankind could muster. They struggled, struggled as the salmon swimming upstream, only to end, to end forever in nothingness. He did not

understand why they did not just collapse in despair, but perhaps he could better appreciate why they clung to myths of their gods and an afterlife—these beliefs of theirs, false or not, gave them hope, allowed them to continue on.

Lhean shook his head. One day, perhaps, he would discuss the peculiarities of mortals with Ealdaen or maybe Telagioth. He never used to care, but now that he had traveled among and with humans, he'd become curious and taken an interest. But that was for another time; at the moment, it appeared he had a problem.

The rupture force of the shattering of the looking mask had thrust him—and likely his other companions—out of Blackveil. One moment he'd been standing in the dying remains of Castle Argenthynne, and the next he'd found himself in this crevice somewhere else. He uncurled himself to climb up, mindful of loose rock that tumbled clattering down if he misplaced his weight. When he reached the rim, he peered cautiously over it, observing only more rocky rubble awash in thin sunlight and stunted scrub trees growing from between black-flecked, gray granite blocks. The air smelled poorly and unclear, of acrid smoke that burned the back of his throat.

He pulled himself the rest of the way out, noting that this upheaved terrain was not just a rending of the land, but the obliteration of some great human work, for the edges of the rubble had not been formed by nature, but by tools. There was also evidence of some great conflagration, for soot adhered to the bottoms and fissures of rock not exposed to weathering.

He turned and found a face of stone staring back at him, its sculpted planes cracked and stained, its beard crumbled away, the remnants of a crown about its temple. The rest was lost beneath the rubble. Despite the ruins and the ill air of the place, it confirmed he was no longer in Blackveil. He knew this place, and he did not. The etherea was nearly gone, sick, dying. A being infused with etherea, as all Eletians were, he could sense inside himself its waning light. It was not just that it was tainted, but that it was almost *gone* from the land, from existence.

And so it was with his home. No matter where an Eletian may be he could always sense Eletia, the water running through the Alluvium, life throbbing through root and leaf, the spirit of his people. Even in the depths of Blackveil he had felt Eletia as a strong presence within.

He placed a trembling hand on his breast plate, over his heart, seeking but failing to feel a stronger awareness of his people. So alone, so bereft, the despair almost broke him to weeping.

Instead he turned his attention to the devastation around him, the jutting angles of hand-cut stone, rotting, sooty timbers. The ruin was upon a high hill, and more stretched all the way to its base where a city, a human city, stood. It was all symmetrically laid out, long rectangular buildings set in precise rows, their huge chimneys spewing filth into the sky. False streams glinted among them, too perfect to be made by nature. Humans called them canals.

He made out streets straight as swords, and more buildings of varying size and shape but still precisely placed. There was little green among the structures and nothing of nature in the design, no curves, no turnings, which made it all so foreign to Lhean's Eletian eyes, so difficult to reconcile in his mind. It was an injury to the land, and the injury extended even beyond his long sight, for the city had beat back the forest that once stood there and much of the farmland, as well.

A clacking of rocks started him to caution again, and he crouched, tugging his gray cloak around his shoulders to conceal the brightness of his armor. He scanned the ruins and discerned two men encumbered with tools, making their way uphill over piles of rubble. They were some distance away, but Lhean's keen hearing was good enough, he could pick up every word they spoke.

“—thought I saw someone up there,” said a fellow wearing a brimmed hat.

“Some of the stones look like people and, depending on the light, looks like they’re moving.”

“Still . . .” the first trailed off, his breath ragged from the effort of climbing over treacherous ground.

“Could be Ghouls,” the other replied, “hunting for relics.”

“Could be, though they’d be in big trouble if they got caught without a license.”

“Enough’ll take the chance if they think they’ll find something good.”

The man in the brimmed hat paused to catch his breath and mop his brow with his sleeve. His companion also stopped, removing an implement from his shoulder and leaning it against a block of granite. He arched his back and kneaded the small of it with his knuckles.

The man in the hat took a long look up the slope. “Sometimes,” he said quietly, “I think there are real ghouls in these ruins.”

His companion laughed. “You’re letting all the old stones get to you, friend. Come, if we don’t finish the survey today, we’ll be the ones in trouble, especially if we’re the cause of a delay for getting that drill emplaced.”

His friend shuddered, and they began making their painstaking way, wobbling on loose rocks, sending debris skidding down the hill behind them.

Lhean slid back into his crevice and huddled at the bottom with his knees drawn to his chest. He knew with certainty where he was: these were the ruins of Sacor City, and the one structure in the city that had created so much of the rubble on the crown of the hill was the king’s castle.

The force capable of tearing it down must have been terrible beyond imagination, for the strength of the castle was not merely in stone but subtle touches of magic, far less than what was used in the crafting of the D’Yer Wall, but enough to reinforce it. He’d felt the will to endure in the stone when he’d visited King Zachary with Graelalea and Telagioth at the end of winter. He’d felt the castle’s confidence and pride even though it was several centuries old. He was also certain the humans who inhabited it, worked and lived within its walls, were entirely deaf to the life in it.

But now it was gone, the castle dead, echoes of memory.

Since Eletians did not see time as necessarily linear, Lhean was not surprised he had traveled forward. He could not sense Ealdaen or Telagioth, so either they had not come here with him, or they lay dead. As for the others, his human companions? He could not say.

It did not matter. He must find some way of returning to the time he’d left behind. Otherwise, in this land where etherea had dwindled to almost nothing, he too, would sicken and fade until he was no more.

In the Present:

YOLANDHE’S ISLAND

The waves rolled Yap onto the pebbly beach. He dug his fingers between the pebbles into silt and sediment to keep the ocean from dragging him back into the deathly deeps. The retreating waves pulled relentlessly on him, hissing over stone and sand, pebbles clicking together. Yap scrambled forward so he would not lose ground, even while retching all the sea water he had inadvertently drunk.

He managed to reach the crest in the beach that marked the high tide line, and he lay there atop knots of dead rockweed, panting and resting, relieved to have made it to land.

Not food for the fishes today, he thought, as he had often thought after surviving a bad storm on the *Mermaid*, a pirate ship on which he'd served.

Despite having spent much of his life aboard ships, he had never learned to swim. Most mariners never did. Why, learning to swim was bad luck for a sailor. It was like inviting the gods to send disaster, a wave to sweep you overboard or sink the ship.

Somehow he'd made it to land without knowing how to swim. He bet if he knew how, the currents wouldn't have been favorable, and he'd have drowned. The storm and breaking up of the gig notwithstanding, fortune was smiling on old Yap and had brought him ashore alive.

He groaned. But how his head and lungs hurt, and how exhausted he was from his ordeal. He spared a thought for his master. Lord Amberhill was a landsman—surely he did not know how to swim either. Yap hoped it was so. He hoped that fortune had pulled Lord Amberhill ashore, too.

Yap lay there on the stones, oblivious as a hermit crab scuttled by his fingers. He closed salt-rimed eyes against the brightness of the sun uncloaked by the parting of storm clouds.

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Later, Yap awoke with a start. His belly ached badly, very badly. He shivered. His back was dry from the sun, but his front wet from lying prone. Waves tickled his toes, which meant the tide was on its way back in. He rubbed his eyes, knocking his specs askew. Somehow they'd stayed with him through the disaster. He tried to polish the residue of salt water from them with his shirt, but when he put them back on, he found he'd only smeared them. It was then, when he looked up to see his surroundings, he realized he was not alone.

First he saw her bare feet and ankles, then he looked up her long legs to the simple kilt of seagrass green. She wore a necklace of pearls and sea glass. Her long hair tousled away from a face he'd seen before. A tremor of fear ran through him, threatening to disgorge the contents of his already upset gut. He writhed on the ground and floundered about in an attempt to crawl away. He'd crawl back into the ocean if he had to.

"Where do you go, small man?" she asked.

Yap squeezed his eyes shut, wanted to clap his hands over his ears, but he knew it was no good, her voice held such power, for she was the sea witch, Yolandhe. She had long, long ago cursed him and his crew to be held stranded on a windless sea, trapped in a bottle for all time until someone had dropped it, releasing the spell. Oddly, the *Mermaid* had materialized in a house nestled deep in the forest, far away from the sea. Yap was the last of his crew who lived.

"I believe," she said, her voice the calming rush of the tide combing the shore, "you took something that is not yours when last you were upon my island."

“N-no,” he croaked.

“Give. It. Back.” She did not shout, but the command had the power of a storm in it, the crashing waves, the shrieking winds.

An upwelling in Yap’s gut caused him to vomit, first only salty fluid, but then more came up, a viscous mass of globules that, when deposited on the ground, was a small pile of pearls slimed with bile. More heaving produced coins of silver and gold, an emerald, a pair of rings, a necklace of gold links, more pearls, a brooch of a dragon, and worst of all, a long dagger with a gold hilt and ruby pommel. He thought it would slice his insides as it came, that it would choke the life out of him as it caught in his throat. When the hilt reached his mouth, he pulled it out and tossed it aside, and yet more pearls gushed out. When it seemed he was finished, he lay there shivering.

Yolandhe did not move. She waited.

