

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHORS OF THE DEATH GATE CYCLE

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LEGACY OF THE DARKSWORD



Legacy of the Darksword

The Darksword Setting

Subsequent volume

Margaret Weis & Tracy Hickman

Dedicated to all our readers who keep asking us, “And then what happens?”

CHAPTER ONE

Finally, a child may be born to the rarest of all the Mysteries, the Mystery of Life. The thaumaturgist, or catalyst, is the dealer in magic, though he does not possess it in great measure himself. It is the catalyst, as his name implies, who takes the Life from the earth and the air; from fire and water, and, by assimilating it within his own body, is able to enhance it and transfer it to the magi who can use it.

FORGING THE DARKSWORD

Saryon, now somewhere in his sixties or seventies, as reckoned by Earth time, lived very quietly in a small flat in Oxford, England. He was uncertain of the year of his birth in Thimhallan, and thus I, who write this story out for him, cannot provide his exact age. Saryon never did adapt well to the concept of Earth time relative to Thimhallan time. History has meaning only to those who are its products and time is but a means of measuring history, whether it be the history of the past moment or the history of the past billion moments. For Saryon, as for so many of those who came to Earth from the once-magical land of Thimhallan, time began in another realm—a beautiful, wondrous, fragile bubble of a realm. Time ended when that bubble burst, when Joram pricked it with the Darksword.

Saryon had no need for measuring time anyway. The catalyst (though no longer required in this world, that is how he always termed himself) had no appointments, kept no calendar, rarely watched the evening news, met no one for lunch. I was his amanuensis, or so he was pleased to call me. I preferred the less formal term of secretary. I was sent to Saryon by command of Prince Garald.

I had been a servant in the Prince's household and was supposed to have been Saryon's servant, too, but this he would not allow. The only small tasks I was able to perform for him were those I could sneak in before he was aware of it or those which I wrested from him by main force.

I would have been a catalyst myself, had our people not been banished from Thimhallan. I had very little magic in me when I left that world as a child, and none at all now after living for twenty years in the world of the mundane. But I do have a gift for words and this was one reason my prince sent me to Saryon. Prince Garald deemed it essential that the story of the Darksword be told. In particular, he hoped that by reading these tales, the people of Earth would come to understand the exiled people of Thimhallan.

I wrote three books, which were immensely well received by the populace of Earth, less well received among my own kind. Who among us likes to look upon himself and see that his life was one of cruel waste and overindulgence, greed, selfishness, and rapacity? I held a mirror to the people of Thimhallan. They looked into it and did not like the ugly visage that glared back at them. Instead of blaming themselves, they blamed the mirror. My master and I had few visitors. He had decided to pursue his study of mathematics, which was one reason that he had moved from the relocation camps to Oxford, in order to be near the libraries connected with that ancient and venerable university. He did not attend classes.

but had a tutor, who came to the flat to instruct him. When it became apparent that the teacher had nothing more to teach and that, indeed, the teacher was learning from the pupil, the tutor ceased to make regular visits, although she still dropped by occasionally for tea.

This was a calm and blessed time in Saryon's tumultuous life, for—although he does not say so—I can see his face light when he speaks of it and I hear a sadness in his voice, as if regretting that such a peaceful existence could not have lasted until middle age faded, like comfortable jeans, into old age, from thence to peaceful eternal sleep.

That was not to be, of course, and that brings me to the evening that seems to me, looking back on it, to be the first pearl to slide off the broken string, the pearls that were days of Earth time and that would start falling faster and faster from that night on until there would be no more pearls left, only the empty string and the clasp that once held it together. And those would be tossed away, a useless.

Saryon and I were pottering about his flat late that night, putting on the teakettle, an act which always reminded him—so he was telling me—of another time when he'd picked up a teakettle and it wasn't a teakettle. It was Simkin.

We had just finished listening to the news on the radio. As I said, Saryon had not up until now been particularly interested in the news of what was happening on Earth, news which he always felt had little to do with him. But this news appeared, unfortunately, to have more to do with him than he or anyone else wanted and so he paid attention to it.

The war with Hch'nyv was not going well. The mysterious aliens, who had appeared so suddenly, with such deadly intent, had conquered yet another one of our colonies. Refugees, arriving back on Earth, told terrible tales of the destruction of their colony, reported innumerable casualties, and stated that the Hch'nyv had no desire to negotiate. They had, in fact, slain those sent to offer the colony's surrender. The objective of the Hch'nyv appeared to be the annihilation and eradication of every human in the galaxy.

This was somber news. We were discussing it when I saw Saryon jump, as if he had been startled by some sudden noise, though I myself heard nothing.

"I must go to the front door," he said. "Someone's there."

Saryon, who is reading the manuscript, stops me at this point to tell me somewhat testily, that I should break here and elaborate on the story of J or an and Simkin and the Darksword or no one will understand what is to come.

I reply that if we backtrack and drag our readers along that old trail with us (the trail most have walked themselves already!) we would likely lose more than a few along the way. I assure him that the past will unfold as we go along. I hint gently that I am a skilled journalist, with some experience in this field. I remind him that he was fairly well satisfied with the work I'd done on the first three books, and beg him to allow me to return to this story.

Being essentially a very humble man, who finds it overwhelming that his memoirs should be considered so important that Prince Garald had hired me to record them, Saryon readily acknowledges my skill in this field and permits me to

continue.

~~“How odd,” Saryon remarked. “I wonder who is here at this time of night?”~~

I wondered why they did not ring the doorbell, as any normal visitor would do, indicated as much.

“They have rung it,” Saryon said softly. “In my mind, if not my ears. Can’t you hear it?”

I could not, but this was not surprising. Having lived most of his life in Thimhallan, he was far more attuned to the mysteries of its magicks than I, who had been only five when Saryon rescued me, an orphan, from the abandoned Font.

Saryon had just lit the flame beneath the teakettle, preparatory to heating water for a bedtime tisane which we both enjoyed and which he insisted on making for me. He turned from the kettle to stare at the door and, like so many of us, instead of going immediately to answer it or to look through the window to see who was there, he stood in the kitchen in his nightshirt and slippers and wondered again aloud.

“Who could be wanting to see me at this time of night?”

Hope’s wings caused his heart to flutter. His face flushed with anticipation. Hope, who had served him so long, knew exactly what he was thinking.

Many years ago (twenty years ago, to be precise, although I doubt if he himself had any concept of the passage of so much time), Saryon had said good-bye to two people he loved. He had neither seen nor heard from those two in all this time. He had no reason to think that he should ever hear from them again, except that Joram had promised, when they parted, that when his son was of age, he should send that son to Saryon.

