And it shall come to pass that what men made shall be shattered, and the Shadow shall lie across the Pattern of the Age, and the Dark One shall once more lay his hand upon the world of man. Women shall weep and men quail as the nations of the earth are rent like rotting cloth. Neither shall anything stand nor abide . . .

Yet one shall be born to face the Shadow, born once more as he was born before and shall be born again, time without end. The Dragon shall be Reborn, and there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth at his rebirth. In sackcloth and ashes shall he clothe the people, and he shall break the world again by his coming, tearing apart all ties that bind. Like the unfettered dawn shall he blind us, and burn us, yet shall the Dragon Reborn confront the Shadow at the Last Battle, and his blood shall give us the Light. Let tears flow, O ye people of the world. Weep for your salvation.

- from The Karaethon Cycle: The Prophecies of the Dragon,

as translated by Ellaine Marise'idin Alshinn,
Chief Librarian at the Court of Arafel,
in the Year of Grace 231 of the New Era, the Third Age

PROLOGUE
In the Shadow

The man who called himself Bors, at least in this place, sneered at the low murmuring that rolled around the vaulted chamber like the soft gabble of geese. His grimace was hidden by the black silk mask that covered his face, though, just like the masks that covered the hundred other faces in the chamber. A hundred black masks, and a hundred pairs of eyes trying to see what lay behind them.

CHAPTER
4
Summoned

CHAPTER
5
The Shadow in Shienar

CHAPTER
6
Dark Prophecy

"Their throats were cut," Ingtar said. "Both good men, and yet they were butchered like pigs. It was done from inside. Someone killed them, then opened the gate. Someone who could get close to them without suspicion. Someone they knew."
Rand looked at the empty cell where Padan Fain had been. "But that means . . . ."
"Yes. There are Darkfriends inside Fal Dara. Or were. We will soon know if that's the case. Kajin is checking now to see if anyone is missing. Peace! Treachery in Fal Dara keep!" Scowling, he looked around the dungeon, at the men waiting for him. They all had swords, worn over feastday clothes, and some had helmets. "We aren't doing any good here. Out! Everyone!" Rand joined the withdrawal. Ingtar tapped Rand's jerkin. "What is *this*? Have you decided to become a stableman?"
"It's a long story," Rand said. "Too long to tell here. Maybe some other time." Maybe never, if I'm lucky. Maybe I can escape in all this confusion. No, I can't. Not until I know Egwene's all right. And Mat. Light, what will happen to him without the dagger? "I suppose Lord Agelmar's doubled the guard on all the gates."
"Tripled," Ingtar said in tones of satisfaction. "No one will pass those gates, from inside or out. As soon as Lord Agelmar heard what had happened, he ordered that no one was to be allowed to leave the keep without his personal permission."
As soon as he heard . . . ? "Ingtar, what about before? What about the earlier order keeping everyone in?"
"Earlier order? What earlier order? Rand, the keep was not closed until Lord Agelmar heard of this. Someone told you wrong."
Rand shook his head slowly. Neither Ragan nor Tema would have made up something like that. And even if the Amyrlin Seat had given the order, Ingtar would have to know of it. So who? And how? He glanced sideways at Ingtar, wondering if the Shienaran was lying. You really are going mad if you suspect Ingtar.
They were in the dungeon guardroom, now. The severed heads and the pieces of the guards had been removed, though there were still red smears on the table and damp patches in the straw to show where they had been. Two Aes Sedai were there, placid-looking women with brown-fringed shawls, studying the words scrawled on the walls, careless of what their skirts dragged through in the straw. Each had an inkpot in a writing-case hung at her belt and was making notes in a small book with a pen. They never even glanced at the men trooping through.
"Look here, Verin," one of them said, pointing to a section of stone covered with lines of Trolloc script. "This looks interesting."
The other hurried over, picking up reddish stains on her skirt. "Yes, I see. A much better hand than the rest. Not a Trolloc. Very interesting." She began writing in her book, looking up every so often to read the angular letters on the wall.
Rand hurried out. Even if they had not been Aes Sedai, he would not have wanted to remain in the same room with anyone who thought reading Trolloc script written in human blood was "interesting."
Ingtar and his men stalked on ahead, intent on their duties. Rand dawdled, wondering where he could go now. Getting back into the women's apartments would not be easy without Egwene to help. Light, let her be all right. Moiraine said she'd be all right.
Lan found him before he reached the first stairs leading up. "You can go back to your room, if you want, sheepherder. Moiraine had your things fetched from Egwene's room and taken to yours."
"How did she know... ?"
"Moiraine knows a great many things, sheepherder. You should understand that by now. You had better watch yourself. The women are all talking about you running through the halls, waving a sword. Staring down the Amyrlin, so they say."
"Light! I am sorry they're angry, Lan, but I was invited in. And when I heard the alarm . . . burn me, Egwene was down here!"
Lan pursed his lips thoughtfully; it was the only expression on his face. "Oh, they're not angry, exactly. Though most of them think you need a strong hand to settle you down some. Fascinated is more like it. Even the Lady Amalisa can't stop asking questions about you. Some of them are starting to believe the servants' tales. They think you're a prince in disguise, sheepherder. Not a bad thing. There is an old saying here in the Borderlands: 'Better to have one woman on your side than ten men.' The way they are talking among themselves, they're trying to decide whose daughter is strong enough to handle you. If you don't watch your step, sheepherder, you will find yourself married into a Shienaran House before you realize what has happened." Suddenly he burst out laughing; it looked odd, like a rock laughing. "Running through the halls of the women's apartments in the middle of the night, wearing a laborer's jerkin and waving a sword. If they don't have you flogged, at the very least they'll talk about you for years. They have never seen a male as peculiar as you. Whatever wife they chose for you, she'd probably have you the head of your own House in ten years, and have you thinking you had done it yourself, besides. It is too bad you have to leave."
Rand had been gaping at the Warder, but now he growled, "I have been trying. The gates are guarded, and no one can leave. I tried while it was still daylight. I couldn't even take Red out of the stable."
"No matter, now. Moiraine sent me to tell you. You can leave anytime you want to. Even right now. Moiraine had Agelmar exempt you from the order."
"Why now, and not earlier? Why couldn't I leave before? Was she the one who had the gates barred then? Ingtar said he knew nothing about any order to keep people in before tonight."
Rand thought the Warder looked troubled, but all he said was, "When someone gives you a horse, sheepherder, don't complain that it isn't as fast as you'd like."
"What about Egwene? And Mat? Are they really all right? I can't leave until I know they're all right."

"The girl is fine. She'll wake in the morning, and probably not even remember what happened. Blows to the head are like that. "
"What about Mat?"
"The choice is up to you, sheepherder. You can leave now, or tomorrow, or next week. It's up to you." He walked away, leaving Rand standing there in the corridor deep under Fal Dara keep.

CHAPTER
7
Blood Calls Blood

CHAPTER
9
Leavetakings

The outer courtyard was in ordered turmoil when Rand finally reached it with his saddlebags and the bundle containing the harp and flute. The sun climbed toward midday. Men hurried around the horses, tugging at saddle girths and pack harness, voices raised. Others darted with last-minute additions [illegible]

From outside the open gates came the sounds of the Amyrlin's pikemen and archers forming up in the square. They had marched around from a side gate. One of the trumpeters tested his horn.

Some of the Warders glanced at Rand as he walked across the courtyard; a few raised eyebrows when they saw the heron-mark sword, but none spoke. Half wore the cloaks that were so queasy-making to look at. Mandarb, Lan's stallion, was there, tall, and black, and fierce-eyed, but the man himself [illegible]

Rand's bay stallion was with the other group on the far side of the courtyard, with Ingtar, and a bannerman holding Ingtar's Gray Owl banner, and twenty other armored men with lances tipped with two feet of steel, all mounted already. The bars of their helmets covered their faces, and golden surcoats [illegible]

The big bay danced as Rand tied his saddlebags and bundle behind the high-cantled saddle. He put his foot in the stirrup and murmured, "Easy, Red," as he swung into the saddle, but he let the stallion frisk away some of his stable-bound energy.

To Rand's surprise, Loial appeared from the direction of the stables, riding to join them. The Ogier's hairy-fetlocked mount was as big and heavy as a prime Dhurran stallion. Beside it, all the other animals looked the size of Bela, but with Loial in the saddle, the horse seemed almost a pony.

Loial carried no weapon that Rand could see; he had never heard of any Ogier using a weapon. Their stedding were protection enough. And Loial had his own priorities, his own ideas of what was needed for a journey. The pockets of his long coat had a telltale bulge, and his saddlebags showed the sq[illegible]

The Ogier stopped his horse a little way off and looked at Rand, his tufted ears twitching uncertainly.

"I didn't know you were coming," Rand said. "I'd think you would have had enough of traveling with us. This time there's no telling how long it will be, or where we will end up."

Loial's ears lifted a little. "There was no telling when I first met you, either. Besides, what held then, holds now. I can't let the chance pass to see history actually weave itself around ta'veren. And to help find the Horn . . . ."

Mat and Perrin rode up behind Loial and paused. Mat looked a little tired around the eyes, but his face wore a bloom of health.

"Mat," Rand said, "I'm sorry for what I said. Perrin, I didn't mean it. I was being stupid."

Mat only glanced at him, then shook his head and mouthed something to Perrin that Rand could not hear. Mat had only his bow and quiver, but Perrin also wore his axe at his belt, with its big half-moon blade balanced by a thick spike.

"Mat? Perrin? Really, I didn't - " They rode on toward Ingtar.

"That is not a coat for traveling, Rand," Loial said.

Rand glanced down at the golden thorns climbing his crimson sleeve and grimaced. Small wonder Mat and Perrin still think I'm putting on airs. On returning to his room he had found everything already packed and sent on. All of the plain coats he had been given were on the packhorses, so the servant[illegible]

"I'll change when we stop tonight," he muttered. He took a deep breath. "Loial, I said things to you I should not have, and I hope you'll forgive me. You have every right to hold them against me, but I hope you won't. "

Loial grinned, and his ears stood up. He moved his horse closer. "I say things I should not all the time. The Elders always said I spoke an hour before I thought."

Suddenly Lan was at Rand's stirrup, in his gray-green scaled armor that would make him all but disappear in forest or darkness. "I need to talk to you, sheepherder." He looked at Loial. "Alone, if you please, Builder." Loial nodded and moved his big horse away.

"I don't know if I should listen to you," Rand told the Warder. "These fancy clothes, and all those things you told me, they didn't help much."

"When you can't win a big victory, sheepherder, learn to settle for the small ones. If you made them think of you as something more than a farmboy who'll be easy to handle, then you won a small victory. Now be quiet and listen. I've only time for one last lesson, the hardest. Sheathing the Sword."

"You've spent an hour every morning making me do nothing but draw this bloody sword and put it back in the scabbard. Standing, sitting, lying down. I think I can manage to get it back in the sheath without cutting myself. "

"I said listen, sheepherder," the Warder growled. "There will come a time when you must achieve a goal at all costs. It may come in attack or in defense. And the only way will be to allow the sword to be sheathed in your own body."

"That's crazy," Rand said. "Why would I ever - ?"

The Warder cut him off. "You will know when it comes, sheepherder, when the price is worth the gain, and there is no other choice left to you. That is called Sheathing the Sword. Remember it."

The Amyrlin appeared, striding across the crowded courtyard with Leane and her staff, and Lord Agelmar at her shoulder. Even in a green velvet coat, the Lord of Fal Dara did not look out of place among so many armored men. There was still no sign of the other Aes Sedai. As they went by, Rand ca[illegible]

"But, Mother," Agelmar was protesting, "you've had no time to rest from the journey here. Stay at least a few days more. I promise you a feast tonight such as you could hardly get in Tar Valon."

The Amyrlin shook her head without breaking stride. "I cannot, Agelmar. You know I would if I could. I had never planned to remain long, and matters urgently require my presence in the White Tower. I should be there now."

"Mother, it shames me that you come one day and leave the next. I swear to you, there will be no repetition of last night. I have tripled the guard on the city gates as well as the keep. I have tumblers in from the town, and a bard coming from Mos Shirare. Why, King Easar will be on his way from Fal M[illegible]

Their voices faded as they crossed the courtyard, swallowed up by the din of preparation. The Amyrlin never as much as glanced in Rand's direction.

When Rand looked down, the Warder was gone, and nowhere to be seen. Loial brought his horse back to Rand's side. "That is a hard man to catch and hold, isn't he, Rand? He's not here, then he's here, then he's gone, and you don't see him coming or going."

Sheathing the Sword. Rand shivered. Warders must all be crazy.

The Warder the Amyrlin was speaking to suddenly sprang into his saddle. He was at a dead gallop before he reached the wide-standing gates. She stood watching him go, and her stance seemed to urge him to go faster.

"Where is he headed in such a hurry?" Rand wondered aloud.

"I heard," Loial said, "that she was sending someone out today, all the way to Arad Doman. There is word of some sort of trouble on Almoth Plain, and the Amyrlin Seat wants to know exactly what. What I don't understand is, why now? From what I hear, the rumors of this trouble came from Tar Val[illegible]

Rand felt cold. Egwene's father had a big map back at home, a map Rand had pored over more than once, dreaming before he found out what the dreams were like when they came true. It was old, that map, showing some lands and nations the merchants from outside said no longer existed, but Almot[illegible]

Loial appeared not to have heard. Rubbing the side of his nose with a finger like a sausage, the Ogier was still peering at the gate where the Warder had vanished. "If she wanted to know, why not send someone before she left Tar Valon? But you humans are always sudden and excitable, always jump[illegible]

Rand laughed. It was a weak laugh, but it felt good to have something to laugh at. "Maybe if we lived as long as you Ogier, we'd be more settled." Loial was ninety years old; by Ogier standards, not old enough by ten years to be outside the stedding alone. That he had gone anyway was proof, he mai[illegible]

"Perhaps so," Loial mused, "but you humans do so much with your lives. We do nothing but huddle in our stedding. Planting the groves, and even the building, were all done before the Long Exile ended." It was the groves Loial held dear, not the cities men remembered the Ogier for building. It was t[illegible]

Ingtar and the other men shifted in their saddles, preparing to dismount and kneel, but she motioned them to stay as they were. Leane stood at her shoulder, and Agelmar a pace back. From his glum face, he appeared to have given up trying to convince her to remain longer.

The Amyrlin looked at them one by one before she spoke. Her gaze stayed on Rand no longer than on any other.

[illegible]

Domon watched the three of them leave, then stared sourly at the pouch and the parchment on the table in front of him. Someone wanted him to go east. Tear or Mayene, it did not matter so long as he went east. He thought he knew who wanted it. And then again, I have no a clue to them. Who could [illegible]

"Trouble, Bayle?" Nieda asked. "You do look as if you had seen a Trolloc." She giggled, an improbable sound from a woman her size. Like most people who had never been to the Borderlands, Nieda did not believe in Trollocs. He had tried telling her the truth of it; she enjoyed his stories, and though[illegible]

"No trouble, Nieda." He untied the pouch, dug a coin out without looking, and tossed it to her. "Drinks for everyone till that do run out, then I'll give you another."

Nieda looked at the coin in surprise. "A Tar Valon mark! Do you be trading with the witches now, Bayle?"

"No," he said hoarsely. "That I do not!"

She bit the coin, then quickly snugged it away behind her broad belt. "Well, it be gold for that. And I suspect the witches be no so bad as some make them out, anyway. I'd no say so much to many men. I know a money changer who do handle such. You'll no have to give me another, with as few as be [illegible]

He nodded numbly, though his mug was still almost full, and she trundled off. She was a friend, and would not speak of what she had seen. He sat staring at the leather pouch. Another mug was brought before he could make himself open it enough to look at the coins inside. He stirred them with a cal[illegible]

While he was sitting there worrying, Yarin Maeldan, his brooding, stork-like second on Spray, came into the Badger with his brows pulled down to his long nose and stood over the captain's table. "Carn's dead, Captain. "

Domon stared at him, frowning. Three others of his men had already been killed, one each time he refused a commission that would take him east. The magistrates had done nothing; the streets were dangerous at night, they said, and sailors a rough and quarrelsome lot. Magistrates seldom troubled the[illegible]

"But this time I did accept them," he muttered.

"Tisn't all, Captain," Yarin said. "They worked Carn with knives, like they wanted him to tell them something. And some more men tried to sneak aboard Spray not an hour gone. The dock watch ran them off. Third time in ten days, and I never knew wharf rats to be so persistent. They like to let an al[illegible]

Domon reared to his feet. "Roust the crew, Yarin. Find them and tell them Spray sails as soon as there do be men enough aboard to handle her." Stuffing the parchment into his coat pocket, he snatched up the bag of gold and pushed his second out the door ahead of him. "Roust them, Yarin, for I'll leav[illegible]

Domon gave Yarin a shove to start him running, then stalked off toward the docks. Even footpads who heard the clinking of the pouch he carried steered clear of him, for he walked now like a man going to do murder.

There were already crewmen scrambling aboard Spray when he arrived, and more running barefoot down the stone quay. They did not know what he feared was pursuing him, or even that anything did pursue him, but they knew he made good profits, and after the Illianer way, he gave shares to the cre[illegible]

Spray was eighty feet long, with two masts, and broad in the beam, with room for deck cargo as well as in the holds. Despite what Domon had told the Cairhienin - if they had been Cairhienin - he thought she could stand the open water. The Sea of Storms was quieter in the summer.

"She'll have to," he muttered, and strode below to his cabin.

He tossed the sack of gold on his bed, built neatly against the hull like everything else in the stern cabin, and dug out the parchment. Lighting a lantern, hanging in its swivel from the overhead, he studied the sealed document, turning it as if he could read what was inside without opening it. A rap on th[illegible]

"Come. "

Yarin stuck his head in. "They're all aboard but three I couldn't find, Captain. But I've spread the word through every tavern, hell, and crib in the quarter. They'll be aboard before it's light enough to start upriver."

"Spray do sail now. To sea." Domon cut off Yarin's protests about light and tides, and Spray not being built for the open sea. "Now! Spray can clear the bars at dead low tide. You've no forgotten how to sail by the stars, have you? Take her out, Yarin. Take her out now, and come back to me when we [illegible]

His second hesitated-Domon never let a tricky bit of sailing pass without him on deck giving orders, and taking Spray out in the night would be all of that, shallow draft or no-then nodded and vanished. In moments the sounds of Yarin shouting orders and bare feet thumping on the decks overhead pen[illegible]

Finally he lifted the mantle of the lantern and stuck a knife into the flame. Smoke curled up as oil burned off the blade, but before the metal could turn red, he pushed charts out of the way and pressed the parchment flat on his desk, working the hot steel slowly under the sealing wax., The top fold lifte[illegible]

It was a simple document, without preamble or salutation, and it made sweat break out on his forehead.

The bearer of this it a Darkfriend wanted in Cairhien for murders and other foul crimes, least among them, theft from Our Person. We call upon you to seize this man and all things found in his keeping, to the smallest. Our representative will come to carry away what he has stolen from Us. Let all he p[illegible]

Sealed by Our Hand
Galldrian su Riatin Rie
King of Cairhien
Defender of the Dragonwall

In thin red wax below the signature were impressed the Rising Sun seal of Cairhien and the Five Stars of House Riatin.

"Defender of the Dragonwall, my aged grandmother," Domon croaked. "Fine right the man do have to call himself that any longer."

He examined the seals and signature minutely, holding the document close to the lamp, with his nose all but brushing the parchment, but he could find no flaw in the one, and for the other, he had no idea what Galldrian's hand looked like. If it was not the King himself who had signed it, he suspected t[illegible]

For a moment he thought of putting the parchment into the lantern's flame it was a dangerous thing to have, in Tear or Illian or anywhere he could imagine-but finally he tucked it carefully into a secret cubbyhole behind his desk, concealed by a panel only he knew how to open.

"My possessions, eh?"

He collected old things, as much as he could living on shipboard. What he could not buy, because it was too expensive or too large, he collected by seeing and remembering. All those remnants of times gone, those wonders scattered around the world that had first pulled him aboard a ship as boy. He h[illegible]

Digging into his chest, he set out on the desk what he had bought in Maradon. A lightstick, left from the Age of Legends, or so it was said. Certainly no one knew the making of them any longer. Expensive, that, and rarer than an honest magistrate. It looked like a plain glass rod, thicker than his thumb[illegible]

And it was heartstone. The shopkeeper had never dared add that to what he thought were lies. No riverfront shopkeeper in Maradon could afford even one piece of cuendillar.

The disk felt hard and smooth in his hand, and not at all valuable except for its age, but he was afraid it was what his pursuers were after. Lightsticks, and ivory carvings, and even bones turned to stone, he had seen other times, other places. Yet even knowing what they wanted-if he did know-he still h[illegible]

A knock at the door. He set the disk down and pulled an unrolled chart over what lay on his desk. "Come."

Yarin entered. "We're beyond the breakwater, Captain. "

Domon felt a flash of surprise, then anger with himself. He should never have gotten so engrossed that he failed to feel Spray lifting on the swells. "Make west, Yarin. See to it."

"Ebou Dar, Captain?"

No far enough. No by five hundred leagues. "We'll put in long enough for me to get charts and top the water barrels, then we do sail west."

"West, Captain? Tremalking? The Sea Folk are tight with any traders but their own."

"The Aryth Ocean, Yarin. Plenty of trade between Tarabon and Arad Doman, and hardly a Taraboner or Domani bottom to worry about. They do no like the sea, I have heard. And all those small towns on Toman Head, every one holding itself free of any nation at all. We can even pick up Saldaean fu[illegible]

Yarin shook his head slowly. He always looked at the dark side, but he was a good sailor. "Furs and pepper'll cost more there than running upriver for them, Captain. And I hear there's some kind of war. If Tarabon and Arad Doman are fighting, there may be no trade. I doubt we'll make much off the [illegible]

"The Taraboners and the Domani have always squabbled over Almoth Plain and Toman Head. Even if it has come to blows this time, a careful man can always find trade. West, Yarin."

When Yarin had gone topside, Domon quickly added the black-and-white disk to the cubbyhole, and stowed the rest back in the bottom of his chest. Darkfriends or Aes Sedai, I'll no run the way they want me. Fortune prick me, I'll no.

Feeling safe for the first time in months, Domon went on deck as Spray heeled to catch the wind and put her bow west into the night-dark sea.

CHAPTER
10
The Hunt Begins

Ingtar set a fast pace for the beginning of along journey, fast enough that Rand worried a little about the horses. The animals could keep up the trot for hours, but there was still most of the day ahead, and likely days more beyond that. The way Ingtar's face was set, though, Rand thought he might inten[illegible]

Hurin rode a pace behind Ingtar, but it was the sniffer who led them south, pointing the way for Ingtar. The land was rolling, forested hills, thick with fir and leatherleaf and oak, but the path Hurin set led almost straight as an arrow, never wavering except to go around a few of the taller hills, where th[illegible]

Rand tried to ride with Mat and Perrin, but when Rand let his horse drop back to them, Mat nudged Perrin, and Perrin reluctantly galloped to the head of the column with Mat. Telling himself there was no point riding at the back by himself, Rand rode back to the front. They fell to the rear again, Mat a[illegible]

[illegible]

CHAPTER
11
Glimmers of the Pattern

For once, Ingtar called a halt to the day's march with the sun still golden above the horizon. The toughened Shienarans were feeling the effects of what they had seen in the village. Ingtar had not stopped so early before, and the campsite he chose had the look of a place that could be defended. It was a [illegible]

"All I'm bloody saying," he heard Uno tell Ragan as they dismounted, "is that I bloody saw her, burn you. Just before we found the goat-kissing Halfman. The same flaming woman as at the flaming ferry. She was there, and then she bloody wasn't. You say what you bloody want to, but you watch how[illegible]

Rand paused with one foot on the ground and the other still in the stirrup. The same woman? But there wasn't any woman at the ferry, just some curtains blowing in the wind. And she couldn't have gotten to that village ahead of us if there had been. The village . . . .

He shied away from the thought. Even more than the Fade nailed to the door, he wanted to forget that room, and the flies, and the people who were there and not there. The Halfman had been real - everybody had seen that - but the room . . . . Maybe I'm finally going mad. He wished Moiraine was the[illegible]

"Packhorses and supplies in the middle," Ingtar commanded as the lancers went about setting up camp. "Rub the horses down, then saddle them again in case we must move quickly. Every man sleeps by his mount, and there'll be no fires tonight. Watch changes every two hours. Uno, I want scouts out[illegible]

He's feeling it, Rand thought. It isn't just some Darkfriends and a few Trollocs and maybe a Fade anymore. Just some Darkfriends and a few Trollocs, and maybe a Fade! Even a few days before there would not have been any "just" about it. Even in the Borderlands, even with the Blight less than a day[illegible]

"Rand?" He jumped as Ingtar spoke at his shoulder. "Are you going to stay all night with one foot in the stirrup?"

Rand put his other foot on the ground. "Ingtar, what happened back at that village?"

"Trollocs took them. The same as the people at the ferry. That is what happened. The Fade. . . ." Ingtar shrugged and stared down at a flat, canvas-wrapped bundle, large and square, in his arms; he stared at - it as if he saw hidden secrets he would rather not know. "The Trollocs took them for food. The[illegible]

Rand took a deep breath to steady his stomach. "The Fade back there didn't have any fun, Ingtar. What could nail a Myrddraal to a door, alive?"

Ingtar hesitated, shaking his head, then pushed the big bundle at Rand. "Here. Moiraine Sedai told me to give you this at the first camp south of the Erinin. I don't know what is in it, but she said you would need it. She said to tell you to take care of it; your life may depend on it."

Rand took it reluctantly; his skin prickled at the touch of the canvas. There was something soft inside. Cloth, maybe. He held it gingerly. He doesn't want to think about the Myrddraal either. What happened in that room? He realized suddenly that for him, the Fade, or even that room, was preferable to [illegible]

"I was told to tell you at the same time that if anything happens to me, the lances will follow you."

"Me!" Rand gasped, forgetting the bundle and everything else. Ingtar met his incredulous stare with a calm nod. "That's crazy! I've never led anything but a flock of sheep, Ingtar. They would not follow me anyway. Besides, Moiraine can't tell you who your second is. It's Uno."

"Uno and I were called to Lord Agelmar the morning we left. Moiraine Sedai was there, but it was Lord Agelmar who told me. You are second, Rand. "

"But why, Ingtar? Why?" Moiraine's hand was bright and clear in it, hers and the Amyrlin's, pushing him along the path they had chosen, but he had to ask.

The Shienaran looked as if he did not understand it either, but he was a soldier, used to odd commands in the endless war along the Blight. "I heard rumors from the women's apartments that you were really a . . . . " He spread gauntleted hands. "No matter. I know you deny it. Just as you deny the look[illegible]

Rand wanted to say it was no duty of his, but instead he said, "Uno knows about this. Who else, Ingtar?"

"All the lances. When we Shienarans ride, every man knows who is next in line if the man in command falls. A chain unbroken right down to the last man left, even if he's nothing but a horseholder. That way, you see, even if he is the last man, he is not just a straggler running and trying to stay alive. [illegible]

The bundle in Rand's arms seemed to weigh ten stone. Light, she could be a hundred leagues off, and she still reaches out and tugs the leash. This way, Rand. That way. You're the Dragon Reborn, Rand. "I don't want the duty, Ingtar. I will not take it. Light, I'm just a shepherd! Why won't anybody bel[illegible]

"You will do your duty, Rand. When the man at the top of the chain falls, everything below him falls apart. Too much is falling apart. Too much already. Peace favor your sword, Rand al'Thor."

"Ingtar, I - " But Ingtar was walking away, calling to see if Uno had the scouts out yet.

Rand stared at the bundle in his arms and licked his lips. He was afraid he knew what was in it. He wanted to look, yet he wanted to throw it in a fire without opening it; he thought he might, if he could be sure it would burn without anyone seeing what was inside, if he could be sure what was inside w[illegible]

He glanced around the camp. The Shienarans were unloading the pack animals, some already handing out a cold supper of dried meat and flatbread. Mat and Perrin tended their horses, and Loial sat on a stone reading a book, with his long-stemmed pipe clenched between his teeth and a wisp of smoke[illegible]

He knelt in a small clearing sheltered by thick-foliaged branches and set the bundle on the ground. For a time he just stared at it. She wouldn't have. She couldn't. A small voice answered, Oh, yes, she could. She could and would. Finally he set about untying the small knots in the cords that bound it. N[illegible]

When he had the last cord unfastened, he opened out what was folded inside with hands that felt numb, then stared at it, his mouth full of dust. It was all of one piece, neither woven, nor dyed, nor painted. A banner, white as snow, big enough to be seen the length of a field of battle. And across it marc[illegible]

"Look at that! Look what he's got, now!" Mat burst into the clearing. Perrin came after him more slowly. "First fancy coats," Mat snarled, "and now a banner! We'll hear no end of lording it now, with - " Mat got close enough to see the banner clearly, and his jaw dropped. "Light!" He stumbled back a [illegible]

Anger boiled up in Rand, anger at Moiraine and the Amyrlin Seat, pushing him, pulling him. He snatched up the banner in both hands and shook it at Mat, words boiling out uncontrollably. "That's right! The Dragon's banner!" Mat took another step back. "Moiraine wants me to be a puppet on Tar Val[illegible]

Mat had backed up against a tree trunk. "A false Dragon?" He swallowed. "You? That . . . that's crazy."

Perrin had not retreated. He squatted down with his thick arms on his knees and studied Rand with those bright golden eyes. In the evening shadows they seemed to shine. "If the Aes Sedai want you for a false Dragon . . . ." He paused, frowning, thinking things through. Finally, he said quietly, "Rand, can you channel?" Mat gave a strangled gasp.

Rand let the banner drop; he hesitated only a moment before nodding wearily. "I did not ask for it. I don't want it. But. . . . But I do not think I know how to stop it." The room with the flies came back unbidden to his mind. "I don't think they'll let me stop."

"Burn me!" Mat breathed. "Blood and bloody ashes! They'll kill us, you know. All of us. Perrin and me as well as you. If Ingtar and the others find out, they will cut our bloody throats for Darkfriends. Light, they'll probably think we were part of stealing the Horn, and killing those people in Fal Dara."

"Shut up, Mat," Perrin said calmly.

"Don't tell me to shut up. If Ingtar doesn't kill us, Rand will go mad and do it for him. Burn me! Burn me!" Mat slid down the tree to sit on the ground. "Why didn't they gentle you? If the Aes Sedai know, why didn't they gentle you? I never heard of them letting a man who can wield the Power just walk away."

"They don't all know," Rand sighed. "The Amyrlin - "

"The Amyrlin Seat! She knows? Light, no wonder she looked at me so strange."

" - and Moiraine told me I'm the Dragon Reborn, and then they said I could go wherever I wanted. Don't you see, Mat? They are trying to use me."

"Doesn't change you being able to channel," Mat muttered. "If I were you, I'd be halfway to the Aryth Ocean by now. And I would not stop until I found someplace where there were no Aes Sedai, and never likely to be any. And no people. I mean . . . well. . . ."

"Shut up, Mat," Perrin said. "Why are you here, Rand? The longer you stay around people, the more likely it is somebody will find out and send for Aes Sedai. Aes Sedai who won't tell you to go on about your business." He paused, scratching his head over that. "And Mat's right about Ingtar. I don't doubt he would name you Darkfriend and kill you. Kill all of us, maybe. He seems to like you, but he'd still do it, I think. A false Dragon? So would the others. Masema wouldn't need that much excuse, for you. So why aren't you gone?"

Rand shrugged. "I was going, but first the Amyrlin came, and then the Horn was stolen, and the dagger, and Moiraine said Mat was dying, and . . . . Light, I thought I could stay with you until we found the dagger, at least; I thought I could help with that. Maybe I was wrong."

"You came because of the dagger?" Mat said quietly. He rubbed his nose and grimaced. "I never thought of that. I never thought you wanted to . . . Aaaah! Are you feeling all right? I mean, you aren't going mad already, are you?"

Rand dug a pebble out of the ground and threw it at him.

"Ouch!" Mat rubbed his arm. "I was just asking. I mean, all those fancy clothes, and all that talk about being a lord. Well, that isn't exactly right in the head."

"I was trying to get rid of you, fool! I was afraid I'd go mad and hurt you." His eyes dropped to the banner, and his voice lowered. "I will, eventually, if I don't stop it. Light, I don't know how to stop it."

"That is what I'm afraid of," Mat said, standing. "No offense, Rand, but I think I will just sleep as far away from you as I can, if you don't mind. That's if you are staying. I heard about a fellow who could channel, once. A merchant's guard told me. Before the Red Ajah found him, he woke one morning, and his whole village was smashed flat. All the houses, all the people, everything but the bed he was sleeping in, like a mountain had rolled over them."

Perrin said, "In that case, Mat, you should sleep cheek by jowl with him."

"I may be a fool, but I intend to be a live fool." Mat hesitated, looking sideways at Rand. "Look, I know you came along to help me, and I am grateful. I really am. But you just are not the same anymore. You understand that, don't you?" He waited as if he expected an answer. None came. Finally he vanished into the trees, back toward the camp.

"What about you?" Rand asked.

Perrin shook his head, shaggy curls swinging. "I don't know, Rand. You are the same, but then again, you aren't. A man channeling; my mother used to frighten me with that, when I was little. I just do not know." He stretched out his hand and touched a corner of the banner. "I think I would burn this, or bury it, if I were you. Then I'd run so far, so fast, no Aes Sedai would ever find me. Mat was right about that." He stood up, squinting at the western sky, beginning to turn red with the sinking sun. "Time to get back to the camp. You think on what I said, Rand. I'd run. But maybe you can't run. Think of that, too." His yellow eyes seemed to look inward, and he sounded tired. "Sometimes you can't run." Then he was gone, too.

Rand knelt there, staring at the banner spread out on the ground. "Well, sometimes you can run," he muttered. "Only, maybe she gave me this to make me run. Maybe she has something waiting for me, if I run. I won't do what she wants. I won't. I'll bury it right here. But she said my life may depend on it, and Aes Sedai never lie so you can see it . . . ."

Suddenly his shoulders shook with silent laughter. "Now I'm talking to myself. Maybe I am going mad already."

When he returned to the camp, he carried the banner wrapped in the canvas once more, tied with knots less neat than Moiraine's had been.

The light had begun to fail and the shadow of the rim covered half the hollow. The soldiers were settling in, all with their horses by their sides, lances propped to hand. Mat and Perrin were bedding down alongside their horses. Rand gave them a sad look, then fetched Red, standing where he had been left with his reins dangling, and went to the other side of the hollow, where Hurin had joined Loial. The Ogier had given over reading and was examining the half-buried stone on which he had been sitting, tracing something on the stone with the long stem of his pipe.

Hurin stood and gave Rand something just short of a bow. "Hope you don't mind me making my bed here, Lord - uh - Rand. I was just listening to the Builder here."

"There you are, Rand," Loial said. "You know, I think this stone was worked once. See, it's weathered, but it looks as if it was a column of some kind. And there are markings, also. I can't quite make them out, but they look familiar, somehow."

"Maybe you'll be able to see them better in the morning," Rand said. He pulled the saddlebags from Red. "I'll be glad of your company, Hurin." I'm glad of anybody's company who isn't afraid of me. How much longer can I have it, though?

He shifted everything into one side of the saddlebags-spare shirts and breeches and woolen stockings, sewing kit, tinder box, tin plate and cup, a greenwood box with knife and fork and spoon, a packet of dried meat and flatbread for emergency rations, and all the other traveler's necessaries - then stuffed the canvas-wrapped banner into the empty pocket. It bulged, the straps barely reaching the buckles, but then, the other side bulged now, too. It would do.

Loial and Hurin seemed to sense his mood, leaving him in silence while he stripped saddle and bridle from Red, rubbed the big bay down with tufts of grass torn from the ground, then resaddled him. Rand refused their offer of food; he did not think he could have stomached the best meal he had ever seen just then. All three of them made their beds there beside the stone, a simple matter of a blanket folded for a pillow and cloak to cover.