Waited for what? Sweat poured down Yap’s face. His belly ached, but this time it was from all the heaving. Then he hiccupped and a diamond pendant popped out of his mouth.

Yolandhe nodded. She walked on as if he were no more than driftwood. She didn’t even pick up any of the precious objects he’d spewed at her feet. Perhaps that they had been returned to the island was enough.

He rose shakily to his knees, feeling much, much lighter. “Wait!” he called. “Have ya seen my master? We was wrecked in the storm!”

Yolandhe paused, the sea breeze tossing her hair back. She spoke softly, almost delicately, but the breeze carried her words to Yap with no difficulty.

“Yes,” she said. “I have found him. He has returned to me.”

PLUMBING

Karigan decided she was not a good patient. Not a *patient* patient. Following her conversation with the professor, she was up and down, pacing despite the pain lancing through her leg. She windmilled her good arm and stretched her back. Too much time in bed and her muscles would grow weak and limp. Arms Master Drent would never approve.

She further occupied herself by seeking out the privy Mirriam had mentioned. When she found it, she paused in awe, gawking at the shiny porcelain bowl supported by four bronze mermaids, its seatback fashioned into the shape of a breaching whale.

“Oh, my,” Karigan murmured. She peered into the bowl and saw that it contained still water. This was different than the privies she was accustomed to. There’d been shacks with holes and finer closets with aqueducts of actual running water coursing beneath. Selium had a fine system of piped water to deal with the unmentionable.

A brass lever, filigreed with twining seaweeds and periwinkles, jutted from the floor adjacent to the bowl, reaching to the height of her hips. It was not clear to her exactly what the lever was for, but its proximity to the bowl suggested it was integral to its functioning. There was only one way to find out. She pulled on the lever.

It drew back with a *clack-clack-clack-clack* that emanated from some hidden mechanism beneath the floor. When she pulled it back as far as it would go, she released it and the roar of water made her jump. She'd expected *something* to happen, but it still surprised her when it did. She watched in fascination as the water in the bowl whirled out of existence in a forceful vortex through a hole in the bottom.

As the lever slowly returned to its starting position, with additional muffled clicking and clacking, a trap door opened from above the seatback and a brass fish emerged. A stream of water spouted from its mouth and cascaded neatly into the bowl until it was refilled. Then the fish backed into the wall, and the trap door slammed shut.

One would need to be standing when one pulled the lever, she thought, or get all wet. Or, perhaps this was how the people here cleaned themselves?

So enchanted was Karigan, that she pulled the lever again just to watch the fish emerge. And again. And again.

After entertaining herself with the bowl, she discovered an adjoining room with a magnificent tub, also supported by brass mermaids, pairs of fish spouts poised on the edge of the tub, and higher above on the wall. So, one did not have to clean oneself while sitting on the bowl! There was a complicated looking array of levers around the tub. Karigan pulled on one, and again there was the mechanical clattering from beneath the floor and behind the wall, and a rush of water flowed from one of the fish. To her wonder, the water was hot. Perhaps they'd found hot springs to tap into, as in Selium? She guessed its companion spout must produce cold water, and without pumping or dragging in heavy buckets!

She was about to strip off her sleeping gown and fill the tub. She'd not had a bath since before leaving Sacor City—*her* Sacor City—and heading into Blackveil. How wonderful it would be to soak in such—

"There you are!"

Karigan almost fell into the tub as Mirriam burst into the bathing room.

"Are you the one playing with the water?" the housekeeper demanded. "The pressure is off in the kitchen, and Cook is most displeased. In quite a state, actually."

"Uh . . ." Karigan began. "I—I was hoping to take a bath."

"You must not use the tub. If you get your cast wet, you shall ruin it, and then where would we be? I'm afraid it's sponge baths for you until your wrist heals."

Karigan grimaced. "Sponge baths? Isn't there a way to—"

"Mender's orders."

Karigan was beginning to resent the strict dictates of Mender Samuels.

"Speaking of which," Mirriam continued, "you should be in bed."

"I, um, need to use—" and Karigan pointed into the room with the amazing porcelain bowl.

"Land sakes, child, then use it, but no playing with the plumbing. I shall await you in the hallway and see you back to bed directly."

Karigan sighed as Mirriam stepped outside. It was not going to be as easy to sneak around the house as she hoped, with the housekeeper patrolling the halls like a guard dog.

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Back in her room, Karigan planted her fists on her hips and stood her ground. "I do not wish to get back in bed." Before Mirriam could utter another of Mender Samuels' proclamations, she added, "I'm restless. I can't just sit here and do nothing."

Mirriam's pose mirrored Karigan's, and the two stared at one another for several moments. "You are right handed?" the housekeeper asked.

Karigan raised her plastered wrist as if it were a foreign object. "Yes."

"Then needle work is likely out."

Thank the gods for small favors, Karigan thought.

"Can you read?"

"Yes, yes I can."

"Good to know that that part of your education has not been neglected. I shall see what I can do." Then Mirriam glanced disapprovingly at Karigan's bare feet. "And I shall find slippers for you. Going without is quite inappropriate."

Karigan glanced at her offending feet and wiggled her toes.

"You get back to bed," Mirriam said.

This time Karigan obeyed, knowing the housekeeper would refuse to leave otherwise. She pulled up the covers, and Mirriam grunted in satisfaction and left, closing the door behind her. From the hallway, Karigan heard a muffled query about "the patient," from someone and Mirriam's caustic reply: "She has an apparent fascination with the plumbing, as if she's never used it before. Did they not have any at the asylum? She's—" Mirriam's voice faded with her footsteps.

Karigan leaned back into her pillows, a little surprised by how weary her explorations had left her, and before she knew it, she had dozed off, only to be awakened sometime later by the clangor of bells from deep within the city. Though she might bristle at being forced to rest, she had to admit her body had been through much and obviously needed at least some.

Drawn by the bells, she swung her legs out of bed and padded to the window. The light against the brick wall opposite had changed its slant, reinforcing the sense of time's passing since last she had looked. Did these bells signify time as they did in her own Sacor City? Did they call worshippers to prayer in local chapels of the moon? If so, they were not particularly beautiful sounding bells but dull and heavy.

Perhaps if she stuck her head out the window she might be able to see more. She struggled with the latch and tried to lift the sash. It was painted closed. She tapped it with the heel of her hand and forced, best as she could even with her broken wrist, to push it upward. The window screeched as it shifted, after no small amount of concerted effort. Had anyone raised it in the last hundred years? No doubt the noise would bring Mirriam running. *Let her come,* Karigan thought, *but not before I have a look.*

She edged the window open wider, enough for her to stick her head out. She craned her neck, looking both left and right. She did not see much, but to the right, between this house and the adjacent building, there was an opening that led to the street. It was just enough for her to observe people, and horses and carriages rushing to and fro. Soon the bells stopped ringing, their leaden tones dying. The activity on the street also diminished. The warm air reminded her of mid- to late spring. She had lost track of time in Blackveil, but they'd entered the forest on the spring equinox. She could not say for sure, but it appeared she'd arrived in the future in the same season she'd left in the past.

"MISS GOODGRAVE!"

Karigan knocked her head on the sash. "Ow!" She backed away from it rubbing the back of her head and turned to gaze on Mirriam and Lorine gaping behind her.

Mirriam was the first to move, setting a pile of books on Karigan's bedside table and storming across to the window to slam it shut. Karigan winced. She decided Mirriam was not good for the nerves of convalescing patients.

"Miss Goodgrave," Mirriam admonished, "the air is not healthy. You must keep the window shut."

The air did have that unpleasant acrid tang to it, but Karigan was definitely tired of hearing what she could and could not do, no matter how much these people were trying to help her.

"I was curious," she said. "All I can see is that brick wall."

"You shall find that curiosity has no place in this household. Now, Lorine has your midday meal and I've brought you some books." She looked at Karigan's feet again and rolled her eyes. "And there shall be slippers, and no more window opening foolishness, do you understand?"

Karigan nodded, and Mirriam marched from the room muttering to herself. Karigan and Lorine exchanged glances, neither of them willing to risk a move lest the slightest breath called the storm back down upon them.

Finally Karigan cleared her throat, and that appeared to be a signal for Lorine to carry the tray to the bed. Karigan hauled herself into bed quickly, observing the tray looked heavy.

"Don't you mind Mirriam, miss," Lorine said as she gently rested the tray on Karigan's lap. "She doesn't like her routine upset."

"What's wrong with the air?"

Lorine shrugged. "It's the way it's always been. Dirty and bad for the weak and elderly. Sometimes better, sometimes worse, depending on what's coming out the stacks and which way the wind is blowing." Then she leaned close and whispered, "Ill humors roam the night air." She held her grave expression for several seconds before nodding and adding in normal tones, "I hear it is better in the countryside."

She removed the lid from the main dish on the tray, and Karigan recoiled at the pungent steam that plumed from the contents. Boiled dinner! Just like her aunts used to make. Boiled cabbage, corned beef, and potatoes. She tried to conceal her revulsion.

"Call me if you need anything," Lorine said, and left.