Now, whenever the doorbell rang or the knocker knocked, Saryon envisioned Joram’s son standing on the doorstep. Saryon pictured that child with his father’s long, curling black hair, but lacking, hopefully, his father’s red-black inner fire.

The psychic demand for Saryon to go to the front door came again, this time with such a forceful intensity and impatience that I myself was aware of it—a startling sensation for me. Had the doorbell in fact been sounding, I could envision the person leaning on the button. There were lights on in the kitchen which could be seen from the street, and whoever was out there, mentally issuing us commands, knew that Saryon and I were home.

Jolted out of his reverie by the second command, Saryon shouted, “I’m coming,” which statement had no hope of being heard through the thick door that led from the kitchen.

Retiring to his bedroom, he grabbed his flannel robe, put it on over his nightshirt. I was still dressed, having never developed a liking for nightshirts. He walked hastily back through the kitchen, where I joined him. We went from there through the living room and out of the living room into the small entryway. He turned on the outside light, only to discover that it didn’t work.

“The bulb must have burned out,” he said, irritated. “Turn on the hall light.”

I flipped the switch. It did not work either.

Strange, that both bulbs should have chosen this time to burn out.

~~"I don't like this, Master,"~~ I signed, even as Saryon was unlocking the door, preparing to open it.

I had tried many times to convince Saryon that, in this dangerous world, there might be those who would do him harm, who would break into his house, rob and beat him, perhaps even murder him. Thimhallan may have had its faults, but such sordid crimes were unknown to its inhabitants, who feared centaurs and giant dragons and faeries and peasant revolts, not hoodlums and thugs and serial killers.

"Look through the peephole," I admonished.

"Nonsense," Saryon returned. "It must be Joram's child. And how could I see him through the peephole in the dark?"

Picturing a baby in a basket on our doorstep (he had, as I said, only the vaguest notion of time), Saryon flung open the door.

We did not find a baby. What we saw was a shadow darker than night standing on the doorstep, blotting out the lights of our neighbors, blotting out the light of the stars.

The shadow coalesced into a person dressed in black robes, who wore a black cowl pulled up over the head. All I could see of the person by the feeble light reflected from the kitchen far behind me were two white hands, folded correctly in front of the black robes, and two eyes, glittering.

Saryon recoiled. He pressed his hand over his heart, which had stopped fluttering, very nearly stopped altogether. Fearful memories leapt out of the darkness brought on us by the black-clothed figure. The fearful memories jumped on the catalyst. "Duuk-tsarith!" he cried through trembling lips. Duuk-tsarith, the dreaded Enforcers of the world of Thimhallan. On our first coming—under duress—to this new world, where magic was diluted, the Duuk-tsarith had lost almost all of their magical power. We had heard vague rumors to the effect that, over the past twenty years, they had found the means to regain what had been lost. Whether or not this was true, the Duuk-tsarith had lost none of their ability to terrify.

Saryon fell back into the entryway. He stumbled into me and, so I vaguely recollect, put his arm out as though he would protect me. Me! Who was supposed to protect him!

He pressed me back against the wall of the small entryway, leaving the door standing wide open, with no thought of slamming it in the visitor's face, with no thought of denying this dread visitor entry. This was one who would not be denied. I knew that as well as Saryon, and though I did make an attempt to put my own body in front of that of the middle-aged catalyst, I had no thought of doing battle.

The Duuk-tsarith glided over the threshold. With a brief gesture of his hand, he caused the door to swing silently shut behind him. He put back the cowl, revealing his face, and stared intently at Saryon for several seconds, almost as if expecting some response. Saryon was too flustered, too upset to do anything except stand on the braided rug and shiver and tremble.

The Enforcer's gaze shifted to me, entered my soul, caught and held fast to my heart, so that I feared if I disobeyed, my beating heart would stop.

The Duuk-tsarith spoke. "First, I caution you both to remain silent. It is for your own protection. Do you understand?"

The words were not spoken aloud. They were fiery letters, traced across the back of my eyes.

Saryon nodded. He didn't understand what was going on, any more than I did, but neither of us was going to argue.

"Good," said the Enforcer. "Now I am going to perform a magic spell. Do not be alarmed. It will not harm you."

The Duuk-tsarith spoke inaudible words, that came to me only in whispers. Fearfully, not terribly reassured by the Duuk-tsarith's promise, we stared around, waiting for the Almin knew what to happen.

Nothing happened, at least that I could see. The Duuk-tsarith, his finger on his lips, again to enjoin silence, led the way into the living room. We shuffled along behind him, keeping close to each other. Once we were in the living room, the Enforcer pointed one long, white finger.

A painting hung on the wall, a painting which had been acquired along with the flat and which depicted a pastoral scene of cows in a field. From behind the painting now glowed an eerie green light.

The Duuk-tsarith pointed again, this time to the phone. The same green light surrounded the phone.

The Duuk-tsarith nodded to himself, as if he'd expected to find the phenomenon, whatever it was. He didn't bother to explain. Once again, and this time emphatically, he silently cautioned us not to speak.

And then the Duuk-tsarith did a most peculiar thing. He turned with the calm repose of a guest who has been invited to remove his hat and coat and stay to tea. Moving with quiet grace among the furniture, the Enforcer walked to the window, parted the curtain a minuscule crack, and looked outside.

I was overwhelmed by a series of fleeting impressions as my brain tried frantically to grapple with the strange occurrence. At first, I thought that the Duuk-tsarith was signaling reinforcements. Logic arrived to remark dryly that the apprehension of one elderly catalyst and his scribe would hardly call for a SWA team. That first impression was replaced by another.

The Duuk-tsarith was looking outside to see if he had been followed.

Not knowing what else to do and, by now, more curious than fearful, both Saryon and I stayed with the Duuk-tsarith in the living room. Through force of habit, I fumbled for the light switch.

"You needn't bother. It will not work."

The voice of the Duuk-tsarith inside my head was vibrant and sent a mild shock through me, reminding me of the first time I had encountered electricity on this strange world.

"Don't move," the inner voice commanded.

We remained standing in the darkened living room. I could sense Saryon shivering in his nightshirt, for he'd turned the heat down in the flat and his thi

robe was woefully inadequate. I was wondering if I might be allowed to bring my master a sweater, when the Duuk-tsarith spoke silently again. And though the words were not addressed to me, I understood them.

“You don’t remember me, do you, Saryon?”

Having had many encounters with the Duuk-tsarith—all of them extremely unpleasant—Saryon later told me that he feared this must be one of the Enforcers who had caught him in the forbidden library of the Font, or maybe even one who had performed the Turning to Stone, that excruciatingly painful punishment inflicted on those catalysts who rebelled against the Church’s authority. Why one of these people should drop by Saryon’s house for a chat in the small hours of the night was beyond him. He could only stare and stammer and whisper to me something to the effect that, if the person would permit us to turn on the lights and let us see a face, such an act would aid recognition considerably.