The camp was silent now, but Rand lay awake past the fall of full dark. His mind darted back and forth. The banner. What is she trying to make me do? The village. What could kill a Fade like that? Worst of all, the house in the village. Did it really happen? Am I going mad already? Do I run, or do I stay? I have to stay. I have to help Mat find the dagger.

An exhausted sleep finally came, and with sleep, unbidden, the void surrounded him, flickering with an uneasy glow that disturbed his dreams.

Padan Fain stared northward out into the night, past the only fire in his camp, smiling a fixed smile that never touched his eyes. He still thought of himself as Padan Fain - Padan Fain was the core of him - but he had been changed, and he knew it. He knew many things, now, more than any of his old masters could suspect. He had been a Darkfriend long years before Ba'alzamon summoned him and set him on the track of the three young men from Emond's Field, distilling what he knew of them, distilling him, and feeding the essence back so that he could feel them, smell where they had been, follow wherever they ran. Especially the one. A part of him still cringed, remembering what Ba'alzamon had done to him, but it was a small part, hidden, suppressed. He was changed. Following the three had led him into Shadar Logoth. He had not wanted to go, but he had had to obey. Then. And in Shadar Logoth . . . .

Fain drew a deep breath and fingered the ruby-hilted dagger at his belt. That had come from Shadar Logoth, too. It was the only weapon he carried, the only one he needed; it felt like a part of him. He was whole within himself, now. That was all that mattered.

He cast a glance to either side of his fire. The twelve Darkfriends who were left, their once-fine clothes now rumpled and dirty, huddled in the darkness to one side, staring not at the fire, but at him. On the other squatted his Trollocs, twenty in number, the all-too-human eyes in those animal-twisted men's faces following his every move like mice watching a cat.

It had been a struggle at first, waking each morning to find himself not completely whole, to find the Myrddraal back in command, raging and demanding they go north, to the Blight, to Shayol Ghul. But bit by bit those mornings of weakness grew shorter, until . . . . He remembered the feel of the hammer in his hand, driving the spikes in, and he smiled; this time it did touch his eyes, with the joy of sweet memory.

Weeping from the dark caught his ear, and his smile faded. I should never have let the Trollocs take so many. An entire village to slow them down. If those few houses at the ferry had not been deserted, perhaps . . . . But Trollocs were greedy by nature, and in the euphoria of watching the Myrddraal die, he had not paid attention as he should.

He glanced at the Trollocs. Any one of them was nearly twice as tall as he, strong enough to break him to flinders with one hand, yet they edged back, still crouching. "Kill them. All. You may feed, but then make a pile of everything that remains-for our friends to find. Put the heads on top. Neatly, now." He laughed, and cut it off short. "Go!"

The Trollocs scrambled away, drawing scythe-like swords and raising spiked axes. In moments shrieks and bellows rose from where the villagers were bound. Pleas for mercy and children's screams were cut off by solid thuds and unpleasant squishing noises, like melons being broken.

Fain turned his back on the cacophony to look at his Darkfriends. They were his, too, body and soul. Such souls as they had left. Every one of them was mired as deeply as he had been, before he found his way out. Every one with nowhere to go except to follow him. Their eyes clung to him, fearful, pleading. "You think they will grow hungry again before we find another village or a farm? They may. You think I will be letting them have some more of you? Well, perhaps one or two. There aren't any more horses to spare."

"The others were only commoners," one woman managed in an unsteady voice. Dirt streaked her face above a finely cut dress that marked her as a merchant, and wealthy. Smears stained the good gray cloth, and a long tear marred her skirt. "They were peasants. We have served - I have served - "

Fain cut her off, his easy tone making his words all the harder. "What are you, to me? Less than peasants. Herd cattle for the Trollocs, perhaps? If you want to live, cattle, you must be useful."

The woman's face broke. She sobbed, and suddenly all the rest were babbling, telling him how useful they were, men and women who had had influence and position before they were called to fulfill their oaths at Fal Dara. They spilled out the names of important, powerful people whom they knew in the Borderlands, in Cairhien, and other lands. They babbled of the knowledge they alone had of this land or that, of political situations, alliances, intrigues, all the things they could tell him if he let them serve him. The noise of them blended with the sounds of the Trollocs' slaughter and fit right in.

Fain ignored all of it - he had no fear of turning his back on them, not since they had seen the Fade dealt with - and went to his prize. Kneeling, he ran his hands over the ornate, golden chest, feeling the power locked inside. He had to have a Trolloc carry it - he did not trust the humans enough to load it on a horse and packsaddle; some dreams of power might be strong enough to overcome even fear of him, but Trollocs never dreamed of anything except killing - and he had not yet puzzled out how to open it. But that would come. Everything would come. Everything.

Unsheathing the dagger, he laid it atop the chest before settling himself down beside the fire. That blade was a better guard than Trolloc or human. They had all seen what happened when he used it, once; none would come within a span of that curved blade without his command, and then reluctantly.

Lying there in his blankets, he stared northward. He could not feel al'Thor, now; the distance between them was too great. Or perhaps al'Thor was doing his vanishing trick. Sometimes, in the keep, the boy had suddenly vanished from Fain's senses. He did not know how, but always al'Thor came back, just as suddenly as he had gone. He would come back this time, too.

"This time you come to me, Rand al'Thor. Before, I followed you like a dog driven on the trail, but now you follow me." His laughter was a cackle that even he knew was mad, but he did not care. Madness was a part of him, too. "Come to me, al'Thor. The dance is not even begun yet. We'll dance on Toman Head, and I'll be free of you. I'll see you dead at last."

CHAPTER
12
Woven in the Pattern

Egwene hurried after Nynaeve toward the knot of Aes Sedai around the Amyrlin Seat's horse-borne palanquin, her desire to know what had caused the turmoil in Fal Dara keep outweighing even her worry over Rand. He was beyond her reach, for the moment. Bela, her shaggy mare, was with the Aes Sedai's horses, and Nynaeve's mount, too.

The Wardens, hands on sword hilts and eyes searching everywhere, made a steel circle around the Aes Sedai and the palanquin. They were an island of relative calm in the courtyard, where Shienaran soldiers still ran amid the keep's horrified inhabitants. Egwene pushed in beside Nynaeve-the two of them all but ignored after a single sharp glance from the Wardens; all knew they would be leaving with the Amyrlin-and caught enough in the crowd's murmurs to learn of an arrow that had flashed seemingly from nowhere and a bowman yet uncaught.

16

In the Mirror of Darkness

CHAPTER

17

Choices

CHAPTER

18

To the White Tower

CHAPTER

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Beneath the Dagger

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Saidin

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The Nine Rings

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The Testing

"Cenn? How did even those wool-headed men choose Cenn?"

"It was Malena. She had the whole Women's Circle after their husbands for him." Marin pressed her face almost against the window, trying to look every way at once. "Silly men don't talk about whose name they're putting in the box beforehand; I suppose every man who voted for Cenn thought he

"Who is this Malena who has the Women's Circle doing her bidding? I've never heard of her."

"She's from Watch Hill. She's the Wis. . . . " Marin turn from the window wringing her hands. "Malena Aylar's the Wisdom, Nynaeve. When you didn't come back . . . . Light, I hope she doesn't find out you're here."

Nynaeve shook her head in wonder. "Marin, you're afraid of her. You are shaking. What kind of woman is she? Why did the Women's Circle ever choose someone like her?"

Mistress al'Vere gave a bitter laugh. "We must have been mad. Malena came down to see Mavra Mallen the day before Mavra had to go back to Deven Ride, and that night some children took sick, and Malena stayed to look after them, and then the sheep started dying, and Malena took care of that,

A picture flashed in Nynaeve's head of Alsbet Luhhan and her husband, Haral, the blacksmith. She was nearly as tall as him, and stoutly built, though handsome. "Alsbet's almost as strong as Haral. I can't believe . . . . "

"Malena's not a big woman, but she's - she's fierce, Nynaeve. She beat Alsbet all around the Green with a stick, and none of us who saw had the nerve to try to stop it. When they found out, Bran and Haral said she had to go, even if they were interfering in Women's Circle business. I think some of the

Nynaeve gasped. "But . . . . Are you sure, Marin? Are you certain?" The other woman nodded, her face wrinkling on the point of tears. "Marin, if you even suspected this woman might have poisoned Bran, how could you not go to the Circle?"

"She said Bran and Haral didn't walk in the Light," Marin mumbled, "talking against the Wisdom the way they did. She said that was why they died; the Light abandoned them. She talks about sin all the time. She said Paet al'Caar sinned, talking against her after Bran and Haral died. All he said was

Nynaeve felt cold to her bones. "Marin, you can't allow this." The way back will come but once. Be steadfast. She pushed it away. "If the Women's Circle stands together, you can be rid of her."

"Stand together against Malena?" Marin's laugh was nearer a sob. "We're all afraid of her. But she's good with the children. There are always children sick these days, it seems, but Malena does the best she can. Almost no one ever died of sickness when you were Wisdom."

"Marin, listen to me. Don't you see why there are always children sick? If she can't make you afraid of her, she makes you think you need her for the children. She's doing it, Marin. Just as she did it to Bran."

"She couldn't," Marin breathed. "She, wouldn't. Not the little ones."

"She is, Marin. " The way back - Nynaeve suppressed the thought ruthlessly. "Is there anyone in the Circle who isn't afraid? Anyone who will listen?"

The other woman said, "No one who isn't afraid. But Corin Ayellin might listen. If she does, she might bring two or three more. Nynaeve, if enough of the Circle listens, will you be our Wisdom again? I think you may be the only one who won't back down to Malena, even if we all know. You don't

"I will." The way back - No! These are my people! "Get your cloak, and we'll go to Corin. "

Marin was hesitant about leaving the inn, and once Nynaeve had her outside she slunk along from doorstep to doorstep, crouching and watching.

Before they were halfway to Corin Ayellin's house, Nynaeve saw a tall, scrawny woman striding down the other side of the Green toward the inn, slashing the heads off weeds with a thick willow switch. Bony as she was, she had a look of wiry strength, and a set, determined slash of a mouth.

"Malena." Marin pulled Nynaeve into the space between two houses, and whispered as if afraid the woman might hear across the Green. "I knew Cenn would go to her."

Something made Nynaeve look over her shoulder. Behind her stood a silver arch, reaching from house to house, glowing whitely. The way back will come but once. Be steadfast.

Marin gave a soft scream. "She's seen us. Light help us, she's coming this way!"

The tall woman had turned across the Green, leaving Cenn standing uncertainly. There was no uncertainty on Malena's face. She walked slowly, as if there were no hope of escape, a cruel smile growing with every step.

Marin tugged at Nynaeve's sleeve. "We have to run. We have to hide. Nynaeve, come on. Cenn will have told her who you are. She hates anyone even to speak of you."

The silver arch pulled Nynaeve's eyes. The way back. . . . She shook her head, trying to remember. It is not real. She looked at Marin; stark terror twisted the woman's face. You must be steadfast to survive.

"Please, Nynaeve. She's seen me with you. She - has - seen - me! Please, Nynaeve! "

Malena came closer, implacable. My people. The arch shone. The way back. It is not real.

With a sob, Nynaeve tore her arm out of Marin's grasp and plunged toward the silvery glow.

Marin's shriek hounded her. "For the love of the Light, Nynaeve, help me! HELP ME!"

The glow enveloped her.

Staring, Nynaeve staggered out of the arch, barely aware of the chamber or the Aes Sedai. Marin's last cry still rang in her ears. She did not flinch when cold water was suddenly poured over her head.

"You are washed clean of false pride. You are washed clean of false ambition. You come to us washed clean, in heart and soul." As the Red Aes Sedai stepped back, Sheriam came to take Nynaeve's arm.

Nynaeve gave a start, then realized who it was. She seized the collar of Sheriam's dress in both hands. "Tell me it was not real. Tell me!"

"Bad?" Sheriam pried her hands loose as if she were used to this reaction. "It is always worse, and the third is the worst of all."

"I left my friend . . . I left my people . . . in the Pit of Doom to come back." Please, Light, it was not real. I didn't really . . . . I have to make Moiraine pay. I have to!

"There is always some reason not to return, something to prevent you, or distract you. This ter'angreal weaves traps for you from your own mind, weaves them tight and strong, harder than steel and more deadly than poison. That is why we use it as a test. You must want to be Aes Sedai more than any

"You demand a great deal." Nynaeve stared at the third arch as the red haired Aes Sedai took her toward it. The third is the worst. "I'm afraid," she whispered. What could be worse than what I just did?

"Good," Sheriam said. "You seek to be Aes Sedai, to channel the One Power. No one should approach that without fear and awe. Fear will keep you cautious; caution will keep you alive." She turned Nynaeve to face the arch, but she did not step back immediately. "No one will force you to enter a thi

Nynaeve licked her lips. "If I refuse, you'll put me out of the Tower and never let me come back." Sheriam nodded. "And this is the worst." Sheriam nodded again. Nynaeve drew breath. "I am ready."

"The third time," Sheriam intoned formally, "is for what will be. The way back will come but once. Be steadfast."

Nynaeve threw herself at the arch in a run.

Laughing, she ran through swirling clouds of butterflies rising from wildflowers that covered the hilltop meadow with a knee-deep blanket of color. Her gray mare danced nervously, reins dangling, at the edge of the meadow, and Nynaeve stopped running so as not to frighten the animal more.

Below the hill, the necklace of the Thousand Lakes spread through the city of Malkier, reflecting the cloud-brushing Seven Towers, with Golden Crane banners flying at their heights in the mists. The city had a thousand gardens, but she preferred this wild garden on the hilltop. The way back will

The sound of hooves made her turn.

"If your duties allow," Galad said, "I would like to see you again, Egwene. We could walk, or if you obtain permission to leave the Tower, we could picnic outside the city."

"That - that would be nice." She was uncomfortably aware of the others, Min and Gawyn still with their amused grins, Elayne still with her scowl.

She tried to settle herself, to think of Rand. He's so . . . beautiful. She gave a jump, half afraid she had spoken aloud.

"Until then." Finally taking his eyes from hers, Galad bowed to Elayne. "Sister." Lithe as a blade, he strolled on across the bridge.

"That one," Min murmured, peering after him, "will always do what is right. No matter who it hurts."

"Sister?" Egwene said. Elayne's scowl had lessened only slightly. "I thought he was your . . . . I mean, the way you're frowning . . . ." She had thought Elayne was jealous, and she still was not sure.

"I am not his sister," Elayne said firmly. "I refuse to be."

"Our father was his father," Gawyn said dryly. "You cannot deny that, unless you want to call Mother a liar, and that, I think, would take more nerve than we have between us."

For the first time Egwene realized that he had the same reddish gold hair as Elayne, though darkened and curled by sweat.

"Min is right," Elayne said. "Galad has not the smallest part of humanity in him. He takes right above mercy, or pity, or . . . . He is no more human than a Trolloc."

"And being good with a sword is enough?" Elayne sniffed. "Men! Egwene, as you may have guessed, this disgracefully unclothed lummox is my brother. Gawyn, Egwene knows Rand al'Thor. She is from the same village. "

"Is she? Was he really born in the Two Rivers, Egwene?"

Egwene made herself nod calmly. What does he know? "Of course, he was. I grew up with him."

"And I want to be yours," Elayne said.

Impulsively, Egwene hugged her, and then Min jumped down, and the three of them stood there on the bridge hugging one another all together.

"We three are tied together," Min said, "and we cannot let any man get in the way of that. Not even him."

"Would one of you mind telling me what this is all about?" Gawyn inquired gently.

"You would not understand," his sister said, and the three girls all caught a fit of the giggles.

"Elaida," Elayne said, "this is Egwene. She was born with the seed in her, too. And she has already had some lessons, so she is as far along as I am. Elaida?"

The Aes Sedai's face was blank and unreadable. "In Caemlyn, child, I am councilor to the Queen your mother, but this is the White Tower, and you, a novice." Min made as if to go, but Elaida stopped her with a sharp, "Stay, girl. I would speak with you."

"I've known you all my life, Elaida," Elayne said incredulously. "You watched me grow up, and made the gardens bloom in winter so I could play."

"Child, there you were the Daughter-Heir. Here you are a novice. You must learn that. You will be great one day, but you must learn!"

"Yes, Aes Sedai."

Egwene was astounded. If someone had snubbed her so before others, she would have been in a fury.

They ran, holding their skirts up. Egwene looked at Elayne. Elayne had two spots of color in her cheeks and a determined look on her face.

"I will be Aes Sedai," Elayne said softly, but it sounded like a promise.

Behind them, Egwene heard the Aes Sedai begin, "I am given to understand, girl, that you were brought here by Moiraine Sedai."

She wanted to stay and listen, to hear if Elaida asked about Rand, but High rang through the White Tower, and she was summoned to chores. She ran as she had been commanded to run.

"I will be Aes Sedai," she growled. Elayne flashed a quick smile of understanding, and they ran faster.

Min's shirt clung to her when she finally left the bridge. Not sweat from the sun, but from the heat of Elaida's questions. She looked over her shoulder to make sure the Aes Sedai was not following her, but Elaida was nowhere in sight.

"Moiraine, the Light blind you," she muttered, "whatever you brought me here for, come out from wherever you're hiding and tell me so I can go!

The only answer was the sweet song of the graywings. With a grimace she went in search of a place to cool off.

Rand shook his head. He often forgot that Loial had run away from home, in effect, to see the world. "What about you, Hurin? There's music in the Foregate, and people laughing. I'll wager no one is playing Daes Dae'mar there."

"Hurin, you don't need my permission for anything. You know that."

"As you say, my Lord." The sniffer gave a suggestion of a bow.

"I'd rather not risk it," Loial said.

"What are these?" he asked.

Cuale bowed again. "Invitations, of course, my Lord. From three of the noble Houses." He bowed himself away.

"Who would send me invitations?" Rand turned them over in his hand. None of the men at the tables looked up, but he had the feeling they were watching just the same. He did not recognize the seals. None was the crescent moon and stars Selene had used. "Who would know I was here?"

With a grimace, Rand took two steps and hurled the invitations into the fire. They caught immediately. "I am not playing Daes Dae'mar, " he said, loudly enough for everyone to hear. Not even Cuale looked at him. "I've nothing to do with your Great Game. I am just here to wait for some friends. "

Hurin caught his arm. "Please, Lord Rand." His voice was an urgent whisper. "Please don't do that again."

"Again? You really think I'll receive more?"

Once he had to stop for another procession of giant puppets. While the drummers beat their tambours and capered, a pig-faced Trolloc with tusks fought a man in a crown. After a few desultory blows, the Trolloc collapsed to laughter and cheers from the onlookers.

Rand grunted. They don't die so easily as that.

That made him think of Thom Merrilin, and he hurried on. Memories of Thom were always sad. Thom had been a friend. A friend who had died for him. While I ran away and let him die.

In another of the big structures, a. woman in voluminous white robes appeared to make things vanish from one basket and appear in another, then disappear from her hands in great puffs of smoke. The crowd watching her oohed and aahed loudly.

"Two coppers, my good Lord," a ratty little man in the doorway said. "Two coppers to see the Aes Sedai."

"I don't think so." Rand glanced back at the woman. A white dove had appeared in her hands. Aes Sedai? "No." He gave the ratty man a small bow and left.

He was making his way through the throng, wondering what to see next, when a deep voice, accompanied by the plucking of a harp, drifted out from a doorway with the sign of a juggler over it.

". . . cold blows the wind down Shara Pass; cold lies the grave unmarked. Yet every year at Sunday, upon those piled stones appears a single rose, one crystal teardrop like dew upon the petals, laid by the fair hand of Dunsinin, for she keeps fast to the bargain made by Rogosh Eagle-eye."

The voice drew Rand like a rope. He pushed through the doorway as applause rose within.

"Two coppers, my good Lord," said a rat-faced man who could have been twin to the other. "Two coppers to see - "

"Thom." Rand's whisper was lost in the noise of the crowd.

Holding Rand's eye, Thom Merrilin nodded slightly toward a small door beside the dais. Then he was bowing again, smiling and basking in the applause.

Rand made his way to the door and through it. It was only a small hallway, with three steps leading up to the dais. In the other direction from the dais Rand could see a juggler practicing with colored balls, and six tumblers limbering themselves.

Rand could not help laughing. "I left Whitebridge sure you were dead. Moiraine said you were still alive, but I . . . . Light, Thom, it's good to see you again! I should have gone back to help you."

Rand shook his head. To his surprise, Thom seemed disappointed.

"I have them, Thom. I'll bring them to you, I promise. I can't believe you are alive. And I can't believe you aren't in Illian. The Great Hunt setting out. The prize for the best telling of The Great Hunt of the Horn. You were dying to go. "

"Thom, I have so much to tell you."

CHAPTER
26
Discord

Rand darted through the common room of The Defender of the Dragonwall and hurried upstairs, grinning at the startled look the innkeeper had given him. Rand wanted to grin at everything. Thom's alive!

He flung open the door to his room and went straight to the wardrobe.

Loial and Hurin put their heads in from the other room, both in their shirtsleeves and with pipes in their teeth trailing thin streams of smoke.

"Has something happened, Lord Rand?" Hurin asked anxiously.

Rand slung the bundle made from Thom's cloak on his shoulder. "The best thing that could, next to Ingtar coming. Thom Merrilin's alive. And he's here, in Cairhien. "

"The gleeman you told me about?" Loial said. "That is wonderful, Rand. I would like to meet him."

"Then come with me, if Hurin's willing to keep watch awhile."

"Let them think what they want. Come on, Loial."

"I think not." The Ogier sighed. "I really would rather stay here." He raised a book with a thick finger marking his place. "I can meet Thom Merrilin some other time."

"Loial, you can't stay cooped up in here forever. We do not even know how long we'll be in Cairhien. Anyway, we didn't see any Ogier. And if we do, they would not be hunting for you, would they?"

"Not hunting, precisely, but . . . Rand, I may have been too hasty in leaving Stedding Shangtai the way I did. When I do go home, I may be in a great deal of trouble." His ears wilted. "Even if I wait until I'm as old as Elder Haman. Perhaps I could find an abandoned stedding to stay in until then."

"If Elder Haman won't let you come back, you can live in Emond's Field. It's a pretty place." A beautiful place.

"I am sure it is, Rand, but that would never work. You see - "

"We will talk about it when it comes to that, Loial. Now you are coming to see Thom."

Once through the Jangai Gate, in the east wall of the city, everyone seemed to know The Bunch of Grapes. Rand and Loial quickly found themselves there, on a street that was quiet for the Foregate, with the sun halfway down the afternoon sky.

The stairs creaked under Rand's boots, let alone Loial's. Rand was not sure if the building would stand up much longer. He found the door and knocked, wondering who Dena was.

"Come in," a woman's voice called. "I cannot open it for you."

"Whatever it is," she said, looking at her juggling, "leave it on the table. Thom will pay you when he comes back."

"Are you Dena?" Rand asked.

She snatched the balls out of the air and turned to regard him. She was only a handful of years older than he, pretty, with fair Cairhienin skin and dark hair hanging loose to her shoulders. "I do not know you. This is my room, mine and Thom Merrilin's."

"The innkeeper said you might let us wait here for Thom," Rand said. "If you're Dena?"

Rand hefted the bundle he carried. "I've brought Thom back his harp and his flute. And I want to visit with him," he added quickly; she seemed on the point of telling him to leave them. "I haven't seen him in a long time. "

Rand gave their names as he sat in the other chair - it creaked alarmingly under even his weight - and asked doubtfully, "Are you Thom's apprentice?"

Dena gave a small smile. "You might say that." She had resumed her juggling, and her eyes were on the whirling balls.

"I have never heard of a woman gleeman," Loial said.

He cleared his throat. "Maybe we ought to wait downstairs," he began when the door opened and Thom came in with his cloak flapping around his ankles, patches fluttering. Cased flute and harp hung on his back; the cases were reddish wood, polished by handling.

Dena made the balls disappear inside her dress and ran to throw her arms around Thom's neck, standing atiptoe to do it. "I missed you," she said, and kissed him.

The kiss went on for some time, so long that Rand was beginning to wonder if he and Loial should leave, but Dena let her heels drop to the floor with a sigh.

"Thom, we have visitors. Loial, son of Arent son of Halan. Oh, and a boy who calls himself Rand al'Thor."

Thom looked over her head at Rand, frowning. "Leave us for a while, Dena. Here." He pressed some silver coins into her hand. "Your knives are ready. Why don't you go pay Ivon for them?" He brushed her smooth cheek with a gnarled knuckle. "Go on. I'll make it up to you."

She gave him a dark look, but she tossed her cloak around her shoulders, muttering, "Ivon better have the balance right."

"And I to meet you, Thom Merrilin." Loial stood to make his bow in return; when he straightened, his head almost brushed the ceiling, and he quickly sat down again. "The young woman said she wants to be a gleeman. "

Rand pushed the bundle across the table. Thom undid it hurriedly-he blinked when he saw it was his old cloak, all covered with colorful patches like the one he wore-and opened the hard leather flute case, nodding at the sight of the gold-and-silver flute nestled inside.

"I earned my bed and meals with that after we parted," Rand said.

"I didn't touch it," Rand assured him.

Thom plucked two strings, wincing. "At least you could have kept it in tune," he muttered.

Rand leaned across the table toward him. "Thom, you wanted to go to Illian, to see the Great Hunt set out, and be one of the first to make new stories about it, but you couldn't. What would you say if I told you you could still be a part of it? A big part?"

Loial stirred uneasily. "Rand, are you sure. . . ?" Rand waved him to silence, his eyes on Thom.

"It doesn't matter if the Hunt has left Illian or not." Rand heard Loial's breath catch. "Thom, we have the Horn of Valere."

For a moment there was dead silence. Thom broke it with a great guffaw of laughter. "You two have the Horn? A shepherd and a beardless Ogier have the Horn of . . . ." He doubled over, pounding his knee. "The Horn of Valere!"

"But we do have it," Loial said seriously.

"Moiraine says it's the Horn," Rand said.

"Thom's mirth was cut short. "She does, does she? I thought you said she was not with you."

He reached out and touched the herons embroidered on Rand's high collar.
For a moment, Rand could only gape at him, and when he could speak, his voice was unsteady. "The sword makes five. Hilt, scabbard, and blade." He turned his hand down on the table, hiding the brand on his palm. For the first time since Selene's salve had done its work, he could feel it. Not hurting, but he knew it was there.
"So they do." Thom barked a laugh. "There's another comes to mind.

"Twice dawns the day when his blood is shed.
Once for mourning, once for birth.
Red on black, the Dragon's blood stains the rock of Shayol Ghul.
In the Pit of Doom shall his blood free men from the Shadow."

Rand shook his head, denying, but Thom seemed not to notice. "I don't see how a day can dawn twice, but then a lot of it doesn't really make much sense. The Stone of Tear will never fall till Callandor is wielded by the Dragon Reborn, but the Sword That Cannot Be Touched lies in the Heart of the Stone, so how can he wield it first, eh? Well, be that as it may. I suspect Aes Sedai would w [illegible]
It was an effort for Rand to make his voice calm, but he did it. "No Aes Sedai are using me for anything. I told you, the last I saw of Moiraine was in Shienar. She said I could go where I wanted, and I left."
"And there's no Aes Sedai with you now? None at all?"
"None."
Thom knuckled his dangling white mustaches. He seemed satisfied, and at the same time puzzled. "Then why ask about the Prophecies? Why send the Ogier out of the room?"
"I . . . didn't want to upset him. He's nervous enough about the Horn. That's what I wanted to ask. Is the Horn mentioned in the - the Prophecies?" He still could not make himself say it all the way out. "All these false Dragons, and now the Horn is found. Everybody thinks the Horn of Valere is supposed to summon dead heroes to fight the Dark One in the Last Battle, and the . . . the Drago [illegible]
"I suppose it is. Not many know that about the Dragon Reborn fighting the Last Battle, or if they do, they think he'll fight alongside the Dark One. Not many read the Prophecies to find out. What was that you said about the Horn? 'Supposed to'?"
"I've learned a few things since we parted, Thom. They will come for whoever blows the Horn, even a Darkfriend."
Bushy eyebrows rose nearly to Thom's hairline. "Now that I didn't know. You have learned a few things."
"It doesn't mean I would let the White Tower use me for a false Dragon. I don't want anything to do with Aes Sedai, or false Dragons, or the Power, or . . ." Rand bit his tongue. Get mad and you start babbling. Fool!
"For a time, boy, I thought you were the one Moiraine wanted, and I even thought I knew why. You know, no man chooses to channel the Power. It is something that happens to him, like a disease. You cannot blame a man for falling sick, even if it might kill you, too."
"Your nephew could channel, couldn't he? You told me that was why you helped us, because your nephew had had trouble with the White Tower and there was nobody to help him. There's only one kind of trouble men can have with Aes Sedai."
Thom studied the tabletop, pursing his lips. "I don't suppose there is any use in denying it. You understand, it is not the kind of thing a man talks about, having a male relative who could channel. Aaagh! The Red Ajah never gave Owyn a chance. They gentled him, and then he died. He just gave up wanting to live . . ." He exhaled sadly.
Rand shivered. Why didn't Moiraine do that to me? "A chance, Thom? Do you mean there was some way he could have dealt with it? Not gone mad? Not died?"
"Owyn held it off almost three years. He never hurt anyone. He didn't use the Power unless he had to, and then only to help his village. He . . ." Thom threw up his hands. "I suppose there was no choice. The people where he lived told me he was acting strange that whole last year. They did not much want to talk about it, and they nearly stoned me when they found out I was his uncle. I sup [illegible]
For a moment Rand was silent. Fool! Of course there's no way to deal with it. You're going to go mad and die whatever you do. But Ba'alzamon said - "No!" He colored under Thom's scrutiny. "I mean . . . I am out of it, Thom. But I still have the Horn of Valere. Think of it, Thom. The Horn of Valere. Other gleemen might tell tales about it, but you could say you had it in your hands." He [illegible]
Thom frowned as if considering it, but in the end he shook his head firmly. "Boy, I like you well enough, but you know as well as I do that I only helped before because there was an Aes Sedai mixed in it. Seaghan doesn't try to cheat me more than I expect, and with the King's Gift added in, I could never earn as much in the villages. To my very great surprise, Dena seems to love me, and - [illegible]
He leaned over to pick up one of the wooden instrument cases, long and narrow. When he opened it, a flute lay inside, plainly made but mounted with silver. He closed it again and slid it across the table. "You might need to earn your supper again someday, boy."
"I might at that," Rand said. "At least we can talk. I will be in - "
The gleeman was shaking his head. "A clean break is best, boy. If you're always coming around, even if you never mention it, I won't be able to get the Horn out of my head. And I won't be tangled in it. I won't."

After Rand left, Thom threw his cloak on the bed and sat with his elbows on the table. The Horn of Valere. How did that farmboy find . . . He shut off that line of thought. Think about the Horn too long, and he would find himself running off with Rand to carry it to Shienar. That would make a story, carrying the Horn of Valere to the Borderlands with Trollocs and Darkfriends pursuing. S [illegible]
"Old fool," he muttered.
"Aye, an old fool," Zera said from the door. He gave a start; he had been so absorbed in his thoughts that he had not heard the door open. He had known Zera for years, off and on in his wanderings, and she always took full advantage of the friendship to speak her mind. "An old fool who's playing the Game of Houses again. Unless my ears are failing, that young lord has the sound of Andor [illegible]
Thom blinked, then considered the way Rand had looked. That coat had surely been fine enough for a lord. He was growing old, letting things like that slip by him. Ruefully, he realized he was considering whether to tell Zera the truth or let her continue thinking as she did. All it takes is to think about the Great Game, and I start playing it. "The boy is a shepherd, Zera, from the Two Rivers [illegible]
She laughed scornfully. "And I'm the Queen of Ghealdan. I tell you, the Game has grown dangerous in Cairhien the last few years. Nothing like what you knew in Caemlyn. There are murders done, now. You'll have your throat cut for you, if you don't watch out."
"I tell you, I am not in the Great Game any longer. That's all twenty years in the past, near enough."
"Aye." She did not sound as if she believed it. "But be that as it may, and young outland lords aside, you've begun performing at the lords' manors."
"They pay well."
"And they'll pull you into their plots as soon as they see how. They see a man, and think how to use him, as naturally as breathing. This young lord of yours won't help you; they will eat him alive."
He gave up on trying to convince her he was out of it. "Is that what you came up to say, Zera?"
"Aye. Forget playing the Great Game, Thom. Marry Dena. She'll take you, the more fool her, bony and white-haired as you are. Marry her, and forget this young lord and Daes Dae'mar."
"I thank you for the advice," he said dryly. Marry her? Burden her with an old husband. She'll never be a bard with my past hanging around her neck. "If you don't mind, Zera, I want to be alone for a while. I perform for Lady Arilyn and her guests tonight, and I need to prepare."
She gave him a snort and a shake of her head and banged the door shut behind her.
Thom drummed his fingers on the table. Coat or no coat, Rand was still only a shepherd. If he had been more, if he had been what Thom once suspected - a man who could channel - neither Moiraine nor any other Aes Sedai would ever have let him walk away ungentled. Horn or no Horn, the boy was only a shepherd.
"He is out of it," he said aloud, "and so am I."