Karigan stared at the pale, limp offerings on her plate. Ill humors, indeed, she thought, wishing she could

reopen the window.

PHOSPHORENE

After Lorine removed the almost untouched meal, the scents of fresh paper and ink replaced the stench of boiled cabbage as Karigan flipped through the books Mirriam had brought. The pages were crisp and the bindings unbent—clearly new-bought. She marveled at the clean print; very little bleeding of ink, the type neat and precise. Though her own time boasted printing presses, none produced such a fine product.

For all that, the illustrations inside were black and white etchings, not nearly as beautiful as the hand-colored renderings she was accustomed to. *Something gained, something lost*, she thought. The illustrations were generally of young men and young women strolling with arms linked, or a man kneeling before his lady. The title of the first she looked at was, *Clara May's Day to Remember*. Another was *A Pretty Proposal*. The books were, quite plainly, stories of courtship and romance, of girls seemingly beset by hardship only to be rescued by gentlemen of means. All stories Mirriam must have deemed suitable for a young lady.

Karigan sighed. Not that she didn't enjoy a good romance, but the idea it was the only sort of book she'd be interested in annoyed her. She supposed, however, she might actually learn something about the mores and expectations of this world, so she picked one at random, *Saucy Sera and Mister Chaunce*.

Saucy Sera, apparently, had a wild streak, rebelling against what was normally expected of girls. She ran and played and climbed trees, and when she was punished for doing what girls should not, she dressed up as a boy and ran away so she could do as she wished, including ride horses. Karigan's heart was with spirited Sera as she strove for freedom, but naturally her plan fell to pieces when Mister Chaunce rescued her from a dire situation in which her true gender was about to be exposed in a humiliating and public manner. Her character underwent complete metamorphosis as she fell immediately in love with Mister Chaunce. Her wild ways quickly faded, and she became a proper young lady interested only in fashion and pleasing Mister Chaunce. Sera's reward? A grand wedding day in which she married the gentleman who had saved her from herself.

Karigan thought a happier ending would have been Sera finding a way to stay free and independent, but, she surmised, this was not what the girls were taught here and probably not what they fantasized about. Who wouldn't want some hero to rescue them and shoulder all responsibilities? And, she wondered wistfully, who wouldn't desire falling in true love? It was all very seductive.

By the time she finished Sera's story, the light in the room had dimmed, and the bells clanged again. As if on cue, Lorine arrived with supper. Much to Karigan's relief, there was no cabbage or corned beef in sight, boiled or otherwise.

"Mirriam says you must eat up," Lorine said in her soft voice. "You must regain your strength and put some flesh on your bones."

Karigan didn't think eating up would be a problem when she poked her fork through the pastry of a meat pie oozing with savory juices.

"Lorine," Karigan said, causing the maid to halt on her way out. She wanted to know for sure what the bells represented. "Why do the bells ring? Is it to tell the time?"

Lorine gazed at Karigan as if puzzled, then smiled. "I keep forgetting you were not raised in the city. Yes.

The bells tell us the time. But most importantly for the mill managers, it tells the slaves when they must work, when they may stop for meals, and when they are done for the day.”

“Was this their last bell? Have they been dismissed for the day?”

“No, miss. It was the supper bell. After supper, they will work while there is still daylight. From sunrise to sunset they labor.”

“Like farmers,” Karigan murmured.

“I think farming might be . . .” Lorine broke off, staring toward the window, lost in thought.

“Might be what?” Karigan prompted.

“More bearable.” Lorine shook her head as if dazed. “Nothing to trouble yourself about, miss. Is there anything else?”

“No,” Karigan replied. Lorine curtsied and was gone, leaving Karigan to reflect on Lorine’s words and wonder about what her experiences as a mill slave had been like.

After she ate her fill, she needed to be up and out of bed again, so she crept out into the hallway and again heard male voices from somewhere downstairs. She picked out the professor’s tones, as well as two or three others. Unlike the visit from Mr. Hadley, the circus boss, this gathering sounded more sociable with occasional laughter. She was thinking about sneaking down the hall to at least take a peek when a throat was cleared behind her.

“Is there something you need?” Mirriam asked.

Karigan slowly turned round. Of course Mirriam would discover her in the hall. Where else would she possibly be? “No,” she replied. “On my way to the privy.”

“I trust you remember where it is?”

Karigan nodded.

“Good. I shall await you here.”

“Damnation,” Karigan muttered to herself when she entered the privy and shut the door. This was much worse than her days as a schoolgirl in Selium, where it seemed every adult had been peering over her shoulder. She couldn’t even enjoy the emergence of the fish spout from the wall when she pulled the lever, knowing Mirriam awaited her outside. When she finished, she was duly escorted back to her room.

Once more ensconced in bed, she picked through the books again. This time a piece of paper that appeared to be torn from a larger sheet slipped out of one of the books. It was filled with type and a couple of pictures. It was entitled, “Excavations of the Old City,” and in the top etching appeared the profile of “Professor Bryce Lowell Josston, Licensed Practitioner of Archeology.”

Professor Josston of Mill City, Known for His Studies of Ancient Sea King Relics, Has Turned His Erudite Attentions to His Own Neighborhood.

“The ruins of the Old City have always captivated my imagination as I grew up beneath their brooding visage,” the professor said. “And now I have been given permission to excavate in the ruins to seek further

links to the legacy of the first Sea Kings.”

The professor is a scion of a Preferred Family that made its fortune in the manufacture of cotton textiles. It is said he has eschewed industry in favor of scholarly pursuits and sold his majority interest in the Josston Mills. The Imperial Grant to Excavate, the professor believes, will endow him with a lifetime of potential discoveries.

“There is nothing better to me than learning about how those of the past lived,” he said.

Professor Josston joins several others in pursuit of artifacts on the Emperor’s behalf, including the notable Doctor Ezra Stirling Silk, Special Consul to the Emperor on Antiquities and True History, who has conducted remarkable excavations along the east coast and in the Northern Sea Archipelago.

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The second etching illustrated a broad knife with an entwined pair of dragons forming the hilt. The caption read, *Bronze knife believed to be Sea King relic, unearthed by Professor Josston in the Bealing Harbor dig.*

Bealing Harbor was in Hillander Province, or what used to be Hillander. To Karigan, the sea kings were but a curiosity of far ancient times, lost in the shadows preceding the Black Ages. She knew little of them except that they’d been violent marauders, pillaging and battling the tribal people who had roamed the region that she knew as Sacoridia. They had subdued the people and ruled for scores of years, especially along the coast. Likely their blood still ran through the veins of many Sacoridians. The sea kings had left abruptly, just simply got up and left, sailing their fleets of ships east. If there was any reason for their sudden departure, it was lost to time.

In any case, it appeared the sea kings were an approved topic of history, perhaps because it was so distant as to be deemed harmless. She wondered if the clipping had been slipped to her purposely, and if so, by whom? Why not just hand it to her? She shook out all of the books, but no other loose papers fell out.

Probably just as well. She’d had enough mysteries and revelations for one day. As the light in her room waned, the bells clanged a final time, and Karigan imagined workers filing out of the mills, weary and relieved another day had finished. Where did they go? If they were slaves, she could not expect they’d be returning to very comfortable accommodations.

My father managed to make his fortune in textiles, she thought, even though his suppliers did not rely on slave labor.

If Professor Josston’s family had made its fortune with cotton mills, she had to assume slaves were involved. The professor’s apparent removal from the business, and his rescue of Lorine, softened her harsh assessment of him. But he was obviously very well off and had profited from slave labor. She wondered what life was like for other people who were not the scions of Preferred families.

The door creaked open and Mirriam strode in, the last of day’s light glancing on the monocle hanging from her neck.

“You aren’t going to read in the dark, are you?” she demanded. She bustled over to Karigan’s bedside table where a globe sat on a bronze pedestal. She twisted a key in its base and at once the globe filled with a bright, steady light.

“Like magic,” Karigan murmured.

“There is no magic in this world, young lady,” Mirriam said, “but modern wonders gleaned from the ingenuity of men.”

To Karigan’s chagrin, there was truth in the housekeeper’s words about the magic. “Is it whale oil?” she asked.

Mirriam laughed. “Now where are we going to find a whale to make oil? Not enough of them left to supply the needs of the city, much less the empire. It’s phosphorene that gives off the light. Surely they weren’t still using candles in the asylum . . . ?”

Karigan swallowed, not wanting to reveal just how ignorant she truly was, but she had little choice. “How do you extinguish the light?”

Mirriam muttered something to herself in a tone of disbelief and then added, not without pity, “I am shocked the Goodgraves put you in such an institution lacking modern amenities. Why, it’s barbaric! No wonder the professor brought you here. Now watch.” Mirriam simply turned the key in the opposite direction and the room darkened.

It was amazing, so simple, Karigan thought. No fires that needed to be started and kept burning. No flint and steel, just the turn of that key.

Mirriam twisted the key once more and light filled the room. Despite the lack of magic, this world was filled with wonders. What else Karigan might discover, she could scarcely imagine.

“In the morning,” Mirriam announced, “there shall be bathing and a change of bandages. Mender Samuels will stop by to see how you are doing.” With that, the housekeeper left her.