“All will be made clear soon enough,” said the Enforcer, and it seemed to me that there was a sad quality to his words, as if the man—it was a man, I had at last ascertained that much—was disappointed that Saryon had not recognized him. “Now, follow my instructions. Return to the kitchen and prepare your tea, as you normally do. Take the cup to your bedroom, as you normally do, and lie down to read to this young man, as you normally do. Don’t deviate from your nightly habits in even one instance, either of you. You can be seen from the bedroom window. Do not think that I was followed, but I can’t be certain.”

This last sentence was not conducive to relieving our apprehension. We did as we were commanded, however. As a catalyst, Saryon was accustomed to obedience, as was I, having been raised a servant in the royal household. In this case, it made no sense for my master to stand around in his nightshirt, arguing. We went to the kitchen.

The Duuk-tsarith remained in the darkened living room, but I could feel the man’s eyes on me. It was extremely unnerving. Until now, neither Saryon nor I had realized that we had developed “nightly habits.” Consequently, when this fact was brought to our attention, and we were forced to think about what we did every night, we couldn’t remember doing any of it.

“Don’t think,” came the voice of the Duuk-tsarith. “Let your body take over. When you are settled in your bed, Father, then we will talk.”

This was not exactly the way we would have chosen to spend our evening, but we didn’t have much choice. Saryon took the Enforcer’s advice and tried not to think about what he was doing. He turned off the kettle, which had been whistling loudly, though we’d been too distraught to notice. He poured the water, stirred the tea. I added to it a plate of digestible biscuits. We tottered—tea and biscuits in hand—off to his bedroom.

The Duuk-tsarith glided along silently behind.

Saryon, remembering the duties of a host, paused, turned, and held up the teacup, asking in dumb show if his visitor would like to share our repast.

“Keep moving!” The voice in my head was urgent. Then it added, in softer tones, “No, thank you.”

Saryon went to his small bedroom, where he placed the tea and the biscuits on

the nightstand beside his bed. I pulled up the chair. Picking up the book, I found the place where we had left off reading last night.

Saryon climbed into bed and it was only when he was safely tucked beneath the sheets that he remembered he usually brushed his teeth at this point. He looked at me, made a motion of using a toothbrush. I shrugged my shoulders, helpless to advise or assist.

Flustered, he was about to mention it to the Enforcer, then changed his mind. Giving me another glance, he settled himself. He opened the book, and drank a sip of tea. I usually ate a biscuit, but at that moment, due to the dryness in my mouth, I couldn't have swallowed one and I feared I would choke.

The Duuk-tsarith, watching us from the shadowed hallway, appeared satisfied. He left momentarily, returned with a chair from the kitchen, and sat down in the hall. Again came the whispered words of magic, and both Saryon and I looked about expectantly, wondering which of the pictures on the wall was going to turn green.

None did.

"I believe," said the silent voice, "that you usually listen to music, do you not?"

Of course! Saryon had forgotten. He switched on the CD player, which was, as far as he was concerned, one of the most miraculous and wondrous devices of the technological world. Beautiful music—I recall that it was Mozart—filled the room. Saryon began to read aloud from the book *Right Ho, Jeeves* by P. G. Wodehouse, one of our favorite authors. We would have been quite content had not the shadowy figure been perched, like Poe's raven, in the hall.

"It is now safe to talk," said the Duuk-tsarith, and this time he spoke the words aloud, albeit in a low voice. He drew the cowl back from his face. "But keep your voice down. I have deactivated the devices of the D'karn-kair, but there may be others present of which I am not aware."

Now that we could talk, all the questions which had been crowding my mind fled. Not that I could have spoken them myself, but I could have let my master speak for me. I could see that Saryon was in much the same state.

He could only munch his biscuit, sip his tea, and stare. The face of the Duuk-tsarith was in the direct light and Saryon seemed to find something vaguely familiar about the man. Saryon would later tell me that he did not experience the sensation of overwhelming dread one usually feels in the presence of the Enforcers. Indeed, he felt a small thrill of pleasure at the sight of the man and, he could only have remembered who he was, knew that he would be glad to see him.

"I'm sorry, sir." Saryon faltered. "I know that I know you, but between age and failing eyesight ..."

The man smiled.

"I am Mosiah," he said.

CHAPTER TWO

One by one, after each had been coldly rebuffed by the strange, dark-haired child, the other children let Joram severely alone. But there was one among them who persisted in his attempts to be friendly. This was Mosiah.

THE DARKSWOR

I believe that Saryon would have exclaimed aloud in astonishment and pleasure, but he remembered in time the injunction to keep our voices down. He started to rise from his bed to go and enfold his old friend in a fond embrace, but the Duuk-tsarith shook his head and motioned with his hand that Saryon was to remain where he was. Although the bedroom shades were drawn, the light was visible from outside and so was the catalyst's silhouette.

Saryon could only stammer, "Mosiah ... I can't . . . I'm so sorry, my dear boy . . . twenty years . . . I'm getting old, you see, and my memory . . . not to mention my eyesight . . ."

"Don't apologize, Father," Mosiah said, falling back on the old form of address, though it was hardly applicable now. "I have changed a lot, over the years. It is no small wonder you did not recognize me."

"Indeed you have changed," said Saryon gravely, with a sorrowful glance at the black clothing of the Enforcer which Mosiah wore.

Mosiah seemed surprised. "I thought perhaps you might have heard that I had become one of the Duuk-tsarith. Prince Garald knew."

"We rarely speak, the Prince and I," said Saryon apologetically. "He felt it was best, for my own safety, or so he was kind enough to say. Remaining in contact with me would have damaged him politically. I could see that clearly. It was the main reason I left the relocation camp."

And now it was Mosiah who looked sadly upon Saryon, and the catalyst who was stricken with confusion and guilt.

"I ... deemed it was best," Saryon said, flushing. "There were those who looked at me ... if they didn't blame me, I brought back memories. . . ." His voice died away to silence.

"There are those who say you abandoned them in return for favors," Mosiah said.

I could no longer contain myself. I made a quick and violent gesture with my hand, to negate these cruel words, for I could tell that they wounded my master.

Mosiah looked wonderingly at me, not so much in astonishment that I did not speak—for he, as an Enforcer, must already know everything there was to know about me, including the fact that I was a mute—but that I was so quick to defend Saryon.

"This is Reuven," said Saryon, introducing me.

Mosiah nodded. As I said, he must have known all about me.

"He is your secretary," Mosiah said.