CHAPTER
27
The Shadow in the Night

I do not understand it," Loial said. "I was winning, most of the time. And then Dena came in and joined the game, and she won it all right back. Every toss. She called it a little lesson. What did she mean by that?"
Rand and the Ogier were making their way through the Foregate, The Bunch of Grapes behind them. The sun sat low in the west, a red ball half below the horizon, throwing long shadows behind them. The street was empty save for one of the big puppets, a goat-horned Trolloc with a sword at its belt, coming toward them with five men working the poles, but sounds of merriment drifted s [illegible]
Rand stopped fingering the wooden flute case and slung it on his back. I suppose I couldn't expect him to throw over everything and come with me, but at least he could talk to me. Light, I wish Ingtar would show up. He stuffed his hands in his pockets and felt Selene's note.
"You don't suppose she . . . ." Loial paused uncomfortably. "You don't suppose she cheated, do you? Everybody was grinning as if she were doing something clever."
Rand shrugged at his cloak. I have to take the Horn and go. If we wait for Ingtar, anything can happen. Fain will come sooner or later. I have to stay ahead of him. The men with the puppet were almost to them.
"Rand," Loial said suddenly, "I don't think that's a - "
Abruptly the men let their poles clatter to the packed dirt street; instead of collapsing, the Trolloc leaped for Rand with outstretched hands.
There was no time to think. Instinct brought the sword out of its sheath in a flashing arc. The Moon Rises Over the Lakes. The Trolloc staggered back with a bubbling cry, snarling even as it fell.
For an instant everyone stood frozen. Then the men - the Darkfriends, they had to be - looked from the Trolloc lying in the street to Rand, with the sword in his hands and Loial at his side. They turned and ran.
Rand was staring at the Trolloc, too. The void had surrounded him before his hand touched hilt; saidin shone in his mind, beckoning, sickening. With an effort, he made the void vanish, and licked his lips. Without the emptiness, fear crawled on his skin.
"Loial, we have to get back to the inn. Hurin's alone, and they - " He grunted as he was lifted into the air by a thick arm long enough to pin both of his to his chest. A hairy hand grabbed his throat. He caught sight of a tusked snout just over his head. A rank smell filled his nose, equal parts sour sweat and pigsty.
As quickly as it had seized him, the hand at his throat was torn away. Stunned, Rand stared at it, at the thick Ogier fingers clutching the Trolloc's wrist.
"Hold on, Rand." Loial's voice sounded strained. The Ogier's other hand came around and took hold of the arm still holding Rand above the ground. "Hold on."
Rand was shaken from side to side as Ogier and Trolloc struggled. Abruptly he fell free. Staggering, he took two steps to get clear and turned back with sword raised.
Standing behind the boar-snouted Trolloc, Loial had it by wrist and forearm, holding its arms spread wide, breathing hard with the effort. The Trolloc snarled gutturally in the harsh Trolloc tongue, throwing its head back in efforts to catch Loial with a tusk. Their boots scuffled across the dirt of the street.
Rand tried to find a place to put his blade in the Trolloc without hurting Loial, but Ogier and Trolloc spun in their rough dance so much that he could find no opening.
With a grunt, the Trolloc pulled its left arm free, but before it could loose itself completely, Loial snapped his own arm around its neck, hugging the creature close. The Trolloc clawed at its sword; the scythe-like blade hung on the wrong side for left-handed use, but inch by inch the dark steel began sliding out of the scabbard. And still they thrashed about so that Rand could not strike with [illegible]
The Power. That could do it. How, he did not know, but he knew nothing else to try. The Trolloc had its sword half unsheathed. When the curved blade was bare, it would kill Loial.
Reluctantly, Rand formed the void. Saidin shone at him, pulled at him. Dimly, he seemed to recall a time when it had sung to him, but now it only drew him, a flower's perfume drawing a bee, a midden's stench drawing a fly. He opened himself up, reached for it. There was nothing there. He could as well have been reaching for light in truth. The taint slid off onto him, soiling him, but the [illegible]
With a sudden heave, Loial threw the Trolloc aside, so hard that the thing cartwheeled against the side of a building. It struck, headfirst, with a loud crack, and slid down the wall to lie with its neck twisted at an impossible angle. Loial stood staring at it, his chest heaving.
Rand looked out of the emptiness for a moment before he realized what had happened. As soon as he did, though, he let void and tainted light go, and hurried to Loial's side.
"I never . . . killed before, Rand." Loial drew a shuddering breath.
"It would have killed you if you hadn't," Rand told him. Anxiously, he looked at the alleys and shuttered windows and barred doors. Where there were two Trollocs, there had to be more. "I'm sorry you had to do it, Loial, but it would have killed both of us, or worse."
"I know. But I cannot like it. Even a Trolloc." Pointing toward the setting sun, the Ogier seized Rand's arm. "There's another of them."
Against the sun, Rand could not make out details, but it appeared to be another group of men with a huge puppet, coming toward Loial and him. Except that now he knew what to look for, the "puppet" moved its legs too naturally, and the snouted head rose to sniff the air without anyone lifting a pole. He did not think the Trolloc and Darkfriends could see him among the evening shadows, [illegible]
"Fain knows I am out here somewhere," he said, hastily wiping his blade on a dead Trolloc's coat. "He's set them to find me. He is afraid of the Trollocs being seen, though, or he wouldn't have them disguised. If we can reach a street where there are people, we'll be safe. We have to get back to Hurin. If Fain finds him, alone with the Horn . . . ."
He pulled Loial along to the next corner and turned toward the nearest sounds of laughter and music, but long before they reached it, another group of men appeared ahead of them in the otherwise empty street with a puppet that was no puppet. Rand and Loial took the next turning. It led east.
Every time Rand tried to reach the music and laughter, there was a Trolloc in the way, often sniffing the air for a scent. Some Trollocs hunted by scent. Sometimes, here where there were no eyes to see, a Trolloc stalked alone. More than once he was sure it was one he had seen before. They were closing in, and making sure he and Loial did not leave the deserted streets with their shuttered [illegible]
"Rand," Loial said finally, "there is nowhere else to go."
They had reached the eastern edge of the Foregate; the tall buildings to either side of them were the last. Lights in windows on the upper stories mocked him, but the lower floors were all shut tight. Ahead lay the hills, cloaked in first twilight and bare of so much as a farmhouse. Not entirely empty, though. He could just make out pale walls surrounding one of the larger hills, perhaps a mile [illegible]
"Once they push us out there," Loial said, "they won't have to worry who sees them."
Rand gestured to the walls around the hill. "Those should stop a Trolloc. It must be a lord's manor. Maybe they'll let us in. An Ogier, and an outland lord? This coat has to be good for something sooner or later." He looked back down the street. No Trollocs in sight yet, but he drew Loial around the side of the building anyway.
"I think that is the Illuminators' chapter house, Rand. Illuminators guard their secrets tightly. I don't think they would let Galldrian himself inside there."
"What trouble have you gotten yourself into now?" said a familiar woman's voice. There was suddenly a spicy perfume in the air.
Rand stared: Selene stepped around the corner they had just rounded, her white dress bright in the dimness. "How did you get here? What are you doing here? You have to leave immediately. Run! There are Trollocs after us."
"So I saw." Her voice was dry, yet cool and composed. "I came to find you, and I find you allowing Trollocs to herd you like sheep. Can the man who possesses the Horn of Valere let himself be treated so?"
"I don't have it with me," he snapped, "and I don't know how it could help if I did. The dead heroes are not supposed to come back to save me from Trollocs. Selene, you have to get away. Now!" He peered around the corner.
Not more than a hundred paces away, a Trolloc was sticking its horned head cautiously into the street, smelling the night. A large shadow by its side had to be another Trolloc, and there were smaller shadows, too. Darkfriends.
"Too late," Rand muttered. He shifted the flute case to pull off his cloak and wrap it around her. It was long enough to hide her white dress entirely, and trail on the ground besides. "You'll have to hold that up to run," he told her. "Loial, if they won't let us in, we will have to find a way to sneak in."
"But, Rand - "
"Would you rather wait for the Trollocs?" He gave Loial a push to start him, and took Selene's hand to follow at a trot. "Find us a path that won't break our necks, Loial."

[illegible]

"The sand buckets! Fetch the sand buckets quickly!"
"This is disaster! Disaster!"
"Some of them went that way!"
Loial grabbed Rand's shoulder. "You cannot help her, Rand. Not by being taken yourself. We must go." Someone appeared at the end of the alley, a shadow outlined by the glow of flames behind, and pointed toward them. "Come on, Rand!"
Rand let himself be pulled out of the door into the darkness. The fire faded behind them until it was only a glow in the night, and the lights of the Foregate came closer. Rand almost wished more Trollocs would appear, something he could fight. But there was only the night breeze ruffling the grass.
"I tried to stop her," Loial said. There was a long silence. "We really couldn't have done anything. They would just have taken us, too."
Rand sighed. "I know, Loial. You did what you could." He walked backwards a few steps, staring at the glow. It seemed less; the Illuminators must be putting out the flames. "I have to help her somehow." How? Saidin? The Power? He shivered. "I have to."
They went through the Foregate by the lighted streets, wrapped in a silence that shut out the gaiety around them.
When they entered The Defender of the Dragonwall, the innkeeper held out his tray with a sealed parchment.
Rand took it, and stared at the white seal. A crescent moon and stars. "Who left this? When?"
"An old woman, my Lord. Not a quarter of an hour gone. A servant, though she did not say from what House." Cuale smiled as if inviting confidences.
"Thank you," Rand said, still staring at the seal. The innkeeper watched them go upstairs with a thoughtful look.
Hurin took his pipe out of his mouth when Rand and Loial entered the room. Hurin had his short sword and sword-breaker on the table, wiping them with an oily rag. "You were long with the gleeman, my Lord. Is he well?"
Rand gave a start. "What? Thom? Yes, he's." He broke open the seal with his thumb and read.

When I think I know what you are going to do, you do something else. You are a dangerous man. Perhaps it will not be long before we are together again. Think of the Horn. Think of the glory. And think of me, for you are always mine.

Again, it bore no signature but the flowing hand itself. "Are all women crazy?" Rand demanded of the ceiling. Hurin shrugged. Rand threw himself into the other chair, the one sized for an Ogier; his feet dangled above the floor, but he did not care. He stared at the blanket-covered chest under the edge of Loial's bed. Think of the glory. "I wish Ingtar would come."

CHAPTER
28
A New Thread in the Pattern

Perrin watched the mountains of Kinslayer's Dagger uncomfortably as he rode. The way still slanted upwards, and looked as if it would climb forever, though he thought the crest of the pass must not be too much farther. To one side of the trail, the land sloped sharply down to a shallow mountain stream, dashing itself to froth over sharp rocks; to the other side the mountains reared in a se [illegible]
The wolves said there were people in the mountains. Perrin wondered if they were some of Fain's Darkfriends. The wolves did not know, or care. They only knew the Twisted Ones were somewhere ahead. Still far ahead, though Ingtar had pressed the column hard. Perrin noticed that Uno was watching the mountains around them much the way he himself was.
Mat, his bow slung across his back, rode with seeming unconcern, juggling three colored balls, yet he looked paler than he had. Verin examined him two and three times a day now, frowning, and Perrin was sure she had even tried Healing at least once, but it made no difference Perrin could see. In any case, she seemed to be more absorbed in something about which she did not speak.
Rand, Perrin thought, looking at the Aes Sedai's back. She always rode at the head of the column with Ingtar, and she always wanted them to move even faster than the Shienaran lord would allow. Somehow, she knows about Rand. Images from the wolves flickered in his head-stone farmhouses and terraced villages, all beyond the mountain peaks; the wolves saw them no differently than [illegible]
Ingtar let his horse fall back beside Perrin's. Sometimes, to Perrin's eyes, the crescent crest on the Shienaran's helmet looked like a Trolloc's horns. Ingtar said softly, "Tell me again what the wolves said."
"I've told you ten times," Perrin muttered.
"Tell me again! Anything I may have missed, anything that will help me find the Horn . . . ." Ingtar drew a breath and let it out slowly. "I must find the Horn of Valere, Perrin. Tell me again."
There was no need for Perrin to order it in his mind, not after so many repetitions. He droned it out. "Someone - or something - attacked the Darkfriends in the night and killed those Trollocs we found." His stomach no longer lurched at that. Ravens and vultures were messy feeders. "The wolves call him - or it - Shadowkiller; I think it was a man, but they wouldn't go close enough to see cl [illegible]
"Shadowkiller," Ingtar murmured. "Something of the Dark One, like a Myrddraal? I have seen things in the Blight that might be called Shadowkillers, but . . . . Did they see nothing else?"
"They would not come close to him. It was not a Fade. I've told you, they will kill a Fade quicker than they will a Trolloc, even if they lose half the pack. Ingtar, the wolves who saw it passed this to others, then still others, before it reached me. I can only tell you what they passed on, and after so many tellings . . . ." He let the words die as Uno joined them.
"Aielman in the rocks," the one-eyed man said quietly.
"This far from the Waste?" Ingtar said incredulously. Uno somehow managed to look offended without changing his expression, and Ingtar added, "No, I don't doubt you. I am just surprised."
"He flaming wanted me to see him, or I likely wouldn't have." Uno sounded disgusted at admitting it. "And his bloody face wasn't veiled, so he's not out for killing. But when you see one bloody Aiel, there's always more you don't." Suddenly his eye widened. "Burn me if it doesn't look like he bloody wants more than to be seen." He pointed: a man had stepped into the way ahead of them.
Instantly Masema's lance dropped to a couch, and he dug his heels into his horse, leaping to a dead gallop in three strides. He was not the only one; four steel points hurtled toward the man on the ground.
"Hold!" Ingtar shouted. "Hold, I said! I'll have the ears of any man who doesn't stop where he stands!"
Masema pulled in his horse viciously, sawing the reins. The others also stopped, in a cloud of dust not ten paces from the man, their lances still held steady on the man's chest. He raised a hand to wave away the dust as it drifted toward him; it was the first move he had made.
He was a tall man, with skin dark from the sun and red hair cut short except for a tail in the back that hung to his shoulders. From his soft, laced knee-high boots to the cloth wrapped loosely around his neck, his clothes were all in shades of brown and gray that would blend into rock or earth. The end of a short horn bow peeked over his shoulder, and a quiver bristled with arrows at his belt [illegible]
"I have no pipers to play the tune," the man announced with a smile, "but if you wish the dance . . . ." He did not change his stance, but Perrin caught a sudden air of readiness. "My name is Urien, of the Two Spires sept of the Reyn Aiel. I am a Red Shield. Remember me."
Ingtar dismounted and walked forward, removing his helmet. Perrin hesitated only a moment before climbing down to join him. He could not miss the chance to see an Aiel close up. Acting like a black-veiled Aiel. In story after story Aiel were as deadly and dangerous as Trollocs - some even said they were all Darkfriends - but Urien's smile somehow did not look dangerous despite the fa [illegible]
"He looks like Rand." Perrin looked around to see that Mat had joined them, too. "Maybe Ingtar's right," Mat added quietly. "Maybe Rand is an Aiel."
Perrin nodded. "But it doesn't change anything."
"No, it doesn't." Mat sounded as if he were talking about something beside what Perrin meant.
"We are both far from our homes," Ingtar said to the Aiel, "and we, at least, have come for other things than fighting." Perrin revised his opinion of Urien's smile; the man actually looked disappointed.
"As you wish it, Shienaran." Urien turned to Verin, just getting down off her horse, and made an odd bow, digging the points of his spears into the ground and extending his right hand, palm up. His voice became respectful. "Wise One, my water is yours."
Verin handed her reins to one of the soldiers. She studied the Aiel as she came closer. "Why do you call me that? Do you take me for an Aiel?"
"No, Wise One. But you have the look of those who have made the journey to Rhuidean and survived. The years do not touch the Wise Ones in the same way as other women, or as they touch men."
An excited look appeared on the Aes Sedai's face, but Ingtar spoke impatiently. "We are following Darkfriends and Trollocs, Urien. Have you seen any sign of them?"
"Trollocs? Here?" Urien's eyes brightened. "It is one of the signs the prophecies speak of. When the Trollocs come out of the Blight again, we will leave the Three-fold Land and take back our places of old." There was muttering from the mounted Shienarans. Urien eyed them with a pride that made him seem to be looking down from a height.
"The Three-fold Land?" Mat said.
Perrin thought he looked still paler; not sick, exactly, but as if he had been out of the sun too long.
"You call it the Waste," Urien said. "To us it is the Three-fold Land. A shaping stone, to make us; a testing ground, to prove our worth; and a punishment for the sin."
"What sin?" Mat asked. Perrin caught his breath, waiting for the spears in Urien's hand to flash.
The Aiel shrugged. "So long ago it was, that none remember. Except the Wise Ones and the clan chiefs, and they will not speak of it. It must have been a very great sin if they cannot bring themselves to tell us, but the Creator punishes us well."
"Trollocs," Ingtar persisted. "Have you seen Trollocs?"
Urien shook his head. "I would have killed them if I had, but I have seen nothing but the rocks and the sky."
Ingtar shook his head, losing interest, but Verin spoke, sharp concentration in her voice. "This Rhuidean. What is it? Where is it? How are the girls chosen to go?"
Urien's face went flat, his eyes hooded. "I cannot speak of it, Wise One."
In spite of himself Perrin's hand gripped his axe. There was that in Urien's voice. Ingtar had also set himself, ready to reach for his sword, and there was a stir among the mounted men. But Verin stepped up to the Aiel, until she was almost touching his chest, and looked up into his face.
"I am not a Wise One as you know them, Urien," she said insistently. "I am Aes Sedai. Tell me what you can say of Rhuidean."
The man who had been ready to face twenty men now looked as if he wished for an escape from this one plump woman with graying hair. "I . . . can tell you only what is known to all. Rhuidean lies in the lands of the Jenn Aiel, the thirteenth clan. I cannot speak of them except to name them. None may go there save women who wish to become Wise Ones, or men who wish to be clan chi [illegible]
Verin continued to look up at him, pursing her lips.
Urien looked at the sky as though he was trying to remember it. "Will you slay me now, Aes Sedai?"
She blinked. "What?"
"Will you slay me now? One of the old prophecies says that if ever we fail the Aes Sedai again, they will slay us. I know your power is greater than that of the Wise Ones." The Aiel laughed suddenly, mirthlessly. There was a wild light in his eyes. "Bring your lightnings, Aes Sedai. I will dance with them."

[illegible]

CHAPTER
29
Seanchan

Geofram Bornhald ignored the smell of burning houses and the bodies that lay sprawled on the dirt of the street. Byar and a white-cloaked guard of a hundred rode into the village at his heels, half the men he had with him. His legion was too scattered for his liking, with Questioners having too many of the commands, but his orders had been explicit: Obey the Questioners.
There had been but slight resistance here; only half a dozen dwellings gave off columns of smoke. The inn was still standing, he saw, white-plastered stone like almost every structure on Almoth Plain.
Reining up before the inn, his eyes went past the prisoners his soldiers held near the village well to the long gibbet marring the village green. It was hastily made, only a long pole on uprights, but it held thirty bodies, their clothes ruffled by the breeze. There were small bodies hanging among their elders. Even Byar stared at that in disbelief.
"Muadh!" he roared. A grizzled man trotted away from those holding the prisoners. Muadh had fallen into the hands of Darkfriends, once; his scarred face took even the strongest aback. "Is this your work, Muadh, or the Seanchan?"
"Neither, my Lord Captain." Muadh's voice was a hoarse, whispered growl, another leaving of the Darkfriends. He said no more.
Bornhald frowned. "Surely that lot did not do it," he said, gesturing to the prisoners. The Children did not look so neat as when he had brought them across Tarabon, but they seemed ready to parade compared with the rabble - that crouched under their watchful eyes. Men in rags and bits of armor, with sullen faces. Remnants of the army Tarabon had sent against the invaders on Toman He [illegible]
Muadh hesitated, then said carefully, "The villagers say they wore Taraboner cloaks, my Lord Captain. There was a big man among them, with gray eyes and a long mustache, that sounds twin to Child Earwin, and a young lad, trying to hide a pretty face behind a yellow beard, who fought with his left hand. Sounds almost like Child Wuan, my Lord Captain."
"Questioners!" Bornhald spat. Earwin and Wuan were among those he had had to hand over to the Questioners' command. He had seen Questioner tactics before, but this was the first time he had ever been faced with children's bodies.
"If my Lord Captain says so." Muadh made it sound like fervent agreement.
"Cut them down," Bornhald said wearily. "Cut them down, and make sure the villagers know there will be no more killing." Unless some fool decides to be brave because his woman is watching, and I have to make an example. He dismounted, eyeing the prisoners again, as Muadh hurried off calling for ladders and knives. He had more to think about than Questioners' overzealousness; he [illegible]
"They do not put up much fight, my Lord Captain," Byar said, "either these Taraboners or what is left of the Domani. They snap like cornered rats, but run as soon as anything snaps back."
"Let us see how we do against the invaders, Byar, before we look down on these men, yes?" The prisoners' faces bore a defeated look that had been there before his men came. "Have Muadh pick one out for me." Muadh's face was enough to soften most men's resolve by itself. "An officer, preferably. One who looks intelligent enough to tell what he has seen without embroidery, but young [illegible]
The innkeeper was there, for a wonder, an obsequious, sweating man, his dirty shirt straining over his belly until the embroidered red scrollwork seemed ready to pop off. Bornhald waved the man away; he was vaguely aware of a woman and some children huddling in a doorway, until the fat innkeeper shepherded them out.
Bornhald pulled off his gauntlets and sat at one of the tables. He knew too little about the invaders, the strangers. That was what almost everyone called them, those who did not just babble about Artur Hawkwing. He knew they called themselves the Seanchan, and Hailene. He had enough of the Old Tongue to know the latter meant Those Who Come Before, or the Forerunners. They also [illegible]
A sound of boots in the doorway made him put on a wolfish grin, but Byar was not accompanied by Muadh. The Child of the Light who stood beside him, back braced and helmet in the crook of his arm, was Jeral, who Bornhald expected to be a hundred miles away. Over his armor, the young man wore a cloak of Domani cut, trimmed with blue, not the white cloak of the Children.
"Muadh is talking to a young fellow now, my Lord Captain," Byar said. "Child Jeral has just ridden in with a message."
Bornhald waved for Jeral to begin.
The young man did not unbend. "The compliments of Jaichim Carridin," he started, looking straight ahead, "who guides the Hand of the Light in - "
"I have no need of the Questioner's compliments," Bornhald growled, and saw the young man's startled look. Jeral was young, yet. For that matter, Byar looked uncomfortable, as well. "You will give me his message, yes? Not word for word, unless I ask it. Simply tell me what he wants."
The Child, set to recite, swallowed before he began. "My Lord Captain, he - he says you are moving too many men too close to Toman Head. He says the Darkfriends on Almoth Plain must be rooted out, and you are - forgive me, Lord Captain - you are to turn back at once and ride toward the heart of the plain." He stood stiffly, waiting.
Bornhald studied him. The dust of the plain stained Jeral's face as well as his cloak and his boots. "Go and get yourself something to eat," Bornhald told him. "There should be wash water in one of these houses, if you wish it. Return to me in an hour. I will have messages for you to carry." He waved the young man out.
"The Questioners may be right, my Lord Captain," Byar said when Jeral was gone. "There are many villages scattered on the plain, and the Darkfriends - "
Bornhald's hand slapping the table cut him off. "What Darkfriends? I have seen nothing in any village he has ordered taken except farmers and craftsmen worried that we will burn their livelihoods, and a few old women who tend the sick." Byar's face was a study in lack of expression; he was always readier than Bornhald to see Darkfriends. "And children, Byar? Do children here become [illegible]
"The sins of the mother are visited to the fifth generation," Byar quoted, "and the sins of the father to the tenth." But he looked uneasy. Even Byar had never killed a child.
"Has it never occurred to you, Byar, to wonder why - Carridin has taken away our banners, and the cloaks of the men the Questioners lead? Even the Questioners themselves have put off the white. This suggests something, yes?"
"He must have his reasons, Lord Captain," Byar said slowly. "The Questioners always have reasons, even when they do not tell the rest of us."
Bornhald reminded himself that Byar was a good soldier. "Children to the north wear Taraboner cloaks, Byar, and those to the south Domani. I do not like what this suggests to me. There are Darkfriends here, but they are in Falme, not on the plain. When Jeral rides, he will not ride alone. Messages will go to every group of the Children I know how to find. I mean to take the legion onto To [illegible]
Byar looked troubled, but before he could speak, Muadh appeared with one of the prisoners. The sweating young man in a battered, ornate breastplate shot frightened looks at Muadh's hideous face.
Bornhald drew his dagger and began trimming his nails. He had never understood why that made some men nervous, but he used it just the same. Even his grandfatherly smile made the prisoner's dirty face pale. "Now, young man, you will tell me everything you know about these strangers, yes? If you need to think on what to say, I will send you back out with Child Muadh to consider it."
The prisoner darted a wide-eyed look at Muadh. Then words began to pour out of him.

The long swells of the Aryth Ocean made Spray roll, but Domon's spread feet balanced him as he held the long tube of the looking glass to his eye and studied the large vessel that pursued them. Pursued, and was slowly overtaking. The wind where Spray ran was not the best or the strongest, but where the other ship smashed the swells into mountains of foam with its bluff bow, it could no [illegible]
"Strangers, Captain?" Yarin had the sound of sweat in his voice. "Is it a strangers' ship?"
Domon lowered the looking glass, but his eye still seemed filled by that tall, square-looking ship with its odd ribbed sails. "Seanchan," he said, and heard Yarin groan. He drummed his thick fingers on the rail, then told the helmsman, "Take her closer in. That ship will no dare enter the shallow waters Spray can sail."
Yarin shouted commands, and crewmen ran to haul in booms as the helmsman put the tiller over, pointing the bow more toward the shoreline. Spray moved more slowly, heading so far into the wind, but Domon was sure he could reach shoal waters before the other vessel came up on him. Did her holds be full, she could still take shallower water than ever that great hull can.
His ship rode a little higher in the water than she had on sailing from Tanchico. A third of the cargo of fireworks he had taken on there was gone, sold in the fishing villages on Toman Head, but with the silver that flowed for the fireworks had come disturbing reports. The people spoke of visits from the tall, boxy ships of the invaders. When Seanchan ships anchored off the coast, the villag [illegible]
In Tanchico, no one had even known what they called themselves, and the Taraboners spoke confidently of their soldiers driving the invaders into the sea. But in every coastal town, it was different. The Seanchan told astonished people they must swear again oaths they had forsaken, though never deigning to explain when they had forsaken them, or what the oaths meant. The young wome [illegible]
And when the people had been thoroughly cowed, when they had been made to kneel and swear, bewildered, to obey the Forerunners, await the Return, and serve Those Who Come Home with their lives, the Seanchan sailed away and usually never returned. Falme, it was said, was the only town they held fast.
In some of the villages they had left, men and women crept back toward their former lives, to the extent of talking about electing their Councils again, but most eyed the sea nervously and made pale-cheeked protests that they meant to hold to the oaths they had been made to swear even if they did not understand them.
Domon had no intention of meeting any Seanchan, if he could avoid it.
He was raising the glass to see what he could make out on the nearing Seanchan decks, when, with a roar, the surface of the sea broke into fountaining water and flame not a hundred paces from his larboard side. Before he had even began to gape, another column of flame split the sea on the other side, and as he was spinning to stare at that, another burst up ahead. The eruptions died as qui [illegible]
"We . . . we'll reach shallow water before they can close with us," Yarin said slowly. He seemed to be trying not to look at the water roiling under clouds of mist.
Domon shook his head. "Whatever they did, they can shatter us, even do I take her into the breakers." He shivered, thinking of the flame inside the fountains of water, and his holds full of fireworks. "Fortune prick me, we might no live to drown." He tugged at his beard and rubbed his bare upper lip, reluctant to give the order-the vessel and what it contained were all he had in the world-bu [illegible]
As crewmen ran to lower the triangular sails, Domon turned to watch the Seanchan ship approach. Spray lost headway and pitched in the swells. The other vessel stood taller above the water than Domon's ship, with wooden towers at bow and stern. Men were in the rigging, raising those strange sails, and armored figures stood atop the towers. A longboat was put over the side, and sped tow [illegible]
The first to climb up was one of the armored men, and Domon saw immediately why some of the villagers claimed the Seanchan themselves were monsters. The helmet looked very much like some monstrous insect's head, with thin red plumes like feelers; the wearer seemed to be peering out through mandibles. It was painted and gilded to increase the effect, and the rest of the man's armo [illegible]
Then the armored figure removed his helmet, and Domon stared. He was a woman. Her dark hair was cut short, and her face was hard, but there was no mistaking it. He had never heard of such a thing, except among the Aiel, and Aiel were well known to be crazed. Just as disconcerting was the fact that her face did not look as different as he had expected of a Seanchan. Her eyes were blu [illegible]
The other soldiers followed the woman onto the deck. Domon was relieved to see, when some of them removed their strange helmets, that they, at least, were men; men with black eyes, or brown, who could have gone unnoticed in Tanchico or Illian. He had begun to have visions of armies of blue-eyed women with swords. Aes Sedai with swords, he thought, remembering the sea erupting [illegible]
The Seanchan woman surveyed the ship arrogantly, then picked Domon out as captain-it had to be him or Yarin, by their clothes; the way Yarin had his eyes closed and was muttering prayers under his breath pointed to Domon-and fixed him with a stare like a spike.
"Are there any women among your crew or passengers?" She spoke with a soft slurring that made her hard to understand, but there was a snap in her voice that said she was used to getting answers. "Speak up, man, if you are the captain. If not, wake that other fool and tell him to speak."
"I do be captain, my Lady," Domon said cautiously. He had no idea how to address her, and he did not want to put a foot wrong. "I have no passengers, and there be no women in my crew." He thought of the girls and women who had been carried off, and, not for the first time, wondered what these folk wanted with them.
The two women dressed as women were coming up from the longboat, one drawing the other-Domon blinked-by a leash of silvery metal as she climbed aboard. The leash went from a bracelet worn by the first woman to a collar around the neck of the second. He could not tell whether it was woven or jointed-it seemed somehow to be both-but it was clearly of a piece with both bracelet [illegible]
"Speak slowly, man," the blue-eyed woman demanded in her slurred speech. She came across the deck to confront him, staring up at him and in some way seeming taller and larger than he. "You are even harder to understand than the rest in this Light-forsaken land. And I make no claim to be of the Blood. Not yet. After Corenne . . . I am Captain Egeanin."

[illegible]

Turak's expression never changed, but the man with the braid cut Domon off with a snapped, "Unshaven dog! You speak of giving the High Lord what Captain Egeanin has already given. You bargain, as if the High Lord were a - a merchant! You will be flayed alive over nine days, dog, and - " The barest motion of Turak's finger silenced him.
"I cannot allow you to leave me, trader," the High Lord said. "In this shadowed land of oath-breakers, I find none who can converse with a man of sensibilities. But you are a collector. Perhaps your conversation will be interesting." He took the chair, lolling back in its curves to study Domon.
Domon put on what he hoped was an ingratiating smile. "High Lord, I do be a simple trader, a simple man. I do no have the way of talking with great Lords."
The man with the braid glared at him, but Turak seemed not to hear. From behind one of the screens, a slim, pretty young woman appeared on quick feet to kneel beside the High Lord, offering a lacquered tray bearing a single cup, thin and handleless, of some steaming black liquid. Her dark, round face was vaguely reminiscent of the Sea Folk. Turak took the cup carefully in his long-nail [illegible]
"The aroma of kaf," Turak said, "is almost as enjoyable as the flavor. Now, trader. I have learned that cuendillar is even more rare here than in Seanchan. Tell me how a simple trader came to possess a piece." He sipped his kaf and waited.
Domon took a deep breath and set about trying to lie his way out of Falme.

CHAPTER
30
Daes Dae'mar

In the room shared by Hurin and Loial, Rand peered through the window at the ordered lines and terraces of Cairhien, the stone buildings and slate roofs. He could not see the Illuminators' chapter house; even if huge towers and great lords' houses had not been in the way, the city walls would have prevented it. The Illuminators were on everyone's tongues in the city, even now, days after t [illegible]
Rand turned away. He hoped no one had been hurt in the fire, but the Illuminators had not so far admitted there had been a fire. They were a close-mouthed lot about what went on inside their chapter house.
"I will take the next watch," he told Hurin, "as soon as I come back."
"There is no need, my Lord." Hurin bowed as deeply as any Cairhienin. "I can keep watch. Truly, my Lord need not trouble himself."
Rand drew a deep breath and exchanged looks with Loial. The Ogier only shrugged. The sniffer was growing more formal every day they remained in Cairhien; the Ogier simply commented that humans often acted oddly.
"Hurin," Rand said, "you used to call me Lord Rand, and you used not to bow every time I looked at you." I want him to unbend and call me Lord Rand again, he thought with amazement. Lord Rand! Light, we have to get out of here before I start wanting him to bow. "Will you please sit down? You make me tired, looking at you."
Hurin stood with his back stiff, yet appeared ready to leap to perform any task Rand might request. He neither sat down nor relaxed now. "It wouldn't be proper, my Lord. We have to show these Cairhienin we know how to be every bit as proper as - "
"Will you stop saying that!" Rand shouted.
"As you wish, my Lord."
It was an effort for Rand not to sigh again. "Hurin, I'm sorry. I should not have shouted at you."
"It's your right, my Lord," Hurin said simply. "If I don't do the way you want, it's your right to shout."
Rand stepped toward the sniffer with the intention of grabbing the man's collar and shaking him.
A knock on the connecting door to Rand's room froze them all, but Rand was pleased to see that Hurin did not wait to ask permission before picking up his sword. The heron-mark blade was at Rand's waist; going out, he touched its hilt. He waited for Loial to seat himself on his long bed, arranging his legs and the tails of his coat to further obscure the blanket-covered chest under the bed, t [illegible]
The innkeeper stood there, rocking with eagerness and pushing his tray at Rand. Two sealed parchments lay on the tray. "Forgive me, my Lord," Cuale said breathlessly. "I could not wait until you came down, and then you were not in your own room, and - and . . . Forgive me, but . . ." He jiggled the tray.
Rand snatched the invitations - there had been so many - without looking at them, took the innkeeper's arm, and turned him toward the door to the hall. "Thank you, Master Cuale, for taking the trouble. If you'll leave us alone, now, please . . ."
"But, my Lord," Cuale protested, "these are from - "
"Thank you." Rand pushed the man into the hall and pulled the door shut firmly. He tossed the parchments onto the table. "He hasn't done that before. Loial, do you think he was listening at the door before he knocked?"
"You are starting to think like these Cairhienin." The Ogier laughed, but his ears twitched thoughtfully and he added, "Still, he is Cairhienin, so he may well have been. I don't think we said anything he should not have heard."
Rand tried to remember. None of them had mentioned the Horn of Valere, or Trollocs, or Darkfriends. When he found himself wondering what Cuale could make of what they actually had said, he gave himself a shake. "This place is getting to you, too," he muttered to himself.
"My Lord?" Hurin had picked up the sealed parchments and was gazing wide-eyed at the seals. "My Lord, these are from Lord Barthanes, High Seat of House Damodred, and from" - his voice dropped with awe - "the King."

Rand waved them away. "They still go in the fire like the rest. Unopened."

"But, my Lord!"

"Hurin," Rand said patiently, "you and Loial between you have explained this Great Game to me. If I go wherever it is they've invited me, the Cairhienin will read something into it and think I am part of somebody's plot. If I don't go, they'll read something into that. If I send back an answer, they will dig for meaning in it, and the same if I don't answer. And since half of Cairhien apparently spies on the other half, everybody knows what I do. I burned the first two, and I will burn these, just like all the others." One day there had been twelve in the pile he tossed into t[illegible]

"I have tried to tell you," Loial said. "I don't think it works that way. Whatever you do, Cairhienin will see some sort of plot in it. At least, that is what Elder Haman always said."

Hurin held the sealed invitations out to Rand as if offering gold. "My Lord, this one bears the personal seal of Galldrian. His personal seal, my Lord. And this one the personal seal of Lord Barthanes, who is next to the King himself in power. My Lord, burn these, and you make enemies as powerful as you can find. Burning them's worked so far because the other Houses are all waiting to see what you're up to, and thinking you must have powerful allies to risk insulting them. But Lord Barthanes - and the King! Insult them, and they'll act for sure."

Rand scrubbed his hands through his hair. "What if I refuse them both?"

"It won't work, my Lord. Every last House has sent you an invitation, now. If you decline these - well, for sure at least one of the other Houses will figure, if you're not allied with the King or Lord Barthanes, then they can answer your insult of burning their invitation. My Lord, I hear the Houses in Cairhien use killers, now. A knife in the street. An arrow from a rooftop. Poison slipped in your wine."

"You could accept them both," Loial suggested. "I know you don't want to, Rand, but it might even be fun. An evening at a lord's manor, or even at the Royal Palace. Rand, the Shienarans believed in you."

Rand grimaced. He knew it had been chance that the Shienarans thought he was a lord; a chance likeness of names, a rumor among the servants, and Moiraine and the Amyrlin stirring it all. But Selene had believed it, too. Maybe she'll be at one of these.

Hurin was shaking his head violently, though. "Builder, you don't know Daes Dae'mar as well as you think you do. Not the way they play it in Cairhien, not now. With most Houses, it wouldn't matter. Even when they're plotting against each other to the knife, they act like they aren't, out where everybody can see. But not these two. House Damodred held the throne until Laman lost it, and they want it back. The King would crush them, if they weren't nearly as powerful as he is. You can't find bitterer rivals than House Riatin and House Damodred. If my Lord accept[illegible]

"And I suppose," Rand growled, "if I only accept one, the other will think I'm allied with that House." Hurin nodded. "And they will probably try to kill me to stop whatever I'm involved in." Hurin nodded again. "Then do you have any suggestion as to how I avoid any of them wanting to see me dead?" Hurin shook his head. "I wish I'd never burned those first two. "

"Yes, my Lord. But it wouldn't have made much difference, I'm guessing. Whoever you accepted or rejected, these Cairhienin would see something in it."

Rand held out his hand, and Hurin laid the two folded parchments in it. The one was sealed, not with the Tree and Crown of House Damodred, but with Barthanes's Charging Boar. The other bore Galldrian's Stag. Personal seals. Apparently he had managed to rouse interest in the highest quarters by doing nothing at all.

"These people are crazy," he said, trying to think of a way out of this.

"Yes, my Lord."

"I will let them see me in the common room with these," he said slowly. Whatever was seen in the common room at midday was known in ten Houses before nightfall, and in all of them by daybreak next. "I won't break the seals. That way, they will know I have not answered either one yet. As long as they are waiting to see which way I jump, maybe I can earn a few more days. Ingtar has to come soon. He has to."

"Now that is thinking like a Cairhienin, my Lord," Hurin said, grinning.

Rand gave him a sour look, then stuffed the parchments into his pocket on top of Selene's letters. "Let's go, Loial. Maybe Ingtar has arrived."

When he and Loial reached the common room, no man or woman in it looked at Rand. Cuale was polishing a silver tray as if his life depended on its gleam. The serving girls hurried between the tables as if Rand and the Ogier did not exist. Every last person at the tables stared into his or her mug as if the secrets of power lay in wine or ale. Not one of them said a word.

