

Curse of the Zwilling

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Don Sakers

CURSE OF THE ZWILLING
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DEDICATION:

To Steve Grey — who was almost a twin.

BOOK ONE:
Moondance

September 1985

*O Fortuna, velat luna
Statu variabilis,
Semper crecis, aut decrecis;
vita detestabilis
nunc obdurat, et tunc curat
ludo mentis aciem,
egestatum, protestatum
dissolvit ut glaciem.*

—*Carmina Burana*

Chapter One

(Susan Whitlow)

The air conditioner was still not working.

Susan Whitlow wiped sweat from her brow before any more drops spotted the papers she was grading. Bad enough to have to come in on a Saturday, but to spend it grading papers in this hellhole of an office without air conditioning compounded the agony to ridiculous levels.

Heaving a great sigh, Susan pushed back her chair and turned off the struggling air conditioner. Her office was not large — a mere cubby forgotten in a corner of the third floor of ancient Purnell Hall — but at least she'd had the presence of mind to pick the office with *two* windows. She wrenched the second open as far as it would go, and winced at the blast of humid air that washed into the room.

Damn, damn. Middle of September already, and summer heat had still not broken. Susan leaned against the windowsill, looked out across tree-spotted grass to the thick growth that led down to the Patapsco River. Aged oaks and an occasional willow soared skyward from tangled leafy underbrush, stirring only a bit in the hot wind. The air hung heavy with humidity and the cloying perfume of honeysuckle.

Susan wiped her face again and reached for a glass of iced tea on the corner of her cluttered desk. The ice had long since melted, and only a few beads of perspiration clung to the outside of the glass — yet warm and diluted as it was, the tea still tasted good. There was a refrigerator in the faculty lounge down the hall...she supposed she should go down and get some more. It would make this grading session go much more easily.

Still she stood by the window. Two students, a boy and a girl, tossed a Frisbee back and forth behind Purnell; now and again their laughter made its way to Susan's ears. The boy was dressed only in tattered gym shorts; the girl wore shorts and a green-and-black Patapsco University tee shirt. Green and black — what had possessed the University to choose such a depressing combination of colors?

For that matter, Susan sighed, what had possessed them to build the school in this benighted location? Oh, Spring and Autumn were beautiful enough, when the entire Patapsco Valley celebrated the age-old rhythms of life all for the amazement and amusement of the young people who frequented the campus. But Winter was treacherous, with ice and snow that could seal off this isolated area, with week after unendurable week of grey clouds and dreary cold rain. And Summer — well, no one had ever claimed to enjoy a Maryland Summer. In mid-June the Chesapeake Bay evaporated, and hung around as humidity until mid-September when it took its place once again. Or so it seemed.

Susan counted by tapping her fingers, the old wood of the windowsill rough beneath them. This was the tenth Maryland Summer she had endured here at Patapsco. Each year she swore it would be the last. And each year, somehow, she found herself staying on another year rather than go through the hassle of finding a new position.

She looked back at her desk, and couldn't help a grin. Face it, girl, one of the reasons you don't move away is that you can't contemplate the immense task of sorting through all

these papers and packing them up to go to another school. There was a stack on top of the file cabinet, laden with a layer of dust, that Susan was sure dated from her Coptic Theology class six years ago. An imposing heap of professional journals awaited indexing under a chair in the far corner — Susan had looked at it faithfully every three weeks for the past five years and had yet to do anything except make it deeper.

She forced herself to sit back down at her desk and face the jumble of loose-leaf sheets that occupied the center of her faded blue blotter. First year Comparative Religion. Susan made it a practice to give an in-depth quiz at the end of the first week of classes, just so she could tell which students were really paying attention and which were trying to get an easy “A.”

Why did this particular heresy continue, that Comp Rel was a cake course? Especially Comparative Religion at Patapsco University, where Susan Whitlow and her fellow faculty members were experts in those particular mystical beliefs usually lumped together as “magic” by the general population?

To be sure, most students who finished her course left with good marks. That was because the uninterested ones, the ones who couldn’t meet Susan’s high standards, tended to drop the course early in the game. She had already lost twenty percent during the first week — but the quizzes on her desk showed that she could easily afford to lose another quarter of the class.

This one, for example. Susan held the paper closer — when would these kids learn to write in *pen* rather than pencil? She’d never worn glasses before becoming a professor; rotten handwriting and light pencils were at least half the reason that she now had thick plastic lenses perched atop her nose. Or, rather, starting to slide down her nose.

Damn, it was hot!

Susan looked at the phone, almost hidden beneath creeping papers on the left-hand corner of her desk. David was coming

today for an interview regarding his most recent paper — maybe she should call him and ask him to come in early and get the quizzes graded. After all, what were graduate students for if they couldn't take these odious tasks away from the instructor?

She reached for the phone, then withdrew her hand. No, Susan. That's a dirty trick to play on David. Besides, the young man has enough to keep him busy with his own work.

She sat back, contemplating David's progress. Comprehensives at the end of this year...she was sure he would pass. But then what? Patapsco University was the only school in the nation with a Department of Magic — she winced at the popular nickname, but she always had to admit that a certain validity hid behind its semi-scornful tone. Comparative Religion at Pat U was a quite different department from its counterpart at other schools, and somehow she just couldn't see David's extensive knowledge of pagan ceremonies, alchemical speculations, and white witchcraft fitting in too well at Southern Cal or North Carolina State or even Duke. Harvard, maybe....

No, David had to get a job at Pat U. And with Doctor Nacht gone for the second year in a row, the gods knew there was a need for another qualified instructor. Susan, Anton Faring, and Monroe Quaile had been managing so far, but they needed help. All the more so since Monroe, damn him, had announced his intention of going on sabbatical next year.

Back to the quizzes.

When Susan reached for her tea, her hand hit the top of the glass and it fell from her desk, breaking cleanly in half on the dirty linoleum floor and spilling a wide swath of brown tea on the floor and halfway up the wall behind her. Susan tore kleenexes from a box and bent to wipe up the spill with a curse on her lips.

In the shallow puddle, shapes moved.

What?

Leaves swaying in a strong wind. A battered wall of white

and tan stones, covered with ivy. Flames. And a hand with a knife.

Susan shook her head, tore her eyes from the puddle. Tea, forgotten, began to soak into a cardboard carton of old final exams, while Susan stood and looked out the window.

Outside, the humid air hung oppressive and the sun beat down from hazy sky with the intensity of a blast furnace. The Frisbee-tossing students were nowhere to be seen. For the moment, Susan was alone without any living companionship. Even the squirrels that usually dashed through the trees were gone.

What had happened? Why did her knees feel so weak?

You know, a voice said within her.

She clenched her fists and stared toward the river, hidden by a steep slope and the dense curtains of leaves to the south.

Scrying, it was called. To see pictures in standing water. Susan had not practiced the art for, oh, a dozen years at least. Not since she was finishing up her own postgraduate work under Doctor Nacht at the City College.

Witchcraft.

No. It was nothing like that. Susan was falling into the same trap that caught her less attentive first-year students. The mind is capable of a good many things that we don't understand, she repeated to herself, straight from her first class lecture. Sometimes these processes might be so mysterious, so little comprehended, that we give them names like "witchcraft" and "magic" and "extrasensory perception." But they are nothing more than the normal functioning of the human mind, conscious and unconscious, often spurred on by emotional distress or religious fervor. To think that these anomalous events represent the supernatural is the fall for the same delusions that kept medieval science from advancing beyond the stage of copying ancient Greek and Arabic manuscripts.

Pictures in pools of liquid. What was her mind trying to tell her? Something so important, apparently, that it couldn't wait

for the usual thought-laboratory of her dreams.

She heard someone in the hall.

A student? They wouldn't come bothering her on a Saturday, not in the second week of classes. No major papers assigned, no tests about which to bicker, hardly any assignments beyond the usual readings.

One of the students in her Independent Study class? They had barely begun to study Mystery Cults...but Susan had to admit that one of them — Cathy Vovcenko sprang to mind immediately — might already have intelligent questions that might require further discussion.

If so, though, why not wait until Monday's class and share questions with the rest of the group? Cathy knew better than that, after two years in the Comparative Religion program.

Susan looked at her watch. Half past noon. David wasn't due until three. Maybe he had come early. If so, he would definitely have to help with the quiz papers. She couldn't cope with his own work until they were out of the way.

There was the slightest hint of a knock, and her door swung forward. Standing at the window, Susan felt a trace of uncertainty grip her stomach. The way the office was set up, she couldn't see who was coming in until they came around the door. The price she paid for two windows. But she had always hated the setup.

"Yes?"

"Doctor Whitlow?" A young man stepped into the office. He wore faded blue jeans with a developing hole in the left knee, an armless tee shirt of some deep blue material. His hair was close-cropped and brown; his arms were long, thin and dusty. As if he had been walking along some of the sandy paths that led down to the river. As he turned to maneuver his way into the office, Susan saw that sweat stained the back of his shirt where it clung to his skin. A pair of Nike tennis shoes, originally white but now dirty beige, hugged his feet without the benefit of socks.

"Who are you?" Susan thought she might have seen the

boy around campus, but wasn't sure. He had the look of the generic Freshman. She was sure that he wasn't in any of her classes.