"That is what he has me call him," Saryon said, glancing in my direction with a fond smile. "Though it has always seemed to me that 'son' would be the more

appropriate term.”

~~I felt my skin burn with pleasure, but I only shook my head. He was dear as father to me, the Almin knows, but I would never take such a liberty.~~

“He is mute,” Saryon continued, explaining my affliction without embarrassment.

Nor did I feel any embarrassment myself. The handicap which one has had a lifetime seems more normal than not. As I had foreseen, Mosiah had advanced knowledge of this, as his next words proved.

“Reuven was only a small child when the Shattering”—the term the people of Thimhallan now use for the destruction of their way of life—“occurred. He was left an orphan. Whatever happened to him was so traumatizing that it bereft him of speech. You found him, critically ill and alone in the abandoned Font. He was brought up in the household of Prince Garald, educated in the relocation camp, and sent to you by the Prince to record the story of the Darksword. I read it,” Mosiah added, with a polite smile for me. “It was accurate, as far as it went.”

I am used to receiving mixed compliments for my work, and therefore I made no reply. It is never dignified to defend one’s creative endeavors. And I made allowances for the fact that Mosiah had been one of the central participants.

“As for my leaving the relocation camp,” Saryon said, continuing the earlier conversation, “I did what I thought was best for everyone.”

His hand holding the teacup began to shake. I rose, went to him, and removed the cup, placing it on the nightstand.

“This house is quite nice,” said Mosiah, glancing around, somewhat coldly. “Your work in the field of mathematics and Reuven’s work in literature have made you a comfortable living. Our people in the relocation camps don’t live as well as this—”

“They could if they wanted to,” Saryon said, with a flash of the old spirit.

Knowing him as I do, and knowing his history, I guessed that this must be the same driving spirit which led him to seek out the forbidden books in the Font library. The same spirit that helped Joram forge the Darksword. The same spirit that faced the Turning with such courage and kept his soul alive, though his flesh had been changed to rock.

“No barbed wire surrounds those camps,” Saryon said, speaking with increasing passion. “The guards at the gates were placed there when we first came to keep out the curious, not to prevent our people from leaving. Those guards should have been gone long ago, but our people begged for them to stay. Every person in the camp could have entered into this new world and found his or her place.

“But do they? No! They cling to some hopeless dream of returning to Thimhallan, of going back there to find—what? A land that is dead and blasted. Thimhallan has not changed since we left. It will not change, no matter how much we wish for it. The magic is gone!” Saryon’s voice was soft and aching and thrilling. “It is gone and we should accept that and go on.”

“The people of Earth do not like us,” said Mosiah.

“They like me!” Saryon said crisply. “Of course, they don’t like you. You refus

to mingle with the 'mundane,' as you call them, although many of them have a much magic in their bodies as you do in yours. Still, you shun them and isolate yourselves from them and it is no wonder they look upon you with distrust and suspicion. It was this same pride and arrogance which brought about the collapse of our world and put us into those relocation camps, and it is our pride and arrogance which keep us there!"

Mosiah would have spoken, I think, but he could not do so without raising his voice to interrupt my master, who, now conversing on his pet topic, was on his soapbox—a quaint term used by the natives of this world.

Indeed, Mosiah appeared moved by this speech. He did not reply, at first, but remained seated in thought a short space of time.

"What you say is true, Father," he said. "Or, rather, it was true at the beginning. We should have left the camp, gone forth into the world. But it was not pride which kept us behind those barricades. It was fear. Such a strange and terrifying world! Oh, admittedly, the Earthers brought in their sociologists and their psychologists, their counselors and teachers to try to help us 'fit in.' But I am afraid that they did more harm than good. The more they showed us of the wonders of this world, the more our people shrank away from them.

"Pride, yes, we had our share," he continued. "And not misplaced. Our world was beautiful. There was good in it." Mosiah leaned forward, his elbows resting on his knees, gazing earnestly at Saryon. "The Earthers could not believe in it, Father. Even the soldiers who had been there had difficulty believing what they had seen with their own eyes! On their return, they were ridiculed, and so they began to doubt their own senses, saying that we drugged them, made them see things that weren't there."

Mosiah shrugged. "The 'ologists' were kind and they tried to understand, but it was beyond their capacity to do so. Such an alien existence to them! When they looked at a young woman of twenty, to all appearances healthy and normal—by their standards—who did nothing all day but lie in bed, they could not understand what was wrong with her. When they were told that she was lying in bed because she was accustomed to floating through the air on wings of magic, that she had never walked a step in her life and had no idea how to walk, nor any inclination to do so, now that her magic was gone, they could not believe it.

"Oh, yes, I know that they appeared to accept it on the surface. All the medical tests confirmed the fact that the girl had never walked. But deep inside, in the inner core of their being, they did not believe. It is like asking them to believe in the faeries of which you wrote in your book, Reuven.

"Do you talk to your neighbors of your visit to the faeries, Father? Have you told the woman who lives next door, who is a secretary for a real-estate broker, that you were nearly seduced by the faerie queen?"

Saryon's face was exceedingly red. He stared down at the sheets, absently brushed away a few biscuit crumbs. "Of course not. It wouldn't be fair of me to expect her to understand. Her world is so ... dissimilar. . . ."

"Your books." Mosiah's penetrating gaze shifted to me. "People read them and enjoy them. But they don't believe the stories, do they? They don't believe that

such a world ever existed or that such a person as Joram ever lived. I have even heard it suggested that you pretend to have this affliction of yours to avoid interviews, because you are afraid that you would be revealed as a fraud and a fake."

Saryon glanced anxiously at me, for he was not aware that I had heard these accusations. He had gone to great lengths to spare me. I therefore took care to indicate that they caused me no concern, which, in truth, they did not, for so long as my work pleased one man, and that my master, I cared nothing for what other people thought.

"And herein was created a strange dichotomy," said Mosiah. "They do not believe us, they do not understand us, and yet they are afraid of us. They are afraid that we will regain powers they do not believe we possessed in the first place. They try to prove to themselves and to us that such power never existed. What they fear, they destroy. Or try to."

An uncomfortable silence fell between us. Saryon blinked and attempted to stifle a yawn.

"It is your normal time to retire," Mosiah said, suddenly coming back to the present. "Do so. Keep to your routine."

It was my custom to bid my master good night and go to my room, to spend some time writing before I, too, went to bed. I did so, going upstairs and turning on the light. Then I crept back down the stairs in the darkness. Mosiah did not look particularly pleased to see me, but I think he knew that nothing short of my death would keep me from my master's side.