Karigan sighed. Whatever discoveries she made about this world, they would have to be made at night, as the household slept. Did Mirriam sleep? Maybe she’d ask Lorine. In any case, she’d learn the rhythms of the house’s occupants and discover what she could.

She yawned and reached for one of the novels. She’d bide her time as evening wore on and begin her investigations once the house fell into somnolence. But before she was four pages into the book, her head nestled in the pillow, and she drifted away once again into the healing sleep her body so desperately needed, unaware of when Lorine came in later and removed the book from her hands, pulled the covers up, and turned off the light.

APPARITIONS

A *scratching* sound irritated Karigan to wakefulness, an incessant noise that scraped at her nerves. She blinked in the predawn gray, once more having to orient herself to where she was and *when*. She rubbed her eyes and yawned, wondering what caused the noise that had awakened her.

Scratch-scratch-scratch, like a pen rapidly stroking across paper.

She raised herself to her elbows. “Hello?” she queried, searching into the shadows spilling across her room.

She discerned nothing, but she pinpointed the noise emanating from a particularly dark corner. She stared hard, perceived movement. A trick of her eyes?

“Hello?” she said again, a slight quaver in her voice, and again there was no response. The scritch did not sound mousey, and it had a sort of rhythm to it.

I’m becoming just as mad as they think I am.

She tossed aside her covers and stood on the rug beside her bed. She took tentative steps toward the dark corner. The scritch grew a little louder as she approached. She made out the frame of the one chair in her room. She thought to turn back and ignite her lamp when she caught a faint flutter of movement around the chair, like pale moth wings in the night. Transfixed, she drew closer. Spectral smoke wafted and drifted above the chair until it resolved into a vaguely human figure.

A wave of cold rippled through Karigan’s flesh lifting the hairs on her arms. She licked her lips. She dared not step any closer to the apparition lest it vanish. Its features were so blurred she could not even tell whether it was male or female. It sat bent over a flat object on its lap.

“Who are you?” she whispered. Perhaps, she thought, Who *were* you? was the more appropriate question. In any case, she received no reply.

The gray of her room began to lighten, the puddles of black retreating. The faint apparition faded even more.

“Can you see me?” Karigan whispered, but the hunched figure remained intent on whatever was on its lap, even as it faded to a wisp of smoke.

Scritch-scratch.

Was it writing?

The city bell clanged and, startled, Karigan glanced at the window, which had brightened with the dawn. The bell to call the mill slaves to work. Between tollings, she heard no scritch, and when she glanced at the chair, the apparition had vanished.

Either she had indeed gone mad, or apparitions could appear even in a world deprived of magic. Not that spirits of the dead should have to rely on magic to exist, but it still surprised her.

Why had it appeared to her? She’d enough experience with the supernatural to know such meetings did not usually occur by chance.

She stood there staring at the empty chair for several moments, then shook her head. She gave some thought to using the early hour to sneak around the house, but she heard footsteps in the hallway and other sounds of life elsewhere in the house, bringing to an end any such notion. At least now she knew the household began to awaken with the first bell, which was more than she’d known before.

She sighed and limped back to bed to await the day.

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After breakfast Karigan suffered through the humiliation of the sponge bath, protesting all the while there must be a way to take a regular bath without getting her cast wet, and couldn’t she do this herself, please. Mirriam was as immovable as a granite pillar and informed Karigan this was not her first sponge bath. Karigan had known someone cleaned her up upon her arrival to the professor’s house, though she’d not been conscious. Being awake and aware of it was a whole different level of embarrassment.

“Stop your fussing,” Mirriam ordered as she scrubbed Karigan’s back. “You’re just making it take longer.”

After the sponge bath, Karigan had to admit she felt better, especially when Mirriam and Lorine set to work washing her hair in the bathing room sink, which was shaped like a giant clam shell. Mirriam deftly shifted the various levers to make the water temperature just right while Lorine’s nimble fingers massaged Karigan’s scalp. Afterward, Lorine put much care into detangling and brushing Karigan’s hair. The strokes of the brush felt marvelous.

“I wish my hair was half so lovely as yours,” Lorine murmured. “Long and thick.”

Karigan had not yet seen Lorine’s hair for it was always wrapped beneath her scarf.

Lorine expertly braided Karigan’s hair, then helped her back to her room, where Mirriam and Mender Samuels awaited with fresh bandages. Karigan withheld cries of pain as crusty scabs were yanked off with the old bandages, the one around her leg hurting the worst by far. The mender bent over her leg and took a long whiff of the wound.

“I smell no putrefaction, and the flesh appears to be healing,” he pronounced. “If all continues this way, I shall remove the sutures very soon.” He listened to Karigan’s heart through a conical tube apparatus, the wide end placed on her chest, his ear listening at the narrow end. Like a small speaking trumpet, Karigan decided. The mender inquired of Mirriam about Karigan’s diet. After a favorable response, he asked, “No ill humors, fever, or the like?”

“None that I’ve detected,” Mirriam replied. “Seems eager to get into mischief. But beyond that, only the illness of her mind.”

Karigan glowered.

“You say she will take no morphia?”

“I am right here and able to answer for myself,” Karigan said. “I will take no morphia.”

“My dear,” the mender said in a condescending tone, “you’ve nothing to prove. The morphia is only to benefit you by subduing your pain.”

And *me*, she thought. “I do not need morphia.”

The mender gave her a testy frown as though he preferred his patients drowsy and malleable. “Very well, but I shall bring it up with your uncle. Most young ladies would desire relief.”

Karigan held her tongue, but it was not easy.

“Her mental frailties,” the mender told Mirriam, “do not make her fit to speak for herself.”

The housekeeper escorted him to the door. She paused and gave Karigan an enigmatic look and then was gone. What was in that look? Approval? Disapproval? Something more complex? Karigan could not tell.

“I just want to go home,” she murmured. Now that she was once again alone in her room, it hit her. She wanted away from these strange people and their ways. She profoundly missed her Condor, her fellow Riders, and the way the world worked in her own time. She missed Ghost Kitty curling up beside her on her pillow and purring her to sleep.

She would find a way home; she would learn how Mornhavon had defeated Sacoridia, and she would take that information with her. Until she figured out these matters, she must remain patient and accept the professor's protection so she could rebuild her strength.

If she couldn't get past Mirriam, she would use the window. She'd enough bed sheets to tie together . . . Karigan considered plans and counter plans until the midday bell rang, and Lorine appeared with a meal. Karigan steeled herself for more boiled dinner, when Lorine lifted the lid off the main dish and there was only barley soup. Karigan did not think her sigh of relief went unnoticed.

She thought to question Lorine about Mirriam's habits and schedule but dismissed the idea as too obvious. She'd have to observe on her own. The maid curtsied and departed, leaving Karigan to thoughtfully spoon soup—carefully blowing on it first—into her mouth. Perhaps if she made herself sleep all day, then she'd stay awake long enough in the night to commence her prowling. It was ridiculous, really, that she, a Green Rider, was cooped up like this. She—

Karigan paused with a spoon of steaming soup halfway to her lips, when she felt someone's gaze on her. Had her ghost returned, here in the brightness of day? Slowly she turned her head, seeking any sign of that filmy presence. She did not see it, but when her gaze fell across the window, and she discovered a pair of golden eyes staring unblinkingly in at her, she screamed, and barley soup cascaded across the room, the bowl smashing on the floor.

Mirriam burst in almost immediately, with Lorine on her heels. "Miss Goodgrave! What on Earth? How dare you fling the professor's porcelain!"

Karigan hissed as the burning hot soup soaked through her nightgown, and she plucked the fabric away from her skin. "I saw a pair of eyes! In the window." Now for certain, she'd utterly convinced them of her insanity.

Mirriam stomped over to the window, gazed up, gazed down, and gazed all around. "I see nothing," she replied, whirling around to stare at Karigan, her hands on her hips.

Karigan was not surprised, and as her wits settled back into their proper place, she belatedly realized that whiskers, and white and pale gray fur had accompanied the eyes before her scream had scared the poor cat off her window ledge. She laughed at herself.

"Miss Goodgrave, stop this instant." Mirriam raised her hand as if to slap her.

Just as quickly Karigan raised her arm to block it. "I am not hysterical," she said, no laughter in her voice now. "I was laughing because I'm just realizing I was startled by a cat. A cat at my window." Karigan did not add that her sighting of an apparition in the early morning hours had put her on edge.

Mirriam's posture relaxed, and her upraised hand fell to her side. Her expression, however, revealed she was not entirely convinced.

"There has been a cat hanging about the back garden lately," Lorine said.

"White with gray?" Karigan asked.

Lorine nodded.

"No one had better be feeding it," Mirriam replied. "Filthy creatures."

Lorine clasped her hands in front of her and glanced down at the floor, but Mirriam did not observe it for she was gazing intently at Karigan.

“Just after we’ve cleaned and put fresh bedding on,” Mirriam said. “Now we’ll have to do it all over again.”

“I’m sorry,” Karigan said with a grimace. “I was just really startled.”

“See that it does not happen again.”