"Doctor Whitlow, I was sent to find you." He moved toward her; Susan was irrationally comforted that the desk separated them.

"Who sent you?"

He didn't answer, merely took another step. His hands were quite taut, the way a tennis player might casually hold his racket while waiting for an opponent's serve. In fact, something about the boy suggested that he was poised, ready.

For what?

"What do you want?" Susan tried again, taking a step to the right and keeping bookshelves at her back. Outside she heard leaves soughing in a breath of wind, but no movement of air came into the tiny office.

"I need to borrow some of your books. The Breslau Folios. The Kalocsa Codex. And I want access to Doctor Nacht's office."

Susan couldn't believe what she was hearing. Where did an eighteen-year-old find out about the Kalocsa Codex — one of the few remaining authentic grimoires not in Church possession? And what could he do with it, unless he was a student of Medieval Slavic languages?

"Those books are kept in the Special Collections Room at the Library. Why do you want them?"

"I have an interest. And I must have entry to Doctor Nacht's office."

"All of Doctor Nacht's effects are stored away." And damned if I'm going to tell you where, unless I know what it is you're after.

Susan took a breath. "I've had encounters with boys like you before. You've read a little about magic, maybe you've talked with some practicing witches. You know that we have some of the old books here, and you just can't wait to try out some of the spells." She didn't attempt to keep the scorn out

of her voice. "When are you going to grow up? Enroll in Intro to Comparative Religion. You'll learn that all this mumbo-jumbo that has impressed you is little more than the survival of the philosophy and theology of the medieval world. What's your name?"

The boy looked her straight in the eyes. His face held an intensity that Susan had only seen before in young couples deep in love. That sort of intensity always scared her.

The lad's voice was clear and steady. "You do not know what you speak of. Either that, or you're trying to put me off with lies. You and your colleagues have been clever: putting wards on the Special Collections Room to keep out people like me. It will not work, Susan Whitlow." His use of her name gave her a chill in spite of the weather. "No wards survive the death of the person who established them."

Susan took a step forward, reached for the phone. "This has gone far enough. It's not funny. I'm calling Campus Security."

"I do not intend to be funny." He reached for her, and Susan snatched back her hand. The boy took a step to the right, coming around the desk at her. She was trapped between the desk, the wall, and the bookcase. Sweet Goddess, does he really intend to kill me? Some mad cultist, and I'm going to die. Goddess, don't let it happen.

Susan bolted for the window, screaming for help. But as soon as she started, her foot slipped in a puddle of spilled tea and she fell heavily. Something sliced her leg through her stockings — the broken glass that she had neglected to pick up.

The boy jumped at her, moving like a leaping dog; Susan grasped the broken glass, heedless of the slit it cut in her hand, and thrust it at her attacker. She managed to slice his right shoulder, then he slapped the glass away with a powerful motion of his hand.

His face inches from hers, he sniffed like an animal catching a scent on the wind. "You did not set the wards."

“D-David’s idea. After Doctor Nacht left.” Please, please, leave me alone.

His eyes closed, then reopened. There was no feeling in them. “Nevertheless, I need power. You have some talents; you are useful to me.”

“Who are you?”

“I am the twin. The Zwilling.” He covered her mouth with one hand. She tasted dirt, sweat, and blood from somewhere. My God, what is he going to do? Rape? Where in hell is Security? Why haven’t they heard me scream?

The boy opened his mouth, bent toward her. Susan tried to cry out, couldn’t.

Then she felt damp breath and unaccustomed warmth at her throat. An instant later, teeth ripped through her flesh and she felt her own blood spurt forth into the hot, humid air.

The boy bit, and bit again, and each time it was knives digging into her unprotected throat and chest. She struggled, but couldn’t throw him off.

Soon enough, the pain was over.

Chapter Two

(David Galvin)

By two o'clock David Galvin was sick and tired of cleaning. His trailer was a moderately small one, three rooms and a bath — how did it get so *messy*?

Dumping grey-brown dishwater down the sink, David smiled. The fact that he hadn't given the place a good cleaning for three months probably had something to do with the four green plastic bags of trash that he'd amassed in this day's straightening-up spell. And some of the things in the refrigerator...well, David was glad that his mother wasn't around to see them. He still shuddered to think of the unidentifiable blue-green mass so carefully wrapped in crumpled tinfoil.

Wiping his hands on a tattered dish towel that needed a good washing of its own, David looked at the clock and swore. His appointment with Susan was only an hour away — and he still had to shower and get his notes together.

He stripped off his tee shirt — Patapsco University, what else, they were only six-fifty in the campus bookstore — and casually let it fall across the back of a dining room chair. He bent to the table, where just two hours earlier he had carefully arranged his typewriter and three stacks of papers

overflowing their manila folders. Damn, he *knew* he wouldn't be able to find anything. This happened every time he cleaned. Where was the most recent draft...the one with all the corrections that Susan had made last time? Ah, there it was...mixed in with a few unfinished letters to the folks in Michigan and a couple of clippings from this morning's *Sun*.

If I don't watch myself, David thought, I'll end up with a desk like Susan's. And then I'll *never* find anything again.

A corner of the dining table, right next to the door, was where David piled things that had to go out with him — less chance of forgetting them if he saw them just before leaving. He left his papers there, laid the phone bill on top of them, and stumbled toward the bathroom trying to untie his tennis shoes as he walked.

One shoe landed on the bed; the other ricocheted and skittered off in the direction of the dresser. David shrugged, and stepped into the bathroom.

He peered into the mirror and ran his hand over his chin. The stubble that grew there was fine and light-colored, but still he had to shave. Briefly, as he did every morning, David considered letting his beard grow. But no, with hair as blond as his, he had trouble enough with just a mustache that no one ever saw; he didn't want to grow a beard that would only look ridiculous.

Ruefully, David looked down at the fine blond hair that covered nearly his entire lanky body. Nothing he could do about it, although one of his girlfriends had teased him about having a nice shiny coat of fur. *That* relationship hadn't lasted too long.

A lukewarm shower felt good after having his hands in hot dishwater for an hour. David soaped his hair and stood for a good long time under the water. He wanted to remember this when he went out into the heat. If his conference with Susan didn't go on too long, he would stop at the pool and get in a half hour or so of swimming before coming back to finish the cleaning.

David smiled, letting water-spray rinse soap from him. The hell with cleaning. He would stop at the Rathskeller after the pool and have a beer or two, watch "M*A*S*H" on the projection TV, and see who he could talk to. He thought he would need a break, after this session with Susan.

After drying himself off David pulled on his gym shorts and a new shirt, found the errant tennis shoe behind the dresser and pulled on both shoes without socks. His hair was still wet; he made do with a few swipes at it with the brush. It didn't matter, by the time he got to campus he would be drenched in sweat anyhow.

Grabbing his paper and phone bill, David opened the door and winced at the blast of heat that met him. Three aluminum steps down, the door slammed shut, and David absently tested it to see that it was shut. Then...he stopped.

What? The heat? The humidity? The smell of evergreen that always hung over the trailer park? The gritty dust that seemed to well up from gravel at his feet?

No. Something else.

Magic?

Wrinkling his brow, David turned back to the door and ran his hand over the surface in a design that only he knew. Maybe it was a silly thing to do, but Doctor Nacht had taught him to always keep up protective wards. "This University attracts a good number of crazy people, folks who have dabbled in the Arts and think we can teach them some of the darker spells." That's what Doctor Nacht had always called his studies: the Arts.

David wasn't sure if he believed in the Arts as strongly as Doctor Nacht had. Most of the classical spells were all nonsense — those who knew what they were doing were generally close-mouthed about their procedures. But David knew from experience that there were powers in the world that couldn't be explained by natural science...and it never hurt to be safe. So he renewed his protective wards whenever he went out.

What was going on? Were the undergrads playing around again? Last year Doctor Faring had caught them causing great consternation in the Physics Department, but that had stopped quickly enough with Faring's strict lecture on the proper use of centuries-old manuscripts. Besides, the feeling on this Saturday afternoon was not as focussed as it would be if the undergraduates were practicing things they shouldn't.

Someone else? There was a full coven operating in Carroll County, out near Gamber, scarcely a dozen miles away. All they ever did, however, was to mess around with sympathetic magic to encourage their crops. And those crazy people downtown with their secret meetings at Poe's grave — *they* were hardly capable of creating any disturbance that would reach this far. Patapsco University was, after all, fully twelve miles from downtown Baltimore.

That meant...what? That someone, somewhere, was playing with forces he or she didn't understand. The feeling was like an annoying itch below the threshold of sensation; as David walked out towards Davis Avenue he found that he could easily ignore the heavy feeling in the air. He shrugged. Whoever it was, they would lose interest soon enough, and then he would have peace again.

Davis Avenue was a tiny, winding road that climbed up and down the hills of the Patapsco Valley. David turned right and walked a few hundred paces, waving offhandedly to the woman who delivered the mail. Then he remembered the phone bill, and chased down her jeep as she pulled off to load the boxes of the trailer park.

"Afternoon, David. Hot enough for you?" She wore a red bandanna around her light brown hair, and blue shorts that hugged her ample legs a little too tightly for David's taste.

"Too hot," he agreed. "Think it's going to rain soon?"