After a moment, he pulled the two invitations from his pocket and studied the seals, then stuck them back. Cuale gave a little jump as Rand started for the door. Before it closed behind him, he heard conversation spring up again.

Rand strode down the street so fast that Loial did not have to shorten his stride to stay beside him. "We have to find a way out of the city, Loial. This trick with the invitations can't work more than two or three days. If Ingtar doesn't come by then, we must leave anyway."

"Agreed," Loial said.

"But how?"

Loial began ticking off points on his thick fingers. "Fain is out there, or there would not have been Trollocs in the Foregate. If we ride out, they will be on us as soon as we are out of sight of the city. If we travel with a merchant train, they'll certainly attack it." No merchant would have more than five or six guards, and they would probably run as soon as they saw a Trolloc. "If only we knew how many Trollocs Fain has, and how many Darkfriends. You have cut his numbers down." He did not mention the Trolloc he had killed, but from his frown, his long eyebrows hanging down onto his cheeks, he was thinking of it.

"It doesn't matter how many he has," Rand said. "Ten are as bad as a hundred. If ten Trollocs attack us, I don't think we'll get away again." He avoided thinking of the way he might, just might, deal with ten Trollocs. It had not worked when he tried to help Loial, after all.

"I do not think we could, either. I don't think we have money to take passage very far, but even so, if we tried to reach the Foregate docks - well, Fain must have Darkfriends watching. If he thought we were taking ship, I don't believe he would care who saw the Trollocs. Even if we fought free of them somehow, we would have to explain ourselves to the city guards, and they would certainly not believe we cannot open the chest, so - "

"We are not letting any Cairhienin see that chest, Loial."

The Ogier nodded. "And the city docks are no good, either." The city docks were reserved for the grain barges and the pleasure craft of the lords and ladies. No one came to them without permission. One could look down on them from the wall, but it was a drop that would break even Loial's neck. Loial wiggled his thumb as if trying to think of a point for that, too. "I suppose it is too bad we cannot reach Stedding Tsofu. Trollocs would never come into a stedding. But I don't suppose they would let us get that far without attacking."

Rand did not answer. They had reached the big guardhouse just inside the gate by which they had first entered Cairhien. Outside, the Foregate teemed and milled, and a pair of guards kept watch on them. Rand thought a man, dressed in what had once been good Shienaran clothes, ducked back into the crowd at the sight of him, but he could not be sure. There were too many people in clothes from too many lands, all of them hurrying. He went up the steps into the guardhouse, past breastplated guards on either side of the door.

The large anteroom had hard wooden benches for people with business there, mainly folk waiting with a humble patience, wearing the plain, dark garments that marked the poorer commoners. There were a few Foregaters among them, picked out by shabbiness and bright colors, no doubt hoping for permission to seek work inside the walls.

Rand went straight to the long table in the back of the room. There was only one man seated behind it, not a soldier, with one green bar across his coat. A plump fellow whose skin looked too tight, he adjusted documents on the table and shifted the position of his inkwell twice before looking up at Rand and Loial with a false smile.

"How may I help you, my Lord?"

"The same way I hoped you could help me yesterday," Rand said with more patience than he felt, "and the day before, and the day before that. Has Lord Ingtar come?"

"Lord Ingtar, my Lord?"

Rand took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Lord Ingtar of House Shinowa, from Shienar. The same man I have asked after every day I've come here."

"No one of that name has entered the city, my Lord."

"Are you certain? Don't you need to look at your lists, at least?"

"My Lord, the lists of foreigners who have come to Cairhien are exchanged among the guardhouses at sunrise and at sunset, and I examine them as soon as they come before me. No Shienaran lord has entered Cairhien in some time. "

"And the Lady Selene? Before you ask again, I do not know her House. But I've given you her name, and I have described her to you three times. Isn't that enough?"

The man spread his hands. "I am sorry, my Lord. Not knowing her House makes it very difficult." He had a bland look on his face. Rand wondered whether he would tell even if he knew.

A movement at one of the doors behind the desk caught Rand's eye-a man starting to step into the anteroom, then turning away hurriedly. "Perhaps Captain Caldevwin can help me," Rand told the clerk.

"Captain Caldevwin, my Lord?"

"I just saw him behind you."

"I am sorry, my Lord. If there was a Captain Caldevwin in the guardhouse, I would know."

Rand stared at him until Loial touched his shoulder. "Rand, I think we might as well go."

"Thank you for your help," Rand said in a tight voice. "I will return tomorrow. "

"It is my pleasure to do what I may," the man said with his false smile.

Rand stalked out of the guardhouse so fast that Loial had to hurry to catch him up in the street. "He was lying, you know, Loial." He did not slow down, but rather hurried along as if he could burn away some of his frustration through physical exertion. "Caldevwin was there. He could be lying about all of it. Ingtar could already be here, looking for us. I'll bet he knows who Selene is, too."

"Perhaps, Rand. Daes Dae'mar -"

"Light, I'm tired of hearing about the Great Game. I don't want to play it. I do not want to be any part of it." Loial walked beside him, saying nothing. "I know," Rand said at last. "They think I'm a lord, and in Cairhien, even outland lords are part of the Game. I wish I'd never put on this coat." Moiraine, he thought bitterly. She's still causing me trouble. Almost immediately, though, if reluctantly, he admitted that she could hardly be blamed for this. There had always been some reason to pretend to be what he was not. First keeping Hurin's spirits up, and then trying to impress Selene. After Selene, there had not seemed to be any way out of it. His steps slo[illegible]

"Ta'veren," Loial began.

"I do not want to hear about that, either." Rand started off again as fast as before. "All I want is to give the dagger to Mat, and the Horn to Ingtar." Then what? Go mad? Die? If I die before I go mad, at least I won't hurt anybody else. But I don't want to die, either. Lan can talk about Sheathing the Sword, but I'm a shepherd, not a Warder. "If I can just not touch it," he muttered, "maybe I can . . . Owyn almost made it."

"What, Rand? I didn't hear that."

"It was nothing," Rand said wearily. "I wish Ingtar would get here. And Mat, and Perrin."

They walked along in silence for a time, with Rand lost in thought. Thom's nephew had lasted almost three years by channeling only when he thought he had to. If Owyn had managed to limit how often he channeled, it must be possible to not channel at all, no matter how seductive saidin was.

"Rand," Loial said, "there's a fire up ahead."

Rand got rid of his unwelcome thoughts and looked off into the city, frowning. A thick column of black smoke billowed up above the rooftops. He could not see what lay at the base of it, but it was too close to the inn.

"Darkfriends," he said, staring at the smoke. "Trollocs can't come inside the walls without being seen, but Darkfriends . . . Hurin!" He broke into a run, Loial easily keeping pace beside him.

The closer they came, the more certain it was, until they rounded the last stone-terraced corner and there was The Defender of the Dragonwall, smoke pouring out of its upper windows and flames breaking through the roof. A crowd had gathered in front of the inn. Cuale, shouting and jumping about, was directing men carrying furnishings out into the street. A double line of men passed inside buckets filled with water from a well down the street and empty buckets back out. Most of the people only stood and watched; a new gout of flame burst through the slate roof, and they gave a loud aaaah.

Rand pushed through the crowd to the innkeeper. "Where is Hurin?"

"Careful with that table!" Cuale shouted. "Do not scrape it!" He looked at Rand and blinked. His face was smudged with smoke. "My Lord? Who? Your manservant? I do not remember seeing him, my Lord. No doubt he went out. Do not drop those candlesticks, fool! They are silver!" Cuale danced off to harangue the men lugging his belongings out of the inn.

"Hurin wouldn't have gone out," Loial said. "He would not have left the . . . ." He looked around and left it unsaid; some of the onlookers seemed to find an Ogier as interesting as the fire.

"I know," Rand said, and plunged into the inn.

The common room hardly seemed as if the building were on fire. The double line of men stretched up the stairs, passing their buckets, and others scrambled to carry out what furniture was left; but there was no more smoke down here than if something had been burning the kitchen. As Rand pressed upstairs, it began to thicken. Coughing, he ran up the steps.

The lines stopped short of the second landing, men halfway up the stairs hurling their water up into a smoke-filled hallway. Flames licking up the walls flickered red through the black smoke.

One of the men grabbed Rand's arm. "You cannot go up there, my Lord. It is all lost above here. Ogier, speak to him."

It was the first Rand realized that Loial had followed him. "Go back, Loial. I'll bring him out."

"You cannot carry Hurin and the chest both, Rand." The Ogier shrugged. "Besides, I won't leave my books to burn."

"Then keep low. Under the smoke." Rand dropped to his hands and knees on the stairs, and scrambled up the rest of the way. There was cleaner air down near the floor; still smoky enough to make him cough, but he could breathe it. Yet even the air seemed blistering hot. He could not get enough of it through his nose. He breathed through his mouth, and felt his tongue drying.

Some of the water the men threw landed on him, soaking him to the skin. The coolness was only a momentary relief; the heat came right back. He crawled on determinedly, aware of Loial behind him only from the Ogier's coughing.

One wall of the hallway was almost solid flame, and the floor near it had already begun to add thin tendrils to the cloud that hung over his head. He was glad he could not see what lay above the smoke. Ominous crackling told enough.

The door to Hurin's room had not caught yet, but it was hot enough that he had to try twice before he could manage to push it open. The first thing to meet his eye was Hurin, sprawled on the floor. Rand crawled to the sniffer and lifted him up. There was a lump on the side of his head the size of a plum.

Hurin opened unfocused eyes. "Lord Rand?" he murmured faintly. '. . . knock at the door . . . thought it was more inni . . . ." His eyes rolled back in his head. Rand felt for a heartbeat, and sagged with relief when he found it.

"Rand . . ." Loial coughed. He was beside his bed, with the covers thrown up to reveal the bare boards underneath. The chest was gone.

Above the smoke, the ceiling creaked, and flaming pieces of wood fell to the floor.

Rand said, "Get your books. I will take Hurin. Hurry." He started to drape the limp sniffer over his shoulders, but Loial took Hurin from him.

"The books will have to burn, Rand. You can't carry him and crawl, and if you stand up, you will never reach the stairs." The Ogier pulled Hurin up onto his broad back, arms and legs hanging to either side. The ceiling gave a loud crack. "We must hurry, Rand."

"Go, Loial. Go, and I'll follow."

The Ogier crawled into the hall with his burden, and Rand started after him. Then he stopped, staring back at the connecting door to his room. The banner was still in there. The banner of the Dragon. Let it burn, he thought, and an answering thought came as if he had heard Moiraine say it. Your life may depend on it. She's still trying to use me. Your life may depend on it. Aes Sedai never lie.

With a groan, he rolled across the floor and kicked open the door to his room.

The other room was a mass of flame. The bed was a bonfire, red runners already crossed the floor. There would be no crawling across that. Getting to his feet, he ran crouching into the room, flinching from the heat, coughing, choking. Steam rose from his damp coat. One side of the wardrobe was already burning. He snatched open the door. His saddlebags lay inside, still protected from the fire, one side bulging with the banner of Lews Therin Telamon, the wooden flute case beside them. For an instant, he hesitated. I could still let it burn.

The ceiling above him groaned. He grabbed saddlebags and flute case and threw himself back through the door, landing on his knees as burning timbers crashed where he had stood. Dragging his burden, he crawled into the hall. The floor shook with more falling beams.

The men with the buckets were gone when he reached the stairs. He all but slid down the steps to the next landing, scrambled to his feet and ran through the now-empty building into the street. The onlookers stared at him, with his face blackened and his coat covered with smut, but he staggered to where Loial had propped Hurin against the wall of a house across the street. A woman from the crowd was wiping Hurin's face with a cloth, but his eyes were still closed, and his breath came in heaves.

"Is there a Wisdom nearby?" Rand demanded. "He needs help." The woman looked at him blankly, and he tried to remember the other names he had heard people call the women who would be Wisdoms in the Two Rivers. "A Wise Woman? A woman you call Mother somebody? A woman who knows herbs and healing?"

"I am a Reader, if that is what you mean," the woman said, "but all I know to do for this one is to make him comfortable. Something is broken inside his head, I fear."

"Rand! It is you!"

Rand stared. It was Mat, leading his horse through the crowd, with his bow strung across his back. A Mat whose face was pale and drawn, but still Mat, and grinning, if weakly. And behind him came Perrin, his yellow eyes shining in the fire and earning as many looks as the blaze. And Ingtar, dismounting in a high-collared coat instead of armor, but still with his sword hilt sticking up over his shoulder.

Rand felt a shiver run through him. "It's too late," he told them. "You came too late." And he sat down in the street and began to laugh.

CHAPTER
31
On the Scent

Rand did not know Verin was there until the Aes Sedai took his face in her hands. For a moment he could see worry in her face, perhaps even fear, and then suddenly he felt as if he had been doused with cold water, not the wet but the tingle. He gave one abrupt shudder and stopped laughing; she left him to crouch over Hurin. The Reader watched her carefully. So did Rand. What is she doing here? As if I didn't know.

"Where did you go?" Mat demanded hoarsely. "You all just disappeared, and now you're in Cairhien ahead of us. Loial?" The Ogier shrugged uncertainly and eyed the crowd, his ears twitching. Half the people had turned from the fire to watch the newcomers. A few edged closer trying to listen.

Rand let Perrin give him a hand up. "How did you find the inn?" He glanced at Verin, kneeling with her hands on the sniffer's head. "Her?"

"In a way," Perrin said. "The guards at the gate wanted our names, and a fellow coming out of the guardhouse gave a jump when he heard Ingtar's name. He said he didn't know it, but he had a smile that shouted 'lie' a mile off."

"I think I know the man you mean," Rand said. "He smiles that way all the time."

"Verin showed him her ring," Mat put in, "and whispered in his ear."

He looked and sounded sick, his cheeks flushed and tight, but he managed a grin. Rand had never noticed his cheekbones before. "I couldn't hear what she said, but I didn't know whether his eyes were going to pop out of his head or he was going to swallow his tongue first. All of a sudden, he couldn't do enough for us. He told us you were waiting for us, and right where you were staying. Offered to guide us himself, but he really looked relieved when Verin told him no." He snorted. "Lord Rand of House al'Thor. "

"It's too long a story to explain now," Rand said. "Where are Uno and the rest? We will need them. "

"In the Foregate." Mat frowned at him, and went on slowly, "Uno said they'd rather stay there than inside the walls. From what I can see, I'd rather be with them. Rand, why will we need Uno? Have you found . . . them?"

It was the moment Rand realized suddenly he had been avoiding. He took a deep breath and looked his friend in the eye. "Mat, I had the dagger, and I lost it. The Darkfriends took it back." He heard gasps from the Cairhienin listening, but he did not care. They could play their Great Game if they wanted, but Ingtar had come, and he was finished with it at last. "They can't have gone far, though."

Ingtar had been silent, but now he stepped forward and gripped Rand's arm. "You had it? And the" - he looked around at the onlookers - "the other thing?"

"They took that back, too," Rand said quietly. Ingtar pounded a fist into his palm and turned away; some of the Cairhienin backed off from the look on his face.

Mat chewed his lip, then shook his head. "I didn't know it was found, so it isn't as if I had lost it again. It is just still lost." It was plain he was speaking of the dagger, not the Horn of Valere. "We'll find it again. We have two sniffers, now. Perrin is one, too. He followed the trail all the way to the Foregate, after you vanished with Hurin and Loial. I thought you might have just run off . . . well, you know what I mean. Where did you go? I still don't understand how you got so far ahead of us. That fellow said you have been here days."

Rand glanced at Perrin - He's a sniffer? - and found Perrin studying him in return. He thought Perrin muttered something. Shadowkiller? I must have heard him wrong. Perrin's yellow gaze held him for a moment, seeming to hold secrets about him. Telling himself he was having fancies - I'm not mad. Not yet. - he pulled his eyes away.

Verin was just helping a still-shaky Hurin to his feet. "I feel right as goose feathers," he was saying. "Still a little tired, but . . . ." He let the words trail off, seeming to see her for the first time, to realize what had happened for the first time.

"The tiredness will last a few hours," she told him. "The body must strain to heal itself quickly."

The Cairhienin Reader rose. "Aes Sedai?" she said softly. Verin inclined her head, and the Reader made a full curtsy.

As quiet as they had been, the words "Aes Sedai" ran through the crowd in tones ranging from awe to fear to outrage. Everyone was watching now - not even Cuale gave any attention to his own burning inn - and Rand thought a little caution might not be amiss after all.

"Do you have rooms yet?" he asked. "We need to talk, and we can't do it here. "

"A good idea," Verin said. "I have stayed here before at The Great Tree. We will go there."

Loial went to fetch the horses - the inn roof had now fallen in completely, but the stables had not been touched - and soon they were making their way through the streets, all riding except for Loial, who claimed he had grown used to walking again. Perrin held the lead line to one of the packhorses they had brought south.

"Hurin," Rand said, "how soon can you be ready to follow their trail again? Can you follow it? The men who hit you and started the fire left a trail, didn't they?"

"I can follow it now, my Lord. And I could smell them in the street. It won't last long, though. There weren't any Trollocs, and they didn't kill anybody. Just men, my Lord. Darkfriends, I suppose, but you can't always be sure of that by smell. A day, maybe, before it fades."

"I don't think they can open the chest either, Rand," Loial said, "or they would just have taken the Horn. It would be much easier to take that if they could, rather than the whole chest."

Rand nodded. "They must have put it in a cart, or on a horse. Once they get it beyond the Foregate, they'll join the Trollocs again, for sure. You will be able to follow that trail, Hurin."

"I will, my Lord."

"Then you rest until you're fit," Rand told him. The sniffer looked steadier, but he rode slumped, and his face was weary. "At best, they will only be a few hours ahead of us. If we ride hard . . ." Suddenly he noticed that the others were looking at him, Verin and Ingtar, Mat and Perrin. He realized what he had been doing, and his face colored. "I am sorry, Ingtar. It's just that I've become used to being in charge, I suppose. I'm not trying to take your place."

Ingtar nodded slowly. "Moiraine chose well when she made Lord Agelmar name you my second. Perhaps it would have been better if the Amyrlin Seat had given you the charge." The Shienaran barked a laugh. "At least you have actually managed to touch the Horn."

After that they rode in silence.

The Great Tree could have been twin to The Defender of the Dragonwall, a tall stone cube of a building with a common room paneled in dark wood and decorated with silver, a large, polished clock on the mantel over the fireplace. The innkeeper could have been Cuale's sister. Mistress Tiedra had the same slightly plump look and the same unctuous manner - and the same sharp eyes, the same air of listening to what was behind the words you spoke. But Tiedra knew Verin, and her welcoming smile for the Aes Sedai was warm; she never mentioned Aes Sedai aloud, but Rand was sure she knew.

Tiedra and a swarm of servants saw to their horses and settled them in their rooms. Rand's room was as fine as the one that had burned, but he was more interested in the big copper bathtub two serving men wrestled through the door, and the steaming buckets of water scullery maids brought up from the kitchen. One look in the mirror above the washstand showed him a face that looked as if he had rubbed it with charcoal, and his coat had black smears across the red wool.

He stripped off and climbed into the tub, but he thought as much as washed. Verin was there. One of three Aes Sedai that he could trust not to try to gentle him themselves, or turn him over to those who would. Or so it seemed, at least. One of three who wanted him to believe he was the Dragon Reborn, to use him as a false Dragon. She's Moiraine's eyes watching me, Moiraine's hand trying to pull my strings. But I have cut the strings.

His saddlebags had been brought up, and a bundle from the packhorse containing fresh clothes. He toweled off and opened the bundle - and sighed. He had forgotten that both the other coats he had were as ornate as the one he had tossed on the back of a chair for a maid to clean. After a moment, he chose the black coat, to suit his mood. Silver herons stood on the high collar, and silver rapids ran down his sleeves, water battered to froth against jagged rocks.

Transferring things from his old coat to his new, he found the parchments. Absently, he stuffed the invitations in his pocket as he studied Selene's two letters. He wondered how he could have been such a fool. She was the beautiful young daughter of a noble House. He was a shepherd whom Aes Sedai were trying to use, a man doomed to go mad if he did not die first. Yet he could still feel the pull of her just looking at her writing, could almost smell the perfume of her.

"I am a shepherd," he told the letters, "not a great man, and if I could marry anyone, it would be Egwene, but she wants to be Aes Sedai, and how can I marry any woman, love any woman, when I'll go mad and maybe kill her?"

Words could not lessen his memory of Selene's beauty, though, or the way she made his blood go warm just by looking at him. It almost seemed to him that she was in the room with him, that he could smell her perfume, so much so that he looked around, and laughed to find himself alone.

"Having fancies like I'm addled already," he muttered.

Abruptly he tipped back the mantle of the lamp on the bedside table, lit it, and thrust the letters into the flame. Outside the inn, the wind picked up to a roar, leaking in through the shutters and fanning the flames to engulf the parchment. Hurriedly he tossed the burning letters into the cold hearth just before the fire reached his fingers. He waited until the last blackened curl went out before he buckled on his sword and left the room.

Verin had taken a private dining room, where shelves along the dark walls held even more silver than those in the common room. Mat was juggling three boiled eggs and trying to appear nonchalant. Ingtar peered into the unlit fireplace, frowning. Loial had a few books from Fal Dara still in his pockets, and was reading one beside a lamp.

Perrin slouched at the table, studying his hands clasped on the tabletop. To his nose, the room smelled of beeswax used to polish the paneling. It was him, he thought. Rand is the Shadowkiller. Light, what's happening to all of us? His hands tightened into fists, large and square. These hands were meant for a smith's hammer, not an axe.

He glanced up as Rand entered. Perrin thought he looked determined, set on some course of action. The Aes Sedai motioned Rand to a high-backed armchair across from her.

"How is Hurin?" Rand asked her, arranging his sword so he could sit. "Resting?"

"He insisted on going out," Ingtar answered. "I told him to follow the trail only until he smelled Trollocs. We can follow it from there tomorrow. Or do you want to go after them tonight?"

"Ingtar," Rand said uneasily, "I really wasn't trying to take command. I just didn't think." Yet not as nervously as he would have once, Perrin thought. Shadowkiller. We're all of us changing.

Ingtar did not answer, but only kept staring into the fireplace.

"There are some things that interest me greatly, Rand," Verin said quietly. "One is how you vanished from Ingtar's camp without a trace.

Another is how you arrived in Cairhien a week before us. That clerk was very clear on that. You would have had to fly."

One of Mat's eggs hit the floor and cracked. He did not look at it, though. He was looking at Rand, and Ingtar had turned around. Loial pretended to be reading still, but he wore a worried look, and his ears were up in hairy points.

Perrin realized he was staring, too. "Well, he did not fly," he said. "I don't see any wings. Maybe he has more important things to tell us." Verin shifted her attention to him, just for a moment. He managed to meet her eyes, but he was the first to look away. Aes Sedai. Light, why were we ever fools enough to follow an Aes Sedai? Rand gave him a grateful look, too, and Perrin grinned at him. He was not the old Rand-he seemed to have grown into that fancy coat; it looked right on him, now-but he was still the boy Perrin had grown up with. Shadowkiller. A man the wolves hold in awe. A man who can channel.

"I don't mind," Rand said, and told his tale simply.

Perrin found himself gaping. Portal Stones. Other worlds, where the land seemed to shift. Hurin following the trail of where the Darkfriends would be. And a beautiful woman in distress, just like one in a gleeman's tale.

Mat gave a soft, wondering whistle. "And she brought you back? By one of these - these Stones?"

Rand hesitated for a second. "She must have," he said. "So you see, that's how we got so far ahead of you. When Fain came, Loial and I managed to steal back the Horn of Valere in the night, and we rode on to Cairhien because I didn't think we could make it past them once they were roused, and I knew Ingtar would keep coming south after them and reach Cairhien eventually. "

Shadowkiller. Rand looked at him, eyes narrowing, and Perrin realized he had spoken the name aloud. Apparently not loud enough for anyone else to hear, though. No one else glanced at him. He found himself wanting to tell Rand about the wolves. I know about you. It's only fair you know my secret, too. But Verin was there. He could not say it in front of her.

"Interesting," the Aes Sedai said, a thoughtful expression on her face. "I would very much like to meet this girl. If she can use a Portal Stone . . . . Even that name is not very widely known." She gave herself a shake. "Well, that is for another time. A tall girl should not be difficult to find in the Cairhienin Houses. Aah, here is our meal."

Perrin smelled lamb even before Mistress Tiedra led in a procession bearing trays of food. His mouth watered more for that than for the peas and squash, the carrots and cabbage that came with it, or the hot crusty rolls. He still found vegetables tasty, but sometimes, of late, he dreamed of red meat. Not even cooked, usually. It was disconcerting to find himself thinking that the nicely pink slices of lamb that the innkeeper carved were too well done. He firmly took helpings of everything. And two of the lamb.

It was a quiet meal, with everyone concentrating on his own thoughts. Perrin found it painful to watch Mat eat. Mat's appetite was as healthy as ever, despite the feverish flush to his face, and the way he shoveled food into his mouth made it look like his last meal before dying. Perrin kept his eyes on his plate as much as possible, and wished they had never left Emond's Field.

After the maids cleared the table and left again, Verin insisted they remain together until Hurin returned. "He may bring word that will mean we must move at once."

Mat returned to his juggling, and Loial to his reading. Rand asked the innkeeper if there were any more books, and she brought him The Travels of Jain Farstrider. Perrin liked that one, too, with its stories of adventures among the Sea Folk and journeys to the lands beyond the Aiel Waste, where silk came from. He did not feel like reading, though, so he set up a stones board on the table with Ingtar. The Shienaran played with a slashing, daring style. Perrin had always played doggedly, giving ground reluctantly, but he found himself placing the stones with as much recklessness as Ingtar. Most of the games ended in a draw, but he managed to win as man[illegible]

Hurin's grin was at the same time triumphant and perplexed. "I found them, Lord Ingtar. Lord Rand. I tracked them to their lair."

"Lair?" Ingtar said sharply. "You mean they're hiding somewhere close by?"

"Aye, Lord Ingtar. The ones who took the Horn, I followed straight there, and there was Trolloc scent all around the place, though sneaking as if they didn't dare be seen, even there. And no wonder." The sniffer took a deep breath. "It's the great manor Lord Barthanes just finished building."

"Lord Barthanes!" Ingtar exclaimed. "But he . . . he's . . . he's. . . ."

"There are Darkfriends among the high as well as the low," Verin said smoothly. "The mighty give their souls to the Shadow as often as the weak." Ingtar scowled as if he did not want to think of that.

"There's guards," Hurin went on. "We'll not get in with twenty men, not and get out again. A hundred could do it, but two would be better. That's what I think, my Lord."

"What about the King?" Mat demanded. "If this Barthanes is a Darkfriend, the King will help us."

"I am quite sure," Verin said dryly, "that Galldrian Riatin would move against Barthanes Damodred on the rumor that Barthanes is a Darkfriend, and glad of the excuse. I am also quite sure Galldrian would never let the Horn of Valere out of his grasp once he had it. He would bring it out on feastdays to show the people and tell them how great and mighty Cairhien is, and no one would ever see it else."

Perrin blinked with shock. "But the Horn of Valere has to be there when the Last Battle is fought. He couldn't just keep it."

"I know little of Cairhienin," Ingtar told him, "but I've heard enough of Galldrian. He would feast us and thank us for the glory we had brought to Cairhien. He would stuff our pockets with gold and heap honors on our heads. And if we tried to leave with the Horn, he'd cut our honored heads off without pausing to take a breath."

Perrin ran a hand through his hair. The more he found out about kings, the less he liked them.

"What about the dagger?" Mat asked diffidently. "He wouldn't want that, would he?" Ingtar glared at him, and he shifted uncomfortably. "I know the Horn is important, but I'm not going to be fighting in the Last Battle. That dagger. . . . "

Verin rested her hands on the arms of her chair. "Galldrian shall not have it, either. What we need is, some way inside Barthanes's manor house. If we can only find the Horn, we may also find a way to take it back. Yes, Mat, and the dagger. Once it is known that an Aes Sedai is in the citywell, I usually avoid these things, but if I let slip to Tiedra that I would like to see Barthanes's new manor, I should have an invitation in a day or two. It should not be difficult to bring at least some of the rest of you. What is it, Hurin?"

The sniffer had been rocking anxiously on his heels from the moment she mentioned an invitation. "Lord Rand already has one. From Lord Barthanes. "

Perrin stared at Rand, and he was not the only one.

Rand pulled two sealed parchments from his coat pocket and handed them to the Aes Sedai without a word.

Ingtar came to look wonderingly over her shoulder at the seals. "Barthanes, and . . . . And Galldrian! Rand, how did you come by these? What have you been doing?"

"Nothing," Rand said. "I haven't done anything. They just sent them to me." Ingtar let out a long breath. Mat's mouth was hanging open. "Well, they did just send them," Rand said quietly. There was a dignity to him that Perrin did not remember; Rand was looking at the Aes Sedai and the Shienaran lord as equals.

Perrin shook his head. You are fitting that coat. We're all changing.

"Lord Rand burned all the rest," Hurin said. "Every day they came, and every day he burned them. Until these, of course. Every day from mightier Houses." He sounded proud.

"The Wheel of Time weaves us all into the Pattern as it wills," Verin said, looking at the parchments, "but sometimes it provides what we need before we know we need it."

Casually she crumpled the King's invitation and tossed it into the fireplace, where it lay white on the cold logs. Breaking the other seal with her thumb, she read. "Yes. Yes, this will do very well."

"How can I go?" Rand asked her. "They will know I'm no lord. I am a shepherd, and a farmer." Ingtar looked skeptical. "I am, Ingtar. I told you I am." Ingtar shrugged; he still did not look convinced. Hurin stared at Rand with flat disbelief.

Burn me, Perrin thought, if I didn't know him, I wouldn't believe it either. Mat was watching Rand with his head tilted, frowning as if looking at something he had never seen before. He sees it, too, now. "You can do it, Rand," Perrin said. "You can."

"It will help," Verin said, "if you don't tell everyone what you are not. People see what they expect to see. Beyond that, look them in the eye and speak firmly. The way you have been talking to me," she added dryly, and Rand's cheeks colored, but he did not drop his eyes. "It doesn't matter what you say. They will attribute anything out of place to your being an outlander. It will also help if you remember the way you behaved before the Amyrlin. If you are that arrogant, they will believe you are a lord if you wear rags." Mat snickered.

Rand threw up his hands. "All right. I'll do it. But I still think they will know five minutes after I open my mouth. When?"

"Barthanes has asked you for five different dates, and one is tomorrow night. "

"Tomorrow!" Ingtar exploded. "The Horn could be fifty miles downriver by tomorrow night, or - "

Verin cut him off. "Uno and your soldiers can watch the manor. If they try to take the Horn anywhere, we can easily follow, and perhaps retrieve it more easily than from inside Barthanes's walls."

"Perhaps so," Ingtar agreed grudgingly. "I just do not like to wait, now that the Horn is almost in my hands. I will have it. I must! I must!"

Hurin stared at him. "But, Lord Ingtar, that isn't the way. What happens, happens, and what is meant to be, will - " Ingtar's glare cut him off, though he still muttered under his breath, "It isn't the way, talking of 'must'."

Ingtar turned back to Verin stiffly. "Verin Sedai, Cairhienin are very strict in their protocol. If Rand does not send a reply, Barthanes may be so insulted he will not let us in, even with that parchment in our hands. But if Rand does . . . well, Fain, at least, knows him. We could be warning them to set a trap."

"We will surprise them." Her brief smile was not pleasant. "But I think Barthanes will want to see Rand in any case. Darkfriend or not, I doubt he has given up plots against the throne. Rand, he says you took an interest in one of the King's projects, but he doesn't say what. What does he mean?"

"I don't know," Rand said slowly. "I haven't done anything at all since I arrived. Wait. Maybe he means the statue. We came through a village where they were digging up a huge statue. From the Age of Legends, they said. The King means to move it to Cairhien, though I don't know how he can move something that big. But all I did was ask what it was."

"We passed it in the day, and did not stop to ask questions." Verin let the invitation fall in her lap. "Not a wise thing for Galldrian to do, perhaps, unearthing that. Not that there is any real danger, but it is never wise for those who don't know what they are doing to meddle with things from the Age of Legends."

"What is it?" Rand asked.

"A sa'angreal." She sounded as if it were really not very important, but Perrin suddenly had the feeling the two of them had entered a private conversation, saying things no one else could hear. "One of a pair, the two largest ever made, that we know of. And an odd pair, as well. One, still buried on Tremalking, can only be used by a woman. This one can only be used by a man. They were made during the War of the Powers, to be a weapon, but if there is anything to be thankful for in the end of that Age or the Breaking of the World, it is that the end came before they could be used. Together, they might well be powerful enough to Break the World agai[illegible]

Perrin's hands tightened to knots. He avoided looking directly at Rand, but even from the corner of his eye he could see a whiteness around Rand's mouth. He thought Rand might be afraid, and he did not blame him a bit.

Ingtar looked shaken, as well he might. "That thing should be buried again, and as deeply as they can pile dirt and stone. What would have happened if Logain had found it? Or any wretched man who can channel, let alone one claiming he's the Dragon Reborn. Verin Sedai, you must warn Galldrian what he's doing."

"What? Oh, there is no need for that, I think. The two must be used in unison to handle enough of the One Power to Break the World - that was the way in the Age of Legends; a man and a woman working together were always ten times as strong as they were apart - and what Aes Sedai today would aid a man in channeling? One by itself is powerful enough, but I can think of few women strong enough to survive the flow through the one on Tremalking. The Amyrlin, of course. Moiraine, and Elaida. Perhaps one or two others. And three still in training. As for Logain, it would have taken all his strength simply to keep from being burned to a cinder, with[illegible]

She was talking to Rand. Perrin knew it, and from the queasy look in Mat's eye, he did, too. Even Loial shifted nervously in his chair. Oh, Light, Rand, Perrin thought. Light, don't let her use you.

Rand's hands were pressing the tabletop so hard that his knuckles were white, but his voice was steady. His eyes never left the Aes Sedai. "First we have to take back the Horn, and the dagger. And then it is done, Verin. Then it is done."

Watching Verin's smile, small and mysterious, Perrin felt a chill. He did not think Rand knew half what he thought he did. Not half.

CHAPTER
32
Dangerous Words

Lord Barthanes's manor crouched like a huge toad in the night, covering as much ground as a fortress, with all its walls and outbuildings. It was no fortress, though, with tall windows everywhere, and lights, and the sounds of music and laughter drifting out, yet Rand saw guards moving on the tower tops and along the roofwalks, and none of the windows were close to the ground. He got down from Red's back and smoothed his coat, adjusted his sword belt. The others dismounted around him, at the foot of broad, white-stone stairs leading up to the wide, heavily carved doors of the manor.

Ten Shienarans, under Uno, made an escort. The one-eyed man exchanged small nods with Ingtar before taking his men to join the other escorts, where ale had been provided and a whole ox was roasting on a spit by a big fire.

The other ten Shienarans had been left behind, along with Perrin. Every one of them had to be there for a purpose, Verin had said, and Perrin had no purpose to serve this night. An escort was necessary for dignity in Cairhienin eyes, but more than ten would seem suspicious. Rand was there because he had received the invitation. Ingtar had come to lend the prestige of his title, while Loial was there because Ogier were sought after in the upper reaches of the Cairhienin nobility. Hurin pretended to be Ingtar's bodyservant. His true purpose was to sniff out the Darkfriends and Trollocs if he could; the Horn of Valere should not be far from them. Mat, still g[illegible]

When Rand had asked Verin why she was there, she had only smiled and said, "To keep the rest of you out of trouble. "

As they mounted the stairs, Mat muttered, "I still don't see why I have to be a servant." He and Hurin followed behind the others. "Burn me, if Rand can be a lord, I can put on a fancy coat, too."

"A servant," Verin said without looking back at him, "can go many places another man cannot, and many nobles will not even see him. You and Hurin have your tasks."