Saryon's room was now dark. We sat in the darkness, which was not, after all, very dark, due a street lamp right outside the window. Mosiah drew his chair closer to Saryon's bed. The CD player remained on, for it was Saryon's habit to fall asleep to music. It was much past his usual hour for retiring, but he stubbornly refused to admit he was tired. Curiosity kept him awake and fighting his body's need for rest. I know because I felt the same.

"Forgive me, Father," said Mosiah at last. "I did not mean to be drawn down that old road, which, in truth, has long been overgrown with weeds and now leads nowhere. Twenty years have passed. That young girl of twenty is now a matron of forty. She learned to walk, learned to do for herself what had previously been done for her by magic. She learned to live in this world. Perhaps she has even come to believe something of what the mundanes tell her. Thimhallan is nothing but a charming memory to her, a world more real in her dreams than in her waking life. And if, at first, she chose to cling to the hope that she would return to that enchanted world of such miraculous beauty, who can blame her?"

"A world of beauty, yes," said Saryon, "but there was ugliness there, too. Ugliness made more hideous by being denied."

"The ugliness was in the hearts of men and women, was it not, Father?" Mosiah asked. "Not in the world itself."

"True, very true," Saryon said, and he sighed.

"And the ugliness lives still," Mosiah continued, and there came a change in his tone, a tension, which caused both my master and me to glance at each other and

brace ourselves, for we each felt that a blow was coming.

~~“You have not been back to the camps for many years,”~~ Mosiah said abruptly.

Saryon shook his head.

“You have not been in contact with Prince Garald or anyone else? You truly know nothing of what has been going on with our people?”

Saryon looked ashamed, but he was forced to shake his head. At that moment I would have given all I own to be able to talk, for it seemed to me that there was an accusation in Mosiah’s tone, and I would have spoken most vehemently in my master’s defense. As it was, Saryon heard me stir in restless anger. He set his hand on mine and patted it gently, counseling patience.

Mosiah was silent, wondering, perhaps, how to begin. At length he said, “You maintain that our people could leave the camps of their own free will, as you did. In the beginning, that might have been true. It is not true now.

“The guards of the mundane left us years ago. To give them credit, they fought to protect us, as they were ordered, but they were not equal to the task. After several had died and more had deserted, the army pulled out. The guards of the mundane were replaced—by our own.”

“Fought against whom? Who attacked you? I’ve heard nothing of this!” Saryon protested. “Forgive me for doubting you, Mosiah, but surely, if such dreadful things were happening, journalists from all over the world would have descended on the camp.”

“They did, Father. The Khandic Sages spoke to them. The journalists believed the lie—they could not help themselves, for the Khandic Sages coat all their bitter lies with the sweet honey of their magic.”

“Khandic Sages! Who are they?” Saryon was bewildered, shocked beyond coherent speech. “And Prince Garald . . . How could he . . . He would have never allowed ...”

“Prince Garald is a prisoner, held hostage by his love for his people.”

“A prisoner!” Saryon gaped. “Of ... of the mundanes?”

“No, not of the mundanes. And not of us Enforcers, either,” Mosiah added, with another slight smile, “for I see that question in your mind.”

“Then of whom? Or what?” Saryon asked.

“They call themselves T’kon-Duuk. In the language of the mundanes—Technomancers. They give Life to that which is Dead. Most horribly”—Mosiah’s voice lowered—“they draw Life from that which is dead. The power of their magic does not come from living things, as was true in Thimhallan, but from the death of the living. Do you remember the man who called himself Menju the Sorcerer? The man who sought to murder Joram?”

Saryon shuddered. “Yes,” he said in a low voice.

“He was one of them. I know them well,” Mosiah added. “I used to be one of them myself.”

Saryon stared aghast, unable to speak. It was left to me—the mute—to communicate. I made a gesture, pointing from Mosiah to Saryon and myself, asking in dumb show why Mosiah had come to us with this information now, at this time, and what this all had to do with us. And either he understood me

gesture or he read the question in my mind.

~~"I have come," he said, "because they are coming. Their leader, a Khandic Sage known as Kevon Smythe, is coming tomorrow to talk to you, Father. The Duuk-tsarith chose me to warn you, knowing that I am the only one of that order you would trust."~~

"The Duuk-tsarith," Saryon murmured, perplexed. "I am to trust the Duuk-tsarith and so they send Mosiah, who is now one of them and who used to be a Technomancer. Technomancy. Life from death."

Then Saryon looked up. "Why me?" he asked. But he knew the answer, as well as I did.

"Joram," Mosiah replied. "They want Joram. Or perhaps I should say, they want the Darksword."

Saryon's mouth twitched. I realized then the subtlety of my master, one might almost say cunning, if a man as gentle and honest could be accused of such a thing. Though he had not known the news Mosiah had imparted, Saryon had known from the outset that this was why Mosiah had come, and yet my master had not mentioned it. He had been stalling, gaining information. I regarded him in admiration.

"I am sorry, Mosiah," said Saryon, "but you and King Garald and this Kevon Smythe and apparently a great many other people have wasted your time. I cannot take you to Joram and Joram cannot give you the Darksword. The circumstances are all detailed in Reuven's book."

Saryon shrugged. "The Darksword no longer exists. When Joram thrust the sword into the altar in the Temple, the sword was destroyed. Joram could not give you the sword if he wanted to."

Mosiah did not appear astonished or chagrined; nor did he rise to his feet and apologize for having disturbed us over nothing.

"A Darksword exists, Father. Not the original. That, as you say, was destroyed. Joram has forged a new one. We know the truth of this, because an attempt was made to steal it."

CHAPTER THREE

This is what the Duuk-tsarith are trained for—to be aware of everything going on around them, to be in control of everything, yet manage to keep themselves above and apart from it.

FORGING THE DARKSWORD

Saryon was angry. His hand clenched, his anger flickered in his eyes. “You had no right! If Joram did forge a new sword, it must have been because he felt threatened. Was King Garald behind this? His own law clearly forbids—”

“What care do they have for the law?” Mosiah interrupted impatiently. “They know no laws but their own.”

“They?”

“The Technomancers. Don’t you understand yet, Father?” Slowly, Saryon’s hand unclenched. Fear replaced his anger. “Is Joram safe? He was supposed to send the boy to me to be educated. I’ve heard nothing and I feared—”

“Joram is alive, Father,” Mosiah said, smiling slightly. “And he is well and so is Gwendolyn. As for Joram not sending his son to you, he did not do so because he and Gwen did not have a son. They have a daughter. His only child, she is precious in his sight. He is loath to send such a jewel to this world—and I can’t say that I blame him.” Mosiah sighed.

“How do you know this?” Saryon demanded, his voice sharp. “You are spying on him!”

“Protecting him, Father,” said Mosiah softly. “Protecting him. He doesn’t know of our watchfulness. He doesn’t suspect. How could he know, who has no magic Life within him? We are careful not to disturb him or his family. Unlike others.