"AccuWeather says we might get showers tomorrow. But it's like this all up and down the coast. Don't expect any relief for about a week, they say." The woman fished in her canvas mailsack, pulled out two envelopes. "Here's your mail."

David took the envelopes, handed over his phone bill. "Can you take this for me, Sandy?"

"Sure." She tucked the bill onto the dashboard of the jeep. "Cheer up. Couple of months, you'll wish it was hot again."

David grinned. "I don't think so. I like the cold a lot better than heat."

"No air conditioner in your car?"

"No. That's why I decided to walk to school. Cooler that way."

Sandy nodded sagely. "Don't blame you. Wish I could get A.C. in this this thing. I'm getting too old for this route."

"Never, Sandy."

"I've seen this route go from just a couple of houses to way it is now, takes all day to get the mail delivered. Your school, gets bags and bags. You have no idea. About time I moved up to a clerk job, I think."

David glanced at his watch. Before he could speak, Sandy waved him on. "Go, go on, you ain't got time to listen to an old broad like me complain. Shoulda never let me get started." She heaved herself out of the jeep, pulled a canvas bag up onto her shoulder, and walked toward the trailer park whistling. David gave her a wave, and then set off down Davis Avenue.

Soon enough he came to the Gas and Electric Company's right-of-way, a dirt car path flanked by huge steel towers bearing HIGH VOLTAGE and NO TRESPASSING signs. Ignoring the notices, David stepped over the single strand of wire fence and started down the path. By cutting across BG&E property and through the Levengood farm, he could come into campus the back way and reach Purnell Hall directly rather than having to go around University Drive. Walking, it was definitely the quickest way.

The Levengood cows gave no indication of recognizing anything strange in this Saturday's air. Most of them stood peacefully in the shade of various oak and maple trees; two grazed near the fence and moved away when David

approached. The cows didn't like him much. Not that he blamed them, he was always a little hesitant about approaching them too closely himself. Cows were smart animals, David had often thought, and he didn't want them putting thoughts in people's heads. He merely waved as he passed, and cried, "Don't worry, Bossie, I'm just passing through."

Up a small rise, David came out onto the cultivated greenery of the campus. Evett Hall was ahead, a boxlike building that housed the Graduate Departments of Economics and Business. Beyond Evett was Purnell, a somewhat older building of nondescript stone lined with narrow windows fitted with crosspieces of dark wood. David liked Purnell Hall — it was the catch-all of the Graduate School, ten different departments in one three-story building. Comparative Religion was crammed into a forgotten hallway at the south end of the top floor. Dusty offices and a basement held treasures that no man could guess at. Purnell had once been the Administration Building, before Admin moved into their new quarters across University Drive — half the files were still in the basement, dating back to the early seventies when the school was first opened. Raw materials for some future grad student in history, David thought.

Purnell Hall was quiet even for a Saturday. There were a few classes going on, doors open to take advantage of whatever cross-ventilation there was in the old building. David gave sympathetic glances to a few daydreaming English students, and took the elevator to the third floor humming to himself. At least he didn't have to go to *classes* on a day like this. There were some advantages to being the only student in the Graduate Program in his major. He could pretty much set his own schedule.

Elevator doors slid open, and David knew that something was terribly wrong. The sense of magic — of the *misuse* of magic — was strong as smoke at a July cookout. David moved quickly down the corridor, not running but not casually

strolling either. At the end, he paused between Doctor Faring's door and Susan Whitlow's. Both were closed, both felt of this powerful interference.

David made a last attempt to bring rationality back to this Saturday afternoon. Tired, irritated by the heat and the wasted morning cleaning, he was imagining things. He was too sensitive, that was all. There were enough influences around here, God knew, to disturb anyone sensitive to them. Cemeteries, Indian battlegrounds, the old ruined church where two dozen people had died in a boiler explosion. A hot late-summer day, and all the bad feelings in this valley were on the wing down the Patapsco to the sea. And David was just a little more receptive than usual. That was all.

Susan's office was unlocked. He opened the door, and stepped in. He half-expected to see her sitting at her desk grading papers, but she was nowhere. He glanced at his watch: three-oh-six. Susan wouldn't have left when she knew he was coming. Unless she left a note.

David made his way to her littered desktop. Two dozen quizzes from her introductory class — half of them graded, with precise scrawls in Susan's handwriting and customary green ink.

The floor was sticky. David looked down, saw broken glass and the remnants of a puddle of some liquid — tea? And something else, splattered on the linoleum...

Blood.

His heart leapt, and the hairs on the nape of his neck stood up. He crouched, followed blood from desk to window. It was still sticky. Had Susan cut herself, then, and gone to get a bandage? No. The trail led to the window, not the door.

He looked out the window. Directly under the office a body lay on the grass, clothed in a green blouse and red-and-white polyester skirt.

"Susan!" Shouting did no good, David knew even when he saw her that she was dead. He fought to control his stomach, backed away from the window until he bumped into the

desk.

Horror. Hate. Pain. Fear. Something with the eyes of a beast, something that moved with quickness and cunning and a terrifying purpose of its own.

It was out there. Somewhere.

David took a deep breath, felt his heart racing like a runaway locomotive.

Susan, dead. She can't be, he thought wildly, looking at the papers still clutched in his right hand. I was going to talk to her this afternoon.

Oh, God, she taught me so much.

Trembling, he reached across Susan's desk for the phone, dialled Campus Security.

I never even had a chance to tell her how much I learned from her.

Now she'll never know.

As he waited for the call to go through, his eyes fell on a page in her class lectures notebook. "To think that these anomalous events represent the supernatural is to fall for the same delusions that kept medieval science from advancing beyond the stage of copying ancient Greek and Arabic manuscripts."

Poor Susan. How could she have known how wrong she was?

"Security, this is David Galvin. You'd better get someone over to the south side of Purnell Hall right away. And call for the police. There's been a murder."

Chapter Three

(Mark Evans)

His parents had spent the night fighting again, and Mark Evans was not at all happy.

At seven-thirty this morning Dad had stormed out of the house, on his way to work without even bothering to kiss Mom goodbye. Mark watched from his bedroom window as Dad pulled away in the big red station wagon. This sort of thing had been happening all too often lately.

There was a gentle tap on his door, and it opened to reveal Mark's twelve-year-old brother Peter. Peter still wore his blue pajamas, and his dark hair was mussed from sleep. The boy's eyes were wide. "Dad just left, didn't he?"

"Yup." Mark, already dressed in faded jeans and a red-and-white pullover, sat down on his bed and started to lace his tennis shoes. Peter lay down next to him and propped his chin up on his hands. "Mom's in her room, crying." The younger boy looked up at his brother, his face set in deliberate neutrality. "I think it was a big one, this time."

"I think you're right." Mark finished putting on his shoes. "Come on, get dressed. And don't forget to brush your teeth."

"Are you going to take me to school again, Mark?"

"Sure. Now don't go bothering Mom. Come downstairs

when you're ready and I'll fix your breakfast." The younger boy went off to his room, and Mark caught a glimpse of a collection of Orioles' pennants and some *Star Wars* model spaceships hanging from the ceiling by threads. Mark shook his head and threw the books he'd need for today's classes into his knapsack. He didn't have his reading done for German — well, tough. With any luck he wouldn't have to say anything in class. Heck, he might even hook German — nothing interesting was going on today anyhow, and he needed time to think.

When Mark went downstairs his mother was still in her room. In the kitchen, he noticed that the liquor cabinet was open and a bottle of bourbon missing. Frowning, Mark closed the cabinet and shot a glance toward his mother's closed door. He wished she wouldn't drink so much...that was at least *part* of the problem between Mom and Dad. Then he shrugged. Neither of them was doing anything to help; this had not been a completely happy home for a long time.

What if Mom and Dad got a divorce? Mark wondered if he would have to drop out of school. He was nineteen...legally an adult, but he couldn't support himself in school with just the thousand or so dollars he managed to earn working for Recreation and Parks this summer. And he was all too aware that jobs were not going to come easy to a Comparative Religion major. Even as it was taught at Patapsco.

Mark cleaned the coffee pot and measured coffee into the filter, poured water in and waited for it to drip through. He needed a cup of coffee to face a Monday morning — especially a Monday morning like this.

Damn, who did his parents think they *were*?! This wasn't just a matter of their own lives — when they fought like this it messed up Mark's life too, and who knew what they were doing to Peter?

The young boy entered the kitchen, glanced toward his mother's room but didn't say anything. Mark sat him down at the table and put a bowl in front of him, took milk from the

refrigerator. "Sugar Pops or Captain Crunch?"

"Captain Crunch."

Mark handed the box to his brother, thought again and took out a bowl for himself. His coffee was ready; he filled his mug and sat down across the table from Peter.

Peter filled his bowl with cereal, passed the gaudy box to Mark, then looked around the table. "What do you need?" Mark asked.

"Spoon." Peter jumped down from his chair, took two spoons from the kitchen drawer. He tossed one to Mark with a grin. "Some big brother you are. Can't even remember the spoons," he said with a grin.

"Cut it out." Mark poured milk on his cereal, took a spoonful of the crunchy sugary stuff, and made a face. "How can you eat this first thing in the morning?"

"Mostly I don't. If you play with it long enough Mom gets bored and you can leave it when it's time to go to school."

Mark couldn't help smiling. "What time do you have to get to school?"