"Be quiet now, Mat," Ingtar put in, "unless you want to give us away." They were approaching the doors, where half a dozen guards stood with the Tree and Crown of House Damodred on their chests, and an equal number of men in dark green livery with Tree and Crown on the sleeve.

Taking a deep breath, Rand proffered the invitation. "I am Lord Rand of House al'Thor," he said all in a rush, to get it over with. "And these are my guests. Verin Aes Sedai of the Brown Ajah. Lord Ingtar of House Shinowa, in Shienar. Loial, son of Arent son of Halan, from Stedding Shangtai." Loial had asked that his stedding be left out of it, but Verin insisted they needed every bit of formality they could offer.

The servant who had reached for the invitation with a perfunctory bow gave a little jerk at each additional name; his eyes popped at Verin's. In a strangled voice he said, "Be welcome in House Damodred, my lords. Be welcome, Aes Sedai. Be welcome, friend Ogier." He waved the other servants to open the doors wide, and bowed Rand and the others inside, where he hurriedly passed the invitation to another liveried man and whispered in his ear.

This man had the Tree and Crown large on the chest of his green coat. "Aes Sedai," he said, using his long staff to make a bow, almost bending his head to his knees, to each of them in turn. "My lords. Friend Ogier. I am called Ashin. Please to follow me."

The outer hall held only servants, but Ashin led them to a great room filled with nobles, with a juggler performing at one end and tumblers at the other. Voices and music coming from elsewhere said these were not the only guests, or the only entertainments. The nobles stood in twos, and threes and fours, sometimes men and women together, sometimes only one or the other, always with careful space between so no one could overhear what was said. The guests wore the dark Cairhienin colors, each with bright stripes at least halfway down his or her chest, and some had them all the way to their waists. The women had their hair piled high in elaborate to[illegible]

Ashin rapped his staff and announced them in a loud voice, Verin first.

They drew every eye. Verin wore her brown-fringed shawl, embroidered in grape vines; the announcement of an Aes Sedai sent a murmur through the lords and ladies, and made the juggler drop one of his hoops, though no one was watching him any longer. Loial received almost as many looks, even before Ashin spoke his name. Despite the silver embroidery on collar and sleeves, the otherwise unrelieved black of Rand's coat made him seem almost stark beside the Cairhienin, and his and Ingtar's swords drew many glances. None of the lords appeared to be armed. Rand heard the words "heron-mark blade" more than once. Some of the glances he was g[illegible]

A slim, handsome man approached. He had long, graying hair, and multihued stripes crossed the front of his deep gray coat from his neck almost to the hem just above his knees. He was extremely tall for a Cairhienin, no more than half a head shorter than Rand, and he had a way of standing that made him seem even taller, with his chin up so he seemed to be looking down at everyone else. His eyes were black pebbles. He looked warily at Verin, though.

"Grace honors me with your presence, Aes Sedai." Barthanes Damodred's voice was deep and sure. His gaze swept across the others. "I did not expect so distinguished a company. Lord Ingtar. Friend Ogier." His bow to each was little more than a nod of the head; Barthanes knew exactly how powerful he was. "And you, my young Lord Rand. You excite much comment in the city, and in the Houses. Perhaps we will have a chance to talk this night." His tone said that he would not miss it if the chance never came, that he had not been excited to any comment, but his eyes slid a fraction before he caught them, to Ingtar and Loial, and to Verin. "Be welcom[illegible]

The murmur of conversation picked up once more, and the juggler spun his hoops again in a narrow loop that almost reached the worked plaster ceiling, a good four spans up. The tumblers had never stopped; a woman leaped into the air from the cupped hands of one of her companions, her oiled skin shining in the light of a hundred lamps as she spun, and landed on her feet on the hands of a man who was already standing atop another's shoulders. He lifted her up on outstretched arms as the man below raised him in the same way, and she spread her arms as if for applause. None of the Cairhienin seemed to notice.

Verin and Ingtar drifted into the crowd. The Shienaran received a few wary looks; some looked at the Aes Sedai with wide eyes, others with the worried frowns of those finding a rabid wolf within arm's reach. The latter came from men more often than women, and some of the women spoke to her.

Rand realized that Mat and Hurin had already disappeared to the kitchens, where all the servants who had come with the guests would be gathering until sent for. He hoped they would not have trouble sneaking away.

Loial bent down to speak for his ear alone. "Rand, there is a Waygate nearby. I can feel it."

"You mean this was an Ogier grove?" Rand said softly, and Loial nodded.

"Stedding Tsofu had not been found again when it was planted, or the Ogier who helped build Al'cair'rahienallen would not have needed a grove to remind them of the stedding. This was all forest when I came through Cairhien before, and belonged to the King."

"Barthanes probably took it away in some plot." Rand looked around the room nervously. Everyone was still talking, but more than a few were watching the Ogier and him. He could not see Ingtar. Verin stood at the center of a knot of women. "I wish we could stay together."

"Verin says not, Rand. She says it would make them all suspicious and angry, thinking we were holding ourselves aloof. We have to allay suspicion until Mat and Hurin find whatever they find."

"I heard what she said as well as you, Loial. But I still say, if Barthanes is a Darkfriend, then he must know why we're here. Going off by ourselves is just asking to be knocked on the head."

"Verin says he won't do anything until he finds out whether he can make use of us. Just do what she told us, Rand. Aes Sedai know what they are about." Loial walked into the crowd, gathering a circle of lords and ladies before he had gone ten steps.

Others started toward Rand, now that he was alone, but he turned in the other direction and hurried away. Aes Sedai may know what they're about, but I wish I did. I don't like this. Light, but I wish I knew if she was telling the truth. Aes Sedai never lie, but the truth you hear may not be the truth you think it is.

He kept moving to avoid talking with the nobles. There were many other rooms, all filled with lords and ladies, all with entertainers: three different gleemen in their cloaks, more jugglers and tumblers, and musicians playing flutes, bitterns, dulcimers, and lutes, plus five different sizes of fiddle, six kinds of horn, straight or curved or curled, and ten sizes of drum from tambour to kettle. He gave some of the horn players a second look, those with curled horns, but the instruments were all plain brass.

They wouldn't have the Horn of Valere out here, fool, he thought. Not unless Barthanes means to have dead heroes come as part of the entertainment.

There was even a bard in silver-worked Taren boots and a yellow coat, strolling through the rooms plucking his harp and sometimes stopping to declaim in High Chant. He glared contemptuously at the gleemen and did not linger in the rooms where they were, but Rand saw little difference between him and them except for their clothes.

Suddenly Barthanes was walking by Rand's side. A liveried servant immediately offered his silver tray with a bow. Barthanes took a blown-glass goblet of wine. Walking backwards ahead of them still bowing, the servant held the tray toward Rand until Rand shook his head, then melted into the crowd.

"You seem restless," Barthanes said, sipping.

"I like to walk." Rand wondered how to follow Verin's advice, and remembering what she had said about his visit to the Amyrlin, he settled into Cat Crosses the Courtyard. He knew no more arrogant way to walk than that. Barthanes's mouth tightened, and Rand thought perhaps the lord found it too arrogant, but Verin's advice was all he had to go by, so he did not stop. To take some of the edge off, he said pleasantly, "This is a fine party. You have many friends, and I've never seen so many entertainers."

"Many friends," Barthanes agreed. "You can tell Galldrian how many, and who. Some of the names might surprise him."

"I have never met the King, Lord Barthanes, and I don't expect I ever will."

"Of course. You just happened to be in that flyspeck village. You were not checking on the progress of retrieving that statue. A great undertaking, that."

"Yes." He had begun thinking of Verin again, wishing she had given him some advice on how to talk with a man who assumed he was lying. He added without thinking, "It's dangerous to meddle with things from the Age of Legends if you don't know what you are doing."

Barthanes peered into his wine, musing as if Rand had just said something profound. "Are you saying you do not support Galldrian in this?" he asked finally.

"I told you, I've never met the King."

"Yes, of course. I did not know Andormen played at the Great Game so well. We do not see many here in Cairhien."

Rand took a deep breath to stop from telling the man angrily that he was not playing their Game. "There are many grain barges from Andor in the river."

"Merchants and traders. Who notices such as they? As well notice the beetles on the leaves." Barthanes's voice carried equal contempt for both beetles and merchants, but once again he frowned as if Rand had hinted at something. "Not many men travel in company with Aes Sedai. You seem too young to be a Warder. I suppose Lord Ingtar is Verin Sedai's Warder?"

"We are who we said we are," Rand said, and grimaced. Except me.

Barthanes was studying Rand's face almost openly. "Young. Young to carry a heron-mark blade."

"I am less than a year old," Rand said automatically, and immediately wished he had it back. It sounded foolish, to his ear, but Verin had said act as he had with the Amyrlin Seat, and that was the answer Lan had given him. A Borderman considered the day he was given his sword to be his nameday.

"So. An Andorman, and yet Borderland-trained. Or is it Warder-trained?" Barthanes's eyes narrowed, studying Rand. "I understand Morgase has only one son. Named Gawyn, I have heard. You must be much like him in age."

"I have met him," Rand said cautiously.

"Those eyes. That hair. I have heard the Andoran royal line has almost Aiel coloring in their hair and eyes."

Rand stumbled, though the floor was smooth marble. "I'm not Aiel, Lord Barthanes, and I'm not of the royal line, either."

"As you say. You have given me much to think on. I believe we may find common ground when we talk again." Barthanes nodded and raised his glass in a small salute, then turned to speak to a gray-haired man with many stripes of color down his coat.

Rand shook his head and moved on, away from more conversation. It had been bad enough talking to one Cairhienin lord; he did not want to risk two. Barthanes appeared to find deep meanings in the most trivial comments. Rand realized he had just now learned enough of Daes Dae'mar to know he had no idea at all how it was played. Mat, Hurin, find something fast, so we can get out of here. These people are crazy.

And then he entered another room, and the gleeman at the end of it, strumming his harp and reciting a tale from The Great Hunt of the Horn, was Thom Merrilin. Rand stopped dead. Thom did not seem to see him, though the gleeman's gaze passed over him twice. It seemed that Thom had meant what he said. A clean break.

Rand turned to go, but a woman stepped smoothly in front of him and put a hand on his chest, the lace falling back from a soft wrist. Her head did not quite come to his shoulder, but her tall array of curls easily reached as high as his eyes. The high neck of her gown put lace ruffles under her chin, and stripes covered the front of her dark blue dress below her breasts. "I am Alaine Chuliandred, and you are the famous Rand al'Thor. In Barthanes's own manor, I suppose he has the right to speak to you first, but we are all fascinated by what we hear of you. I even hear that you play the flute. Can it be true?"

"I play the flute." How did she . . . ? Caldevwin. Light, everybody does hear everything in Cairhien. "If you will excuse - "

"I have heard that some outland lords play music, but I never believed it. I would like very much to hear you play. Perhaps you will talk with me, of this and that. Barthanes seemed to find your conversation fascinating. My husband spends his days sampling his own vineyards, and leaves me quite alone. He is never there to talk with me."

"You must miss him," Rand said, trying to edge around her and her wide skirts. She gave a tinkling laugh as if he had said the funniest thin in the world.

Another woman sidled in beside the first, and another hand was laid on his chest. She wore as many stripes as Alaine, and they were of an age, a good ten years older than he. "Do you think to keep him to yourself, Alaine?" The two women smiled at each other while their eyes threw daggers. The second turned her smile on Rand. "I am Belevaere Osiellin. Are all Andormen so tall? And so handsome?"

He cleared his throat. "Ah . . . some are as tall. Pardon me, but if you will - "

"I saw you talking with Barthanes. They say you know Galldrian, as well. You must come to see me, and talk. My husband is visiting our estates in the south."

"You have the subtlety of a tavern wench," Alaine hissed at her, and immediately was smiling up at Rand. "She has no polish. No man could like a woman with a manner so rough. Bring your flute to my manor, and we will talk. Perhaps you will teach me to play?"

"What Alaine thinks of as subtlety," Belevaere said sweetly, "is but lack of courage. A man who wears a heron-mark sword must be brave. That truly is a heron-mark blade, is it not?"

Rand tried backing away from them. "If you will just excuse me, I - " They followed step for step until his back hit the wall; the width of their skirts together made another wall in front of him.

He jumped as a third woman crowded in beside the other two, her skirts joining theirs to the wall on that side. She was older than they, but just as pretty, with an amused smile that did not lessen the sharpness of her eyes. She wore half again as many stripes as Alaine and Belevaere; they made tiny curtsies and glared at her sullenly.

"Are these two spiders trying to toil you in their webs?" The older woman laughed. "Half the time they tangle themselves more firmly than anyone else. Come with me, my fine young Andoran, and I will tell you some of the troubles they would give you. For one thing, I have no husband to worry about. Husbands always make trouble."

Over Alaine's head he could see Thom, straightening from a bow to no applause or notice whatsoever. With a grimace the gleeman snatched a goblet from the tray of a startled servant.

"I see someone I must speak to," Rand told the women, and squeezed out of the box they had put him in just as the last woman reached for his arm. All three stared after him as he hurried to the gleeman.

Thom eyed him over the lip of the goblet, then took another long swallow.

"Thom, I know you said a clean break, but I had to get away from those women. All they wanted to talk about was their husbands being away, but they were already hinting at other things." Thom choked on his wine, and Rand slapped his back. "You drink too fast, and something always goes down the wrong way. Thom, they think I am plotting with Barthanes, or maybe Galldrian, and I don't think they will believe me when I say I'm not. I just needed an excuse to leave them."

Thom stroked his long mustaches with one knuckle and peered across the room at the three women. They were still standing together, watching Rand and him. "I recognize those three, boy. Breane Taborwin alone would give you an education such as every man should have at least once in his life, if he can live through it. Worried about their husbands. I like that, boy." Abruptly his eyes sharpened. "You told me you were clear of Aes Sedai. Half the talk here tonight is of the Andoran lord appearing with no warning, and an Aes Sedai at his side. Barthanes and Galldrian. You've let the White Tower put you in the cooking pot this time."

"She only came yesterday, Thom. And as soon as the Horn is safe, I'll be free of them again. I mean to see to it. "

"You sound as if it isn't safe now," Thom said slowly. 'You didn't sound that way before."

"Darkfriends stole it, Thom. They brought it here. Barthanes is one of them. "

Thom seemed to study his wine, but his eyes darted to make sure no one was close enough to listen. More than the three women were watching them with sideways glances while pretending to talk among themselves, but every knot maintained its distance from every other. Still, Thom spoke softly. "A dangerous thing to say if it isn't true, and more dangerous if it is. An accusation like that, against the most powerful man in the kingdom . . . . You say he has the Horn? I suppose you're after my help again, now that you're tangled with the White Tower once more."

"No." He had decided Thom had been right, even if the gleeman did not know why. He could not involve anyone else in his troubles. "I just wanted to get away from those women."

The gleeman blew out his mustaches, taken aback. "Well. Yes. That is well. The last time I helped you, I got a limp out of it, and you seem to have let yourself be tied to Tar Valon strings again. You'll have to get yourself out of it this time." He sounded as if he were trying to convince himself.

"I will, Thom. I will." Just as soon as the Horn is safe and Mat has that bloody dagger back. Mat, Hurin, where are you?

As if the thought had been a summons, Hurin appeared in the room, eyes searching among the lords and ladies. They looked through him; servants did not exist unless needed. When he found Rand and Thom, he made his way between the small clusters of nobles and bowed to Rand. "My Lord, I was sent to tell you. Your manservant had a fall and twisted his knee. I don't know how bad, my Lord."

For a moment Rand stared before he understood. Conscious of all the eyes on him, he spoke loudly enough for the nobles closest to overhear. "Clumsy fool. What good is he to me if he can't walk? I suppose I'd better come see how badly he's hurt himself."

It seemed to be the right thing to say. Hurin sounded relieved when he bowed again and said, "As my Lord wishes. If my Lord will follow me?"

"You play very well at being a lord," Thom said softly. "But remember this. Cairhienin may play Daes Dae'mar, but it was the White Tower made the Great Game in the first place. Watch yourself, boy." With a glare at the nobles, he set his empty goblet on the tray of a passing servant and strolled away, plucking his harp. He began reciting Goodwife Mili and the Silk Merchant.

"Lead on, man," Rand told Hurin, feeling foolish. As he followed the sniffer out of the room, he could feel the eyes following him.

CHAPTER
33
A Message From the Dark

Have you found it?" Rand asked as he followed Hurin down a cramped flight of stairs. The kitchens lay on the lower levels, and the servants who had come attending the guests had all been sent there. "Or is Mat really hurt?"

"Oh, Mat's fine, Lord Rand." The sniffer frowned. "At least, he sounds all right, and he grumbles like a hale man. I didn't mean to worry you, but I needed a reason for you to come below. I found the trail easy enough. The men who set fire to the inn all entered a walled garden behind the manor. Trollocs joined them, went in to the garden with them. Sometime yesterday, I think. Maybe even night before last." He hesitated. "Lord Rand, they didn't come out again. They must still be in there."

At the foot of the stairs the sounds of the servants enjoying themselves drifted down the hall, laughter and singing. Someone had a bittern, strumming a raucous tune to clapping and the thump of dancing. There was no worked plaster or fine tapestries here, only bare stone and plain wood. Light in the halls came from rush torches, smoking the ceiling and spread far enough apart that the light faded between them.

"I'm glad you are talking to me naturally again," Rand said. "The way you have been bowing and scraping, I was beginning to think you were more Cairhienin than the Cairhienin."

Hurin's face colored. "Well, as to that . . . ." He glanced down the hall toward the noise and looked as if he wanted to spit. "They all pretend to be so proper, but . . . . Lord Rand, every one of them says he's loyal to his master or mistress, but they all hint they're willing to sell what they know, or have heard. And when they have a few drinks in them, they'll tell you, all whispering in your ear, things about the lords and ladies they serve that'd fair make your hair stand on end. I know they're Cairhienin, but I never heard of such goings on."

"We will be out of here soon, Hurin." Rand hoped it was true. "Where is this garden?" Hurin turned down a side hall leading toward the back of the manor. "Did you bring Ingtar and the others down already?"

The sniffer shook his head. "Lord Ingtar had let himself be cornered by six or seven of those who call themselves ladies. I couldn't get close enough to speak to him. And Verin Sedai was with Barthanes. She gave me such a look when I came near, I never even tried to tell her."

They rounded another corner just then, and there were Loial and Mat, the Ogier standing a little stooped for the lower ceiling.

Loial's grin almost split his face. "There you are. Rand, I was never so glad to get away from anyone as from those people upstairs. They kept asking me if the Ogier were coming back, and if Galldrian had agreed to pay what was owed. It seems the reason all the Ogier stonemasons left is because Galldrian stopped paying them, except with promises. I kept telling them I didn't know anything about it, but half of them seemed to think that I was lying, and the other half that I was hinting at something."

"We'll be out of here soon," Rand assured him. "Mat, are you all right?" His friend's face looked more hollow-cheeked than he remembered, even back at the inn, and his cheekbones more prominent.

"I feel fine," Mat said grumpily, "but I certainly didn't have any trouble leaving the other servants. The ones who weren't asking if you starved me thought I was sick and didn't want to come too close."

"Have you sensed the dagger?" Rand asked.

Mat shook his head glumly. "The only thing I've sensed is that somebody's watching me, most of the time. These people are as bad as Fades for sneaking around. Burn me, I nearly jumped out of my skin when Hurin told me he'd located the Darkfriends' trail. Rand, I can't feel it at all, and I've been through this bloody building from rafters to basement."

"That does not mean it isn't here, Mat. I put it in the chest with the Horn, remember. Maybe that keeps you from feeling it. I don't think Fain knows how to open it, else he'd not have gone to the trouble of carrying the weight when he fled Fal Dara. Even that much gold isn't important beside the Horn of Valere. When we find the Horn, we will find the dagger. You'll see."

"As long as I don't have to pretend to be your servant anymore," Mat muttered. "As long as you don't go mad and . . . ." He let the words die with a twist of his mouth.

"Rand is not mad, Mat," Loial said. "The Cairhienin would never have let him in here if he were not a lord. They are the ones who are mad."

"I'm not mad," Rand said harshly. "Not yet. Hurin, show me this garden."

"This way, Lord Rand."

They went out into the night by a small door that Rand had to duck to get through; Loial was forced to bend over and hunch his shoulders. There was enough light in yellow pools from the windows above for Rand to make out brick walks between square flower beds. The shadows of stables and other outbuildings bulked in the darkness to either side. Occasional fragments of music drifted out, from the servants below or from those entertaining their masters above.

Hurin led them along the walks until even the dim glow failed and they made their way by moonlight alone, their boots crunching softly on the brick. Bushes that would have been bright with flowers by daylight now made strange humps in the dark. Rand fingered his sword and did not let his eyes stay on any one spot too long. A hundred Trollocs could be hiding around them unseen. He knew Hurin would have smelled Trollocs if they were there, but that did not help a great deal. If Barthanes was a Darkfriend, then at least some of his servants and guards had to be, too, and Hurin could not always smell a Darkfriend. Darkfriends leaping out of the nig[illegible]

"There, Lord Rand," Hurin whispered, pointing.

Ahead, stone walls not much higher than Loial's head enclosed a square perhaps fifty paces on a side. Rand could not be sure, in the shadows, but it looked as if the gardens stretched on beyond the walls. He wondered why Barthanes had built a walled enclosure in the middle of his garden. No roof showed above the wall. Why would they go in there and stay?

Loial bent to put his mouth close to Rand's ear. "I told you this was all an Ogier grove, once. Rand, the Waygate is within that wall. I can feel it. "

Rand heard Mat sigh despairingly. "We can't give up, Mat," he said.

"I'm not giving up. I just have enough brains not to want to travel the Ways again."

"We may have to," Rand told him. "Go find Ingtar and Verin. Get them alone somehow - I don't care how - and tell them I think Fain has taken the Horn through a Waygate. Just don't let anyone else hear. And remember to limp; you are supposed to have had a fall." It was a wonder to him that even Fain would risk the Ways, but it seemed the only answer. They wouldn't spend a day and a night just sitting in there, without a roof over their heads.

Mat swept a low bow, and his voice was heavy with sarcasm. "At once, my Lord. As my Lord wishes. Shall I carry your banner, my Lord?" He started back for the manor, his grumbles fading away. "Now I have to limp. Next it'll be a broken neck, or . . . ."

"He's just worried about the dagger, Rand," Loial said.

"I know," Rand said. But how long before he tells somebody what I am, not even meaning to? He could not believe Mat would betray him on purpose; there was that much of their friendship left, at least. "Loial, boost me up where I can see over the wall. "

"Rand, if the Darkfriends are still - "

"They aren't. Boost me up, Loial."

The three of them moved close to the wall, and Loial made a stirrup with his hands for Rand's foot. The Ogier straightened easily with the weight, lifting Rand's head just high enough to see over the top of the wall.

The thin, waning moon gave little light, and most of the area was in shadow, but there did not seem to be any flowers or shrubs inside the walled square. Only a lone bench of pale marble, placed as if one man might sit on it to stare at what stood in the middle of the space like a huge upright stone slab.

Rand caught the top of the wall and pulled himself up. Loial gave a low hoot and grabbed at his foot, but he jerked free and rolled over the wall, dropping inside. There was close-cropped grass under his feet; he thought vaguely that Barthanes must let sheep in, at least. Staring at the shadowed stone slab, the Waygate, he was startled to hear boots thump to the ground beside him.

Hurin climbed to his feet, dusting himself off. "You should be careful doing that, Lord Rand. Could be anybody hiding in here. Or anything." He peered into the darkness within the walls, feeling at his belt as if for the short sword and sword-breaker he had had to leave at the inn; servants did not go armed in Cairhien. "Jump in a hole without looking, and there'll be a snake in it every time."

"You would smell them," Rand said.

"Maybe." The sniffer inhaled deeply. "But I can only smell what they've done, not what they intend."

There was a scraping sound from over Rand's head, and then Loial was letting himself down from the wall. The Ogier did not even have to straighten his arms completely before his boots touched the ground. "Rash," he muttered. "You humans are always so rash and hasty. And now you have me doing it. Elder Haman would speak to me severely, and my mother . . . ." The darkness hid his face, but Rand was sure his ears were twitching vigorously. "Rand, if you don't start being a little careful, you are going to get me in trouble."

Rand walked to the Waygate, walked all the way around it. Even close up it looked like nothing more than a thick square of stone, taller than he was. The back was smooth and cool to the touch-he only brushed his hand against it quickly-but the front had been carved by an artist's hands. Vines, leaves, and flowers covered it, each so finely done that in the dim moonlight they seemed almost real. He felt the ground in front of it; the grass had been scraped partly away in two arcs such as those gates would make in opening.

"Is that a Waygate?" Hurin asked uncertainly. "I've heard tell of them, of course, but . . . ." He sniffed the air. "The trail goes right to it and stops, Lord Rand. How are we going to follow them, now? I've heard if you go through a Waygate, you come out mad, if you come out at all."

"It can be done, Hurin. I've done it, and Loial, and Mat and Perrin." Rand never took his eyes from the tangles of leaves on the stone. There was one unlike any other carved there, he knew. The trefoil leaf of fabled Avendesora, the Tree of Life. He put his hand on it. "I'll bet you can smell their trail along the Ways. We can follow anywhere they can run." It would not hurt to prove to himself that he could make himself step through a Waygate. "I'll prove it to you." He heard Hurin groan. The leaf was worked in the stone just as the others were, but it came away in his hand. Loial groaned, too.

In an instant the illusion of living plants seemed suddenly real. Stone leaves appeared to stir with a breeze, flowers appeared to have color even in the dark. Down the center of the mass a line appeared, and the two halves of the slab swung slowly toward Rand. He stepped back to let them open. He did not find himself looking at the other side of the walled square, but neither did he see the dull silver reflection he remembered. The space between the opening gates was a black so dark it seemed to make the night around it lighter. The pitch-blackness oozed out between the still-moving gates.

Rand leaped back with a shout, dropping the Avendesora leaf in his haste, and Loial cried out, "Machin Shin. The Black Wind."

The sound of wind filled their ears; the grass stirred in ripples toward the walls, and dirt swirled up, sucked into the air. And in the wind a thousand insane voices seemed to cry, ten thousand, overlapping, drowning each other. Rand could make out some of them, though he tried not to.

. . . blood so sweet, so sweet to drink the blood, the blood that drips, drips, drops so red; pretty eyes, fine eyes, I have no eyes, pluck the eyes from out of your head; grind your bones, split your bones inside your flesh, suck your marrow while you scream; scream, scream, singing screams, sing your screams . . . . And worst of all, a whispering thread through all the rest. Al'Thor. Al'Thor. Al'Thor.

Rand found the void around him and embraced it, never minding the tantalizing, sickening glow of saidin just out of his sight. Greatest of all the dangers along the Ways was the Black Wind that took the souls of those it killed, and drove mad those it let live, but Machin Shin was a part of the Ways; it could not leave them. Only it was flowing into the night, and the Black Wind called his name.

The Waygate was not yet fully open. If they could only put the Avendesora leaf back . . . . He saw Loial scrambling on his hands and knees, fumbling and searching the grass in the darkness.

Saidin filled him. He felt as if his bones were vibrating, felt the red-hot, ice-cold flow of the One Power, felt truly alive as he never was without it, felt the oil-slick taint . . . . No! And silently he screamed back at himself from beyond the emptiness, It's coming for you! It'll kill all of us! He hurled it all at the black bulge, standing out a full span from the Waygate, now. He did not know what it was that he hurled, or how, but in the heart of that darkness bloomed a coruscating fountain of light.

The Black Wind shrieked, ten thousand wordless howls of agony. Slowly, giving way inch by reluctant inch, the bulge lessened; slowly the oozing reversed, back into the still-open Waygate.

The Power raced through Rand in a torrent. He could feel the link between himself and saidin, like a river in flood, between himself and the pure fire blazing in the heart of the Black Wind, a raging cataract. The heat inside him went to white-heat, and beyond, to a shimmer that would have melted stone and vaporized steel and made the air burst into flame. The cold grew till the breath in his lungs should have frozen solid and hard as metal. He could feel it overwhelming him, feel life eroding like a soft clay riverbank, feel what was him wearing away.

Can't stop! If it gets out . . . . Have to kill it! I - can - not - stop! Desperately he clung to fragments of himself. The One power roared through him; he rode it like a chip of wood in rapids. The void began to melt and flow; the emptiness steamed with freezing cold.

The motion of the Waygate halted, and reversed.

Rand stared, sure, in the dim thoughts floating outside the void, that he was only seeing what he wanted to see.

The gates drifted closer together, pushing back Machin Shin as if the Black Wind had solid substance. The inferno still roared in its breast.

With a vague, distant wondering, Rand saw Loial, still on hands and knees, backing away from the closing gates.

The gap narrowed, vanished. The leaves and vines merged into a solid wall, and were stone.

Rand felt the link between him and the fire snap, the flow of Power through him cease. A moment more, and it would have swept him away completely. Shaking, he dropped to his knees. It was still there inside. Saidin. No longer flowing, but there, in a pool. He was a pool of the One Power. He trembled with it. He could smell the grass, the dirt beneath, the stone of the walls. Even in the darkness he could see each blade of grass, separate and whole, all of them at once. He could feel each minute stirring of the air on his face. His tongue curdled with the taste of the taint; his stomach knotted and spasmed.

Frantically he clawed his way out of the void; still on his knees, not moving, he fought free. And then all that was left was the fading foulness on his tongue, and the cramping in his stomach, and the memory. So alive.

"You saved us, Builder." Hurin had his back pressed against the wall, and his voice was hoarse. "That thing - that was the Black Wind? - it was worse than - was it going to hurl that fire at us? Lord Rand! Did it harm you? Did it touch you?" He came running as Rand got to his feet, helping him the last bit. Loial was getting up, too, dusting his hands and his knees.

"We'll never follow Fain through that." Rand touched Loial's arm. "Thank you. You did save us." You saved me, at least. It was killing me. Killing me, and it felt - wonderful. He swallowed; a faint trace of the taste still coated his mouth. "I want something to drink."

"I only found the leaf and put it back," Loial said, shrugging. "It seemed that if we could not get the Waygate closed, it would kill us. I am afraid I'm not a very good hero, Rand. I was so afraid I could hardly think. "

"We were both afraid," Rand said. "We may be a poor pair of heroes, but we are what there is. It's a good thing Ingtar is with us."

"Lord Rand," Hurin said diffidently, "could we - leave, now?"

The sniffer made a fuss about Rand going over the wall first, with not knowing who was waiting outside, until Rand pointed out that he had the only weapon among them. Even then Hurin did not seem to like letting Loial lift Rand to catch the top of the wall and pull himself over.

Rand landed on his feet with a thud, listening and peering into the night. For a moment he thought he saw something move, heard a boot scrape on the brick walk, but neither was repeated, and he dismissed it as nervousness. He thought that he had a right to be nervous. He turned to help Hurin down.

"Lord Rand," the sniffer said as soon as his feet were solidly on the ground, "how are we going to follow them now? From what I've heard of those things, the whole lot of them could be halfway across the world by now, in any direction."

"Verin will know a way." Rand suddenly wanted to laugh; to find the Horn and the dagger - if they could be found, now - he had to go back to the Aes Sedai. They had let him loose, and now he had to go back. "I won't let Mat die without trying."

Loial joined them, and they went back toward the manor, to be met at the small door by Mat, who opened it just as Rand reached for the handle. "Verin says you're not to do anything. If Hurin's found where the Horn is kept, then she says that's all we can do, now. She says we'll leave as soon as you come back, and make a plan. And I say this is the last time I go running back and forth with messages. If you want to say something to somebody, you can talk to them yourself from now on." Mat peered past them into the darkness. "Is the Horn out there somewhere? In an outbuilding? Did you see the dagger?"

Rand turned him around and got him back inside. "It isn't in an outbuilding, Mat. I hope Verin has a good idea of what to do now; I don't have any."

Mat looked as if he wanted to ask questions, but he let himself be pushed along the dimly lit corridor. He even remembered to limp as they started upstairs.

When Rand and the others reentered the rooms filled with nobles, they received a number of looks. Rand wondered if they somehow knew something of what had happened outside, or if he should have sent Hurin and Mat to the front hall to wait, but then he realized the looks were no different from what they had been before, curious and calculating, wondering what the lord and the Ogier had been up to. Servants were invisible to these people. No one tried to approach them, since they were together. It seemed there were protocols to conspiracy in the Great Game; anyone might try to listen to a private conversation, but they would not intrude on it.

Verin and Ingtar were standing together, and thus also alone. Ingtar looked a little dazed. Verin gave Rand and the other three a brief glance, frowned at their expressions, then resettled her shawl and started for the entry hall.

As they reached it, Barthanes appeared as if someone had told him they were leaving. "You go so soon? Verin Sedai, can I not entreat you to stay longer?"

Verin shook her head. "We must go, Lord Barthanes. I've not been in Cairhien in some years. I was glad of your invitation to young Rand. It has been . . . interesting."

"Then Grace see you safely to your inn. The Great Tree, is it not? Perhaps you will favor me with your presence again? You would honor me, Verin Sedai, and you, Lord Rand, and you, Lord Ingtar, not to mention you, Loial, son of Arent son of Halan." His bow was a little deeper for the Aes Sedai than for the others, but still no more than a slight inclination.

Verin nodded in acknowledgment. "Perhaps. The Light illumine you, Lord Barthanes." She turned for the doors.

As Rand moved to follow the others, Barthanes caught his sleeve with two fingers, holding him back. Mat looked as if he might stay, too, until Hurin pulled him to join Verin and the rest.

"You wade even deeper in the Game than I thought," Barthanes said softly. "When I heard your name, I could not believe it, yet you came, and you fit the description, and . . . . I was given a message for you. I think I will deliver it after all."

Rand had felt a prickling along his backbone as Barthanes spoke, but at the last, he stared. "A message? From whom? Lady Selene?"

"A man. Not the sort for whom I would usually carry messages, but he has . . . certain . . . claims on me that I cannot ignore. He gave no name, but he was a Lugarder. Aaah! You know him."

"I know him." Fain left a message? Rand looked around the wide hall. Mat and Verin and the others were waiting by the doors. Liveried servants stood stiffly along the walls, ready to leap at a command yet appearing neither to hear nor see. The sounds of the gathering floated from deeper in the manor. It did not look like a place where Darkfriends might attack. "What message?"

"He says he will wait for you on Toman Head. He has what you seek, and if you want it, you must follow. If you refuse to follow him, he says he will hound your blood, and your people, and those you love until you will face him. It sounds mad, of course, a man like that saying he will hound a lord, and yet, there was something about him. I think he it mad - he even denied you are a lord, as any eye can plainly see - but there is still something. What is it he carries with him, with Trollocs to guard it? What is it you seek?" Barthanes seemed shocked at the directness of his own questions.

"The Light illumine you, Lord Barthanes." Rand managed a bow, but his legs wobbled as he joined Verin and the others. He wants me to follow? And he'll hurt Emond's Field, Tam, if I don't. He had no doubt Fain could do it, would do it. At least Egwene is safe, in the White Tower. He had sickening images of Trollocs descending in hordes on Emond's Field, of eyeless Fades stalking Egwene. But how can I follow him? How?

Then he was out in the night, mounting Red. Verin and Ingtar and the others were all already on their horses, and the escort of Shienarans was closing round them.

"What did you find?" Verin demanded. "Where does he keep it?" Hurin cleared his throat loudly, and Loial shifted in his high saddle. The Aes Sedai peered at them.

"Fain has taken the Horn to Toman Head through a Waygate," Rand said dully. "By this time, he's probably already waiting there for me."

"We will speak of this later," Verin said, so firmly that no one spoke at all on the ride back to the city, to The Great Tree.

Uno left them there, after a quiet word from Ingtar, taking the soldiers back to their inn in the Foregate. Hurin took one look at Verin's set face by the light of the common room, muttered something about ale, and scurried to a table in a corner, alone. The Aes Sedai brushed aside the innkeeper's solicitous hopes that she had enjoyed herself, and silently led Rand and the rest to the private dining room.

Perrin looked up from The Travels of Jain Farstrider when they walked in, and frowned when he saw their faces. "It didn't go well, did it?" He set the book aside, closing the leatherbound book. Lamps and beeswax candles around the room gave a good light; Mistress Tiedra charged heavily, but she did not stint.