“Just recently, an arm of the Technomancers known as the D’karn-darah defied the law which prohibits any person from traveling to Thimhallan. They had read Reuven’s book”—he gave me a wry smile—“and they went to the altar at the Temple of the Necromancers to try to recover the Darksword. They found what one might have expected. As you know, Father, the altar itself was made of darkstone. The sword had fused with the stone.

“The Technomancers used every device known to man to try to free the sword from the most sophisticated laser cutting tools to old-fashioned blowtorches. They attempted to cut the altar itself into pieces, to haul it back to their laboratories. They did not even scratch its surface.”

Saryon appeared relieved. “Good.” He nodded. “Excellent. Thank the Almin.”

“Don’t be so quick to thank Him, yet, Father,” Mosiah said. “Failing to make a dent in the altar, the Technomancers went to Joram.”

“They were wasting their time. He would have been furious,” Saryon predicted.

Mosiah’s smile twisted. “He was furious. The Khandic Sages had never seen such fury. His anger astonished them, and they are not easily astonished. Kevo Smythe himself talked to Joram, though now Smythe denies that he did so. He thought to win Joram with his charm, but, as you know, Father, our friend is not easily charmed. Smythe offered Joram vast wealth, power, whatever he wanted i

exchange for the location of raw darkstone and the secret of the forging of Darkswords.

“Smythe barely escaped with his life. Joram threw Smythe— literally picked him up and threw him—out the door and warned him that the next time he returned he could count his life as nothing. By this time, the Border Patrol had arrived. You ask what took them so long? How the Technomancers evaded the defenses? Easily. Several of their own had managed to get themselves assigned to the duty. They shut down the alarm signals, permitted their brethren to cross the Border without notice.

“When the Border Patrol arrived, they escorted Smythe and his followers off the planet. To our relief, the Technomancers lost interest in the Darksword after that. Their scientists studied the reports brought back from Thimhallan and made the determination that the original sword could never be removed from the altar and it was therefore useless to them. Without Joram’s assistance, and without permission to take teams of workers to Thimhallan—permission that would never be granted—the search for raw darkstone would be too difficult and too costly to undertake.

“King Garald hoped that this incident would be an end of the Technomancers’ desire for the Darksword and it might have been, Father, except that Joram did a very foolish thing.”

Saryon looked as pained and unhappy as if he himself had been responsible for Joram’s behavior. “He forged a new sword.”

“Precisely. We are not certain how. Smythe’s visit had made Joram suspicious and paranoid—”

“Made him feel as if he were being watched,” Saryon interrupted.

Mosiah paused a moment, then slightly smiled. “I have never known you to be sarcastic, Father. Very well. I grant that Joram had some basis for his feelings. But if he had only gone to King Garald or General Boris instead of trying to fight the whole world all by himself!”

“Battling life alone was always Joram’s way,” Saryon said, and his voice was filled with affectionate sorrow and understanding. “His blood is that of Emperor. He comes from a long line of rulers who held the fate of nations in their hands. To ask for help would be a sign of weakness. You recall the effort it took him to ask me to help him create the Darksword. He was—”

Saryon paused. I had been wondering when this would occur to him.

“Joram could not have forged a Darksword,” he said excitedly. “Not without a catalyst. I drew Life from the world, gave Life to the Darksword, which in turn used that Life to drain Life from those who possessed it.”

“He didn’t need you to forge the sword itself, Father. He only needed you to enhance its abilities.”

“But without a catalyst to do that, the sword is no more dangerous than any other sword. Why would the Technomancers still want it?”

“Consider the number of catalysts among our people, Father. Catalysts living in poverty in the relocation camps, who would be more than willing to exchange their gifts for the promise of wealth and power from the Technomancers. Though

the corrupt Bishop Vanya is now dead, his legacy lives on among some of his followers.”

“Yes, I can see how that could be true,” said Saryon sadly. “How did Joram manage to escape the watchful eye of the Duuk-tsarith long enough to forge the sword?”

Mosiah shrugged and spread his hands. “Who knows? Such a feat would be relatively simple, especially if he had an amulet made of darkstone. Or, for all we know, he forged this sword years ago, before we began to keep watch. None of that matters now, however. We attempted to keep word of this new Darksworn secret, but the Technomancers found out. Their interest has been rekindled.”

“Are Joram and his family in danger?” Saryon asked anxiously.

“Not for the moment, mainly because of the efforts of the Duuk-tsarith. Ironically isn’t it, Father. Those who once sought Joram’s death now risk death themselves to guard his life.”

“You?” Saryon asked. “You’re risking death?”

“Yes,” Mosiah replied, very calmly. He gestured around the darkened room. “Thus the reason for these precautions. The T’kon-Duuk are eager to get their hands on me. I know too many of their secrets, you see, Father. I am a great danger to them. I have come to warn you of them, of the techniques they will try to use to persuade you to take them with you to Joram—”

Saryon raised a hand to halt the flow of words. Mosiah ceased speaking instantly, with a quiet respect for the elderly catalyst which did much to increase his favor with me. I could never trust him completely, not while he wore the black robes of the Enforcers. The Duuk-tsarith never worked for just one end. They worked for several and sought to gain the middle into the bargain.

“I will not go,” Saryon said firmly. “Have no fear of that. I would be of no use. I don’t know what you or they or anyone else thinks I could do.”

“Joram respects and trusts you, Father. Your influence with him is—” Mosiah broke off.

He was staring at me. They were both staring at me. I had made a noise. I must, I realize, have sounded very strange—a guttural sort of croak in my throat. It made a signal to my master.

“Reuven says that there is something out there,” Saryon said.

The words had not yet left Saryon’s lips before Mosiah was standing next to me. This sudden movement of his was at least as startling as the apparition I thought I had seen outside the window. One moment he was across the room from me, sitting in the darkened hallway, and the next instant he was by my side, peering out the window. In his fluid, silent motion, he was one with the shadow. Imagine my astonishment when, glancing back at my master to be certain he was all right, I caught a glimpse of Mosiah, seated in his chair!

I realized, then, that the Enforcer next to me was insubstantial. Mosiah, so to speak, had been sent on an errand by its master.

“What did you see? Tell me! Immediately!” he demanded. The words blazed in my mind.

I signaled with my hands. Saryon translated.

“Reuven says he thinks he saw a person dressed all in silver—”

~~Mosiah—the Mosiah seated in the chair—was on his feet. His shadow had~~ returned to its body.

“They are here,” he said. “The D’karn-darah. Blood-doom knights. Either they followed me or they have come for their own reasons. I fear it is the latter. You are not safe here, either of you. You must come with me. Now!”