"Nine o'clock. You know that."

"Yeah, I just couldn't remember. Wasn't it eight-thirty once?"

"That was *last* year."

"Oh. Well, I have a class at nine. If I get you there are about twenty of, can you kill time until school starts?"

"They don't let us in the building until quarter of nine."

Mark looked out the window. The kitchen sat at the back of the house; he saw the back yard sloping down toward the Patapsco River, invisible now beyond the hill. On the other bank was a curtain of bushy trees — and beyond that, the University. The Evans house was just across the river from the Faculty Apartments...but to get to school, Mark had to drive fifteen minutes around the long way, a journey of almost eight miles via the Woodstock Road bridge.

The sky was clear, the sun already beating down with its usual summer force. A humid haze lay over the trees, but it

didn't look like rain. "All right, I guess you'll be safe outside for a few minutes." Mark looked at his watch. Quarter after eight already. "Get your things together, and we'll be leaving in fifteen minutes. Do you have money for lunch?"

Peter had changed into camouflage pants and his slightly-too-small Patapsco University tee shirt; he patted one of his pockets and Mark heard the jingle of change. "I have enough. Left over from last week."

"Okay."

Peter turned on the television and flopped down on the living room floor. Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble were playing baseball on the screen; Mark settled down in his father's chair and fished in his knapsack for his German book. Maybe he could get at least a little of the reading done before it was time to leave.

Too soon, though, it was eight-thirty. He made Peter turn off the TV (onscreen, a ridiculous bird was screaming "Cuckoo for Cocoa-Puffs!"); Mark wondered if the commercials ever changed) and reminded Peter to pick up his books. "Go on out to the car, Peter," he told his brother. When the boy was out the front door, Mark knocked gently on his mother's door.

"Come in."

She lay in bed, the television on and the bourbon propped up against her side. Her eyes were red and she hadn't bothered to change out of her nightgown. She waved a hand at him. "Good morning."

Mark shook his head. "I'm going to take Petey to school. I'll pick him up this afternoon. Should I bring him home for dinner, or do you want me to take him out?"

"Don't take that tone of voice with me, young man. You're not too big for me to take you over my knee."

"Right. We'll go out to dinner." Without waiting for an answer, Mark shut the door and strode out of the house.

Already it was hot, and a blast of heated air hit him like a physical blow when he opened the door of his gold Dodge

Dart. He waved Peter in. "Sooner we get started, sooner we can have the air conditioner on," he said. Mark jumped in after Peter, started the car, and pulled away from the house without a backward look.

All the way down Amram Court and out Mount Hebron Drive, Mark kept quiet. After he made his left turn onto Route 99, he looked over at Peter. "I'll pick you up after school. And how about I'll take you over to the University and we can eat there?"

"You think she's going to be drunk again?"

"I don't know what's going to happen when Dad gets home, but if we're not there it will probably be easier. So how about if we just hang loose tonight, okay?" A hamburger at the Student Center wouldn't be expensive, and Peter always got a kick out of hanging around with the college kids. Maybe Linda and Bob and Cathy would come along for dinner, too. They lived on campus and always complained about cafeteria food. Heck, maybe they could all pile into the car and go down Dogwood Road to the fast-food places.

"That sounds like fun," Peter said. He looked at Mark with an open face still bearing a few freckles. "You're a good big brother, you know."

"Well, you're not such a bad little brother, either." If his parents split up, Mark thought, he hoped they would let him and Peter stay together.

Soon enough Mark pulled into the parking lot of Patapsco Elementary School and let Mark off in front of the red brick building. "Don't forget, I'll be back to pick you up this afternoon," he called after the departing child, and then drove off.

He drove three miles down Route 99, through country that was still largely farmland and large patches of woods. Mark hoped the area would stay as isolated and undeveloped as it was. He had heard his father talk of the troubles there had been when the University was first built, people afraid that it would mean the end of their rural existence. Well, Mark

wasn't sure he blamed them. This was a nice place to live.

He made a right onto Woodstock Road, waving at the folks who tended a roadside fruit and vegetable stand. He followed the road down and down, around some narrow curves, and then over the railroad tracks and across the river on the new concrete bridge they'd built just four years ago. The road changed name here, to Old Court Road; it was a little wider and less twisty on this side of the river. On his right, set on a rise above the river and very near the road, was the old Saint Zachary's Church — a brown-and-white stone building without roof or windows. One wall, not visible from the road, was tumbled almost completely down. There had been an explosion — a boiler or something — when Mark was just a little boy. Some people had been killed, he heard. He imagined that they were buried across the road in the picturesque old cemetery with its grey, weathered monuments and headstones. Mark had explored the old church and the cemetery as a kid...once or twice last year he had taken his friends out there when the weather was nice.

Further up the road, out of sight of the old church and the River, Mark made a right turn onto Davis Avenue. It was a narrow road, barely two lanes, that snaked in between the gentle forested hills that surrounded Patapsco University. There were some nice homes out here, and some extensive farms. It was not a poor section of the valley at all; Mark sometimes wondered what the people who originally lived here must have thought of all these new rich folks moving into their secluded area. They probably raised as much fuss as the rich folks later did when they started to build the school. Some things never changed, Mark supposed.

Around a narrow curve was the trailer park; Mark rode past it with only a glance to make sure that no one was pulling out. David Galvin lived in one of those trailers...the graduate student who conducted Mark's Symposium on Concepts of Sympathetic Magic on Tuesdays and Thursdays. *He* was a pretty nice guy, although he always seemed

confused about whether to behave like a student or like a teacher.

Just a mile on down Davis Avenue Mark turned into University Drive, past the campus gates. Parking Lot G, nestled between the three Graduate buildings, was only half-full; Mark parked and turned off the car, winced at the heat when he opened the door. At least his classroom in Purnell Hall was air-conditioned.

It was about ten minutes to nine when Mark walked into the classroom on the third floor of Purnell Hall. His class — officially titled “The White Goddess in Welsh Poetry” but really another of Doctor Faring’s rambling dissertations on everything in general — was a small one; majors courses in Comparative Religion were all small. The other three students were already in the room, grouped around the table that served as Doctor Faring’s desk.

Bob Toland was the oldest of the group, and always acted as if being a Junior made him better able to cope with life than anyone else. He wore light corduroy trousers and a button shirt. Mark always expected to see Bob in a tie, but somehow that just wasn’t his style. He was light-haired and wore a trimmed mustache. He had played Felix in last year’s production of *The Odd Couple*; having seen Bob’s dorm room, Mark didn’t think that the director had done a bad job of typecasting.

Bob’s girlfriend Linda Falk stood next to him, arm draped casually across his shoulder. She wore a dark blue wraparound skirt and a blouse that looked as if it might be a black leotard. Linda was also a Junior, and concentrated on history as well as the more esoteric reaches of Comparative Religion. She had also managed to make a few simple spells work — she and Bob joked about fertility magic but Mark suspected they had not toyed with such things too much.

Neither of them looked as if they needed any help in that department, at any rate.

The last member of the class, Mark’s fellow Sophomore,

was Cathy Vovcenko. Cathy was short and — Mark had to admit it — rather dumpy. She wore loose blue jeans and a yellow tee shirt that bore the legend “Baltimore is Best”: a souvenir of their group expedition downtown last week. There was no one nicer than Cathy, and Mark felt lucky to be her friend. But then, of course, *everyone* was Cathy’s friend.

“Hi. What’s up?”

Bob spun and looked at Mark hard; Cathy glanced up and met his eyes. “He doesn’t know,” she said to the others.

“What don’t I know?”

Bob frowned. “We tried to call you all day yesterday. Where were you?”

Mark flushed. “Yeah, well, we had a family picnic at my Aunt Nancy’s in Timonium. We were late getting back.” And Mom and Dad fought all the way home, and through the rest of the night. But he didn’t need to tell them that. “Why, what have I missed?”

Cathy put a hand on Mark’s shoulder. “Doctor Whitlow is dead.”

“Dead?”

“They say it may have been murder,” Linda said, her voice tight.

Dead? Doctor Whitlow? One of the best teachers he had ever had? A really beautiful woman...dead?

There was a cough at the door, and all four students turned to see David Galvin leaning against the doorframe, hands in the pockets of his jeans and a notebook under one arm. “Let’s not be too free with accusations of murder.” He crossed to the table and laid his notebook there. “Doctor Faring won’t be in today — he has a lot of things to take care of. He asked me if — “ Mark saw David swallow forcefully, “ — if I’ll take Susan’s position in your Independent Study for the rest of the semester.”

It was Cathy who spoke first, a worried look on her face. “Mr. Galvin, is it true that you...found her?”

He nodded. “Why the formality? You can still call me

'David.' Yes, I found Susan's body. She'd been bitten up rather savagely by some animal, then fell out her office window." Sitting, he made a helpless gesture. "They're saying she was attacked by something, a rabid squirrel maybe, and in her panic she went over out the window." Mark sensed the firm control that lay beneath the man's outwardly-calm words.

Bob narrowed his eyes. "And that's not what happened?"

David spread his hands. "What can I tell you? It was a weird thing. I've been up for two nights reading — I spent yesterday in the Special Collections Room, going through everything I could think of. Including some of Doctor Nacht's notes, things that haven't been published anywhere. And I know what I *felt* in her office." He looked straight ahead, dark circles under his eyes. "I think there's something supernatural involved here."