Verin carefully folded her shawl and laid it across the back of a chair. "Tell me again. The Darkfriends took the Horn through a Waygate? At Barthanes's manor?"

"The ground under the manor used to be an Ogier grove," Loial explained. "When we built . . . ." His voice trailed off and his ears wilted under her look.

"Hurin followed them right to it." Rand wearily threw himself into a chair. "I have to follow more than ever, now. But how? I opened it to show him he could still follow the trail wherever they went, and the Black Wind was there. It tried to reach us, but Loial managed to close the gates before it could come all the way out." He colored a little at that, but Loial had closed the gates, and for all he knew Machin Shin might have made it out without that. "It was standing guard."

"The Black Wind," Mat breathed, frozen halfway into a chair. Perrin was staring at Rand, too. So were Verin and Ingtar. Mat dropped into the chair with a thump.

"You must be mistaken," Verin said at last. "Machin Shin could not be used as a guard. No one can constrain the Black Wind to do anything."

"It's a creature of the Dark One," Mat said numbly. "They're Darkfriends. Maybe they knew how to ask it for help, or make it help."

"No one knows exactly what Machin Shin is," Verin said, "unless, perhaps, it is the essence of madness and cruelty. It cannot be reasoned with, Mat, or bargained with, or talked to. It cannot even be forced, not by any Aes Sedai living today, and perhaps not by any who ever lived. Do you really think Padan Fain could do what ten Aes Sedai could not?" Mat shook his head.

There was an air of despair in the room, of hope and purpose lost. The goal they had sought had vanished, and even Verin's face wore a floundering expression.

"I'd never have thought Fain had the courage for the Ways." Ingtar sounded almost mild, but suddenly he banged his fist against the wall. "I do not care how, or even if, Machin Shin works on Fain's behalf. They have taken the Horn of Valere into the Ways, Aes Sedai. By now they could be in the Blight, or halfway to Tear or Tanchico, or the other side of the Aiel Waste. The Horn is lost. I am lost." His hands dropped to his sides, and his shoulders slumped. "I am lost."

"Fain is taking it to Toman Head," Rand said, and was immediately the object of all eyes again.

Verin studied him narrowly. "You said that before. How do you know?"

"He left a message with Barthanes," Rand said.

"A trick," Ingtar sneered. "He'd not tell us where to follow."

"I don't know what the rest of you are going to do," Rand said, "but I am going to Toman Head. I have to. I leave at first light."

"But, Rand," Loial said, "it will take us months to reach Toman Head. What makes you think Fain will wait there for us?"

"He will wait." But how long before he decides I'm not coming? Why did he set that guard if he wants me to follow? "Loial, I mean to ride as hard as I can, and if I ride Red to death, I'll buy another horse, or steal another, if I have to. Are you sure you want to come?"

"I've stayed with you this long, Rand. Why would I stop now?" Loial pulled out his pipe and pouch and began thumbing tabac into the big bowl. "You see, I like you. I would like you even if you weren't ta'veren. Maybe I like you despite it. You do seem to get me neck-deep in hot water. In any case, I am going with you." He sucked on the pipestem to test the draw, then took a splinter from the stone jar on the mantel and thrust it into a candle flame for a light. "And I don't think you can really stop me."

"Well, I'm going," Mat said. "Fain still has that dagger, so I'm going. But all that servant business ended tonight."

Perrin sighed, an introspective look in his yellow eyes. "I suppose I'll come along, too." After a moment, he grinned. "Somebody has to keep Mat out of trouble."

"Not even a clever trick," Ingtar muttered. "Somehow, I'll get Barthanes alone, and I will learn the truth. I mean to have the Horn of Valere, not chase Jak o' the Wisps."

"It may not be a trick," Verin said carefully, seeming to study the floor under her toes. "There were certain things left in the dungeons at Fal Dara, writings that indicated a connection between what happened that night and" - she gave Rand a quick glance under lowered brows - "Toman Head. I still do not understand them completely, but I believe we must go to Toman Head. And I believe we will find the Horn there."

"Even if they are going to Toman Head," Ingtar said, "by the time we reach it, Fain or one of the other Darkfriends could have blown the Horn a hundred times, and the heroes returned from the grave will ride for the Shadow."

"Fain could have blown the Horn a hundred times since leaving Fal Dara," Verin told him. "And I think he would have, if he could open the chest. What we must worry about is that he might find someone who does know how to open it. We must follow him along the Ways."

Perrin's head came up sharply, and Mat shifted in his chair. Loial gave a low moan.

"Even if we could somehow sneak past Barthanes's guards," Rand said, "I think we'll find Machin Shin still there. We cannot use the Ways."

"How many of us could sneak onto Barthanes's grounds?" Verin said dismissively. "There are other Waygates. Stedding Tsofu lies not far from the city, south and east. It is a young stedding, rediscovered only perhaps six hundred years ago, but the Ogier Elders were still growing the Ways, then. Stedding Tsofu will have a Waygate. It is there and we will ride at first light."

Loial made a slightly louder sound, and Rand was not sure whether it referred to the Waygate or the stedding.

Ingtar still did not seem convinced, but Verin was as smooth and as implacable as snow sliding down a mountainside. "You will have your soldiers ready to ride, Ingtar. Send Hurin to tell Uno before he goes to bed. I think we should all go to bed as soon as possible. These Darkfriends have gained at least a day on us already, and I mean to make up as much of it as I can tomorrow." So firm

Rand followed the others out, but at the door he stopped beside the Aes Sedai and watched Mat heading down the candle-lit hall. "Why does he look like that?" he asked her. "I thought you Healed him, enough to give him some time, anyway."

She waited until Mat and the others had turned up the stairs before speaking. "Apparently, it did not work so well as we believed. The sickness takes an interesting course in him. His strength remains; he will keep that to the end, I think. But his body wastes away. Another few weeks, at most, I would say. You see, there is reason for haste."

"I do not need another spur, Aes Sedai," Rand said, making the title sound hard. Mat. The Horn. Fain's threat. Light, Egwene! Burn me, I don't need another spur.

"And what of you, Rand al'Thor? Do you feel well? Do you fight it still, or have you yet surrendered to the Wheel?"

"I ride with you to find the Horn," he told her. "Beyond that, there is nothing between me and any Aes Sedai. Do you understand me? Nothing!"

She did not speak, and he walked away from her, but when he turned to take the stairs she was still watching him, dark eyes sharp and considering.

CHAPTER
34
The Wheel Weaves

The first light of morning already pearled the sky by the time Thom Merrilin found himself trudging back to The Bunch of Grapes. Even where the halls and taverns lay thickest, there was a brief time when the Foregate lay quiet, gathering its breath. In his present mood, Thom would not have noticed if the empty street had been on fire.

The void vanished, contact with saidin fled, and Rand fell with a thud that would have knocked the breath out of him if he had not already been half numb. He felt rough stone under his cheek, and his hands. It was cold.
He was aware of Verin, struggling from her back to hands and knees. He heard someone vomit roughly, and raised his head. Uno was kneeling on the ground, scrubbing the back of his hand across his mouth. Everyone was down, and the horses stood stiff-legged and quivering, eyes wild and rolling. Ingtar had his sword out, gripping the hilt so hard the blade shook, staring at nothing. Loial sat sprawled, wide-eyed and stunned. Mat was huddled in a ball with his arms wrapped around his head, and Perrin had his fingers dug into his face as if he wanted to rip away whatever he had seen, or perhaps rip out the eyes that had seen it. None of the soldiers were any better. Masema wept openly, tears streaming down his face, and Hurin was looking around as if for a place to run.
"What. . . ?" Rand stopped to swallow. He was lying on rough, weathered stone half buried in the dirt. "What happened?"
"A surge of the One Power." The Aes Sedai tottered to her feet and pulled her cloak tight with a shiver. "It was as if we were being forced . . . pushed. . . . It seemed to come out of nowhere. You must learn to control it. You must! That much of the Power could burn you to a cinder."
"Verin, I. . . . I lived. . . . I was. . . ." He realized the stone under him was rounded. The Portal Stone. Hastily, shakily, he pushed himself to his feet. "Verin, I lived and died, I don't know how many times. Every time it was different, but it was me. It was me."
"The Lines that join the Worlds That Might Be, laid by those who knew the Numbers of Chaos." Verin shuddered; she seemed to be talking to herself. "I've never heard it, but there is no reason we would not be born in those worlds, yet the lives we lived would be different lives. Of course. Different lives for the different ways things might have happened."
"Is that what happened? I . . . we . . . saw how our lives could have been?" I have won again, Lews Therin. No! I am Rand al'Thor!
Verin gave herself a shake and looked at him. "Does it surprise you that your life might go differently if you made different choices, or different things happened to you? Though I never thought I - Well. The important thing is, we are here. Though not as we hoped."
"Where is here?" he demanded. The woods of Stedding Tsofu were gone, replaced by rolling land. There seemed to be forest not far to the west, and a few hills. It had been high in the day when they gathered around the Stone in the stedding but here the sun stood low toward afternoon in a gray sky. The handful of trees nearby were bare branched, or else held a few leaves bright with color. A cold wind gusted from the east, sending leaves scurrying across the ground.
"Toman Head," Verin said. "This is the Stone I visited. You should not have tried to bring us directly here. I don't know what went wrong - I don't suppose I ever will - but from the trees, I would say it is well into late autumn. Rand, we haven't gained any time by it. We've lost time. I would say we have easily spent four months in coming here."
"But I didn't - "
"You must let me guide you in these things. I cannot teach you, it's true, but perhaps I can at least keep you from killing yourself - and the rest of us - by overreaching. Even if you do not kill yourself, if the Dragon Reborn burns himself out like a guttering candle, who will face the Dark One then?" She did not wait for him to renew his protests, but went to Ingtar instead.
The Shienaran gave a start when she touched his arm, and looked at her with frantic eyes. "I walk in the Light," he said hoarsely. "I will find the Horn of Valere and pull down Shayol Ghul's power. I will!"
"Of course you will," she said soothingly. She took his face in her hands, and he drew a sudden breath, abruptly recovering from whatever had held him. Except that memory still lay in his eyes. "There," she said. "That will do for you. I will see how I can help the rest. We may still recover the Horn, but our path has not grown smoother."
As she started around among the others, stopping briefly by each, Rand went to his friends. When he tried to straighten Mat, Mat jerked and stared at him, then grabbed Rand's coat with both hands. "Rand, I'd never tell anyone about - about you. I wouldn't betray you. You have to believe that!" He looked worse than ever, but Rand thought it was mostly fright.
"I do," Rand said. He wondered what lives Mat had lived, and what he had done. He must have told someone, or he wouldn't be so anxious about it. He could not hold it against him. Those had been other Mats, not this one. Besides, after some of the alternatives he had seen for himself . . . . "I believe you. Perrin?"
The curly-haired youth dropped his hands from his face with a sigh. Red marks scored his forehead and cheeks where his nails had dug in. His yellow eyes hid his thoughts. "We don't have many choices really, do we, Rand? Whatever happens, whatever we do, some things are almost always the same." He let out another long breath. "Where are we? Is this one of those worlds you and Hurin were talking about?"
"It's Toman Head," Rand told him. "In our world. Or so Verin says. And it is autumn."
Mat looked worried. "How could - ? No, I don't want to know how it happened. But how are we going to find Fain and the dagger now? He could be anywhere by this time."
"He's here," Rand assured him. He hoped he was right. Fain had had time to take ship for anyplace he wanted to go. Time to ride to Emond's Field. Or Tar Valon. Please, Light, he didn't get tired of waiting. If he's hurt Egwene, or anybody in Emond's Field, I'll . . . . Light burn me, I tried to come in time.
"The larger towns on Toman Head are all west of here," Verin announced loudly enough for all to hear. Everyone was on their feet again, except for Rand and his two friends; she came and put her hands on Mat as she spoke. "Not that there are many villages large enough to call towns. If we are to find any trace of the Darkfriends, to the west is the place to begin. And I think we should not waste the daylight sitting here."
When Mat blinked and stood up - he still looked ill, but he moved spryly - she put her hands on Perrin. Rand backed away when she reached for him.
"Don't be foolish," she told him.
"I don't want your help," he said quietly. "Or any Aes Sedai help."
Her lips twitched. "As you wish."
They mounted immediately and rode west, leaving the Portal Stone behind. No one protested, Rand least of all. Light, let me not be too late.

CHAPTER
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Practice

CHAPTER
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Flight From the White Tower

CHAPTER
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Damane

CHAPTER
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Disagreements

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CHAPTER
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A Plan

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Five Will Ride Forth

CHAPTER
45
Blademaster

I will come back for her. Somehow. Rand sped after the others as fast as he could.

CHAPTER
46
To Come Out of the Shadow

Nynaeve and the others heard distant shouts as they approached the buildings where the damane were housed. The crowds were beginning to pick up, and there was a nervousness to the people in the street, an extra quickness to their step, an extra wariness in the way they glanced past Nynaeve, in her lightning-paneled dress, and the woman she held by a silver leash.

Shifting her bundle nervously, Elayne peered toward the noise of shouts, one street over, where the golden hawk clutching lightning rippled in the wind. "What is happening?"

"Nothing to do with us," Nynaeve said firmly.

"You hope," Min added. "And so do I" She increased her pace, hurrying up the steps ahead of the others, and disappeared inside the tall stone house.

Nynaeve shortened her grip on the leash. "Remember, Seta, you want us to make it through this safely as much as we do."

"I do," the Seanchan woman said fervently. She kept her chin on her chest, to hide her face. "I will cause you no trouble, I swear."

As they turned up the gray stone steps, a sul'dam and a damane appeared at the head of the stairs, coming down as they went up. After one glance to make sure the woman in the collar was not Egwene, Nynaeve did not look at them again. She used the a'dam to keep Seta close by her side, so if the damane sensed the ability to channel in one of them, she would think it was Seta. She felt sweat trickling down her spine, though, until she realized they were paying her no more attention than she gave them. All they saw w [illegible]

Nynaeve pushed open the door, and they went in.

Whatever the excitement beneath Turak's banner, it did not extend here, not yet. There were only women moving about in the entry hall, all easily placed by their dress. Three graydressed damane, with sul'dam wearing the bracelets. Two women in dresses paneled with forked lightning stood talking, and three crossed the hall alone. Four dressed like Min, in plain dark woolens, hurried on their way with trays.

Min stood waiting down the entry hall when they went in; she glanced at them once, then started deeper into the house. Nynaeve guided Seta down the hall after Min, with Elayne scurrying along in their wake. No one gave them a second glance, it seemed to Nynaeve, but she thought the trickle of sweat down her backbone might become a river soon. She kept Seta moving quickly so no one would have a chance for a good look - or worse, a question. With her eyes fixed on her toes, Seta needed so little urging that Ny [illegible]

Near the back of the house, Min took a narrow stairs that spiraled upwards. Nynaeve pushed Seta up it ahead of her, all the way to the fourth floor. The ceilings were low, there, the halls empty and silent except for the soft sounds of weeping. Weeping seemed to fit the air of the chilly halls.

"This place . . ." Elayne began, then shook her head. "It feels. . . ."

"Yes, it does," Nynaeve said grimly. She glared at Seta, who kept her face down. A pallor of fear made the Seanchan woman's skin paler than it was normally.

Wordlessly, Min opened a door and went in, and they followed. The room beyond had been divided into smaller rooms by roughly made wooden walls, with a narrow hallway running to a window. Nynaeve crowded after Min as she hurried to the last door on the right and pushed in.

A slender, dark-haired girl in gray sat at a small table with her head resting on folded arms, but even before she looked up, Nynaeve knew it was Egwene. A ribbon of shining metal ran from the silver collar around Egwene's neck to a bracelet hanging on a peg on the wall. Her eyes widened at the sight of them, her mouth working silently. As Elayne closed the door, Egwene gave a sudden giggle, and pressed her hands to her mouth to stifle it. The tiny room was more than crowded with all of them in it.

"I know I'm not dreaming," she said in a quivering voice, "because if I was dreaming, you'd be Rand and Galad on tall stallions. I have been dreaming. I thought Rand was here. I couldn't see him, but I thought . . . ." Her voice trailed off.

"If you'd rather wait for them . . ." Min said dryly.

"Oh, no. No, you are all beautiful, the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. Where did you come from? How did you do it? That dress, Nynaeve, and the a'dam, and who is . . . ." She gave an abrupt squeak. "That's Seta. How. . . ?" Her voice hardened so that Nynaeve barely recognized it. "I'd like to put her in a pot of boiling water." Seta had her eyes squeezed shut, and her hands clutched her skirts; she was trembling.

"What have they done to you?" Elayne exclaimed. "What could they do to make you want something like that?"

Egwene never took her eyes off the Seanchan woman. "I'd like to make her feel it. That's what she did to me, made me feel like I was neck deep in . . . ." She shuddered. "You do not know what it is like wearing one of these, Elayne. You don't know what they can do to you. I can never decide whether Seta is worse than Renna, but they're all hateful."

"I think I know," Nynaeve said quietly. She could feel the sweat soaking Seta's skin, the cold tremors that shook her limbs: The yellow-haired Seanchan was terrified. It was all she could do not to make Seta's terrors come true then and there.

"Can you take this off of me?" Egwene asked, touching the collar. "You must be able to if you could put that one on - "

Nynaeve channeled, a pinpoint trickle. The collar on Egwene's neck provided anger enough, and if it had not, Seta's fear, the knowledge of how deserved it truly was, and her own knowledge of what she wanted to do to the woman, would have done it. The collar sprang open and fell away from Egwene's throat. With an expression of wonder, Egwene touched her neck.

"Put on my dress and coat," Nynaeve told her. Elayne was already unbundling the clothes on the bed. "We will walk out of here, and no one will even notice you." She considered holding her contact with saidar - she was certainly angry enough, and it felt so wonderful - but, reluctantly, she let it go. This was the one place in Falme where there was no chance of a sul'dam and damane coming to investigate if they sensed someone channeling, but they would certainly do so if a damane saw a woman she thought was a s [illegible]

As Min and Elayne hurriedly helped her change into Nynaeve's old dress, Egwene explained about moving the bracelet from where a sul'dam left it, and how channeling made her sick unless a sul'dam wore the bracelet. Just that morning she had discovered how the collar could be opened without the Power - and found that touching the catch with the intention of opening it made her hand knot into uselessness. She could touch it as much as she wanted so long as she did not think of undoing the catch; the merest hint o [illegible]

Nynaeve felt sick herself. The bracelet on her wrist made her sick. It was too horrible. She wanted it off her wrist before she learned more about a'dam, before she perhaps learned something that would make her feel soiled forever for having worn it.

Unfastening the silver cuff, she pulled it loose, snapped it closed, and hung it on one of the pegs. "Don't think that means you can shout for help now." She shook a fist under Seta's nose. "I can still make you wish you were never born if you open your mouth, and I do not need that bloody . . . thing."

"You - you do not mean to leave me here with it," Seta said in a whisper. "You cannot. Tie me. Gag me so I cannot give an alarm. Please!"

Egwene gave a mirthless laugh. "Leave it on her. She won't call for help even without a gag. You had better hope whoever finds you will remove the a'dam and keep your little secret, Seta. Your dirty secret, isn't it?"

"What are you talking about?" Elayne said.

"I have thought about it a great deal," Egwene said. "Thinking was all I could do when they left me alone up here. Sul'dam claim they develop an affinity after a few years. Most of them can tell when a woman is channeling whether they're leashed to her or not. I wasn't sure, but Seta proves it."

"Proves what?" Elayne demanded, and then her eyes widened in sudden realization, but Egwene went on.

"Nynaeve, a'dam only work on women who can channel. Don't you see? Sul'dam can channel the same as damane." Seta groaned through her teeth, shaking her head in violent denial. "A sul'dam would die before admitting she could channel, even if she knew, and they never train the ability, so they cannot do anything with it, but they can channel."

"I told you," Min said. "That collar shouldn't have worked on her." She was doing up the last buttons down Egwene's back. "Any woman who couldn't channel would be able to beat you silly while you tried to control her with it."

"How can that be?" Nynaeve said. "I thought the Seanchan put leashes on any woman who can channel."

"All of those they find," Egwene told her. "But those they can find are like you, and me, and Elayne. We were born with it, ready to channel whether anyone taught us or not. But what about Seanchan girls who aren't born with the ability, but who could be taught? Not just any woman can become a - a Leash Holder. Renna thought she was being friendly telling me about it. It is apparently a feastday in Seanchan villages when the sul'dam come to test the girls. They want to find any like you and me, and leash them, bu [illegible]

Seta was moaning under her breath. "No. No. No." Over and over again.

"I know she is horrible," Elayne said, "but I feel as if I should help her somehow. She could be one of our sisters, only the Seanchan have twisted it all."

Nynaeve opened her mouth to say they had better worry about helping themselves, and the door opened.

"What is going on here?" Renna demanded, stepping into the room. "An audience?" She stared at Nynaeve, hands on hips. "I never gave permission for anyone else to link with my pet, Tuli. I do not even know who you - " Her eyes fell on Egwene - Egwene wearing Nynaeve's dress instead of damane gray. Egwene with no collar around her throat - and her eyes grew as big as saucers. She never had a chance to yell.

Before anyone else could move, Egwene snatched the pitcher from her washstand and smashed it into Renna's midriff. The pitcher shattered, and the sul'dam lost all her breath in a gurgling gasp and doubled over. As she fell, Egwene leaped on her with a snarl, shoving her flat, grabbing for the collar she had worn where it still lay on the floor, snapping it around the other woman's neck. With one jerk on the silver leash, Egwene pulled the bracelet from the peg and fitted it to her own wrist. Her lips were pulled back fr [illegible]

"Stop it, Egwene!" Nynaeve grabbed Egwene's shoulders, pulling her off of the other woman. "Egwene, stop it! That isn't what you want!" Renna lay gray-faced and panting, staring wildly at the ceiling.

Suddenly Egwene threw herself against Nynaeve, sobbing raggedly at her breast. "She hurt me, Nynaeve. She hurt me. They all did. They hurt me, and hurt me, until I did what they wanted. I hate them. I hate them for hurting me, and I hate them because I couldn't stop them from making me do what they wanted."

"I know," Nynaeve said gently. She smoothed Egwene's hair. "It is all right to hate them, Egwene. It is. They deserve it. But it isn't all right to let them make you like they are."

Seta's hands were pressed to her face. Renna touched the collar at her throat disbelievingly, with a shaking hand.

Egwene straightened, brushing her tears away quickly. "I'm not. I am not like them." She almost clawed the bracelet off of her wrist and threw it down. "I'm not. But I wish I could kill them."

"They deserve it." Min was staring grimly at the two sul'dam.

"Rand would kill someone who did - a thing like that," Elayne said. She seemed to be steeling herself. "I am sure he would."

"Perhaps they do," Nynaeve said, "and perhaps he would. But men often mistake revenge and killing for justice. They seldom have the stomach for justice." She had often sat in judgment with the Women's Circle. Sometimes men came before them, thinking women might give them a better hearing than the men of the Village Council, but men always thought they could sway the decision with eloquence, or pleas for mercy. The Women's Circle gave mercy where it was deserved, but justice always, and it was the Wi [illegible]

Renna wore a fixed stare of horror. Seta's shoulders shook as she sobbed into her hands. Nynaeve hardened her heart - It is justice, she told herself. It is - and herded the others out of the room.

No one paid any more attention to them going out than they had coming in. Nynaeve supposed she had the sul'dam dress to thank for that, but she could not wait to change into something else. Anything else. The dirtiest rag would feel cleaner on her skin.

The girls were silent, walking close behind her, until they were out on the cobblestone street again. She did not know if it was what she had done or the fear that someone might stop them. She scowled. Would they have felt better if she had let them work themselves up to cutting the women's throats?

"Horses," Egwene said. "We will need horses. I know the stable where they took Bela, but I don't think we can get to her."

"We have to leave Bela here," Nynaeve told her. "We are leaving by ship."

"Where is everybody?" Min said, and suddenly Nynaeve realized the street was empty.

The crowds were gone, not a sign of them to be seen; every shop and window along the street were shuttered tight. But up the street from the harbor came a formation of Seanchan soldiers, a hundred or more in ordered ranks, with an officer at their head in his painted armor. They were still halfway down the street from the women, but they marched with a grim, implacable step, and it seemed to Nynaeve that every eye was fixed on her. That's ridiculous. I can't see their eyes inside those helmets, and if anybody had gi [illegible]

"There are more behind us," Min murmured. Nynaeve could hear those boots, now. "I don't know which will reach us first."

Nynaeve took a deep breath. "They are nothing to do with us." She looked beyond the approaching soldiers, to the harbor, filled with tall, boxy Seanchan ships. She could not make out Spray; she prayed it was still there, and ready. "We will walk right past them." Light, I hope we can.

"What if they want you to join them, Nynaeve?" Elayne asked. "You are wearing that dress. If they start asking questions . . . ."

"I will not go back," Egwene said grimly. "I'll die first. Let me show them what they've taught me." To Nynaeve's eye, a golden nimbus suddenly seemed to surround her.

"No!" she said, but it was too late.

With a roar like thunder, the street under the first ranks of Seanchan erupted, dirt and cobblestones and armored men thrown aside like spray from a fountain. Still glowing, Egwene spun to stare up the street, and the thunderous roar was repeated. Dirt rained down on the women. Shouting Seanchan soldiers scattered in good order to shelter in alleys and behind stoops. In moments they were all out of sight, except for those who lay around the two large holes marring the street. Some of those stirred feebly, and moans d [illegible]

Nynaeve threw up her hands, trying to look in both directions at once. "You fool! We are trying not to attract attention!" There was no hope of that now. She only hoped they could manage to work their way around the soldiers to the harbor through the alleys. The damane must know, too, now. They could not have missed that.

"I won't go back to that collar," Egwene said fiercely. "I won't!"

"Look out!" Min shouted.

With a shrill whine, a fireball as big as a horse arched into the air over the rooftops and began to fall. Directly toward them.

"Run!" Nynaeve shouted, and threw herself into a dive toward the nearest alleyway, between two shuttered shops.

She landed awkwardly on her stomach with a grunt, losing half her breath, as the fireball struck. Hot wind washed over her down the narrow passage. Gulping air, she rolled onto her back and stared back into the street.

The cobblestones where they had been standing were chipped and cracked and blackened in a circle ten paces across. Elayne was crouched just inside another alley on the other side of the street. Of Min and Egwene, there was no sign. Nynaeve clapped a hand to her mouth in horror.

Elayne seemed to understand what she was thinking. The Daughter-Heir shook her head violently and pointed down the street. They had gone that way.

Nynaeve heaved a sigh of relief that immediately turned to a growl. Fool girl! We could have gotten by them! There was no time for recriminations, though. She scooted to the corner and peered cautiously around the edge of the building.

A head-sized fireball flashed down the street toward her. She leaped back just before it exploded against the corner where her own head had been, showering her with stone chips.

Anger had her awash in the One Power before she was aware of it. Lightning flashed out of the sky, striking somewhere up the street with a crash near the origin of the fireball. Another jagged bolt split the sky, and then she was running down the alley. Behind her, lightning lanced the mouth of the alley.

If Domon doesn't have that ship waiting, I'll . . . . Light, let us all reach it

Bayle Domon jerked erect as lightning streaked across the slate-gray sky, striking somewhere in the town, then again. There do no be enough cloudy for that!

Something rumbled loudly up in the town, and a ball of fire smashed into a rooftop just above the docks, throwing splintered slates in wide arcs. The docks had emptied themselves of people a while back, except for a few Seanchan; they ran wildly, now, drawing swords and shouting. A man appeared from one of the warehouses with a grolm at his side, running to keep up with the beast's long leaps as they vanished into one of the streets leading up from the water.

One of Domon's crewmen jumped for an axe and swung it high over a mooring cable.

In two strides, Domon seized the upraised axe with one hand and the man's throat with the other. "Spray do stay till I do say sail, Aedwin Cole!"

"They're going mad, Captain!" Yarin shouted. An explosion sent echoes rumbling across the harbor, sending the gulls into screaming circles, and lightning flickered again, crashing to earth inside Falme. "The damane will kill us all! Let us go while they're busy killing one another. They will never notice us till we are gone!"

"I did give my word," Domon said. He wrenched the axe from Cole's hand and threw it clattering onto the deck. "I did give my word." Hurry, woman, he thought, Aes Sedai or whatever you be. Hurry!

Geofram Bornhald eyed the lightning flashing over Falme and dismissed it from his mind. Some huge flying creature - one of the Seanchan monsters, no doubt - flew wildly to escape the bolts. If there was a storm, it would hinder the Seanchan as much as it did him. Nearly treeless hills, a few topped by sparse thickets, still hid the town from him, and him from it.

His thousand men lay spread out to either side of him, one long, mounted rank rippling along the hollows between hills. The cold wind tossed their white cloaks and flapped the banner at Bornhald's side, the wavy-rayed golden sun of the Children of the Light.

"Go now, Byar," he commanded. The gaunt-faced man hesitated, and Bornhald put a snap into his voice. "I said, go, Child Byar!"

Byar touched hand to heart and bowed. "As you command, my Lord Captain." He turned his horse away, every line of him shouting reluctance.

Bornhald put Byar out of his mind. He had done what he could, there. He raised his voice. "The legion will advance at a walk!"

With a creak of saddles the long line of white-cloaked men moved slowly toward Falme.

Rand peered around the corner at the approaching Seanchan, then ducked back into the narrow alley between two stables with a grimace. They would be there soon. There was blood crusted on his cheek. The cuts he had from Turak burned, but there was nothing to be done for them now. Lightning flashed across the sky again; he felt the rumble of its plummet through his boots. What in the name of the Light is happening?

"Close?" Ingtar said. "The Horn of Valere must be saved, Rand." Despite the Seanchan, despite the lightning and strange explosions down in the town proper, he seemed preoccupied with his own thoughts. Mat and Perrin and Hurin were down at the other end of the alley, watching another Seanchan patrol. The place where they had left the horses was close, now, if they could only reach it.

"She's in trouble," Rand muttered. Egwene. There was an odd feeling in his head, as if pieces of his life were in danger. Egwene was one piece, one thread of the cord that made his life, but there were others, and he could feel them threatened. Down there, in Falme. And if any of those threads was destroyed, his life would never be complete, the way it was meant to be. He did not understand it, but the feeling was sure and certain.

"One man could hold fifty here," Ingtar said. The two stables stood close together, with barely room for the pair of them to stand side by side between them. "One man holding fifty at a narrow passage. Not a bad way to die. Songs have been made about less."

"There's no need for that," Rand said. "I hope." A rooftop in the town exploded. How am I going to get back in here? I have to reach her. Reach them? Shaking his head, he peeked around the corner again. The Seanchan were closer, still coming.

"I never knew what he was going to do," Ingtar said softly, as if talking to himself. He had his sword out, testing the edge with his thumb. "A pale little man you didn't seem to really notice even when you were looking at him. Take him inside Fal Dara, I was told, inside the fortress. I did not want to, but I had to do it. You understand? I had to. I never knew what he intended until he shot that arrow. I still don't know if it was meant for the Amyrlin, or for you."

Rand felt a chill. He stared at Ingtar. "What are you saying?" he whispered.

Studying his blade, Ingtar did not seem to hear. "Humankind is being swept away everywhere. Nations fail and vanish. Darkfriends are everywhere, and none of these southlanders seem to notice or care. We fight to hold the Borderlands, to keep them safe in their houses, and every year, despite all we can do, the Blight advances. And these southlanders think Trollocs are myths, and Myrddraal a gleeman's tale." He frowned and shook his head. "It seemed the only way. We would be destroyed for nothing, defending p [illegible]

Rand grabbed Ingtar's lapels. "You aren't making any sense." He can't mean what he's saying. He can't. "Say it plain, whatever you mean. You are talking crazy!"

For the first time Ingtar looked at Rand. His eyes shone with unshed tears. "You are a better man than I. Shepherd or lord, a better man. The prophecy says, 'Let who sounds me think not of glory, but only salvation.' It was my salvation I was thinking of. I would sound the Horn, and lead the heroes of the Ages against Shayol Ghul. Surely that would have been enough to save me. No man can walk so long in the Shadow that he cannot come again to the Light. That is what they say. Surely that would have been enough [illegible]

"Oh, Light, Ingtar." Rand released his hold on the other man and sagged back against the stable wall. "I think. . . . I think wanting to is enough. I think all you have to do is stop being . . . one of them." Ingtar flinched as if Rand had said it out. Darkfriend.

"Rand, when Verin brought us here with the Portal Stone, I - I lived other lives. Sometimes I held the Horn, but I never sounded it. I tried to escape what I'd become, but I never did. Always there was something else required of me, always something worse than the last, until I was . . . . You were ready to give it up to save a friend. Think not of glory. Oh, Light, help me."

Rand did not know what to say. It was as if Egwene had told him she had murdered children. Too horrible to be believed. Too horrible for anyone to admit to unless it was true. Too horrible.

After a time, Ingtar spoke again, firmly. "There has to be a price, Rand. There is always a price. Perhaps I can pay it here."

"Ingtar, I - "

"It is every man's right, Rand, to choose when to Sheathe the Sword. Even one like me."

Before Rand could say anything, Hurin came running down the alley. "The patrol turned aside," he said hurriedly, "down into the town. They seem to be gathering down there. Mat and Perrin went on." He took a quick look down the street and pulled back. "We'd better do the same, Lord Ingtar, Lord Rand. Those bug-headed Seanchan are almost here."

"Go, Rand," Ingtar said. He turned to face the street and did not look at Rand or Hurin again. "Take the Horn where it belongs. I always knew the Amyrlin should have given you the charge. But all I ever wanted was to keep Shienar whole, to keep us from being swept away and forgotten."

"I know, Ingtar." Rand drew a deep breath. "The Light shine on you, Lord Ingtar of House Shinowa, and may you shelter in the palm of the Creator's hand." He touched Ingtar's shoulder. "The last embrace of the mother welcome you home." Hurin gasped.

"Thank you," Ingtar said softly. A tension seemed to go out of him. For the first time since the night of the Trolloc raid on Fal Dara, he stood as he had when Rand first saw him, confident and relaxed. Content.

Rand turned and found Hurin staring at him, staring at both of them. "It is time for us to go."

"But Lord Ingtar - "

" - does what he has to," Rand said sharply. "But we go." Hurin nodded, and Rand trotted after him. Rand could hear the steady tread of the Seanchan's boots, now. He did not look back.

CHAPTER
47
The Grave Is No Bar to My Call

Mat and Perrin were mounted by the time Rand and Hurin reached them. Far behind him, Rand heard Ingtar's voice rise. "The Light, and Shinowa!" The clash of steel joined the roar of other voices.

"Where's Ingtar?" Mat shouted. "What's going on?" He had the Horn of Valere lashed to the high pommel of his saddle as if it were just any horn, but the dagger was in his belt, the ruby-tipped hilt cupped protectively in a pale hand that seemed made of nothing but bone and sinew.

"He's dying," Rand said harshly as he swung onto Red's back.

"Then we have to help him," Perrin said. "Mat can take the Horn and the dagger on to - "

"He is doing it so we can all get away," Rand said. For that, too. "We will all take the Horn to Verin, and then you can help her take it wherever she says it belongs."

"What do you mean?" Perrin asked. Rand dug his heels into the bay's flanks, and Red leaped away toward the hills beyond the town.

"The Light, and Shinowa!" Ingtar's shout soared after him, sounding triumphant, and lightning crashed across the sky in answer.

Rand whipped Red with his reins, then lay against the stallion's neck as the bay laid out in a dead run, mane and tail streaming. He wished he did not feel as if he were running away from Ingtar's cry, running from what he was supposed to do. Ingtar, a Darkfriend. I don't care. He was still my friend. The bay's gallop could not take him away from his own thoughts. Death is lighter than a feather, duty heavier than a mountain. So many duties. Egwene. The Horn. Fain. Mat and his dagger. Why can't there just be one at a [illegible]

He reined in so suddenly that Red slid to a halt, sitting back on his haunches. They were in a scanty copse of bare-branched trees atop one of the hills overlooking Falme. The others galloped up behind him.