A clean nightgown and bedding were brought in, and after Karigan changed, she was ordered to sit in the chair while the bed was made anew, soup was sopped up from the floor, and broken porcelain swept away. In addition, the butler arrived with a little table, Mirriam directing where it should be placed. *Not* next to the window, she ordered the butler.

“From now on,” she informed Karigan, “you shall dine at this table. You are obviously well enough to sit up, and I won’t have you flinging the professor’s porcelain.”

“I did not—”

“And slippers!” Mirriam threw her hands into the air. “Why do I see no slippers? That girl never remembers anything I tell her, and I must do it myself.” She turned on Lorine who had a rag bunched in her hand from wiping up stray droplets of soup. “I am off to Copley’s for slippers and perhaps a few other shops while I’m out.”

With that, Mirriam marched out of the room, and both Karigan and Lorine sighed simultaneously. Lorine smiled shyly at Karigan.

“Is there . . . is there really a cat in the back garden?” Karigan asked.

“Oh, yes, miss. We do give him leavings now and then, but please don’t tell Mirriam—he does no harm.”

“I certainly will not tell Mirriam,” Karigan said with more feeling than she intended.

“Thank you, miss. Like I said, we just give him leavings. He’d like to come in, but, well, as you saw, Mirriam wouldn’t have it. He lets us near enough to pet him sometimes. Well, I must be off to begin laundry now.”

“I’m sorry,” Karigan said again as Lorine loaded her arms with sheets, cleaning rags, and Karigan’s soup-stained nightgown.

“No trouble, miss,” Lorine replied, voice muffled by linens as she headed out the door.

Karigan sat back in her chair wondering if she’d made enough trouble for one day. *Not by far*, she decided. Mirriam had left the house to go shopping, which meant she could poke around without her watchdog pouncing on her the moment she stepped out of her room.

MOTIVES

Karigan snuck out into the empty hallway. She had no illusions about getting very far before someone caught her, since it was full day and everyone was up and about, but her chances of success were better with

Mirriam absent.

She was deciding how to proceed when she heard voices once again coming from the foyer, so she crept down the hallway to the top of the staircase and crouched, hiding behind the newel post and balusters. A man in a red uniform stood just inside the doorway, peaked cap on his head and, girded around his waist, a black belt that held stubby tools or weapons of some sort. Behind him, through the open door, an object like a large metallic ball, glinted in the sun, but she could not discern it clearly. It made her inexplicably nervous. She sensed a roving eye watching, judging, seeking. Seeking what? Or who?

The professor strode into the foyer. "Inspector Gant," he said with great ebullience. "How kind of you to stop by. What a surprise to see you! May I offer you a brandy?"

"No thank you, Professor Josston." The Inspector had the squared shoulders and crisp demeanor of a soldier. "I'm on duty and here on official business. There has been word you're sheltering an undocumented person in your house."

"Undocumented? That's not very likely now, is it? The emperor knows I respect his laws to the utmost."

The Inspector proffered a slight bow of acknowledgment. "Even so, I am required to check. You did take in a young woman recently, did you not?"

Karigan stiffened, but the professor laughed. "My dear Gant, I've made no secret of it. Indeed I have taken in a young woman—my poor niece—so she may live in better circumstances than she left."

"I understand," the Inspector said, clearly unmoved, "but all the same, I must see her documents."

"Documents. Of course." The professor cast about himself as if they'd appear out of thin air. "One moment, please, Inspector, while I return to my office to retrieve them." And he strode out of view.

The Inspector remained where he stood with hands clasped behind his back. There was a querying chirp from behind him, and he glanced over his shoulder. "Yes," he said.

This was followed by several more chirps and hoots. They did not sound like anything Karigan had heard before—not at all like birds. Sharper, more tinny. Not at all like any living creature she knew of.

"Of course," the Inspector replied to the chirps. "He is highly favored and has a habit of taking in strays."

There was a soft whistle and Karigan had an impression of the whatever-it-was expressing doubt.

"He bought that slave's freedom, legal and documented. He does not have a history of harboring runaways. Now, silence."

There was a rude *blatt* from behind, and the Inspector raised an eyebrow.

The professor emerged into the foyer with a sheaf of papers in his hand, which he passed immediately to the Inspector. The Inspector scrutinized the papers, taking time with each page.

"So you say she is your niece," the Inspector murmured. "Several Goodgraves have married into your family as I recall."

"Indeed," the professor replied. "Historically and currently. A bit too much intermarrying with that branch if you know what I mean. Some ill-conceived notions of pure bloodlines and the like, leading, shall we say, to

unfortunate frailties in the offspring.” He tapped his temple in emphasis.

“Yes, I see you had your niece released from an asylum in the northeast.”

“They left her to rot in terrible conditions,” the professor said full of indignation, “and it’s not her fault she’s a bit touched. They are very uncivilized in that region. Mender Samuels can attest to her condition, mental and physical.”

“I’ve heard that asylum has an unsavory reputation,” the Inspector said. “There has been some agitation to close it down.”

“And so it should be closed down and the administrators condemned by the Imperial Council.” The professor’s righteous zeal was very convincing. Karigan thought he put to shame any actor of The Royal Magnificent Theater with his performance. “My poor niece. She is a pretty thing, and I’d a thought to marrying her off to some nice young man not concerned about the disarranged state of her mental faculties, but after such trauma? I doubt anyone would have her.”

Not to mention his performance was making her feel pathetic.

The Inspector made sympathetic noises. “I must check the seal,” he said, and he stepped outside with the papers. Shortly an ominous whine emitted from without. Did she discern a tensing of the professor’s posture as he watched through the doorway?

The Inspector returned and handed the documents back to the professor. “Everything checks out,” he said. “It’s a fine thing you are doing, helping family.”

“Well, unlike you, Inspector, I’ve not been blessed with children of my own, so I guess I find a way to compensate. Speaking of which, how many do you have now? Last I heard, eight?”

The Inspector grinned. “We’ve a ninth coming along.”

“My word! Good man!” The professor clapped him on the shoulder. “Wait till I tell Mirriam.”

The two said their good-byes, the Inspector politely doffing his hat and saying, “Sorry to have troubled you, sir.” When the door closed behind him, the professor sagged against the wall, mopping his brow with a handkerchief.

“Everything all right, Professor?” a male voice asked from the room off the foyer. The voice sounded vaguely familiar, but the speaker did not reveal himself.

“A close one, that,” the professor replied. “I’d only received these documents yesterday.”

“Rasper does good work.”

“Yes. Good enough to fool an Inspector and his mechanical. Thankfully it was Gant this time—he’s more, shall we say, reasonable than some of the others. But don’t give Rasper any idea of how good he is or he’ll start demanding that I pay him more.”

The two laughed, and the professor moved into the room, drawing a pair of doors closed behind him. Karigan sat where she was, dumbfounded that her patron had gone to such lengths to protect her. Obviously he’d be in trouble if he was found out. How odd this world was that everything must be approved and documented.

The idea that the Inspector had a mechanical something-or-other to help him made her shiver. The concept of “mechanicals” was not unknown to her or to others of her time. Mornhaddon the Black had brought them to these shores in his conquest of the New Lands. Her ancestor, Hadriax el Fex, had referenced them in his journal. But none of her contemporaries, not even the scholars, seemed to know what the mechanicals looked like or how they operated, except that some incorporated etherea in their workings. They were part machine and part magic, but if magic was absent from this time, perhaps the Inspector’s device was purely mechanical. The future, it appeared, held many marvels both useful and frightening.

Encouraged by having witnessed this much, Karigan decided to try and learn more. She crept down the stairs, her bare feet silent on the carpeted treads. At the bottom, she glanced all around her. There was, as she thought, a formal parlor to her right, and the closed doors of the room the professor and his companion had entered to her left. A grand hall went deeper into the house from the foyer. No one else was about. She limped over to the closed doors and pressed her ear against one of them. She heard voices within.

“It’s downright strange, I tell you,” she heard the professor proclaim.

His companion made a muffled response.

“Both Samuels and Mirriam observed the wounds on her body as unusual,” the professor said, “the old ones and the fresh ones. The old ones, Samuels said, are like stab wounds from . . . from edged weapons.” He sounded disturbed. If he had believed she were a Green Rider, then perhaps he wouldn’t be so surprised, but it appeared there were no Green Riders in this time and no memory of them. To think all their bravery and efforts came to this, unremembered and disbelieved.

“Mirriam thought her muscles unseemly for a girl, too, even one who might have labored in the mills,” the professor mused. “Maybe a field hand? No lash marks, though. Her wounds, combined with the artifacts lead me to only one conclusion.”

Karigan did not get to hear what it was because someone said, “*Psst*,” behind her. She jumped.

“Miss,” Lorine said, “you must go back to your room.”

“I’m tired of my room.” Oops, that sounded a tad more petulant than Karigan intended.

Lorine gently took her arm and turned her toward the staircase. “Please. Mirriam will be home soon, and if she or anyone else sees you down here . . .”