Mark shivered, saw Linda reach for Bob's hand. But it was Cathy who dared to ask the obvious question: "If something like that killed Doctor Whitlow — why? Could it be interested in the rest of the Department?"

David just shook his head. "I don't have any answers. None at all."

Chapter Four

(David)

Under the circumstances, David cancelled classes for the day. The kids accompanied him across the green campus to the Student Center, an imposing building of brick and cement that towered over the grassy sward known as The Quad. After the shocks of the previous two days, and hours spent talking to police and campus authorities, David wanted to relax and talk with people who didn't need every esoteric concept explained. He led his four followers down the broad stairs, feeling like a mother duck with babies in tow.

The Rathskeller was nearly deserted this early in the morning. David let the kids pick a table a few feet away from the bar, secluded in the artificial darkness of the place. Paneling, tables, benches and bar — all were of dark wood that seemed to drink the light of the pale yellow globes scattered about the walls. The Rathskeller was a favorite trysting place among undergrads — with its low level of illumination and the beer that flowed freely here, it was one of the most popular establishments on campus.

David slid into a booth next to Cathy Vovcenko and Mark Evans, put his hands down on the scarred tabletop. What could these kids do for him? Cathy and Mark were

Sophomores, hardly even begun their study of the supernatural; Linda Falk and Bob Toland showed some promise but he didn't think he could trust their abilities too far. Oh, why did this have to be the first year without any Seniors in the Comparative Religion program?

If only some of last year's Seniors were back. Frank, for instance...a boy with true talent and ability. But Frank was gone, headed for ordination and service with the Jesuits. And Mary Sebron had gone off to study in Germany; not even a chance to call her in for help.

David gave a mental shrug. These kids were all he had to work with — if there really *was* some supernatural threat at Patapsco University, he would have to rely on their untested abilities to help him cope with it.

If, indeed, he *could* cope.

The waiter showed up: an undergrad working his way through school waiting on tables. David and Bob ordered beers, and the rest of the group made do with Cokes. In just a minute or so mugs were before them, beaded with moisture.

David cleared his throat. Three girls a few tables away were chain-smoking Winstons, and the smoke wafted right toward him. "I'm sorry to drag you guys into this. But Cathy asked a good question, and I feel that you should have an answer. Yes, I think the rest of the Department might be in danger from this...whatever it is." He took a sip of beer...bitter. "I can't be sure, you understand. I can't even be sure it's supernatural. But in my own mind, I'm convinced that something unnatural was stirring about this area on Saturday."

"Have you sensed anything like that again?" Linda asked.

David spread his hands. "No, I haven't. I am not." Three ceiling fans spun slowly, but still didn't manage to keep the smoke away. He was beginning to feel a little claustrophobic. Maybe a discussion like this would be better outside, in the light. "Killing Susan was probably only a first step — I doubt that Susan Whitlow had anything to satisfy anyone interested

in the supernatural. Susan was firmly convinced that there are no powers beyond our understanding. I think it will strike again."

Bob Toland made a gesture as if holding out his hand to receive something. "So what do we do to stop it from happening again?"

How confident you are, Bob. You think you can stop anything. You don't know what you might face, and that makes me even more afraid than I was.

David spread his hands. "I can't say. Too much is unknown. What are we up against? One of the classical demons, raised by someone who didn't know what they were doing?" David narrowed his eyes and cocked his head. "Linda, Bob, you haven't been fooling around where you don't belong, have you? Be truthful."

Linda tossed her head, black hair whipping for a moment like a gypsy dancer's skirt. "We certainly know enough to keep away from dangerous things. No, Mr. Galvin, we haven't been bad little children playing with the grimoires, or sorcerer's apprentices animating the broom."

"Don't get defensive. I had to ask."

Bob Toland shrugged. "It's not any of us. I'm sure that no one on the faculty would have raised something this awful. Where does that leave us?"

Where indeed? "I don't know. We have to find out. We need more information, or else we'll never know how to combat this thing."

"If it needs combatting," Cathy said in a small voice.

"What do you mean?"

"Well..." she turned her coke glass between her hands nervously. "Couldn't it have been something that Doctor Whitlow brought on herself? I've read that some of the old books and artifacts are supposedly protected by spells that...that hurt the person trying to use them." She looked up at David with an expression of uncertainty.

"That's possible. Except that I know Susan didn't have

anything of that nature in her office. She was grading papers — and I doubt that a student could have put such a protective spell on a quiz booklet.”

“If it’s not a demon, and it’s not a protection spell, then what could it be?” Mark asked.

“Any number of things. Patapsco University is the only school in the country with a department devoted to magic. We have resources here that some unscrupulous person working with the Arts would love to get ahold of. Luckily, most everything is locked away in the Special Collections Room in the library.”

“Nobody has been in there lately, except for you,” Cathy said.

David narrowed his eyes at her, then remembered. “Oh, that’s right. You work as an aide at the Library, don’t you?”

“Yes,” she answered. “You have to sign out the keys for the Special Collections Room. I looked at the book just yesterday. The last person to sign out, besides you, was Doctor Quaile.”

Bob leaned back, folded his hands behind his head. “You don’t suppose Doctor Quaile is the one responsible?”

David thought of the small, unimpressive Quaile with his outdated wire-rimmed glasses and ever-increasing bald spot. Monroe Quaile, who had held vigil dressed in an ancient robe while David stood beneath the full moon performing the rites of his Senior Thesis. Monroe Quaile, who had calmly and effectively dealt with the unfortunate consequences of that Thesis.

“No,” he shook his head slowly. “You all aren’t aware of it, but the faculty here are a good deal wiser than you give them credit for. Neither Doctor Quaile nor Doctor Faring are the kind to take chances fooling around with the blacker magics.” Maybe, David thought, he should go to Quaile and Faring now, tell them what he thought he had sensed, ask their help.

Mark Evans looked right into David’s eyes. “You’re thinking that we should ask them for help. But David, what if this thing really wants to get at the faculty? Wouldn’t it be

safer not to involve them?"

David felt a shiver. "I don't know. I don't even know what this force might be, what its goals are. Until I have more information, I think I'll follow your suggestion." And am I being foolish? Shouldn't I ask for help when I need it?

Do I need it?

David's glass was empty; he signalled to the waiter. "Anyone else want more?"

Mark and Bob joined him with beers; Linda drank from Bob's mug and Cathy continued to nurse her Coke. In moisture on the dark wood tabletop, David traced glyphs of protection. One reason I don't want to go to Quaille and Faring, he thought, is that they don't really believe what they do. Both can cast spells, both have had supernatural experiences aplenty...but neither one of them *believes*. They were raised in the rational world, and at a crucial instant their disbelief could hinder them.

So what of these kids? Why turn to *them*?

Face it, David. You've taken to heart the advice of your brother's decade — you don't trust anyone over thirty.

Dealing with the supernatural, with things that the rational world did not believe in...it took a special kind of innocence, a special ability to look beyond conventionality. David had it as part of his heritage...these four kids had it because they were not yet firmly moored in the rational world, not yet come to harbor from the wild unbounded seas of childhood.

"Why did it have to be Doctor Whitlow?" Cathy asked. "She was always so nice."

Linda shook her head. "You obviously never took one of her final exams."

Bob smiled indulgently, but touched Linda's hand. "Don't be like that. She's dead."

Linda rolled her eyes. "Just because she's dead doesn't mean that she wasn't lousy at giving finals. Damn it, I went into that exam with a B+, and when I finished there wasn't enough left of my grade to see with a microscope."

Bob cocked his head with a wry grin. "You finished with a solid B and you know it."

"Yeah, but only because..."

David drained his beer with four deep gulps, sat back in the bench. Something...something was not right.

Letting Bob and Linda continue their discussion, he looked around the Rathskeller. More students had wandered in since they'd arrived. A few sat on high stools by the bar, two accounting students in jacket and tie were playing a fast and furious game of Centipede, and several tables had their accompanying knots of students taking a late-morning break from classes and studying.

What felt wrong?

David sniffed — and knew what it was.

Enemy.

Somewhere in this room, something malevolent and destructive lurked. Suddenly David was not at all amused by the dark corners, the low lights, the wraithlike wisps of smoke that drifted through the air. He felt his hackles rise, and caught himself clenching his fists.

Where was it?

"Hey, what's wrong with you, David?" Bob joked. "Maybe you better lay off the beer for a while."

"No." David let his concern show in his voice. "Something else." He put his finger on the table, traced a stronger glyph of protection. The feeling of menace didn't decrease.

Where?

The would-be accountants finished their video game, picked up leather briefcases, and walked laughing out the door. Not them. The chain-smoking girls at the next table had been there all along — it wasn't them.

Bob Toland put his right hand on the table next to David's. "What is it?"

"Something bad." A group of younger kids, Freshmen or possibly Sophomores, sat only ten feet away — two girls and two boys. One couple faced David but didn't look his way;

the other two had their backs to him. "Does anyone know those people?" David whispered.

Cathy nodded. "They're in my Western Civ class. Kim Richter, Nancy Hanefan, George Martinez, and Kevin Something-or-other." She dimpled. "It's still early in the semester, I haven't had time to learn everyone's name yet."