"What do you mean?" Perrin demanded. "We can help Verin take the Horn where it's supposed to go? Where are you going to be?"

"Maybe he's going mad already," Mat said. "He wouldn't want to stay with us if he was going mad. Would you, Rand?"

"You three take the Horn to Verin," Rand said. Egwene. So many threads, in so much danger. So many duties. "You do not need me."

Mat caressed the dagger's hilt. "That's all very well, but what about you? Burn me, you can't be going mad yet. You can't!" Hurin gaped at them, not understanding half of it.

"I'm going back," Rand said. "I should never have left." Somehow, that did not sound exactly right in his own ears; it did not feel right inside his head. "I have to go back. Now." That sounded better. "Egwene is still there, remember. With one of those collars around her neck."

"Are you sure?" Mat said. "I never saw her. Aaaah! If you say she is there, then she's there. We'll all take the Horn to Verin, and then we will all go back for her. You don't think I would leave her there, do you?"

Rand shook his head. Threads. Duties. He felt as if he were about to explode like a firework. Light, what's happening to me? "Mat, Verin must take you and that dagger to Tar Valon, so you can finally be free of it. You don't have any time to waste."

"Saving Egwene isn't wasting time!" But Mat's hand had tightened on the dagger till it shook.

"We aren't any of us going back," Perrin said. "Not yet. Look." He pointed back toward Falme.

The wagon yards and horse lots were turning black with Seanchan soldiers, thousands of them rank on rank, with troops of cavalry riding scaled beasts as well as armored men on horses, colorful gonfalons marking the officers. Grolm dotted the ranks, and other strange creatures, almost but not quite like monstrous birds and lizards, and great things like nothing he could describe, with gray, wrinkled skin and huge tusks. At intervals along the lines stood sul'dam and damane by the score. Rand wondered if Egwene we [illegible]

"All that for us?" Mat said incredulously. "Who do they think we are?"

An answer came to Rand, but he shoved it away before it had a chance to form completely.

"We aren't going the other way either, Lord Rand," Hurin said. "Whitecloaks. Hundreds of them."

Rand wheeled his horse to look where the sniffer was pointing. A long, white-cloaked line rippled slowly toward them across the hills.

"Lord Rand," Hurin muttered, "if that lot lays an eye on the Horn of Valere, we'll never get it close to an Aes Sedai. We'll never get close to it again ourselves."

"Maybe that's why the Seanchan are gathering," Mat said hopefully. "Because of the Whitecloaks. Maybe it doesn't have anything to do with us at all."

"Whether it does or not," Perrin said dryly, "there is going to be a battle here in a few minutes."

"Either side could kill us," Hurin said, "even if they never see the Horn. If they do. . . . "

Rand could not manage to think about the Whitecloaks, or the Seanchan. I have to go back. Have to. He was staring at the Horn of Valere, he realized. They all were. The curled, golden Horn hung at Mat's pommel, the focus of every eye.

"It has to be there at the Last Battle," Mat said, licking his lips. "Nothing says it can't be used before then." He pulled the Horn free of its lashings and looked at them anxiously. "Nothing says it can't."

No one else said anything. Rand did not think he could speak; his own thoughts were too urgent to allow room for speech. Have to go back. Have to go back. The longer he looked at the Horn, the more urgent his thoughts became. Have to. Have to.

Mat's hand shook as he raised the Horn of Valere to his lips.

It was a clear note, golden as the Horn was golden. The trees around them seemed to resonate with it, and the ground under their feet, the sky overhead. That one long sound encompassed everything.

Out of nowhere, a fog began to rise. First thin wisps hanging in the air, then thicker billows, and thicker, until it blanketed the land like clouds.

Geofram Bornhald stiffened in his saddle as a sound filled the air, so sweet he wanted to laugh, so mournful he wanted to cry. It seemed to come from every direction at once. A mist began to rise, growing even as he watched.

The Seanchan. They are trying something. They know we are here.

It was too soon, the town too far, but he drew his sword - a clatter of scabbards ran down the rank of his half legion - and called, "The legion will advance at a trot."

The fog covered everything, now, but he knew Falme was still there, ahead. The pace of the horses picked up; he could not see them, but he could hear.

Abruptly the ground ahead flew up with a roar, showering him with dirt and pebbles. From the white blindness to his right he heard another roar, and men and horses screamed, then from his left, and again. Again. Thunder and screams, hidden by the fog.

"The legion will charge!" His horse leaped forward as he dug in his heels, and he heard the roar as the legion, as much of it as still lived, followed.

Thunder and screams, wrapped in whiteness.

His last thought was regret. Byar would not be able to tell his son Dain how he had died.

Rand could not see the trees around them any longer. Mat had lowered the Horn, eyes wide with awe, but the sound of it still rang in Rand's ears. The fog hid everything in rolling waves as white as the finest bleached wool, yet Rand could see. He could see, but it was mad. Falme floated somewhere beneath him, its landward border black with the Seanchan ranks, lightning ripping its streets. Falme hung over his head. There Whitecloaks charged and died as the earth opened in fire beneath their horses' hooves. There w [illegible]

Hurin gasped. "Lord Rand!" There was no need for him to point.

Down the billowing fog, as if it were the side of a mountain, rode shapes on horses. At first the dense mists hid more than that, but slowly they came closer, and it was Rand's turn to gasp. He knew them. Men, not all in armor, and women. Their clothes and their weapons came from every Age, but he knew them all.

Rogosh Eagle-eye, a fatherly looking man with white hair and eyes so sharp as to make his name merely a hint. Gaidal Cain, a swarthy man with the hilts of his two swords sticking above his broad shoulders. Golden-haired Birgitte, with her gleaming silver bow and quiver bristling with silver arrows. More. He knew their faces, knew their names. But he heard a hundred names when he looked at each face, some so different he did not recognize them as names at all, though he knew they were. Michael instead of Mik [illegible]

He knew the man who rode at their head, too. Tall and hook-nosed, with dark, deep-set eyes, his great sword Justice at his side. Artur Hawkwing.

Mat gaped at them as they reined in before him and the others. "Is this. . . ? Is this all of you?" They were little more than a hundred, Rand saw, and realized that somehow he had known that they would be. Hurin's mouth hung open; his eyes bulged almost out of his head.

"It takes more than bravery to bind a man to the Horn." Artur Hawkwing's voice was deep and carrying, a voice used to giving commands.

"Or a woman," Birgitte said sharply.

"Or a woman," Hawkwing agreed. "Only a few are bound to the Wheel, spun out again and again to work the will of the Wheel in the Pattern of the Ages. You could tell him, Lews Therin, could you but remember when you wore flesh." He was looking at Rand.

Rand shook his head, but he would not waste time with denials. "Invaders have come, men who call themselves Seanchan, who use chained Aes Sedai in battle. They must be driven back into the sea. And - and there is a girl. Egwene al'Vere. A novice from the White Tower. The Seanchan have her prisoner. You must help me free her."

To his surprise, several of the small host behind Artur Hawkwing chuckled, and Birgitte, testing her bowstring, laughed. "You always choose women who cause you trouble, Lews Therin." It had a fond sound, as between old friends.

"My name is Rand al'Thor," he snapped. "You have to hurry. There isn't much time."

"Time?" Birgitte said, smiling. "We have all of time." Gaidal Cain dropped his reins and, guiding his horse with his knees, drew a sword in either hand. All along the small band of heroes there was an unsheathing of swords, an unlimbering of bows, a hefting of spears and axes.

Justice shone like a mirror in Artur Hawkwing's gauntleted fist. "I have fought by your side times beyond number, Lews Therin, and faced you as many more. The Wheel spins us out for its purposes, not ours, to serve the Pattern. I know you, if you do not know yourself. We will drive these invaders out for you." His warhorse pranced, and he looked around, frowning. "Something is wrong here. Something holds me." Suddenly he turned his sharp-eyed gaze on Rand. "You are here. Have you the banner?" A murmur [illegible]

"Yes." Rand tore open the straps of his saddlebags and pulled out the Dragon's banner. It filled his hands and hung almost to his stallion's knees. The murmur among the heroes rose.

"The Pattern weaves itself around our necks like halters," Artur Hawkwing said. "You are here. The banner is here. The weave of this moment is set. We have come to the Horn, but we must follow the banner. And the Dragon." Hurin made a faint sound as if his throat had seized.

"Burn me," Mat breathed. "It's true. Burn me!"

Perrin hesitated only an instant before swinging down off his horse and striding into the mist. There came a chopping sound, and when he returned, he carried a straight length of sapling shorn of its branches. "Give it to me, Rand," he said gravely. "If they need it . . . . Give it to me."

Hastily, Rand helped him tie the banner to the pole. When Perrin remounted, pole in hand, a current of air seemed to ripple the pale length of the banner, so the serpentine Dragon appeared to move, alive. The wind did not touch the heavy fog, only the banner.

"You stay here," Rand told Hurin. "When it's over . . . . You will be safe, here."

Hurin drew his short sword, holding it as if it might actually be of some use from horseback. "Begging your pardon, Lord Rand, but I think not. I don't understand the tenth part of what I've heard . . . or what I'm seeing" - his voice dropped to a mutter before picking up again - "but I've come this far, and I think I'll go the rest of the way."

Artur Hawkwing clapped the sniffer on the shoulder. "Sometimes the Wheel adds to our number, friend. Perhaps you will find yourself among us, one day." Hurin sat up as if he had been offered a crown. Hawkwing bowed formally from his saddle to Rand. "With your permission . . . Lord Rand. Trumpeter, will you give us music on the Horn? Fitting that the Horn of Valere should sing us into battle. Bannerman, will you advance?"

Mat sounded the Horn again, long and high - the mists rang with it - and Perrin heeled his horse forward. Rand drew the heron-mark blade and rode between them.

He could see nothing but thick billows of white, but somehow he could still see what he had before, too. Falme, where someone used the Power in the streets, and the harbor, and the Seanchan host, and the dying Whitecloaks, all of it beneath him, all of him hanging above, all of it just as it had been. It seemed as if no time at all had passed since the Horn was first blown, as though time had paused while the heroes answered the call and now resumed counting.

The wild cries Mat wrung from the Horn echoed in the fog, and the drumming of hooves as the horses picked up speed. Rand charged into the mists, wondering if he knew where he was headed. The clouds thickened, hiding the far ends of the rank of heroes galloping to either side of him, obscuring more and more, till he could see only Mat and Perrin and Hurin clearly. Hurin crouched low in his saddle, wide-eyed, urging his horse on. Mat sounding the Horn, and laughing between. Perrin, his yellow eyes glowing, the [illegible]

In a way, he could still see them, but now it was the way he could see Falme, and the Seanchan. He could not tell where they were, or where he was. He tightened his grip on his sword, peered into the mists ahead. He charged alone through the fog, and somehow he knew that was how it was meant to be.

Suddenly Ba'alzamon was before him in the mists, throwing his arms wide.

Red reared wildly, hurling Rand from his saddle. Rand clung to his sword desperately as he soared. It was not a hard landing. In fact, he thought with a sense of wonder that it was very much like landing on . . . nothing at all. One instant he was sailing through the mists, and the next he was not.

When he climbed to his feet, his horse was gone, but Ba'alzamon was still there, striding toward him with a long, black-charred staff in his hands. They were alone, only they and the rolling fog. Behind Ba'alzamon was shadow. The mist was not dark behind him; this blackness excluded the white fog.

Rand was aware of the other things, too. Artur Hawkwing and the other heroes meeting the Seanchan in dense fog. Perrin, with the banner, swinging his axe more to fend off those who tried to reach him than harm them. Mat, still blowing wild notes on the Horn of Valere. Hurin down from his saddle, fighting with short sword and sword-breaker in the way he knew. It seemed as if the Seanchan numbers would overwhelm them in one rush, yet it was the dark-armored Seanchan who fell back.

Rand went forward to meet Ba'alzamon. Reluctantly, he assumed the void, reached for the True Source, was filled with the One Power. There was no other way. Perhaps he had no chance against the Dark One, but whatever chance he did have lay in the Power. It soaked into his limbs, seemed to suffuse everything about him, his clothes, his sword. He felt as if he should be glowing like the sun. It thrilled him; it made him want to vomit.

"Get out of my way," he grated. "I am not here for you!"

"The girl?" Ba'alzamon laughed. His mouth turned to flame. His burns were all but healed, leaving only a few pink scars that were already fading.

He looked like a handsome man of middle years. Except for his mouth, and his eyes. "Which one, Lews Therin? You will not have anyone to help you this time. You are mine, or you are dead. In which case, you are mine anyway. "

"Liar!" Rand snarled. He struck at Ba'alzamon, but the staff of charred wood turned his blade in a shower of sparks. "Father of Lies!"

"Fool! Did those other fools you summoned not tell you who you are?" The fires of Ba'alzamon's face roared with laughter.

Even floating in emptiness, Rand felt a chill. Would they have lied? I don't want to be the Dragon Reborn. He firmed his grip on his sword. Parting the Silk, but Ba'alzamon beat every cut aside; sparks flew as from a blacksmith's forge and hammer. "I have business in Falme, and none with you. Never with you," Rand said. I have to hold his attention until they can free Egwene. In that odd way, he could see the battle rage among the fog-shrouded wagon yards and horse lots.

"You pitiful wretch. You have sounded the Horn of Valere. You are linked to it, now. Do you think the worms of the White Tower will ever release you, now? They will put chains around your neck so heavy you will never cut them."

Rand was so surprised he felt it inside the void. He doesn't know everything. He doesn't know! He was sure it must show on his face. To cover it, he rushed at Ba'alzamon. Hummingbird Kisses the Honeyrose. The Moon on the Water. The Swallow Rides the Air. Lightning arched between sword and staff. Coruscating glitter showered the fog. Yet Ba'alzamon fell back, his eyes blazing in furious furnaces.

At the edge of his awareness, Rand saw the Seanchan falling back in the streets of Falme, fighting desperately. Damane tore the earth with the One Power, but it could not harm Artur Hawkwing, nor the other heroes of the Horn.

"Will you remain a slug beneath a rock?" Ba'alzamon snarled. The darkness behind him boiled and stirred. "You kill yourself while we stand here. The Power rages in you. It burns you. It is killing you! I alone in all the world can teach you how to control it. Serve me, and live. Serve me, or die!"

"Never!" Have to hold him long enough. Hurry, Hawkwing. Hurry! He launched himself at Ba'alzamon again. The Dove Takes Flight. The Falling Leaf.

This time it was he who was driven back. Dimly, he saw the Seanchan fighting their way back in among the stables. He redoubled his efforts. The Kingfisher Takes a Silverback. The Seanchan gave way to a charge, Artur Hawkwing and Perrin side by side in the van. Bundling Straw. Ba'alzamon caught his blow in a fountain like crimson fireflies, and he had to leap away before the staff split his head; the wind of the blow ruffled his hair. The Seanchan surged forward. Striking the Spark. Sparks flew like hail, Ba'alzam [illegible]

Rand wanted to howl aloud. Suddenly he knew that the two battles were linked. When he advanced, the heroes called by the Horn drove the Seanchan back; when he fell back, the Seanchan rose up.

"They will not save you," Ba'alzamon said. "Those who might save you will be carried far across the Aryth Ocean. If ever you see them again, they will be collared slaves, and they will destroy you for their new masters."

Egwene. I can't let them do that to her.

Ba'alzamon's voice rode over his thoughts. "You have only one salvation, Rand al'Thor. Lews Therin Kinslayer. I am your only salvation. Serve me, and I will give you the world. Resist, and I will destroy you as I have so often before. But this time I will destroy you to your very soul, destroy you utterly and forever."

I have won again, Lews Therin. The thought was beyond the void, yet it took an effort to ignore it, not to think of all the lives where he had heard it. He shifted his sword, and Ba'alzamon readied his staff.

For the first time Rand realized that Ba'alzamon acted as if the heron-mark blade could harm him. Steel can't hurt the Dark One. But Ba'alzamon watched the sword warily. Rand was one with the sword. He could feel every particle of it, tiny bits a thousand times too small to be seen with the eye. And he could feel the Power that suffused him running into the sword, as well, threading through the intricate matrices wrought by Aes Sedai during the Trolloc Wars.

It was another voice he heard then. Lan's voice. There will come a time when you want something more than you want life. Ingtar's voice. It is every man's right to choose when to Sheathe the Sword. The picture formed of Egwene, collared, living her life as a damane. Threads of my life in danger. Egwene. If Hawking gets into Falme, he can save her. Before he knew it, he had taken the first position of Heron Wading in the Rushes, balanced on one foot, sword raised high, open and defenseless. Death is lighter than a [illegible]

Ba'alzamon stared at him. "Why are you grinning like an idiot, fool? Do you not know I can destroy you utterly?"

Rand felt a calmness beyond that of the void. "I will never serve you, Father of Lies. In a thousand lives, I never have. I know that. I'm sure of it. Come. It is time to die."

Ba'alzamon's eyes widened; for an instant they were furnaces that put sweat on Rand's face. The blackness behind Ba'alzamon boiled up around him, and his face hardened. "Then die, worm!" He struck with the staff, as with a spear.

Rand screamed as he felt it pierce his side, burning like a white-hot poker. The void trembled, but he held on with the last of his strength, and drove the heron-mark blade into Ba'alzamon's heart. Ba'alzamon screamed, and the dark behind him screamed. The world exploded in fire.

CHAPTER
48
First Claiming

Min struggled up the cobblestone street, pushing through crowds that stood white-faced and staring, those who were not screaming hysterically. A few ran, seemingly without any idea of where they were running, but most moved like poorly handled puppets, more afraid to go than to stay. She searched the faces, hoping to find Egwene, or Elayne, or Nynaeve, but all she saw were Falmen. And there was something drawing her on, as surely as if she had a string tied to her.

Once she turned to look back. Seanchan ships burned in the harbor, and she could see more in flames off the harbor mouth. Many squarish vessels were already small against the setting sun, sailing west as fast as damane could make the winds drive them, and one small ship was beating away from the harbor, tilting to catch a wind to take it along the coast. Spray. She did not blame Bayle Domon for not waiting longer, not after what she had seen; she thought it a wonder he had remained so long.

There was one Seanchan vessel in the harbor not burning, though its towers were black from fires already extinguished. As the tall ship crept toward the harbor mouth, a figure on horseback suddenly appeared around the cliffs skirting the harbor. Riding across the water. Min's mouth fell open. Silver glittered as the figure raised a bow; a streak of silver lanced to the boxy ship, a gleaming line connecting bow and ship. With a roar she could hear even at that distance, fire engulfed the foretower anew, and sailors rushed [illegible]

Min blinked, and when she looked again, the mounted figure was gone. The ship still slowly made way toward the ocean, the crew fighting the flames.

She gave herself a shake and started to climb the street again. She had seen too much that day for someone riding a horse across water to be more than a momentary distraction. Even if it really was Birgitte and her bow. And Artur Hawkwing. I did see him. I did.

In front of one of the tall stone buildings, she stopped uncertainly, ignoring the people who brushed past her as if stunned. It was in there, somewhere, that she had to go. She rushed up the stairs and pushed open the door.

No one tried to stop her. As far as she could tell, there was no one in the house. Most of Falme was out in the streets, trying to decide whether they had all gone mad together. She went on through the house, into the garden behind, and there he was.

Rand lay sprawled on his back under an oak, face pale and eyes closed, left hand gripping a hilt that ended in a foot of blade that appeared to have been melted at the end. His chest rose and fell too slowly, and not with the regular rhythm of someone breathing normally.

Taking a deep breath to calm herself, she went to see what she could do for him. First was to get rid of that stub of a blade; he could hurt himself, or her, if he started thrashing. She pried his hand open, and winced when the hilt stuck to his palm. She tossed it aside with a grimace. The heron on the hilt had branded itself into his hand. But it was obvious to her that that was not what had him lying there unconscious. How did he come by that? Nynaeve can put a salve on it later.

A hasty examination showed that most of his cuts and bruises were not new - at least, the blood had had time to dry in a crust, and the bruises had started to turn yellow at the edges - but there was a hole burned through his coat on the left side. Opening his coat, she pulled up his shirt. Breath whistled through her teeth. There was a wound burned into his side, but it had cauterized itself. What shook her was the feel of his flesh. It had a touch of ice in it; he made the air seem warm.

Grabbing his shoulders, she began to drag him toward the house. He hung limp, a dead weight. "Great lummox," she grunted. "You couldn't be short, and light, could you? You have to have all that leg and shoulder. I ought to let you lie out here."

But she struggled up the steps, careful not to bump him any more than she could avoid, and pulled him inside. Leaving him just within the door, she knuckled the small of her back, muttering to herself about the Pattern, and made a hasty search. There was a small bedroom in the back of the house, perhaps a servant's room, with a bed piled high with blankets, and logs already laid on the hearth. In moments, she had the blankets thrown back and the fire lit, as well as a lamp on the bedside table. Then she went back for [illegible]

It was no small task getting him to the room, or up onto the bed, but she managed it with only a little hard breathing, and covered him up. After a moment, she stuck a hand under the blankets; she winced and shook her head. The sheets were icy cold; he had no body warmth for the blankets to hold. With a put-upon sigh, she wriggled under the covers beside him. Finally, she put his head on her arm. His eyes were still closed, his breathing ragged, but she thought he would be dead by the time she came back if she left [illegible]

For a time she studied his face. It was only his face she saw; she could never read anyone who was not conscious. "I like older men," she told him. "I like men with education, and wit. I have no interest in farms, or sheep, or shepherds. Especially boy shepherds." With a sigh, she smoothed back the hair from his face; he had silky hair. "But then, you aren't a shepherd, are you? Not anymore. Light, why did the Pattern have to catch me up with you? Why couldn't I have something safe and simple, like being shipwreck [illegible]

There was a sound in the hall, and she raised her head as the door opened. Egwene stood there, staring at them by the light of the fire and the lamp. "Oh," was all she said.

Min's cheeks colored. Why am I behaving like I'm done something wrong? Fool! "I . . . I'm keeping him warm. He is unconscious, and he's as cold as ice."

Egwene did not come any further into the room. "I - I felt him pulling at me. Needing me. Elayne felt it, too. I thought it must be something to do with - with what he is, but Nynaeve didn't feel anything." She drew a deep, unsteady breath. "Elayne and Nynaeve are getting the horses. We found Bela. The Seanchan left most of their horses behind. Nynaeve says we should go as soon as we can, and - and . . . . Min, you know what he is, don't you, now?"

"I know." Min wanted to take her arm from under Rand's head, but she could not make herself move. "I think I do, anyway. Whatever he is, he is hurt. I can do nothing for him except keep him warm. Maybe Nynaeve can."

"Min, you know . . . you do know that he cannot marry. He isn't safe . . . for any of us, Min.

"Speak for yourself," Min said. She pulled Rand's face against her breast. "It's like Elayne said. You tossed him aside for the White Tower. What should you care if I pick him up?"

Egwene looked at her for what seemed a long time. Not at Rand, not at all, only at her. She felt her face growing hotter and wanted to look away, but she could not.

"I will bring Nynaeve," Egwene said finally, and walked out of the room with her back straight and her head high.

Min wanted to call out, to go after her, but she lay there as if frozen. Frustrated tears stung her eyes. It's what has to be. I know it. I read it in all of them. Light, I don't want to be part of this "It's all your fault," she told Rand's still shape. "No, it isn't. But you will pay for it, I think. We're all caught like flies in a spiderweb. What if I told her there's another woman yet to come, one she doesn't even know? For that matter, what would you think of that, my fine Lord Shepherd? You aren't bad-looking at all, but . . . . Light, [illegible]

"Not Rand al'Thor," said a musical voice from the door. "Lews Therin Telamon. The Dragon Reborn."

Min stared. She was the most beautiful woman Min had ever seen, with pale, smooth skin, and long, black hair, and eyes as dark as night. Her dress was a white that would make snow seem dingy, belted in silver. All her jewelry was silver. Min felt herself bristle. "What do you mean? Who are you?"

The woman came to stand over the bed - her movements were so graceful, Min felt a stab of envy, though she had never before envied any woman anything - and smoothed Rand's hair as if Min were not there. "He doesn't believe yet, I think. He knows, but he does not believe. I have guided his steps, pushed him, pulled him, enticed him. He was always stubborn, but this time I will shape him. Ishamael thinks he controls events, but I do." Her finger brushed Rand's forehead as if drawing a mark; Min thought uneasily [illegible]

"Who are you?" Min demanded. The woman looked at her, only looked, but she found herself shrinking back into the pillows, clutching Rand to her fiercely.

"I am called Lanfear, girl."

Min's mouth was abruptly so dry she could not have spoken if her life depended on it. One of the Forsaken! No! Light, no! All she could do was shake her head. The denial made Lanfear smile.

"Lews Therin was and is mine, girl. Tend him well for me until I come for him." And she was gone.

Min gaped. One moment she was there, then she was gone. Min discovered she was hugging Rand's unconscious form tightly. She wished she did not feel as if she wanted him to protect her.

Gaunt face set with grim purpose, Byar galloped with the sinking sun behind him and never looked back. He had seen all he needed to, all he could with that accursed fog. The legion was dead, Lord Captain Geofram Bornhald was dead, and there was only one explanation for that; Darkfriends had betrayed them, Darkfriends like that Perrin of the Two Rivers. That word he had to carry to Dain Bornhald, the Lord Captain's son, with the Children of the Light watching Tar Valon. But he had worse to tell, and to none le [illegible]

CHAPTER
49
What Was Meant To Be

Rand opened his eyes and found himself staring up at sunlight slanting through the branches of a leatherleaf, its broad, tough leaves still green despite the time of year. The wind stirring the leaves carried a hint of snow, come nightfall. He lay on his back, and he could feel blankets covering him under his hands. His coat and shirt seemed to be gone, but something was binding his chest, and his left side hurt. He turned his head, and Min was sitting there on the ground, watching him. He almost did not know her, wearin [illegible]

"Min. It is you. Where did you come from? Where are we?" His memory came in flashes and patches. Old things he could remember, but the last few days seemed like bits of broken mirror, spinning through his mind, showing glimpses that were gone before he could see them clearly.

"From Falme," she said. "We're five days east of there, now, and you've been asleep all that time."

"Falme." More memory. Mat had blown the Horn of Valere. "Egwene! Is she. . . ? Did they free her?" He held his breath.

"I don't know what 'they' you mean, but she's free. We freed her ourselves."

"We? I don't understand." She's free. At least she is -

"Nynaeve, and Elayne, and me."

"Nynaeve? Elayne? How? You were all in Falme?" He struggled to sit up, but she pushed him back down easily and stayed there, hands on his shoulders, eyes intent on his face. "Where is she?"

"Gone." Min's face colored. "They're all gone. Egwene, and Nynaeve, and Mat, and Hurin, and Verin. Hurin didn't want to leave you, really. They're on their way to Tar Valon. Egwene and Nynaeve back to their training in the Tower, and Mat for whatever the Aes Sedai have to do about that dagger. They took the Horn of Valere with them. I can't believe I actually saw it."

"Gone," he muttered. "She didn't even wait till I woke up." The red in Min's cheeks deepened, and she sat back, staring at her lap.

He raised his hands to run them over his face, and stopped, staring at his palms in shock. There was a heron branded across his left palm, too, now, to match the one on his right, every line clean and true. Once the heron to set his path; Twice the heron to name him true. "No!"

"They are gone," she said. "Saying 'no' won't change it."

He shook his head. Something told him the pain in his side was important. He could not remember being injured, but it was important. He started to lift his blankets to look, but she slapped his hands away.

"You can't do any good with that. It isn't healed all the way, yet. Verin tried Healing, but she said it didn't work the way it should." She hesitated, nibbling her lip. "Moiraine says Nynaeve must have done something, or you wouldn't have lived till we carried you to Verin, but Nynaeve says she was too frightened to light a candle. There is . . . something wrong with your wound. You will have to wait for it to heal naturally." She seemed troubled.

"Moiraine is here?" He barked a bitter laugh. "When you said Verin was gone, I thought I was free of Aes Sedai again."

"I am here," Moiraine said. She appeared, all in blue and as serene as if she stood in the White Tower, strolling up to stand over him. Min was frowning at the Aes Sedai. Rand had the odd feeling that she meant to protect him from Moiraine.

"I wish you weren't here," he told the Aes Sedai. "As far as I am concerned, you can go back to wherever you've been hiding and stay there."

"I have not been hiding," Moiraine said calmly. "I have been doing what I could, here on Toman Head, and in Falme. It was little enough, though I learned much. I failed to rescue two of my sisters before the Seanchan herded them onto the ships with the Leashed Ones, but I did what I could. "

"What you could. You sent Verin to shepherd me, but I'm no sheep, Moiraine. You said I could go where I wanted, and I mean to go where you are not. "

"I did not send Verin." Moiraine frowned. "She did that on her own. You are of interest to a great many people, Rand. Did Fain find you, or you him?"

The sudden change of topic took him by surprise. "Fain? No. A fine hero I make. I tried to rescue Egwene, and Min did it before me. Fain said he would hurt Emond's Field if I didn't face him, and I never laid eyes on him. Did he go with the Seanchan, too?"

Moiraine shook her head. "I do not know. I wish I did. But it is as well you did not find him, not until you know what he is, at least."

"He's a Darkfriend. "

"More than that. Worse than that. Padan Fain was the Dark One's creature to the depths of his soul, but I believe that in Shadar Logoth he fell afoul of Mordeth, who was as vile in fighting the Shadow as ever the Shadow itself was. Mordeth tried to consume Fain's soul, to have a human body again, but found a soul that had been touched directly by the Dark One, and what resulted . . . . What resulted was neither Padan Fain nor Mordeth, but something far more evil, a blend of the two. Fain - let us call him that - is mo [illegible]

"If he is alive, if he did not go with the Seanchan, I have to-" He cut off as she produced his heron-mark sword from under her cloak. The blade ended abruptly a foot from the hilt, as if it had been melted. Memory came crashing back. "I killed him," he said softly. "This time I killed him."

Moiraine put the ruined sword aside like the useless thing it now was, and wiped her hands together. "The Dark One is not slain so easily. The mere fact that he appeared in the sky above Falme is more than merely troubling. He should not be able to do that, if he is bound as we believe. And if he is not, why has he not destroyed us all?" Min stirred uneasily.

"In the sky?" Rand said in wonder.

"Both of you," Moiraine said. "Your battle took place across the sky, in full view of every soul in Falme. Perhaps in other towns on Toman Head, too, if half what I hear is to be believed."

"We - we saw it all," Min said in a faint voice. She put a hand over one of Rand's comfortingly.

Moiraine reached under her cloak again and came out with a rolled parchment, one of the large sheets such as the street artists in Falme used. The chalks were a little smudged when she unfurled it, but the picture was still clear enough. A man whose face was a solid flame fought with a staff against another with a sword among clouds where lightning danced, and behind them rippled the Dragon banner. Rand's face was easily recognizable.

"How many have seen that?" he demanded. "Tear it up. Burn it."

The Aes Sedai let the parchment roll back up. "It would do no good, Rand. I bought that two days gone, in a village we passed through. There are hundreds of them, perhaps thousands, and the tale is being told everywhere of how the Dragon battled the Dark One in the skies above Falme."

Rand looked at Min. She nodded reluctantly, and squeezed his hand. She looked frightened, but she did not flinch away. I wonder if that's why Egwene left. She was right to leave.

"The Pattern weaves itself around you even more tightly," Moiraine said. "You need me now more than ever."

"I don't need you," he said harshly, "and I don't want you. I will not have anything to do with this." He remembered being called Lews Therin; not only by Ba'alzamon, but by Artur Hawkwing. "I won't. Light, the Dragon is supposed to Break the World again, to tear everything apart. I will not be the Dragon."

"You are what you are," Moiraine said. "Already you stir the world. The Black Ajah has revealed itself for the first time in two thousand years. Arad Doman and Tarabon were on the brink of war, and it will be worse when news of Falme reaches them. Cairhien is in civil war."

"I did nothing in Cairhien," he protested. "You can't blame that on me."

"Doing nothing was always a ploy in the Great Game," she said with a sigh, "and especially as they play it now. You were the spark, and Cairhien exploded like an Illuminator's firework. What do you think will happen when word of Falme reaches Arad Doman and Tarabon? There have always been men willing to proclaim for any man who called himself the Dragon, but they have never before had such signs as this. There is more. Here.' She tossed a pouch on his chest.

He hesitated a moment before opening it. Within lay shards of what seemed to be black-and-white glazed pottery. He had seen their like before. "Another seal on the Dark One's prison," he mumbled. Min gasped; her grip on his hand sought comfort, now, rather than offering it.

"Two," Moiraine said. "Three of the seven are broken now. The one I had, and two I found in the High Lord's dwelling in Falme. When all seven are broken, perhaps even before, the patch men put over the hole they drilled into the prison the Creator made will be torn asunder, and the Dark One will once more be able to put his hand through that hole and touch the world. And the only hope of the world is that the Dragon Reborn will be there to face him."

Min tried to stop Rand from throwing back the blankets, but he pushed her gently aside. "I need to walk." She helped him up, but with a great many sighs and grumbles about him making his wound worse. He discovered that his chest was wrapped round with bandages. Min draped one of the blankets about his shoulders like a cloak.

For a moment he stood staring down at the heron-mark sword, what was left of it, lying on the ground. Tam's sword. My father's sword. Reluctantly, more reluctantly than he had ever done anything in his life, he let go of the hope that he would discover Tam really was his father. It felt as if he were tearing his heart out. But it did not change the way he felt about Tam, and Emond's Field was the only home he had ever known. Fain is the important thing. I have one duty left. Stopping him.

The two women had to support him, one on either arm, down to where the campfires were already burning, not far from a road of hard-packed dirt. Loial was there, reading a book, To Sail Beyond the Sunset, and Perrin, staring into one of the fires. The Shienarans were making preparations for their evening meal. Lan sat under a tree sharpening his sword; the Warder gave Rand a careful look, then a nod.

There was something else, too. The Dragon banner rippled on the wind over the middle of the camp. Somewhere they had found a proper staff to replace Perrin's sapling.

Rand demanded, "What is that doing out where anybody who passes by can see it?"

"It is too late to hide, Rand," Moiraine said. "It was always too late for you to hide."

"You don't have to put up a sign saying 'here I am,' either. I'll never find Fain if somebody kills me because of that banner." He turned to Loial and Perrin. "I'm glad you stayed. I would have understood if you hadn't."

"Why would I not stay?" Loial said. "You are even more ta'veren than I believed, true, but you are still my friend. I hope you are still my friend." His ears twitched uncertainly.

"I am," Rand said. "For as long as it's safe for you to be around me, and even after, too." The Ogier's grin nearly split his face in two.

"I'm staying as well," Perrin said. There was a note of resignation, or acceptance, in his voice. "The Wheel weaves us tight in the Pattern, Rand. Who would have thought it, back in Emond's Field?"

The Shienarans were gathering around. To Rand's surprise, they all fell to their knees. Every one of them watched him.

"We would pledge ourselves to you," Uno said. The others kneeling with him nodded.

"Your oaths are to Ingtar, and Lord Agelmar," Rand protested. "Ingtar died well, Uno. He died so the rest of us could escape with the Horn." There was no need to tell them or anyone else the rest. He hoped that Ingtar had found the Light again. "Tell Lord Agelmar that when you return to Fal Dara. "

"It is said," the one-eyed man said carefully, "that when the Dragon is Reborn, he will break all oaths, shatter all ties. Nothing holds us, now. We would give our oaths to you." He drew his sword and laid it before him, hilt toward Rand, and the rest of the Shienarans did the same.

"You battled the Dark One," Masema said. Masema, who hated him. Masema, who looked at him as if seeing a vision of the Light. "I saw you, Lord Dragon. I saw. I am your man, to the death." His dark eyes shone with fervor.

"You must choose, Rand," Moiraine said. "The world will be broken whether you break it or not. Tarmon Gai'don will come, and that alone will tear the world apart. Will you still try to hide from what you are, and leave the world to face the Last Battle undefended? Choose."

They were all watching him, all waiting. Death is lighter than a feather, duty heavier than a mountain. He made his decision.