Karigan heard the implication that if mad Miss Goodgrave were discovered wandering around, the fault would fall on Lorine, who’d be in a great deal of trouble. Not wishing to cause Lorine problems, Karigan started up the stairway compliantly, but was vexed not to have heard the rest of the professor’s statement. Midway up, she stopped, thinking to go back down, fling those doors open, and confront the professor. But Lorine anxiously tugged on her sleeve. With a sigh, Karigan continued her upward climb.

When they reached the top landing, the double doors opened, and Karigan paused to look back down. A man strode out into the foyer with books beneath his arm.

“Don’t forget I need those papers tomorrow morning,” the professor called from the adjoining room.

The man halted and turned. “The Hudson Study?”

“That’s the one.”

When Karigan saw the man's profile, it took only a moment for her to recognize him. He'd been standing next to the professor in that lecture hall the night of her arrival. His voice also matched that of the man who'd helped her fight off the assailants in the alley and brought her to the professor's house.

She ignored Lorine's pulling on her arm. "Who is he?" Karigan asked in a whisper.

Whether the man heard her or some other impulse caused him to glance up the stairs, she did not know, but he did, and he stared hard at her, his face unreadable, brows drawn together. He was in his mid-twenties, she thought, very trim in his plain longcoat, but beneath his scrutiny she felt naked, as if he could see past her nightgown, through her skin, and right into her being.

Then it was all over. He turned curtly on his heel. "I'll have the Hudson Study for you first thing, Professor."

"Good man!"

And he swept out the front door.

"Who was he?" Karigan asked Lorine again.

"One of the professor's students. It's not proper for you to be seen like this." She fussed and pulled till Karigan followed her down the hallway.

Karigan assumed "not proper" meant the professor's mad niece should not be seen by anyone from outside the household, especially when she was wearing nothing but a nightgown. "Does he have a name?" Karigan persisted.

"A name?" Lorine's nervous disposition made her seem just about to quiver apart.

"Yes, a name."

"Mr. Cade Harlowe." Lorine spoke breathlessly, and when Karigan espied the pink in her cheeks, she thought she knew why.

"Does he come here often?"

Lorine nodded. "He assists the professor. To help pay his tuition, as I understand it."

They were about halfway to Karigan's room when another door at the far end of the hallway opened and a girl of about eight in servants garb stepped out. She stared openly at Karigan.

"Arhys!" Lorine said. "What are you doing? Mirriam is not pleased with you. She had to go to Copley's after Miss Goodgrave's slippers."

The girl tossed her head. "Mirriam is never pleased about anything."

That was for sure, Karigan thought.

"And mind your manners," Lorine said. "This is the professor's niece, Miss Goodgrave."

"I know," the girl said. She boldly walked up to Karigan and gave her a flippant curtsy as though she were above such things. Karigan almost snorted with laughter. This Arhys was no docile servant—she had cheek. Once she grew out of the round contours of childhood, Karigan predicted she'd be a great beauty with hair

that varied in the light from deep amber to sunshine gold.

"I must dust the parlor," Arhys announced as if she were bestowing a great favor upon the world. She skipped down the hallway toward the stairs.

"That girl," Lorine grumbled. Then, "I apologize for her lack of manners. The professor dotes on her and has made her vain. I suspect she may be a little jealous."

"Of me?"

Lorine nodded. "His attention has been diverted from her since your arrival. Though she has no call to be jealous. She is an orphan the professor took in as a servant, and he employs Mr. Harlowe to tutor her. Otherwise she'd have been taken to the orphanage." Lorine shuddered. "Or she might have ended up living on the streets with the Dregs. She should show a little more gratitude, if you ask me."

"The professor—my uncle—seems to help a lot of people," Karigan said as they entered her room.

"Yes," Lorine replied. "He helps when no one else will lift a finger. He's a good man."

A good man . . . Karigan wondered if he were simply altruistic, or if he had some other, hidden, agenda. The fact that he was willing to forge documents on her behalf and lie to an official suggested to her suspicious mind that perhaps he possessed motives beyond those that benefited her personal welfare.

PROWLING

It still took Karigan by surprise how the need for sleep dropped her so unexpectedly and with such immediacy. After her excursion down the stairs to spy on the professor, she'd been overcome as soon as she returned to her room. One minute she was alert and wide awake, and the next Lorine was rousing her for supper. Her healing body continued to demand its due.

It interfered with her plans to learn the schedules and habits of the household, and no matter how much she slept during the day, she couldn't stay awake at night to prowl.

When she was awake, she restlessly paced, scuffing the soles of her new fur-lined slippers along the floorboards, wishing for some way to vent her energy. Instead of reading the novels Mirriam had brought her, she lifted them to keep her good arm limber, now and then adding a book to the pile to increase the weight. She practiced the various forms she'd learned in arms training, only without a practice sword, and while trying to remain silent so no one would come scold her and discover what she was up to—which was an exercise in itself. She came to know exactly which floorboards creaked, and which did not.

She eventually convinced Lorine to provide her with a broom by saying she wanted to keep her already immaculate room tidy. Lorine looked at her like she was mad, then probably remembered that Karigan was supposed to be, and relented, hoping it would keep her happy.

Working with a broom handle was not nearly as good as using a properly balanced practice sword, or a real blade for that matter. She of course had to use her left hand because of her broken wrist, but it was not as hard as it might have been since she was trained to use her non-dominant side after a previous elbow injury. Grateful as she was just to have the broom, she wished she at least had her bonewood, and planned to request it of the professor citing her bad leg, but she never saw him, which was hugely irritating. When she asked Mirriam where he was, the housekeeper informed her it was none of her concern, but let it slip later he was

out at the “dig site” with his students.

The only people she continued to see were Lorine and Mirriam. If she had her way, that would soon change if only she could stay awake. There weren’t even any visitations from the ghost—none that she was aware of at any rate.

To make matters worse, beneath her cast the flesh itched so much it drove her wild. She had nothing to slide beneath the cast to probe the itches, and she was sorely tempted to go to the bathing room and soak it in water to dissolve it off. Instead, she furiously scratched at the cast itself as if she could somehow transcend the plaster and reach her skin to find release.

When next Mender Samuels appeared to check on her and remove the sutures from various wounds, she demanded, “When is this cast coming off?”

“Three or four more weeks, I should think.”

Karigan perceived the hint of a malignant smile as he said it, like he enjoyed telling her bad news. She wanted to scream her frustration but would not give him the satisfaction.

“You do want it to heal correctly, don’t you?” he asked, while tugging out another stitch.

Karigan grunted and said no more.

Finally a day came when she felt more herself. The combination of good food and sleep infused her with most of her old energy. Her wrist still ached and itched in its cast, and she still limped, but on the whole, she was ready to take on the world, or at least the part of it that contained the household of Professor Bryce Lowell Josston.

She’d made her plans, so now it was a matter of waiting for the night. She took her mind off the coming excursion by sneaking into the bathing room to attend to her own ablutions. She filled the tub with hot water, and just as she sank into it, settling her broken wrist safely on the rim, Mirriam barged right in.

“You get out this instant!” she ordered.

“I will not,” Karigan replied. “You will have to lift me if you want me out.”

Mirriam paced in agitation, perhaps considering her options. “I could ask the gardeners to help . . .”

Karigan did not reply, guessing she was bluffing.

After some moments, Mirriam jabbed her finger in Karigan’s direction. “You will not get your cast wet, and we shall speak when you are done.”

When the housekeeper left, the tension eased out of Karigan’s body, and she took a glorious, long hot soak and a thorough scrub, not getting her cast wet in the process, thank you very much. Afterward, while she dried off in her room, she endured Mirriam’s scolding with equanimity.

“As you can see,” Karigan said, brandishing her cast before Mirriam’s face, “no harm has been done. It’s obvious I’m capable of bathing myself, though Lorine will still need to help me with my hair.” Karigan thought she heard giggles from the hallway in response to Mirriam’s being bested. Arhys, perhaps?

Mirriam pursed her lips. A muscle twitched in her cheek, but she nodded curtly and left. When the door shut

behind her, Karigan spun around in a little dance of victory.

And then she saw the cat watching her through the window, that same pair of golden eyes, the white and light gray fur. He appeared neither scrawny nor scruffy, so perhaps he was a well-fed neighborhood cat. Since she'd already defied Mirriam once today, it did not seem a great leap to do so again. She went to the window and started to lift the sash, but at the first hint of a squeal, the cat jumped. She looked down, but could not see where he went. She shrugged and decided she would have to find some grease with which to ease the window.

Karigan busied herself the rest of the day practicing sword forms and was pleased by the increasing strength and precision of her left arm. When she finished, she gazed out the window. The sky was heavy, deepening with rain clouds. By late afternoon showers fell, accompanied by rumbles of thunder, and kept falling as the household settled into night and eventually into sleep, until only one soul remained awake, or so Karigan hoped. The constant patter of rain on the roof would help cover up the sound of her movements.

Wrapping the shawl around her shoulders, her feet clad in slippers, she tiptoed to her door, opened it, and peered out into the hallway. At night time, she discovered, the hallways were kept dimly illuminated by phosphorene lamps at low glow. Some were made to look like tapers in candle holders, the glass flame bright, but false in that it did not flicker like a real candle. These, unlike the larger lamps, could be carried with ease. She picked one up from its place on a small marble-top table and moved down the hall toward the stairs, followed by her own monstrous shadow.