Linda watched David carefully. "You don't think that *they*...?"

"I don't know what to think. Maybe it's some disembodied force that just happens to feel like it's coming from that direction." David felt his muscles tense, ready to spring from his seat and run for cover. Whatever his brain told him, his senses were convinced that there was an enemy in this room, and that he had better be careful. "I have to go see."

"You're crazy," Bob said. "Something that did what it did to Doctor Whitlow, and you're going to walk right up to it and say, Excuse me, are you the evil force we're trying to locate?"

"No." The smoke was getting to him. And the darkness. David felt closed in, as if he had his back to a wall and some beast was drawing nearer. He wanted to shout to the kids, jump up and run into the safety of daylight.

Some safety. Susan was killed in daylight.

"I have to see." He rose, picking up his empty mug. "I'll go to the bar and get another drink. If that table is the source of my feeling, I'll know."

No, no, something within him shouted. Run. While you can.

He walked. And, walking, felt better. Ceiling fans spun, dispelling the smoke; as long as he was standing David felt less claustrophobic. Striding to the bar left him about five feet from the other table. He put his mug down and waited for the bartender's attention. Slyly, he looked at the four kids.

Freshmen, he decided. The two girls were blond, both with short hair carefully brushed into flyaway styles that they probably thought attractive. The boys, who wore bright Izod

shirts and jeans, were both dark-haired — the shorter of the two had red highlights in his unruly brown hair. Four blue canvas backpacks filled with books took up most of the table surface.

David narrowed his eyes, sniffed. The sense of menace was still here — but he couldn't tell if it came from the kids he watched. Hard to believe that any of them could be the source of some terrible force.

As a matter of fact, David was now almost ready to laugh at himself. Maybe the whole thing was a delusion, composed of equal parts of claustrophobia and stress. Here at the bar, with the ceiling fan making a positive breeze and the prospect of another cool draft beer before him, he found it hard to recapture his sense of enemy presence.

Breeze...?

David looked up, and fear grabbed his heart.

Just above his head, the ceiling fan spun at an incredible rate, faster than an ordinary window fan, fast as propeller blades. As it spun it lurched back and forth in its housing. David felt air twirl in a vortex around him, nearly heard the fan tearing itself from its seat. Another half-minute, and...

The fan fell. David jumped sideways and landed on the floor under the bar, saved by reflexes that had won him many a tennis game. The heavy fan, still spinning like a propeller, crashed onto the bar above him.

Almost in defiance of gravity, the thing spun on the edge of the bar, and then the whirling blades dipped toward David's outthrust shoulder.

There was an eternal instant of dread, as David watched the sharp blades sloping toward his neck and knew he could never get away in time.

Then the fan shuddered, halted its rotation with a crack, and clattered to the floor next to David's legs. He looked up, saw Bob and Linda with hands clasped and eyes closed, and knew that he was right to trust these kids. Whatever spell Bob and Linda had cast, it saved his life...

He scanned the gathering crowd, and saw nowhere a face that reflected the force which had caused this accident. Even the four Freshmen were, as far as he could tell, completely innocent.

But...*This was a warning*, and inner voice told him. *Next time it won't miss you.*

Next time...

Chapter Five (*Cathy Vovcenko*)

Cathy hated Wednesdays.

Three classes in as many hours was a grueling enough pace. And somehow she never managed to get to sleep early enough on Tuesday nights. Especially last night. Bob Toland had been over, ostensibly to see Linda. The three of them had stayed up well into the morning, talking in the fourth-floor dorm room while a late-summer wind rattled the windows and lashed tree branches into menacing shapes outside.

Walking across campus with her books under her arm, Cathy allowed herself a grin. At least David recognized how tired they were, and terminated today's class early. That gave her an extra ten minutes before History, and she intended to use it.

The Student Center was a huge, imposing building made of brick and concrete — although she knew that the architect had done his best to make it look inviting, Cathy had never liked the building. It wasn't as friendly as the older stone structures on campus. Purnell Hall, for example, where the Department of Comparative Religion had its offices and where she had most of her classes: Purnell was constructed of weathered grey stones, covered with ivy, and embellished by

various marble protuberances in the oddest places. Purnell Hall had character, it like an old friend — the Student Center was as characterless as a fast-food restaurant.

She pushed her way past a knot of students at the door, went down stairs and past various offices — yearbook, the *Platypus* newsroom, Student Government Society — to the Post Office. A few other students were examining their mailboxes with expressions of hope, disappointment or anxiety. Cathy twisted her combination and looked inside without expecting to see anything at all. There was a letter from home, and in pulling it from its lair she dropped her history book.

“Here, I’ll get it.” She turned, and felt a shiver.

It was the brown-haired kid from her History class — the one who had been in the Rathskeller Monday when David was almost hurt. Kevin something.

He handed her the book with a smile. “You weren’t in class Monday.”

“N-no, I wasn’t. Hey, can I borrow your notes?”

“Sure. We didn’t do much...just went over chapter three. If you did the reading, you really don’t need the class notes.”

Cathy glanced at her watch. Ten minutes to reach Stanwick Hall, diagonally opposite across the Quad. “I guess we ought to get going to class.”

Kevin gave a tentative nod. “Except that you’re standing in front of my mailbox.”

“Oh.” Cathy took a step aside, waited while the boy retrieved his mail. There were a few letters; he tucked them unread into a pocket in his canvas backpack. “Okay, let’s go.”

Walking out of the air conditioned student center was like stepping into the locker room right after a furious game of lacrosse — the air was damp and heavy. Cathy shook her head. “I’m never going to get used to this weather.”

“You’re not from Maryland?” Kevin asked politely, walking just a step behind her and to the right. He made her a little nervous. Not that he was too close or anything...but he

wasn't walking far enough away from her. Ah, well, maybe he was just a naturally gregarious person.

"No, I grew up in a nice little town called Oak Grove. It's sort of between Chicago and Cincinnati. How about you?"

"Grew up here. We used to live over on Dogwood Road, not three miles from here. Then when my parents got divorced a few years ago, Mom took me to Houston with her. But I couldn't wait to get back. That's why I decided to come to Patapsco." He looked around the campus, seeming almost to sniff the humid air. "I'm glad to be back."

Cathy nodded. "Do you see your father often?"

Kevin frowned, making his thin lips almost disappear. "Dad isn't around here any more." His tone clearly told Cathy that she should not pursue the subject.

"Tell me then, as a native Marylander...do you actually *like* this weather?"

"It could be worse. Thunderstorms, flash floods, things like that. When I was four the whole Patapsco Valley was almost washed out by Hurricane Agnes. After something like that, I guess we're all just glad that the water stays up in the air where it belongs."

There was no time for further meteorological discussion. They reached Stanwick Hall, and Kevin held the door for Cathy. At least Stanwick was air conditioned.

On impulse, Cathy sat behind Kevin when they all took their seats. His other Freshman friends — Nancy Hanefan, who was also in Cathy's biology class, Kim Richter, and a handful of others — also sat nearby. As Professor Holder droned on Cathy studied the Freshmen. She'd seen them about, but she didn't really know them. Were they a group, in the same way that Cathy and Linda, Bob and Mark were a group? She didn't think so. Only the second week of classes. The Freshmen hadn't had time enough to form social groups. More likely, these were all kids from the area, maybe friends from high school, hanging around together in mutual timidity.

And that was okay. Cathy didn't know what she would have done if Linda hadn't been her roommate and introduced her to the others in the Comparative Religion department. Chances are she would still be floundering around without friends.

Kevin looked back at her, and for a second his eyes locked with hers. There was something about his eyes, something that made Cathy feel suddenly melancholy. Oh, Kevin, she thought — I know what's in store for you. These friends from the area, they aren't going to last. They'll find others with their own interests, and you will too. And soon you'll see one another only in class.

He gave her a half-grin, and for an instant his face flickered with amusement. Then he turned back to his notebook.

By the time class was over, there was a rumble in Cathy's stomach and she was ready for something to eat. As she rose and gathered her books, she said to Kevin, "What do you do now? Have time for a bit of lunch?"

He automatically glanced at his watch, an old-fashioned analog-dial gold Bulova. "I have German at one in room 403. I usually eat lunch right in this building. Do you have anything to eat?"

Cathy patted her handbag. "I have a few things stashed away in here. Granola bars, and a Milky Way."

"Good. I have a sandwich and some cookies in my bag." He threw the knapsack over his shoulder. "Come on, there's a Coke machine down the hall. Then I'll show you a neat place to eat."

After stopping for drinks — a Coke for Cathy and a Dr. Pepper for himself — Kevin led her to a door next to the elevator. He opened it to reveal a concrete stairwell leading both down and up. Without hesitation he started down.

"Wait."

"What?" Kevin asked, looking up at her with a totally disarming grin. In the light of caged hundred-watt bulbs, the red highlights stood out in his unkempt brown hair.

"Are you sure we're allowed down there?"

"Nobody's ever stopped me. Come on."

Cathy shrugged and followed the boy.

As she'd suspected, the stairs led to a boiler room. It was large, crowded with foam-wrapped pipes and dominated by massive tanks and furnaces. Along one wall lay rolled lengths of carpet; Kevin sat down on one of them and spread his lunch out on the concrete floor before him. "Come on, sit down."