CHAPTER
50
After

By ship and horse the stories spread, by merchant wagon and man on foot, told and retold, changing yet always alike at the heart, to Arad Doman and Tarabon and beyond, of signs and portents in the sky above Falme. And men proclaimed themselves for the Dragon, and other men struck them down and were struck down in turn.

Other tales spread, of a column that rode from the sinking sun across Almoth Plain. A hundred Borderman, it was said. No, a thousand. No, a thousand heroes come back from the grave to answer the call of the Horn of Valere. Ten thousand. They had destroyed a legion of the Children of the Light entire. They had thrown Artur Hawkwing's returned armies back into the sea. They were Artur Hawkwing's armies returned. Toward the mountains they rode, toward the dawn.

Yet one thing every tale had the same. At their head rode a man whose face had been seen in the sky above Falme, and they rode under the banner of the Dragon Reborn.

And men cried out to the Creator, praying, O Light of the Heavens, Light of the World, let the Promised One be born of the mountain, according to the Prophecies, as he was in Ages past and will be in Ages to come. Let the Prince of the Morning sing to the land that green things will grow and the valleys give forth lambs. Let the arm of the Lord of the Dawn shelter us from the Dark, and the great sword of justice defend us. Let the Dragon ride again on the winds of time.

-from Choral, Drianaan te Calamon, The Cycle of the Dragon,
Author unknown, the Fourth Age

The End
of the Second Book of
The Wheel of Time

GLOSSARY

A Note on Dates in This Glossary. Three systems of recording dates have been in general use since the Breaking of the World. The first recorded years After the Breaking (AB). Since the years of the Breaking and immediately after were years of almost total chaos, and since this calendar was adopted a good hundred years after the end of the Breaking, its starting point was arbitrarily assigned. At the end of the Trolloc Wars many records had been lost, so much so that there was argument about the exact year under the [illegible]

a'dam (AYE-dam): A device, consisting of a collar and a bracelet linked by a silvery metal leash, that may be used to control, against her will, any woman who can channel. The collar is worn by the damane, the bracelet by the sul'dam. See also damane; sul'dam.

Aes Sedai (EYEZ seh-DEYE): Wielders of the One Power. Since the Time of Madness, all surviving Aes Sedai are women. Widely distrusted and feared, even hated, they are blamed by many for the Breaking of the World, and are thought to meddle in the affairs of nations. At the same time, few rulers will be without an Aes Sedai adviser, even in lands where the existence of such a connection must be kept secret. See also Ajah; Amyrlin Seat; Time of Madness.

Agelmar; Lord Agelmar of House Jagad (AGH-el-mar; JAH-gad): Lord of Fal Dara. His sign is three running red foxes.

Age of Legends: The Age ended by the War of the Shadow and the Breaking of the World. A time when Aes Sedai performed wonders now only dreamed of. See also Wheel of Time; Breaking of the World; War of the Shadow.

Aiel (eye-EEL): The people of the Aiel Waste. Fierce and hardy. Also called Aielmen. They veil their faces before they kill, giving rise to the saying "acting like a black-veiled Aiel" to describe someone who is being violent. Deadly warriors with weapons or with nothing but their bare hands, they will not touch a sword. Their pipers play them into battle with the music of dances, and Aielmen call battle "the Dance." See also Aiel warrior societies; Aiel Waste.

Aiel warrior societies: Aiel warriors are all members of one of the warrior societies, such as the Stone Soldiers, the Red Shields, or the Maidens of the Spear. Each society has its own customs, and sometimes specific duties. For example, Red Shields act as police. Stone Soldiers often vow not to retreat once battle has been joined, and will die to the last man if necessary to fulfill this vow. The clans of the Aiel frequently fight among themselves, but members of the same society will not fight one another even if their clans are [illegible]

Aiel Waste: The harsh, rugged, and all-but-waterless land east of the Spine of the World. Few outsiders venture there, not only because water is almost impossible to find for one not born there, but because the Aiel consider themselves at war with all other peoples and do not welcome strangers.

Ajah (AH-jah): Societies among the Aes Sedai to which all Aes Sedai except the Amyrlin Seat belong. They are designated by colors: Blue, Red, White, Green, Brown, Yellow, and Gray. Each follows a specific philosophy of the use of the One Power and the purposes of the Aes Sedai. For example, the Red Ajah bends all its energies to finding men who are attempting to wield the Power and to gentling them. The Brown Ajah, on the other hand, forsakes involvement with the mundane world and dedicates itself to seeking [illegible]

Alanna Mosvani (ah-LAN-nah mos-VANH-nie): An Aes Sedai of the Green Ajah.

alantin (ah-LANH-tin): In the Old Tongue, "Brother"; short for tia avende alantin, "Brother to the Trees"; "Treebrother."

Alar (AYE-lahr): Eldest of the Elders of Stedding Tsofu.

Aldieb (ahl-DEEB): In the Old Tongue, "West Wind," the wind that brings the spring rains.

al'Meara, Nynaeve (ahl-MEER-ah, NIGH-neev): A woman from Emond's Field, in the Two Rivers district of Andor (AN-door).

al'Thor, Rand (ahl-THOR, RAND): A young man from Emond's Field, once a shepherd.

al'Vere, Egwene (ahl-VEER, eh-GWAIN): A young woman from Emond's Field.

Amalisa, Lady (ah-mah-LEE-sah): Shienaran of House Jagad; Lord Agelmar's sister.

Amyrlin Seat (AHM-ehr-lin SEAT): (1) The title of the leader of the Aes Sedai. Elected for life by the Hall of the Tower, the highest council of the Aes Sedai, which consists of three representatives (called Sitters) from each of the seven Ajahs. The Amyrlin Seat has, theoretically at least, almost supreme authority among the Aes Sedai, and ranks socially as the equal of a king or queen. A slightly less formal usage is simply the Amyrlin. (2) The throne upon which the leader of the Aes Sedai sits.

Anaiya (ah-NYE-yah): An Aes Sedai of the Blue Ajah.

angreal (anh-gree-AHL): A very rare object that allows anyone capable of channeling the One Power to handle a greater amount of the Power than would be safely possible unaided. Remnants of the Age of Legends, the means of their making is no longer known. Few remain in existence. See also sa'angreal; ter'angreal.

Arad Doman (AH-rahd do-MAHN): A nation on the Aryth Ocean.

Arafel (AH-rah-fehl): One of the Borderlands.

Avendesora (AH-vehn-deh-SO-rah): In the Old Tongue, "the Tree of Life." Mentioned in many stories and legends.

Aybara, Perrin (ay-BAHR-ah, PEHR-rihn): A young man from Emond's Field, formerly a blacksmith's apprentice.

Ba'alzamon (bah-AHL-zah-mon): In the Trolloc tongue, "Heart of the Dark." Believed to be the Trolloc name for the Dark One. See also Dark One; Trollocs.

Barthanes, Lord, of House Damodred (bahr-THAN-nehs): Cairhienin lord, second only to the king in power. His personal sign is the Charging Boar. The sign of House Damodred is the Crown and Tree.

Bel Tine (BEHL TINE): Spring festival celebrating the end of winter, the first sprouting of crops, and the birth of the first lambs.

Betrayer of Hope: See Ishamael.

Birgitte (ber-GEET-teh): Golden-haired heroine of legend and a hundred gleemen's tales, she had a silver bow and silver arrows, with which she never missed.

bittern (BIHT-tehrn): A musical instrument that may have six, nine, or twelve strings, and is held flat on the knees and played by plucking or strumming.

Blasted Lands: Desolated lands surrounding Shayol Ghul, beyond the Great Blight.

Blight, the: See Great Blight, the.

Borderlands, the: The nations bordering the Great Blight: Saldaea, Arafel, Kandor, and Shienar.

Bornhald, Geofram (BOHRN-hahld, JEHF-rahm): A Lord Captain of the Children of the Light.

Breaking of the World, the: During the Time of Madness, male Aes Sedai who had gone insane, and who could wield the One Power to a degree now unknown, changed the face of the earth. They caused great earthquakes, leveled old mountain ranges and raised new mountains, lifted dry land where seas had been and made the ocean rush in where dry land had been. Many parts of the world were completely depopulated, and the survivors were scattered like dust on the wind. This destruction is remembered in stories, legends, and [illegible]

Byar, Jaret (BY-ahr, JAH-ret): An officer of the Children of the Light.

Caemlyn (KAYM-lihn): The capital city of Andor.

Cairhien (KEYE-ree-EHN): Both a nation along the Spine of the World and the capital city of that nation. The city was burned and looted during the Aiel War (976-978 NE). The sign of Cairhien is a many rayed golden sun rising from the bottom of a field of sky blue.

Carallain (KAH-rah-layn): One of the nations wrung from Artur Hawkwing's empire during the War of the Hundred Years. It weakened thereafter, and the last traces vanished about 500 NE.

Cauthon, Mat (CAW-thon, MAT): A young man from the Two Rivers. Full name: Matrim (MAT-rihm) Cauthon.

channel: (verb) To control the flow of the One Power. See also One Power.

Children of the Light: A society holding strict ascetic beliefs, dedicated to the defeat of the Dark One and the destruction of all Darkfriends. Founded during the War of the Hundred Years by Lothair Mantelar (LOH-thayr MAHN-tee-LAHR) to proselytize against the increasing numbers of Darkfriends, they evolved during the war into a completely military organization, extremely rigid in their beliefs, and completely certain that only they know the truth and the right. They hate Aes Sedai, considering them, and any who support [illegible]

Chronicles, Keeper of the: Second in authority to the Amyrlin Seat among the Aes Sedai, she also acts as secretary to the Amyrlin. Chosen for life by the Hall of the Tower, and usually of the same Ajah as the Amyrlin. See also Amyrlin Seat; Ajah.

Corenne (koh-REEN-neh): In the Old Tongue, "Return," or "the Return."

Covenant of the Ten Nations: A union formed in the centuries after the Breaking of the World when nations were first re-created (circa 300 AB). Dedicated to the defeat of the Dark One. Broken apart by the Trolloc Wars. See also Trolloc Wars.

cuendillar (CWAIN-der-yar): Also known as heartstone. See heartstone,

Daes Dae'mar (DAH-ess day-MAR): The Great Game, also known as the Game of Houses. Name given the scheming, plots, and manipulations for advantage by the noble Houses. Great value is given to subtlety, to aiming at one thing while seeming to aim at another, and to achieving ends with the least visible effort.

Dai Shan: (DYE SHAN): A title in the Borderlands meaning Diademed Battle Lord. See also Borderlands.

damane (dah-MAHN-ee): In the Old Tongue, "Leashed Ones." Women who can channel who are held prisoner by a dam and used by the Seanchan for many purposes, chiefest of these being as weapons in battle. See also Seanchan; a dam; sul'dam.

Damodred, Lord Galadedrid (DAHM-oh-drehd, gah-LARD-eh-drihd): Half-brother to Elayne and Gawyn. His sign is a winged silver sword, point down.

Darkfriends: Those who follow the Dark One and believe they will gain great power and rewards, and even immortality, when he is freed from his prison.

Dark One: Most common name, used in every land, for Shai'tan. The source of evil, antithesis of the Creator. Imprisoned by the Creator at the moment of Creation in a prison at Shayol Ghul. An attempt to free him from that prison brought about the War of the Shadow, the tainting of saidin, the Breaking of the World, and the end of the Age of Legends.

Dark One, naming the: Saying the true name of the Dark One (Shai'tan) draws his attention, inevitably bringing ill fortune at best, disaster at worst. For that reason, many euphemisms are used, among them the Dark One, Father of Lies, Sightblinder, Lord of the Grave, Shepherd of the Night, Heartsbane, Heartfang, Grassburner, and Leafblighter. Someone who seems to be inviting ill fortune is often said to be "naming the Dark One."

Daughter-Heir: Title of the heir to the throne of Andor. The eldest daughter of the queen succeeds her mother on the throne. Without a surviving daughter, the throne goes to the nearest female blood relation of the queen.

Daughter of the Night: See Lanfear.

Dome of Truth: Great audience hall of the Children of the Light, located in Amador (AHmah-door), the capital of Amadicia (AH-mah-DEE-cee-ah). There is a King of Amadicia, but the Children rule in all but name. See also Children of the Light.

Do Miere A'vron (DOH me-EHR a-VRAWN): See Watchers Over the Waves.

Domon, Bayle (DOH-mon, BAIL): The captain of the Spray, who collects old things.

Draghkar (DRAGH-kahr): A creature of the Dark One, made originally by twisting human stock. A Draghkar appears to be a large man with bat-like wings, whose skin is too pale and whose eyes are too large. The Draghkar's song can draw its prey to it, suppressing the victim's will. There is a saying: "The kiss of the Draghkar is death." It does not bite, but its kiss will consume first the soul of its victim, and then its life.

Dragon, false: Occasionally men claim to be the Dragon Reborn, and sometimes one of them gains following enough to require an army to put it down. Some have began wars that involved many nations. Over the centuries most of these have been men unable to channel the One Power, but a few could do so. All, however, either disappeared or were captured or killed without fulfilling any of the Prophecies concerning the Rebirth of the Dragon. These men are called false Dragons. Among those who could channel, the most [illegible]

Dragon, Prophecies of the: Little known and seldom spoken of, the Prophecies, given in The Karaethon Cycle, foretell that the Dark One will be freed again to touch the world. And that Lews Therin Telamon, the Dragon, Breaker of the World, will be reborn to fight Tarmon Gai'don, the Last Battle against the Shadow. See also Dragon, the. Dragon, the: The name by which Lews Therin Telamon was known during the War of the Shadow. In the madness that overtook all male Aes Sedai, Lews Therin killed every living person [illegible]

Dragon Reborn: According to prophecy and legend the Dragon will be born again at mankind's greatest hour of need to save the world. This is not something people look forward to, both because the Prophecies say the Dragon Reborn will bring a new Breaking to the world and because Lews Therin Kinslayer, the Dragon, is a name to make men shudder, even more than three thousand years after his death. See also Dragon, the; Dragon, false; Dragon, Prophecies of the.

Dragon's Fang, the: A stylized mark in the shape of a teardrop balanced on its point. Scrawled on a door or a house, it is an accusation of evil against the people inside, or an attempt to bring the Dark One's attention, and thus harm, to them.

Dreadlords: Those men and women who, able to channel the One Power, went over to the Shadow during the Trolloc Wars, acting as commanders of the Trolloc forces.

Elaida (eh-LY-da): An Aes Sedai of the Red Ajah who advises Queen Morgase of Andor. She sometimes has the Foretelling. See also Foretelling.

Elayne (ee-LAIN): Queen Morgase's daughter, the Daughter-Heir to the Throne of Andor. Her sign is a golden lily.

Fain, Padan (FAIN, PAHD-ahn): A man imprisoned as a Darkfriend in Fal Dara keep.

Far Dareis Mai (FAHR DAH-rize MY): Literally "Maidens of the Spear." A warrior society of the Aiel, which, unlike any of the others, admits women and only women. A Maiden may not marry and remain in the society, nor may she fight while carrying a child. Any child born to a Maiden is given to another woman to raise, in such a way that no one knows who the child's mother was. ("You may belong to no man, nor may any man belong to you, nor any child. The spear is your lover, your child, and your life.") These children [illegible]

Five Powers, the: There are threads to the One Power, and each person who can channel can usually grasp some threads better than others. These threads are named according to the sorts of things that can be done using them - Earth, Air, Fire, Water, and Spirit - and are called the Five Powers. Any wielder of the Power will have a greater degree of strength with one, or possibly two, of these, and lesser strength in the others. Some few may have great strength with three, but since the Age of Legends no one has had great strength [illegible]

Flame of Tar Valon: The symbol of Tar Valon, the Amyrlin Seat, and the Aes Sedai. A stylized representation of a flame; a white teardrop with the point upward.

Forsaken, the: Name given to thirteen of the most powerful Aes Sedai ever known, who went over to the Dark One during the War of the Shadow in return for the promise of immortality. According to both legend and fragmentary records, they were imprisoned along with the Dark One when his prison was resealed. Their names are still used to frighten children.

Gaidin (GYE-deen): Literally, "Brother to Battles." A title used by Aes Sedai for the Warders. See also Warder.

Galad (gah-LAHD): See Damodred, Lord Galadedrid,

Galldrian su Riatin Rie (GAHL-dree-ahn soo REYE-ah-tin REE): Literally, Galldrian of House Riatin, King. King of Cairhien. See also Cairhien.

Game of Houses, the: See Daes Dae'mar.

Gawyn (GAH-wihn): Queen Morgase's son, and Elayne's brother. His sign is a white boar.

gentling: The act, performed by Aes Sedai, of shutting off a male who can channel from the One Power. This is necessary because any man who learns to channel will go insane from the taint on saidin and will almost certainly do horrible things with the Power in his madness. A man who has been gentled can still sense the True Source, but he cannot touch it. Whatever madness has come before gentling is arrested by the act of gentling, but not cured by it, and if it is done soon enough death can be averted. See also One Power, [illegible]

gleeman: A traveling storyteller, musician, juggler, tumbler, and all-around entertainer. Known by their trademark cloaks of many-colored patches, they perform mainly in the villages and smaller towns.

Goaban (GO-ah-banh): One of the nations wrung from Artur Hawkwing's empire during the War of the Hundred Years. It weakened, and faded away approximately 500 NE. See also Artur Hawkwing; War of the Hundred Years.

Great Blight, the: A region in the far north, entirely corrupted by the Dark One. A haunt of Trollocs, Myrddraal, and other creatures of the Shadow.

Great Game, the: See Daes Dae'mar.

Great Hunt of the Horn, the: A cycle of stories concerning the legendary search for the Horn of Valere, in the years between the end of the Trolloc Wars and the beginning of the War of the Hundred Years. If told in its entirety, the cycle would take many days.

Great Lord of the Dark: The name by which Darkfriends refer to the Dark One, claiming that to use his true name would be blasphemous.

Great Serpent: A symbol for time and eternity, ancient before the Age of Legends began, consisting of a serpent eating its own tail. A ring in the shape of the Great Serpent is awarded to women who have been raised to the Accepted among the Aes Sedai.

Hailene (heye-LEE-neh): In the Old Tongue, "Those Who Come Before," or "Forerunners."

Halfman: See Myrddraal.

Hardan: One of the nations wrung from Artur Hawkwing's empire, now long forgotten. It lay between Cairhien and Shienar.

Hawkwing, Artur: A legendary king (ruled FY 943-994) who united all the lands west of the Spine of the World, as well as some lands beyond the Aiel Waste. He even sent armies across the Aryth Ocean (FY 992), but all contact with these was lost at his death, which set off the War of the Hundred Years. His sign was a golden hawk. in flight. See also War of the Hundred Years.

heartstone: An indestructible substance created during the Age of Legends. Any force used in an attempt to break it is absorbed, making heartstone stronger.

hide: A unit of area for measuring land, equal to 100 paces by 100 paces.

Horn of Valere (vah-LEER): The legendary object of the Great Hunt of the Horn. The Horn supposedly can call back dead heroes from the grave to fight against the Shadow.

Hundred Companions, the: One hundred male Aes Sedai, among the most powerful of the Age of Legends, who, led by Lews Therin Telamon, launched the final stroke that ended the War of the Shadow by sealing the Dark One back into his prison. The Dark One's counterstroke tainted saidin; the Hundred Companions went mad and began the Breaking of the World. See also Time of Madness; Breaking of the World; True Source; One Power.

Hurin (HEW-rihn): A Shienaran who has the ability to smell where violence has been done, and to follow the scent of those who did it. Called a "sniffer," he serves the King's justice in Fal Dara, in Shienar.

Illian (IHL-lee-ahn): A great port on the Sea of Storms, capital city of the nation of the same name.

Ingtar, Lord, of House Shinowa (IHNG-tahr); (shih-NOH-wah): A Shienaran warrior. His sign is the Gray Owl.

Ishamael (ih-SHAH-may-EHL): In the Old Tongue, "Betrayer of Hope." One of the Forsaken. Name given to the leader of the Aes Sedai who went over to the Dark One in the War of the Shadow. It is said that even he forgot his true name. See also Forsaken.

Karaethon Cycle, the (ka-REE-ah-thon): See Dragon, Prophecies of the.

kith: Close friends and acquaintances.

Laman (LAY-mahn): A king of Cairhien, of House Damodred, who lost his throne and life in the Aiel War.

Lan; al'Lan Mandragoran (AHL-LAN man-DRAG-or-an): A Warder, bonded to Moiraine. Uncrowned King of Malkier, Dai Shan, and the last surviving Malkieri lord. See also Warder; Moiraine; Malkier; Dai Shan.

Lanfear (LAN-fear): In the Old Tongue, "Daughter of the Night." One of the Forsaken, perhaps the most powerful next to Ishamael. Unlike the other Forsaken, she chose this name herself. She is said to have been in love with Lews Therin Telamon. See also Forsaken; Dragon, the.

league: See Length, units of.

Leane (lee-AHN-eh): An Aes Sedai of the Blue Ajah, and Keeper of the Chronicles. See also Ajah; Chronicles, Keeper of the.

Leashed Ones: See damane.

Length, units of: 10 inches = 3 hands = 1 foot; 3 feet = 1 pace; 2 paces = 1 span; 1000 spans = 1 mile; 4 miles= 1 league.

Lews Therin Telamon; Lews Therin Kinslayer: See Dragon, the.

Liandrin (lee-AHN-drihn): An Aes Sedai of the Red Ajah, from Tarabon.

Logain (loh-GAYN): A false Dragon, gentled by the Aes Sedai.

Loial (LOY-ahl): An Ogier from Stedding Shangtai.

Luc; Lord Luc of House Mantear (LUKE; MAN-tee-ahr): Tigraine's brother. His disappearance in the Great Blight (971 NE) is believed to be connected to Tigraine's later disappearance. His sign was an acorn.

Luthair: See Mondwin, Luthair Paendrag.

Malkier (mahl-KEER): A nation, once one of the Borderlands, now consumed by the Blight. The sign of Malkier was a golden crane in flight.

Manetheren (mahn-EHTH-ehr-ehn): One of the Ten Nations that made the Second Covenant, and also the capital city of that nation. Both city and nation were utterly destroyed in the Trolloc Wars.

marath'damane (MAH-rahth'dah-MAHN-ee): In the Old Tongue, "Those Who Must Be Leashed." Term used by the Seanchan for women who can channel, but who have not yet been captured and collared. See also damane; a dam; Seanchan.

Masema (mah-SEE-mah): A Shienaran soldier who hates Aiel.

mashiara (mah-shee-AH-rah): In the Old Tongue, "beloved," but meaning a love that is lost beyond redeeming.

Merrilin, Thom (MER-rih-lihn, TOM): A gleeman.

mile: See Length, units of.

Min (MIN): A young woman with the ability to read the auras she sometimes sees surrounding people.

Moiraine (mwah-RAIN): An Aes Sedai of the Blue Ajah.

Mondwin, Luthair Paendrag (LEW-thair PAY-ehn-DRAG MONdwihn): Son of Artur Hawkwing, he commanded the armies Hawkwing sent across the Aryth Ocean. His banner was a golden, spreadwinged hawk clutching lightning bolts. See also Hawkwing, Artur.

Mordeth (MOOR-death): Councilor who turned the city of Aridhol to use Darkfriends' ways against the Darkfriends, thus bringing its destruction and earning .it a new name, Shadar Logoth ("Where the Shadow Waits"). Only one thing survives in Shadar Logoth beside the hate that killed it, and that is Mordeth himself, bound in the ruins for two thousand years, waiting for someone to come whose soul he can consume and so take on new flesh.

Morgase (moor-GAYZ): Queen of Andor, High Seat of House Trakand (TRAHK-ahnd).

Myrddraal (MUHRD-draal): Creatures of the Dark One, commanders of the Trollocs. Twisted offspring of Trollocs in which the human stock used to create the Trollocs has resurfaced, but tainted by the evil that made the Trollocs. Physically they are like men except they have no eyes, but can see like eagles in light or dark. They have certain powers stemming from the Dark One, including the ability to cause paralyzing fear with a look and the ability to vanish wherever there are shadows. One of their few known weaknesses is [illegible]

Niall, Pedron (NEYE-awl, PAY-drohn): Lord Captain Commander of the Children of the Light. See also Children of the Light.

Nisura, Lady (nih-SOO-rah): A Shienaran noblewoman, and one of the Lady Amalisa's attendants.

One Power, the: The power drawn from the True Source. The vast majority of people are completely unable to learn to channel the One Power. A very small number can be taught to channel, and an even tinier number have the ability inborn. For these few there is no need to be taught; they will touch the True Source and channel the Power whether they want to or not, perhaps without even realizing what they are doing. This inborn ability usually manifests itself in late adolescence or early adulthood. If control is not taught, or [illegible]

Pattern of an Age: The Wheel of Time weaves the threads of human lives into the Pattern of an Age, often called simply the Pattern, which forms the substance of reality for that Age. See also ta'veren.

Powers, the Five: See Five Powers.

Questioners, the: An order within the Children of the Light. Their avowed purposes are to discover the truth in disputations and to uncover Darkfriends. In the search for truth and the Light, their normal method of inquiry is by torture; their normal attitude that they know the truth already and must only make their victim confess to it. The Questioners refer to themselves as the Hand of the Light, the Hand that digs out truth, and at times act as if they were entirely separate from the Children and the Council of the Anointed, which [illegible]

Ragan (rah-GAHN): A Shienaran warrior,

Red Shields: See Aiel warrior societies.

Renna (REEN-nah): A Seanchan woman; a sul'dam. See also Seanchan; sul'dam.

Rhyagelle (rheye-ah-GEHL): In the Old Tongue, "Those Who Come Home," or "Homecomers."

sa'angreal (SAH-ahn-GREE-ahl): Any one of a number of objects that allow an individual to channel much more of the One Power than would otherwise be possible or safe. A sa'angreal is like unto, but much more powerful than, an angreal. The amount of the Power that can be wielded with a sa'angreal compares to the amount of the Power that can be handled with an angreal as the power wielded with the aid of an angreal does to the amount of the Power that can be handled unaided. Remnants of the Age of Legends, the means [illegible]

saidar (sah-ih-DAHR): saidin (sah-ih-DEEN): See True Source.

Saldaea (sahl-DAY-ee-ah): One of the Borderlands.

Sanche, Siuan (SAHN-chay, swahn): An Aes Sedai formerly of the Blue Ajah. Raised to the Amyrlin Seat 985 NE. The Amyrlin Seat is of all Ajahs, and of none.

Sea Folk: More properly, the Atha'an Miere (a-tha-AHN mee-AIR), the People of the Sea. Inhabitants of islands in the Aryth (AH-rihth) Ocean and the Sea of Storms, they spend little time on those islands, living most of their lives on their ships. Most seaborne trade is carried by the Sea Folk's ships.

Seanchan (SHAWN-CHAN): (1) Descendants of the armies Artur Hawkwing sent across the Aryth Ocean, who have returned to reclaim the lands of their forefathers. (2) The land from which the Seanchan come. See also Hailene; Corenne; Rhyagelle.

Seandar (shawn-DAHR): Capital city of Seanchan, where the Empress sits on the Crystal Throne in the Court of the Nine Moons.

Selene (seh-LEEN): A woman met on the journey to Cairhien.

Seta (SEE-tah): A Seanchan woman; a sul'dam, See also Seanchan; sul'dam.

Shadar Logoth (SHAH-dahr LOH-goth): A city abandoned and shunned since the Trolloc Wars. It is tainted ground, and not a pebble of it is safe. See also Mordeth.

Shai'tan (SHAY-ih-TAN): See Dark One.

Shayol Ghul (SHAY-ol GHOOL): A mountain in the Blasted Lands, the site of the Dark One's prison.

Sheriam (SHEER-ee-ahm): An Aes Sedai of the Blue Ajah. The Mistress of Novices in the White Tower.

Shienar (shy-NAHR): One of the Borderlands. The sign of Shienar is a stooping black hawk.

shoufa (SHOO -jah): A garment of the Aiel, a cloth, usually the color of sand or rock, that wraps around the head and neck, leaving only the face bare.

span See Length, units of.

Spine of the World, the: A towering mountain range, with only a few passes, which separates the Aiel Waste from the lands to the west.

stedding (STEHD-ding): An Ogier (OH-geer) homeland. Many stedding have been abandoned since the Breaking of the World. They are shielded in some way, no longer understood, so that within them no Aes Sedai can channel the One Power, nor even sense that the True Source exists. Attempts to wield the One Power from outside a stedding have no effect inside a stedding boundary. No Trolloc will enter a stedding unless driven, and even a Myrddraal will do so only at the greatest need and then with the greatest reluctance [illegible]

stilling: the act, performed by Aes Sedai, of shutting off a woman who can channel from the One Power. A woman who has been stilled can sense the True Source, but she cannot touch it.

Stone Soldiers: See Aiel warrior societies.

Sul'dam (SUHL-DAHM): A woman who has passed the tests to show that she can wear the bracelet of an a'dam and thus control a damane. See also: a'dam; damane.

Sunday: A feastday and festival in midsummer, celebrated in many parts of the world.

sung wood: See Treesinger.

Suroth, High Lady (SUE-roth): A Seanchan noblewoman of high degree.

Tai'shar (TIE-SHAHR): In the Old Tongue, "True blood of."

ta'maral'ailen (tah-MAHR-ahl-EYE-lehn): In the Old Tongue, "Web of Destiny." A great change in the Pattern of an Age, centered around one or more people who are ta'veren. See also Pattern of an Age; ta'veren.

Tanreall, Artur Paendrag (tahn-REE-ahl, AHR-tuhr PAY-ehn-DRAG): See Hawkwing, Artur.

Tarmon Gai'don (TAHR-mohn GAY-dohn): The Last Battle. See also Dragon, Prophecies of the; Horn of Valere.

Tar Valon (TAHR VAH-lon): A city on an island in the River Erinin. The center of Aes Sedai power, and location of the White Tower.

ta'veren (tah-VEER-ehn): A person around whom the Wheel of Time weaves all surrounding life-threads, perhaps all life-threads, to form a Web of Destiny. See also Pattern of an Age.

Tear (TEER): A great seaport on the Sea of Storms.

Telamon, Lews Therin (TEHL-ah-mon, LOOZ THEH-rihn): See Dragon, the.

ter'angreal (TEER-ahn-GREE-ahl): Any one of a number of remnants of the Age of Legends that use the One Power. Unlike angreal and sa'angreal, each ter'angreal was made to do a particular thing. For example, one makes oaths taken within it binding. Some are used by Aes Sedai, but their original purposes are largely unknown. Some will kill or destroy the ability to channel of any woman who uses them. See also angreal; sa'angreal.

tia avende alantin (TEE-ah ah-VEN-day ah-LANH-tin): "Brother to the Trees."

Tia mi aven Moridin isainde vadin: In the Old Tongue, "The grave is no bar to my call." Inscription on the Horn of Valere. See also Horn of Valere.

Tigraine (tee-GRAIN): As Daughter-Heir of Andor, she married Taringail Damodred and bore his son Galadedrid. Her disappearance in 972 NE, shortly after her brother Luc vanished in the Blight, led to the struggle in Andor called the Succession, and caused the events in Cairhien that eventually brought on the Aiel War. Her sign was a woman's hand gripping a thorny rose stem with a white blossom.

Time of Madness: The years after the Dark One's counterstroke tainted the male half of the True Source, when male Aes Sedai went mad and Broke the World. The exact duration of this period is unknown, but it is believed to have lasted nearly one hundred years. It ended completely only with the death of the last male Aes Sedai. See also Hundred Companions; True Source; One Power; Breaking of the World.

Tinkers: See Tuatha'an.

Traveling People: See Tuatha'an.

Tree, the: See Avendesora.

Treekillers: An Aiel name for the Cairhienin, always said in tones of horror and disgust.

Treesinger: An Ogier who has the ability to sing to trees (called "treesong"), either healing them, or helping them to grow and flower, or making things from the wood without damaging the tree. Objects made in this manner are called "sung wood" and are highly prized. Few Ogier remain who are Treesingers; the Talent seems to be dying out.

treesong: See Treesinger.

Trollocs (TRAHL-lohks): Creatures of the Dark One, created during the War of the Shadow. Huge in stature, they are a twisted blend of animal and human stock. Vicious by nature, they kill for the pure pleasure of killing. Deceitful in the extreme, they cannot be trusted unless coerced by fear. They are divided into tribe-like bands, among them the Dha'vol, the Ko'bal, and the Dhai'mon.

Trolloc Wars: A series of wars, beginning about 1000 AB and lasting more than three hundred years, during which Trolloc armies ravaged the world. Eventually the Trollocs were slain or driven back into the Great Blight, but some nations ceased to exist, while others were almost depopulated. All records of the time are fragmentary. See also Covenant of the Ten Nations.

True Source: The driving force of the universe, which turns the Wheel of Time. It is divided into a male half (saidin) and a female half (saidar), which work at the same time with and against each other. Only a man can draw on saidin, only a woman on saidar. Since the beginning of the Time of Madness, saidin has been tainted by the Dark One's touch. See also One Power.

Tuatha'an (too-AH-thah-AHN): A wandering folk, also known as the Tinkers and as the Traveling People, who live in brightly painted wagons and follow a totally pacifist philosophy called the Way of the Leaf. Things mended by Tinkers are often better than new. They are among the few who can cross the Aiel Waste unmolested, for the Aiel strictly avoid all contact with them.

Turak, High Lord of House Aladon (TOO-rak; AL-ah-dohn): A Seanchan of high degree, commander of the Hailene. See also Seanchan; Hailene.

Verin (VEHR-ihn): An Aes Sedai of the Brown Ajah.

Warder: A warrior bonded to an Aes Sedai. The bonding is a thing of the One Power, and by it he gains such gifts as quick healing, the ability to go long periods without food, water, or rest, and the ability to sense the taint of the Dark One at a distance. So long as a Warder lives, the Aes Sedai to whom he is bonded knows he is alive however far away he is, and when he dies she will know the moment and manner of his death. The bonding does not tell her how far he is, though, nor in what direction. While most Ajahs believe an [illegible]

War of Power: See War of the Shadow.

War of the Hundred Years: A series of overlapping wars among constantly shifting alliances, precipitated by the death of Artur Hawkwing and the resulting struggle for his empire. It lasted from FY 994 to FY 1117. The war depopulated large parts of the lands between the Aryth Ocean and the Aiel Waste, from the Sea of Storms to the Great Blight. So great was the destruction that only fragmentary records of the time remain. The empire of Artur Hawkwing was pulled apart in the wars, and the nations of the present day were [illegible]

War of the Shadow: Also known as the War of Power, it ended the Age of Legends. It began shortly after the attempt to free the Dark One, and soon involved the whole world. In a world where even the memory of war had been forgotten, every facet of war was rediscovered, often twisted by the Dark One's touch on the world, and the One Power was used as a weapon. The war was ended by the resealing of the Dark One into his prison. See also Hundred Companions, the; Dragon, the.

Watchers Over the Waves: A group who believe that the armies Artur Hawkwing sent across the Aryth Ocean will one day return, and so keep watch from the town of Falme (FAHL-may) on Toman Head.

Web of Destiny: See ta'maral'ailen.

Weight, units of: 10 ounces= 1 pound; 10 pounds= stone; 10 stone= hundredweight; 10 hundredweight= 1 ton.

Wheel of Time, the: Time is a wheel with seven spokes, each spoke an Age. As the Wheel turns, the Ages come and go, each leaving memories that fade to legend, then to myth, and are forgotten by the time that Age comes again. The Pattern of an Age is slightly different each time an Age comes, and each time it is subject to greater change, but each time it is the same Age.

Whitecloaks: See Children of the Light.

White Tower: The palace of the Amyrlin Seat in Tar Valon, and the place where Aes Sedai are trained.

Wisdom: In villages, a woman chosen by the Women's Circle for her knowledge of such things as healing, and foretelling the weather, as well as for common good sense. A position of great responsibility and authority, both actual and implied. She is generally considered the equal of the mayor, just as the Women's Circle is the equal of the Village Council. Unlike the mayor, the Wisdom is chosen for life, and it is very rare for a Wisdom to be removed from office before her death. Depending on the land, she may instead have an [illegible]