She hadn't the nerve to open the doors along the hallway, figuring they could very well be inhabited. She suspected Mirriam slept only a couple doors away from her. No, her goal was to look around on the lower level, where the professor's business took place. If she were to find out anything of interest, it would be downstairs.

She carefully descended, her shadow exaggerating her steps. When she reached the bottom landing, she ignored the parlor—one glance the other day had shown her an impersonal room of overstuffed furniture and the requisite portraits of important ancestors. It was enough to tell her the room was rarely used and that she would find nothing of interest there. It seemed to her parlors had not changed much since her own time.

She went straight for the room across the hallway, the one with the double doors. She pushed one door open and stepped inside. Her taper revealed walls of books, gold gilt titles on the bindings winking in the light. A library, then. A long heavy table gleamed in the middle of the room, stacked with a few volumes, and a fireplace yawned black and sooty on the far wall. Rain pelted at heavily draped windows.

She glanced at a few titles: *The Complete Compendium of Archeological Implements*, *Pride of Empire*, and *The Wonderful Realm of Abstract Mathematical Intangibilities*. She supposed if she looked further, she'd find history books on the empire, but they'd probably be propaganda from all she'd heard about the "true history" so far. They might be interesting, but probably would not illuminate what had really happened to *her* Sacordia and the free lands.

As tempting as it was to linger and look through books, she thought her time would be better spent prowling. She backed out of the library, softly closing the door. Back in the foyer, she paused, listening. Except for the distant sound of falling rain, the house remained sepulchral in demeanor.

She forged ahead, trying to shake off comparisons with tombs, and almost immediately found a privy just as extravagant as the one upstairs, but this one had a bird's nest theme. The bowl looked like a nest, supported by branches of brass. Tempted though she was, she did not pull the lever to learn what came out from the trap door above to fill the bowl with water.

She hastened on and found a dining room that attached to the parlor through a doorway. A crystal chandelier glinted in her light above the immense, polished table. She found a pantry and stuck her head into the kitchen but did not investigate.

Down an austere side passage, she found storage rooms full of draped furniture, chests, and lamps missing shades. She hoped not to accidentally open a door to the servants quarters. Mirriam, who was exalted above all as head housekeeper, got a room in the plush upstairs. The rest of the servants would be housed in more utilitarian quarters. Still, she did not have a sense of anyone sleeping or otherwise inhabiting this corridor.

The next door she opened proved more interesting, for she found a very messy and cluttered office. She stepped inside and marveled at the piles of paper and stacks of books rising like columns almost to the ceiling. There was something of a path to a chair and desk, likewise buried in paper and books. The black eye sockets of a horse's skull peeked out from a shelf crowded with books and rolled documents. A rusted dagger sat on a pile like a paperweight. Here and there shovels and pick axes leaned against a bookstack. Some were buried up to their handles. She saw no sign of her own belongings, but there was no way to tell if they were buried anywhere in this clutter.

Karigan thought that if the professor wished to conduct archeological excavations, he should begin with his own office. She dared not touch anything for fear it would all come crashing down on her. Across his desk a map lay unrolled, but she could not make sense of it with its gridwork of numbers, transects, and layers.

She froze when she heard a door open and close somewhere else in the house. She wondered what to do—hide, or stay where she was? What if it was the professor coming to work late in his office?

She hastily lowered the light of the taper to a dim glow. She headed for the door, brushed against a stack of books, and watched in horror as they listed precariously. She gritted her teeth and tried to steady them so they would not topple, but the stack was over-balanced and fell, taking out the stack behind it, and another.

The noise was like thunder, and she flung herself out of the room, across the hall, and into one of the storage rooms. So much for her stealthy sojourn. If they discovered her, she'd be banned from leaving her room *ever*. Not that she'd let them stop her.

Hurried footsteps came down the corridor. She extinguished the taper entirely so no hint of light leaked through the crack at the bottom of the door. There was a second set of footsteps, and she opened the door just the tiniest bit. She saw the professor's back, and Mirriam's, each of them holding a taper.

"What in the world?" Mirriam demanded. She wore a plaid housecoat over her nightgown and a bonnet over her hair. The professor was attired in what looked like formal evening wear, as if he'd just returned from a party.

"It appears," he said, "one of my bookstacks gave way, leading to a chain reaction."

"I've warned you many times, Professor, that it is dangerous in there—a death trap! A whisper could've knocked those books over. What if you'd been in there? We'd be sending for Mender Samuels is what."

"Then a good thing I was not."

"I guess we'll have to set it right in the morning, then," Mirriam said with a mournful note in her voice.

"No, no," the professor said. "I'll let the boys handle it. What are first year students for anyway? You go back to bed and don't worry one iota about it."

“If you’re sure . . .”

“I’m sure. Go back to bed.”

Dismissed, Mirriam retreated down the hall. The professor continued gazing at the mess in his office, tugging at his bushy side whiskers.

“And my night’s just beginning,” he grumbled, and he shook his head.

Karigan expected him to make some attempt at straightening his office, but he turned and walked away. She did not hesitate but slipped out of the storage room to follow him, keeping to the darkness, away from the halo of light emitted by his taper.

He swept past the kitchen and pantry area, past the dining room, and veered into the library, leaving one of the double doors ajar. By the time Karigan reached the doors and peered inside, she discovered he’d left his taper at dim glow on the main table, but he was gone. Vanished.

She stepped boldly into the library, but he was nowhere to be seen. She had observed him entering the library, hadn’t she? Here was his taper as proof. Vanishing was usually *her* trick and the absurdity made her want to chuckle, but she swallowed it back.

She hid herself behind a big leather armchair in a dark corner to see if Professor Josston reappeared, but she’d barely gotten herself situated when she heard what must be the house’s front door opening and closing. She’d made a serious miscalculation about the amount of night time activity in the house.

She dared not leave her hiding spot, and was glad she hadn’t when someone entered the library. She peered around the chair, and in the dim light took in the wide shoulders and serious expression of Mr. Cade Harlowe, his face etched in shadows. He glanced over his shoulder as if to ensure he had not been followed, then did something very curious. He stepped over to one of the bookcases and reached up to a dragon sculpture on one of the shelves. He twisted its tail. This was followed by a distinct *snick*. *He* then pushed the bookcase, and it swung open silently on well-greased hinges and tracks. He stepped through the opening and the bookcase moved smoothly back into place leaving no evidence of his passing except for a stray wisp of air current. Now she knew how the professor had vanished. A hidden room or corridor behind the bookcase.

Just what were he and his student up to?

She smiled. There was only one way to find out.

UNDERGROUND

Karigan allowed several minutes to pass before she left her concealment. She made right for the dragon sculpture, its bronze surface aged to a dark patina. It crouched with wings partially unfurled and sinuous neck curving so that it seemed to gaze directly at her with shadowed eyes, almost daring her to touch it.

She took a deep breath, reached for the tail, and turned it as she’d seen Cade Harlowe do. The *snick* made her jump. It sounded so much louder when she did it that she feared it would awaken the entire household and bring Mirriam running. It did not, but she understood Cade Harlowe’s impulse to check over his shoulder.

A gentle push of the bookcase was all it took to swing it open. The space beyond was dimly lit with a wall lamp, but she took her taper with her just in case and passed through the opening into a cupboard of a space

just large enough for the bookcase to move and for her to stand in. When the bookcase swept closed behind her, her heart pounded—it was difficult to breathe—too like the sarcophagus in which she'd so recently been sealed.

She steadied herself with deep inhalations. There was no lack of air, just nerves too tautly strung in this tiny, closed space. How would she get back out? She saw no mechanism for unlocking the bookcase. She shrugged, telling herself she was going forward, anyway, not retreating, and the way forward was clear, a door outlined by the lamplight.

She lifted the latch and opened it, cool air exhaling into the little room. The lamp sketched out stone steps descending into blackness. Three unlit tapers sat on the top step, but she bypassed them and ignited hers. Closing the door behind her, she began a spiraling journey downward.

She plunged down and down on rough cut stone steps, the air growing increasingly damp. She felt she must surpass even the house's foundation before she reached the bottom, her bad leg quivering from the strain of bearing her own weight with each step down.

In a small chamber at the bottom she found another door, this one much older-looking and ironbound, yet when she tried it, it opened as easily as the others with no groan of ancient hinges. Hoping she'd finally found where the professor and Cade Harlowe had snuck away to, she stepped boldly across the threshold into a dark space dense with silence of which she could make no sense.

She brightened her taper, and even then the scene mystified her. The path before her was like a cobblestone street, and along its sides were dusty shop fronts, hitching posts, troughs. Rubble filled the spaces between and behind the buildings. Hefty beams and brick and masonry arches supported the earthen ceiling above.

"Gods," she murmured, her voice clamorous in the silent world.