The room was surprisingly cool — was it because it was the basement, or simply that the furnaces were not on? Cathy didn't know, but she was grateful. She settled down on the carpet a few feet from Kevin, a bit nervously — there wouldn't be rats, not in a well-kept place like this?

Digging for her granola bars, Cathy encountered her letter from home. She held it up with a chuckle. "Guess I ought to see how things are with the folks."

"That's right, I have mail too." Kevin fished in his knapsack, and Cathy turned her attention to the letter in her hand, written in her mother's scrawl on flowered letter paper. Mom never *did* have much taste.

Cathy's sister was juggling the attention of two of her high-school classmates; Debbie was traumatized and Cathy wondered if Mom would survive the ordeal. The fuel pump in the Buick had gone up, and Dad was driving the Gremlin to work this week — Cathy suppressed a smile at the thought of her six-foot-three father crouched in the driver's seat of the small car. The dog had new heartworm medicine, little green pills that had to be given right before meals. Aunt Franny was visiting next week. And here's a check to buy some new jeans and maybe some food, and how was the Biology lab coming, any dissections yet? And...and...

And Kevin was sobbing.

With a shock, Cathy put down her letter and reached a hand out to the lad. His face was sallow, his eyes misted, and his lower lip had retreated under his teeth. A ragged, gasping

breath was followed by another, then he raised a trembling fist to his mouth.

"Kevin, what is it?"

"M-my mother's dead." He handed her the letter.

Paper white as hard-packed February snow, typewritten words over an illegible signature — some uncle or neighbor — "Drunk driver...intensive care...brain hemorrhage ...never regained consciousness...nothing you could have done...come home at once...funeral set for Saturday..."

She let the paper drop, held out her arms. Kevin moved into them instinctively, put his head on her shoulder and folded his arms across her back tightly. He held on like a white-knuckle businessman grasping the arms of his airplane seat.

"Go ahead and cry," Cathy said, patting him on the back as if he were her little sister. "Get it out."

For the next few minutes Kevin sobbed, making strangled cries that came from deep within him, holding Cathy in what was almost literally a death grip. She felt totally helpless, unable to do anything for him but provide human company in his misery. Grief, she thought, is a wall that separates us from one another, and it's the ultimate separation this side of the grave. I can hold him, but I can't touch him. He's not even in this world...he's in his own private hell of sorrow, and there's no way to reach him there.

Her thoughts turned, inevitably, to herself. Suppose it had been *her* mother? Mom, with her soap operas and her absurd polyester pants and the Toll House cookies that no one else could duplicate? Mom with her infectious laugh and her heart big enough to enclose the whole world...how would Cathy feel if *her* mother's life were taken on the highway by some stinking drunk?

"I'm sorry, Kevin. I'm so sorry."

He drew back, wiped his eyes with the back of his hands. A fly buzzed briefly around his face, attracted perhaps by the scent of sweat and tears; he brushed it aside. "How could she

do this to me? How could she?"

As if she had a choice. No, this was not a time to be rational. "I know." How absurd that sounded, how utterly ineffective. A second fly lighted with the first on Kevin's uneaten sandwich; Cathy waved her hand and both insects took to the air. "Look, you can't go to your German class. You've got to get home."

He reached for his letter, took it from the floor with quivering hands. "You're right. I've got to get my things together and get to the airport."

"Do you have money?" Cathy thought of her own checking account...there probably wasn't enough money in it for a plane ticket. And what was she going to do, turn over money to this unknown Freshman? Compassion was one thing....

"Yes. I have...the Visa card. F-for emergencies. I guess this is an emergency." He sniffed, but didn't start crying again. He looked down at his sandwich, waved his hands. "Get off, you." Four or five flies took flight. A few more circled in the air. One weaved back and forth in front of Cathy's face, and she batted at it helplessly. "I can take the bus to the airport, I guess."

"No. Mark Evans has German at one — isn't he in your class?"

"With Frau Zunge?"

"The old lady in the wheelchair. Yes, that's Mark's class. I'm sure he has his car, we can run you to the airport." A large fly landed on Cathy's bare arm, and before she could swat for it she felt a distinct sting. "Damn, the thing bit me. Where are they coming from?"

Kevin kicked at his sandwich, and a whole cloud of flies took to the air, buzzing angrily. "I don't know, maybe they're down here to escape the heat." One landed on Cathy's cheek, another walked with complete impunity across her left forearm.

She took Kevin's elbow. "Come on. Mark will be in the Student Center. You should stop in to see the Dean of Student

Affairs, to let them know what happened." She stood, batting at the sudden plague of winged pests. "Get away!" she cried, exasperated. Kevin sat still on the rug, and watched three flies take up positions on his hands.

He's going into shock or something, Cathy thought. Have to get him moving. "Come on, Kevin."

He looked up, eyes a million miles away. "How could she do this to me? Now I'm all alone. Unprotected."

"Come on." She tugged him to his feet, picked up his knapsack along with her books, and made a futile effort to shoo flies off his back. A regiment of the insects determinedly followed them up the stairs and out into the humid air, where they flew away.

She found Mark and Linda in the Student Center, at their usual square lunchroom table. Bob, she knew, was in Philosophy class at this time. Cathy sent Kevin to the Dean of Student Affairs, then explained the situation to Mark and Linda.

Linda tossed her head and popped an orange jellybean into her mouth. "I think it's sweet of you two to run him to the airport. Better be careful, Cathy, you don't want to lose your heart for a Freshman. People would talk."

Mark gave her a chilling look. "Come on, Linda, don't joke. The guy's *mother* is dead, for God's sake."

Linda gave a carefully studied cynical grin. "Every child's secret dream."

"Well I don't care what you think, we're —"

Linda stood, picked up her single book — *The Enlightenment in France* — and a spiral notebook, and gave a hand to Cathy. "Seriously, Cathy, what you're doing in wonderful. The guy couldn't be in better hands. Listen, Mark, I'll stop by Frau Zunge's office on my way to class and tell her what's happened. Then she won't get upset at you for missing German."

Mark gave a relieved smile. "Thanks, Linda."

"The least I can do."



All told, it was growing dark when Cathy and Mark left the bright lights of Baltimore-Washington International and started the half-hour trip around the Beltway and out to school. Kevin had managed to catch an evening plane to Atlanta, where he would connect for Houston...Cathy and Mark stayed to keep him company.

The western sky was still alight with the hazy orange of the departing sun, and Mark looked over at her, his face lit from the left and looking more than usually grave. "I'm glad this wasn't your night to work." Cathy was on a work-study program, and several nights a week she worked in the campus library.

"Tough thing to have happen," she said.

"Yeah. The poor guy. I guess he was pretty broken up, huh?" Mark mused for a second. "Although he didn't seem like it at the airport. Seemed...quiet. Like he was in shock."

"Or scared." Cathy didn't even realize she was going to say it, until she did.

"Scared of what?"

"I don't know." She thought back to the boiler room, to the invasion of flies, to Kevin's sobs and his odd cry about being alone and unprotected. "Mark, I don't know. But I think he was scared of something."

They were quiet the rest of the ride back. When Cathy got to her dorm room, Linda was awake and reading in bed. She looked up as Cathy entered. "How did it go?"

"He got off safely."

"Good. Poor kid. Does he have anyone to take care of him?"

"A couple of friends. But we might want to pay some special attention to him for a while, once he gets back."

"Right. Hey, you want to make popcorn?"

"Do we have oil?"

“Dory Thayer has some. I’ll go get it.” Linda wrapped her robe around herself and went out into the hall.

As Cathy was taking the popcorn popper down from the closet, an errant fly buzzed in through the open door. A flyswatter hung on the outside of the closet door; she grabbed it and in a second the insect was a tiny unmourned corpse.

With a shiver, Cathy set up the popcorn popper. Linda of course returned with half a dozen girls following her, and soon the room was full of chatter and music and sustained complaints about boyfriends, teachers, the weather, and the sorry state of international affairs. When Cathy finally went to bed, she fell instantly into a contented sleep, and didn’t wake until the bright light of morning came streaming in through the fourth-floor windows.

Chapter Six

(Linda Falk)

Almost two weeks after Doctor Whitlow's death, the heat had still not broken. Linda was beginning to wonder if it ever would. The afternoon sun was bright enough to burn unprotected skin, and the haze that hung over the valley was oppressively heavy for a Friday afternoon.

Mark Evans' battered Dodge pulled into the dorm parking lot and Linda waved. Mark hopped out, accompanied by Cathy Vovcenko and Kevin Judd, the Freshman who seemed to be Cathy's latest interest. Linda narrowed her eyes, pretending that she squinted at the sun. Her roommate could have chosen someone a bit more suitable to pal around with.

"I thought you guys would *never* get here," Linda said in her best world-weary tone. He watch said two-fifteen; in truth she had just arrived from her History class three minutes ago. "Do you have the beer?"

"In the cooler in the trunk," Mark answered. "Bob and I went out at lunchtime to get it. I hope it's still cold."

"We can get ice if we need it. Come on. I'm so sick of this place that I could simply scream." She crawled into the back of Mark's car, patting Cathy on the hand as she did so. "How was the quiz?"

"I think I did okay." Cathy lowered her voice. "Hey, you don't mind if Kevin comes along with us, do you? I'm afraid I mentioned it to his friends, too."