“We’re not dressed!” Saryon protested.

It must be a very real and present danger which sends an elderly man dashing out into the cold winter night clad only in his nightshirt and bedslippers.

“You don’t need to be,” Mosiah replied. “Your bodies aren’t going anywhere except to bed. Follow my instructions exactly. Father, remain where you are. Reuven, go upstairs to your room and climb into your bed.”

I was not happy at the thought of leaving my master, though what I could have done against the power of the Duuk-tsarith was open to question. Saryon indicated with a nod that we were to obey Mosiah and that is what I did. I urged Mosiah to care for my master and left to go upstairs to my small room.

Saryon always waited until he heard me in the bedroom, which was on the level above his, before turning out the downstairs light. Tonight was the exception since his light was already off. As I have said, it was usually my practice to spend some time writing, but—acting on Mosiah’s orders—I abandoned this custom and retired immediately to my bed. I turned out my light and the house was dark.

Lying alone in the darkness, I began to be afraid. It is easy to frighten oneself at this time of night. I recalled childhood terrors of monsters lurking in the closets. The fear I experienced could not be banished by a flashlight, however. I wondered why I was experiencing this feeling of dread and I realized it was because I felt Mosiah’s fear.

Whatever is out there in the night must be terrible, I thought, to have frightened someone as powerful as the Duuk-tsarith.

I lay in my bed, ears stretched to catch every sound. The night had its usual noises, I suppose, but they were all alarming to me, who had never before paid them much heed. The bark of a dog, the whine and snarl of fighting cats, a lone automobile traveling up the street. I invested these with such sinister meaning that when Mosiah’s words again lit up my mind, I was so startled that my shudders shook the bed frame.

“Come to me,” said Mosiah. “Not your body. Leave that behind. Let your soul rise from its shell and walk with me.”

I had no idea what the man was talking about.

I think I would have laughed—in fact, I am afraid that I did giggle, perhaps from nervous tension—except that I felt his dire urgency. Bewildered, I lay in my bed, wondering what I was supposed to do, wondering if my master knew what to do. Mosiah—or perhaps I should say the “shadow” of Mosiah—took form in the darkness, standing at the foot of the bed.

He held out his hand to me. “It is quite simple,” he said. “You are coming with me. Your body is staying behind. My body is downstairs right now. Yet here I stand before you. Picture yourself rising up out of bed and walking with me. You

are a writer. You must have traveled like this in your imagination many times. When I read your description of Merilon, I could see it again in my mind, it was so vivid. You are a professional day-dreamer, one might say. Simply concentrate a little bit more."

And when I did not immediately move, Mosiah's tone sharpened. "Saryon will not leave without you. You are putting him in danger."

He knew that would rouse me. It would have roused me from my grave. I closed my eyes and imagined myself rising up from my bed and joining Mosiah. At first, nothing happened. I was in such a flutter of excitement and fear that it was difficult to concentrate.

"Relax," Mosiah said softly, hypnotically. "Relax and slough off the heaviness of the body that weighs you down."

His words no longer burned in my mind, but seemed to flow through it like running water. I found myself relaxing, letting the water run over me. My body did, in fact, feel very heavy, so heavy that I knew I could not lift it. And yet, there was the imperative that I had to leave!

I stood up and I walked over to join Mosiah. When I looked back, I was not surprised to see the heavy body still lying in the bed, slumbering soundly, to all appearances.

My fears were forgotten in my wonder and awe.

I started to move toward the door, thinking to go through it and down the stairs to my master's bedroom, as I was accustomed, but Mosiah stopped me.

"You are no longer constrained by physical barriers, Reuven. A thought will take you to Saryon."

And he spoke truly. The moment I thought about being with my master, I was there beside him. At the sight of me, Saryon smiled and nodded and then hesitated, as if having to relearn skills long forgotten, his soul left his body.

I was not surprised to see his spirit suffused with a soft radiant white glow; a distinct contrast to Mosiah, whose spirit seemed cloaked with the same black robes his body wore.

My master was pained by this, as I could tell. And so could Mosiah.

"Once—you remember, Father—my soul was bright and crystal clear as Reuven's. The dark and terrible things I have seen since have left their mark upon me. But we must hurry. They will wait only until they think you are asleep. Don't be afraid, I will not let them harm either of you."

Mosiah's soul slid back into its body. He spoke a word, reached out with his hand as if to some invisible door, pushed on nothing, and walked inside.

"Hurry!" he commanded. "Follow me."

The mind thinks of the strangest things at the most inappropriate times. I remembered, suddenly, a television cartoon I had seen as a child, in which the character—perhaps a rabbit, I'm not certain—is being chased through the forest by a hunter with a gun. The rabbit is cornered, apparently, until he opens a hole in the ground. In the cartoon, he crawls inside, and pulls the hole in after him, leaving the hunter extremely befuddled.

Mosiah had done the very same thing. He had opened a hole in our bedroom

and was urging us to crawl inside!

Saryon, having lived for many, many years in the magical world of Thimhallan was much more accustomed to such arcane manifestations than I was. He immediately entered the hole, then beckoned to me to follow. I started to cross the room, remembered that I didn't have to rely on my feet, and wished myself a my master's side.

I was in the hole. The hole closed behind me and formed a bubble around us holding us suspended in the air, floating somewhere near the ceiling of Saryon's bedroom.

"A Corridor?" Saryon asked, amazed. "Here on Earth?"

I must mention, by the way, that we did not speak, but communicated mind to mind. And it occurred to me that, in this spirit realm, I was no longer mute. I could talk and be heard. The knowledge filled me with such trembling joy and terrible confusion that I was immediately rendered more silent than I had ever been in the physical realm.

"Not as you mean it, Father. Not a Corridor in time and space such as we have on Thimhallan," Mosiah replied. "That skill has been lost to us, and we have not regained it. But we do have the ability to slip inside one of time's folds."

I must try to explain the sensation of being hidden in a "fold" of time, as Mosiah called it. The only way I can put this is to say that it was very much like hiding behind the folds of a heavy curtain. And, in fact, I began to feel an almost smothering constraint upon me, which is caused by, so I learned later, the knowledge that time was passing for my body and I—the spirit— was standing still.

The sensation is not as bad, I understand, for those who enter the fold with both mind and body, for one has only to step out again to be caught up in time's flow. But, despite the fact that my body was slumbering, I began to feel a panic inside me akin to that felt by someone fearing he may miss the last train home. The train—i.e., my body—was moving on ahead, and I was running frantically to catch up. I think I would have attempted to escape, then and there, but I would not leave Saryon.

I found out later that he felt the same, but that he would not leave because of me. We laughed over that, but our laughter was hollow.