Mill City must have been built right over the remains of this old city, she thought, or at least part of it. These stone and timber structures were more like what she was accustomed to in her own time than the brick of Mill City. She limped over to one shop front, her slippers raising puffs of dust, and used the tail end of her shawl to rub grime from the rippled glass. Her light revealed little of the interior but the rough plank floor riddled with debris and a table with a chair pulled slightly away as if its occupant might return at any moment. A plate and tankard draped in cobwebs also waited.

Karigan shivered and backed away. A sign hung askew from one hook over the door, drawing her eye. The sign of the Cock and Hen.

The Cock and . . . ? No! She almost dropped her taper. This could not be possible. The Cock and Hen was in the lower quarter of Sacor City. But there could be no mistake—this was *the* Cock and Hen, a disreputable inn in a rough neighborhood that nevertheless brewed the finest darkest ale in the city. She knew the sign—and the ale—well, and now she began to recognize the rest of the exterior, even as out of place as it looked underground.

Mill City had been built on top of Sacor City, or at least part of it. That was the only conclusion she could come to. The street she now stood on was the Winding Way. The revelation that her city lay buried beneath the foundations of another sent her reeling. She sat on the edge of a trough, oblivious to the dirt smudging her nightgown. "I can't be seeing this." Passing her hand over her eyes did nothing to change the scene before her.

Was all of Sacor City buried? How had this come to pass? And when? She had to keep reminding herself she

was in the future, but she could not draw herself away from the enormity of it, the sense of loss. Her time, her world, was hidden, literally buried. She shook her head and released a rattling breath.

The only one who could explain it to her was down here somewhere in this strange, but familiar, muted world, and now she was more eager than ever to find him. The way was not difficult, for footprints over the dirty, dusty cobblestones had made a clear path she could follow.

She passed buildings she recognized, though sometimes she had to think about which one was which, because of their new setting and the damage to otherwise familiar facades. There was the harness shop that made the special lightweight saddles of the Green Riders. It was next to a blacksmith's shop. She peered through the cracked window and spotted an anvil and forge still intact. If ghosts wished to visit her, she thought, this was the appropriate time and place, but not one so much as whispered past her ear or fluttered among the ruins.

More buildings were crushed beneath rubble, actually cutting off the Winding Way. The footprints veered off to a gaping doorway. There was not much inside the building to suggest what it had once been, but some broken shards of pottery littered the floor. Karigan racked her brain but could not remember.

Plain wooden stairs ascended to an upper level. They were not old, these stairs, but of a more recent construction and covered with dirty footprints. She followed them, climbing into an upper story and landing in a room that could have once been a bed chamber. She discovered another set of stairs that led into the attic. Up she went again and, once in the attic, discovered steep, narrow stairs that rose through a square cut in the roof, through which faint light trickled.

She gathered herself and climbed again, clutching a rope that served as a handrail, and rose through the roof, the roof of the old city, as she thought of it, and for several lengths through a vertical shaft of stone and rubble braced with cross beams. Eventually she emerged into a long chamber of bricks with barrel-arched ceilings. The room smelled dank, of wet stone. Her light fell across hulking metal contraptions that shone with a dull green gleam, rust eating painted surfaces. They'd valves and levers and gears, and she had no idea what they were supposed to be used for.

The faint light she'd seen had not originated here but spilled down the shaft of a stairwell behind her. *Got to keep going.* She entered the stairwell, took a deep breath, and climbed again, her feet ringing dully on wrought iron steps, the handrail clammy to her touch. When she spiraled up to the top of the first flight, she found a lamp at low glow and a door hanging open. She stepped out onto a wooden floor splotted with dark stains, the air thick with dust and a metallic, oily tang.

Even at full brightness, her taper could not begin to illuminate the vast space. She couldn't tell how far the long room extended, but support beams marched down its length like lines of soldiers before vanishing into the dark. Shafts were attached to the ceiling, and wide belts of looping leather dangling down from pulleys swayed in subtle air currents like beckoning nooses. She shuddered.

Deeper in the room, her light glinted on square-framed skeletons of steel heaped in a jumble of parts: rollers embedded with fine metal tines, toothy beveled gears the size of cart wheels, rods and pipes and chains, and many other unidentifiable pieces. She could not fathom their purpose or how they might all fit together—an impossible puzzle. The building groaned and complained with settling noises, and its listless air currents stirred loose tendrils of her hair.

To Karigan it was as if the building echoed the energy, activity that it must have once known; that something of it remained captured here, restless, contained by boarded up windows and disuse.

She shuddered again and backed into the stairwell. No one was in that darkened room of derelict mechanicals. More light shone from above, so she climbed up the spiraling stairs yet one more level, and when she stepped through the door into the dazzling light, she stood blinking some time before her eyes adjusted. When they did, she could see the actual proportions of the room. It was longer than even the king's throne room, and wider, too.

Chandeliers, half a dozen of them, hung down the center of the room between whatever shafts were still attached to the ceiling. The floor, unlike the rough one below, shone to a high polish, and it was almost like standing in a ballroom, though the battered support beams and brick walls were clues to the room's more utilitarian past. The windows were not simply boarded up, but were hung with heavy velvet draperies. Lamp sconces provided additional light.

She was not alone.

About halfway down the room and to the left, Cade Harlowe, stripped down to his trousers and quite unaware of her, punched at a heavy oblong bag hanging from the ceiling, the sweat gleaming on his muscles. The wall near him held racks of swords, pikes, staffs, and other weapons. Weights were lined up along the wall, as well.

Standing near him was the professor, watching his student as critically as any arms master, still dressed in his fancy attire. He noticed Karigan first, his gaze alighting on her. Then Cade Harlowe paused what he was doing and followed the professor's gaze. The three of them stood frozen like that for a long time, just staring at one another, then the professor broke the spell by striding toward her with his arms outstretched.

"How very good to see you up and about, my dear," he said, his voice ringing out across the large space. "I see your curiosity finally got the better of you."

SANCTUARY

Karigan waited as the professor crossed the long space between them, followed by Cade Harlowe, who grabbed a towel along the way to mop his face. Would she get any answers from them, including one to explain what this building was all about? Or would her "uncle" continue to play the mysterious professor and try to put her off. When they reached her, he was all smiles beneath his mustache, but Cade Harlowe's expression was one of suspicion, which must, she thought, match her own.

"I told you she would come looking sooner or later, didn't I, Cade?"

"Yes, Professor." Cade's tone was bland.

"And I would bet all my sweet, old auntie's finest gems—she had seven husbands, you know—that our young lady is the one who caused the disarray in my office tonight."

Karigan chose not to respond one way or the other.

"Well, I suppose it was not unexpected," the professor said as if to himself.

She wondered if he meant the shambles of his office or her causing it.

The professor came back to himself, his gaze turning to one of concern. "I'd hazard you've had a tiring journey to find us, my dear. Shall we retire to someplace more comfortable?" He extended his arm.

Her leg *was* sore after all the stairs. Cade relieved her of her taper, and she took the professor's arm. The professor walked slowly to accommodate her limp, and she was grateful to be able to lean on him.

"How do you like my little sanctuary?" he asked, waving his arm at their surroundings.

"It's . . . it's not little—it's huge! What is this place?"

"It is what remains of the original Josston Mills complex, number four," he replied. His smile faltered slightly. "Five floors of industry in this one building alone. This floor was once the spinning room."

Karigan tried to imagine how many spinners and spinning wheels it would take to fill the place but found she couldn't quite. The professor continued to smile down at her as if he guessed just what she was thinking. She shook her head.

"Nowadays, it is believed this building is but a shell I occasionally use for storage."

"Is it?"

"I do use it for storage," he replied, "though it is not precisely a shell."

As they crossed the great length of the room, her wonder grew. The far end appeared to be an opulent sitting area and library with stout furniture upholstered in rich leather. The wood of furnishings and shelves was dark, burnished with brass fittings. An old Durnesian carpet covered the floor. It was not old in that it looked worn or faded, but that its dyed weavings were of a texture and deepened tint that suggested age. Only the most masterfully made Durnesian carpets aged so well. It also featured the "homestead pattern" that had belonged to a clan of the most revered of makers.

A chipped and hairlined marble sculpture of the god Aeryc cradling the crescent moon stood beside a handsome desk. At first she took the sculpture for granted because she was used to seeing such iconography in her own Sacoridia, but then it occurred to her she'd heard no reference to Aeryc or Aeryon or any other gods since her arrival in this time. She remembered Mornhavon the Black and his Arcosians had worshipped only one god and thought the Sacoridians heathens for supporting an entire pantheon.

As if one god could take care of an entire world's needs, she thought with derision.

Did Mornhavon require his empire's citizens to worship the one god, or did he allow them to choose? She couldn't imagine he would allow choice in religion or in any other matter of importance.

She released the professor's arm and limped to the shelves which rose from floor to ceiling, with a rolling ladder to reach the uppermost heights. Unlike the library in the house, she found some titles she recognized, such as *Lint's Wordage* and *The Journeys of Gilan Wylloland*, the latter an old favorite of hers. She pulled down another book, *The Sealender Legacy*, and found the book largely charred. In fact most of the books she checked were damaged and had the look of age upon them. Unlike the carpet she stood on, they had not done well through time, though it looked like someone had taken care to clean and mend them as much as was feasible.

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