"Shh, hush! Look!" Mosiah cautioned.

He did not silence us so that we would not be heard—for that was not possible, not even for the D'karn-darah. He silenced us that we might hear them. What we heard and what we saw chilled us.

Though we could move through physical barriers, we could not see through them. Trapped inside time's fold, we could not move to another part of the house or see what was transpiring in any other part of the house except Saryon's bedroom. My hearing is acute, however, and the nervous tension I was under accentuated it. I heard a slight clicking sound, which was our front-door lock giving way. The creak of the door's hinges (which Saryon had been asking me to oil) meant that the front door was being stealthily opened. At the same time I heard the snick of the lock of the back door, heard the door itself scrape across

the mud rug which we had placed at the entrance.

Whoever had been out there had entered the house by the front and by the back. But try as I might, I could not hear them moving at all through the front part of the house. One of them was in the bedroom before I was fully aware of his coming.

He was clad all in paper-thin silver robes that clung to his body and crackled faintly as he moved, occasionally emitting tiny blue sparks, like the fur of a cat in the darkness. His face was plastered with the same paper-thin silver, so that only the outline of features—a nose and mouth—were visible. Silver fabric covered his hands and feet like a second skin.

He stood in the bedroom and Mosiah, with a whispered thought, called our attention to a strange phenomenon. The machines in the bedroom knew that D'karn-darah was there. The machines responded to his coming.

The machines' response was not overt or dramatic. I would not have noticed it except for Mosiah's mention. The bedroom's overhead light, which had, of course, been turned off, flickered on. A faint hum of music came from the compact-disc player. The reading lamp gave a feeble gleam.

The D'karn-darah ignored all this and went immediately to Saryon's body, which continued to sleep soundly. He put out a silver-covered hand and shook the catalyst by the shoulder.

"Saryon!" he said loudly.

Beside me, I could feel Saryon's spirit shiver. I was thankful, then, for Mosiah's arrival and his timely warning. If my master had been awakened in the night and seen such a horrific sight bending over him, he might never have recovered from the shock.

At that moment I heard a female voice say "Reuven!" loudly. I felt a slight brushing sensation across my shoulder. Then I knew that the second person, the one who had entered by the back door, had gone to my room. She was standing over my body.

The D'karn-darah shook Saryon again, more forcibly, turning the sleeping body over in the bed. "Saryon!" the man repeated, and his voice was harsh.

I trembled, for I was afraid he would do Saryon some harm. Mosiah again reassured both of us.

"They will not hurt you," he repeated. "They do not dare. They know you may be of use to them."

The one who had been in my room now appeared in Saryon's bedchamber.

"Same thing?" she asked.

"Yes," answered the D'karn-darah who stood beside my master. "Their souls have fled. They were alerted to our coming."

"Duuk-tsarith."

"Of course. Undoubtedly the one named Mosiah, that Enforcer who was once the catalyst's friend."

"You were right, then. You said we would find him here."

"He has been here. He is probably still here, hiding in one of their cursed timber folds, no doubt. And the other two are probably with him right now. Very

possibly"—the man's silver faceless face turned and gazed around the bedroom—~~"they are listening to us at this moment."~~

"Then it is simple. Torture the body. Pain will cause their spirits to return. They will be only too glad, after a while, to tell us where to find the Enforcer."

The female D'karn-darah raised her hand, and where before had been five fingers were now five long steel needles. Electricity began to arc from one to another. She reached the hand with the horribly crackling needles toward Saryon's defenseless form.

Her partner halted her, his own hand closing around her wrist.

"The Khandic Sages will be here tomorrow, working their own methods of persuasion. They would know that we had been here and they would not be pleased."

"They know that we are hunting this Enforcer. They want him as much as we do."

"Yes, but they want this catalyst more." The D'karn-darah sounded irritated. "Very well, we will leave him to them. A pity we could not have arrived a few moments sooner. We would have been able to capture the Duuk-tsarith. As it is, our meeting is only delayed, Enforcer!" He spoke to the air. "And, you, Catalyst. The silver face turned toward the figure in the bed. "I leave this, my . . . business card."

He opened the palm of his gloved hand, reached into his other palm, gave a twist, freeing some object—I could not see what. He tossed that object onto the bed, at the feet of Saryon's slumbering figure. Then the two of them left the bedroom, left the house by the back door.

At their departure, the machines in the house returned to normal. The lights went off, the CD player ceased to play.

We waited, hidden, for some time, to make certain the D'karn-darah were gone and that this was no trick to lure us out of hiding. When Mosiah permitted us to return, my spirit drifted back to find my body. I looked down upon myself.

This was much different than looking into a mirror, for the mirror shows us what we see every day, what we have grown accustomed to seeing. Before now, I had never seen myself with such clarity. And though I was eager to return to Saryon and had questions to ask of Mosiah, I was so entranced by this ability to see myself as a casual observer might see me that I took a few moments to do just that.

Physical attributes I knew well. The mirror shows us these. Fair hair, worn long, that someone in my childhood once called "corn silk." Brown eyes beneath eyebrows that I did not like. They were thick and dark brown, in stark contrast to my fair hair, and gave me a grave and overly serious aspect. The features of my face tended to be sharp, with prominent cheekbones and a nose that was called aquiline. It would grow beaky as I aged.

Being young, my body was lithe, although certainly not strong. Exercise of the mind suited me far better than running very fast on a machine that took me nowhere. Yet now I looked at those thin hands and spindly arms with disfavor. Saryon was in danger, how could I defend him?

I found that I did not have the leisure to spend long on this inspection. The nearer my spirit drew to my body, the more it longed to return, and I had the impression that I dove down to my body from a great height. I awoke, shaking, stomach clenching, as one does from a falling dream. And I have wondered, ever since, if perhaps those dreams aren't really the first tentative journeys our spirits make.

I sat up in my bed, shaking off the feelings of sleep that clung to my body. Hurriedly grabbing my robe, I wrapped it around myself, and switching on the hall light, hastened down the stairs. Light came from Saryon's bedroom. I found my master, looking as groggy as I felt, staring at the object which the D'karndarah had left upon the blanket.

"It will not harm you," Mosiah was saying as I entered. "You may pick it up, if you like."

"I will do so, sir," I signed, and swooped down upon the object, gathering it into my hand before Saryon could touch it.

Mosiah watched me with a slight smile, which was, I think, approving. Saryon just shook his head with fond exasperation.

When I was certain that the object was benign, not likely to explode or burst into flame or—I don't know what I'd expected exactly—I opened my hand and held it out. Saryon and I peered down on it wonderingly.

"What is it?" he asked, puzzled.

"Death," said Mosiah.

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