Linda briefly considered a tantrum, then smiled sweetly. It was too hot. "No problem. The more the merrier. This is a after-class party — anybody who's finished classes is welcome." She leaned her head out the door and looked at Kevin. "Get in the car, kid. I'm a desperate woman, and there's a cold beer in the trunk with my name on it."

"Right," Mark said. "Let's get going."

Narrow Davis Avenue was uncrowded at this time of day; the real rush would come later. When most classes let out and the dayhops left campus, the small road would be bumper-to-bumper. Linda leaned back in the seat, letting the hot wind blow through her hair, as Mark made a left onto Old Court Road at the new Saint Gregory's Church. The car bounced over a hill, then started down toward the river.

Old Court Road descended gradually to the Woodstock Bridge across the Patapsco. Before it got there, though, it passed between a tiny cemetery and the ruins of old Saint Zachary's. Mark pulled off the road next to the old church, his wheels raising a cloud of dust from dirt and gravel. "We're here," he announced happily, and jumped out of the car. The others followed him.

Kevin looked dubious. "Isn't this kind of spooky?" He left the car, looked from the cemetery monuments to the crumbling brown walls of the church. "*This* is your spot for getting away from it all?"

Cathy grinned. "We're never bothered. From here you can see the road, the river, and the railroad tracks. There are lots of paths through the woods. And the cemetery is interesting — lots of really old graves and monuments."

Linda smiled. "Why don't you take Kevin to the graveyard and show him around, Cathy? Mark, you can help me unload the car and set up."

"Good idea." Cathy looked both ways, and then ran across

the road with Kevin behind her. A wrought-iron gate served to keep cars off the single gravel path that led through the cemetery, but there was no fence or wall. As Cathy and the younger boy wandered off among the graves, Linda sighed and met Mark at the back of the car.

Mark had a cold beer ready for her. She opened the can, threw the pop-top into a clump of weeds and trash, and took a swig. "Bless you, Mr. Evans." She peeked into the cooler and whistled. Besides a case of Budweiser and two six-packs of soft drinks, there were packages of lunch meat, cheese, bread, and other sandwich fixings. Nestled next to the cooler was a brown grocery bag containing potato chips, pretzels and a large plastic bag of yellow popcorn. "Mark, you are too good to me. How much did all this cost?"

"Don't worry about it. Bob put in your share."

"Great. Here, help me carry this stuff and we'll set up."

With the cooler between them, Linda and Mark made their way into the old church. The interior was a jumble of old scorched timbers, crumbled stone, and tall undergrowth; Linda watched her step carefully lest she twist an ankle in some hidden hole.

They set the cooler down and Mark sat on what remained of the east wall. Linda threw back her head, drinking in the feeling of the ruined building.

She supposed it was morbid of her, but she loved this place. The ancient walls of grey and brown stone, the empty windows, the precariously-balanced chimney of brick: they all added up to something at once haunting and surprisingly tranquil. The church was something that had lived a full life, suffered disaster, and was now sleepily reverting back to nature. Bit-by-bit, as the plants moved in and the stones wore down, the Patapsco Valley was recapturing the land that had once belonged to Saint Zachary's.

Even vandals had left the property remarkably undisturbed. White spray-painted graffiti was almost completely overgrown by ivy, and nowadays it was hard to read — much

less care — that “DONNY LOVES ANDREA.”

Mark clapped his hands. “Well, should we set the wards?”

Linda nodded. “Do you think you can do it?” During these Friday afternoon parties, the kids usually set magical wards to discourage passersby — especially the occasional nosy police officer — from noticing them. Linda and Bob Toland customarily shared the duty of casting the relatively simple spell that established the wards.

“What, alone? No. If you help, I’m pretty sure I can.”

“Okay. Give me your hand.”

They touched, and Linda felt a slight static shock. She opened herself to the power of nature, standing still for a long moment while the air hung heavy with electric possibility.

Then there was a tingle, starting in her loins and spreading through her body. It left her feeling lighter, more powerful, more alive.

That was something else Linda liked about the old church, a feeling of guilty pleasure. People had died here, killed in a boiler explosion that had scoured the hallowed ground with raging fire. And where people had violently died, there was magical energy; energy that touched her deeply, energy that she could use.

Linda let Mark go through the motions of the spell, watching with approval. He made all the gestures properly, spoke the words correctly; and when a trifling curtain of distortion joined the heat-shimmer of the air, she squeezed his hand. “You did it perfectly. Look.”

At scattered points around the walls, pale runic designs glowed faintly. An earlier generation of students had chalked the original designs; class after class of the Comparative Religion program renewed the spells and gave new power to the glyphs.

“Whew.” Mark slumped against bare stone, sweat standing out on his brow. He pulled a Coke from the cooler and gulped it thankfully. “That’s more work than I remember.”

“It’ll get easier with practice. Next time we’ll let you do it

all by yourself." Linda brushed the hair out of his eyes, proud of the young man for his accomplishment.

For a nerdy Sophomore, Mark wasn't that bad. He was attractive in a way — not the way Bob was, with strength and assurance, but in a tender way that made you want to care for him. He was doing a difficult job, taking care of his little brother and dealing with a family in which neither parent cared for anyone except themselves; Mark had a lot of strength, but it was all hidden underneath. You had to get to know him before you realized what a really great guy he was.

Linda's hand lingered at Mark's face for a moment more. A pole of power, he was radiating magical energy just as his tanned skin radiated heat. For an instant Linda felt the stirrings of other power, thought wildly of hugging him to herself and letting the power build...then she pulled back and looked away.

What was she thinking of? That kind of magic was for her and Bob alone. Together they had used the power of this place and others, had charted the energy of the moon's phases and the seasons with magic as old and vital as the Human race itself.

That wasn't for Mark. Even if he was willing, she had no right to take him down those paths. No right to turn her back on Bob, to whom she was bound with the force of nature.

"Hey, you guys, come over here!" Cathy's shout, from outside the wards, was a million miles away; but Linda welcomed the interruption, and went with Mark to see what her roommate wanted.

Cathy and Kevin stood at the edge of the graveyard, where the cemetery became a hill leading down into the woods. The parched grass was brown, the pitted marble headstones dry and white in the bright sun.

"What?" Linda said as she crossed the road.

"Look." Cathy pointed to the ground at her feet. A few lilies hung in a tangle of dead branches and old brown leaves at the edge of the woods; closer, there were some very worn

grey stones. Linda knew these stones, knew the names engraved so long ago: William S. Fink 1863 - 1934, James Hallaway 1849 - 1933, the enigmatic J. Cavey, a dozen others too worn to read. In her Freshman year, she had spent one frightening night out here with the Seniors, trying to raise some spirits. She still shivered when she remembered that night.

She followed the direction of Cathy's finger, and felt cold despite the warm sun.

Next to one of the more unintelligible stones, the earth had been freshly disturbed. Sandy dirt formed the outline of a small grave, hardly three feet long and perhaps two wide.

"What do you suppose — " Cathy started.

"I don't know," Linda said at once. "Maybe there was a funeral...."

Mark shook his head. "Nobody uses this cemetery any more. They get buried over at Green Sanctuary, or Lorraine Park."

"Kids, then," Linda answered. "Just fooling around. Or a dog." She knew that her guesses sounded unconvincing, but she didn't want to contemplate the alternative — that someone had been digging up graves. "Come on, leave it alone. Bob will be here soon, we ought to get the party started for him."

When Cathy hesitated, Linda pulled her by the hand. Mark and Kevin followed docilely across the road.

Back inside the wards, Linda felt safer. She opened another can of beer, took a great swallow. The cold beer felt good going down.

Cathy eyed her strangely until Linda gave her a steady look. *We'll talk about this later, roommate.* Cathy seemed to accept the hint.

About twenty after three, a blue Toyota pulled up next to Mark's Plymouth. "Bob's here," Linda announced, feeling a little better. If there was any threat — well, between the two of them, she and Bob could handle it.

The driver of the car was tall, lanky Paul Mazeika, a drama classmate of Bob's. The two young men laughed and carried on an animated conversation as they approached the church; Linda breathed a sigh of relief. Bob and Paul would dispel the gloom that danced around the edges of the wards.

"Hi, honey, I'm home," Bob said, slipping an arm around Linda's waist and giving her a quick kiss. As his lips touched hers, Linda felt something akin to an explosion of power — she was supercharged from the magic of the place, and Bob seethed with enthusiasm.

"Good class?"

"Great." He looked around, found Paul already sitting with a beer. "Give me a brew."

Linda handed him a beer, then sat next to him and sipped from the can when he set it down. It was hot, and Linda felt as if her head was ready to explode.

Bob looked at her, frowned. "Is something wrong?"

"We found a grave disturbed in the cemetery," Kevin Judd volunteered.

Bob's frown deepened. *This bothers him as much as it does me*, Linda thought.

Around a mouthful of potato chips, Mark questioned, "What do you think it could be?"

Bob gave Mark a look that clearly told him to hold his tongue. "A prank, probably." We'll talk about this later, Bob's eyes said. "Did anybody see the school paper today? What's going on with the new parking lot?"

Cathy took her lead from Bob's forced casualness. "The community is still against it. President Carson is going to meet with the community associations on Monday night."

Paul stretched out his long legs and took a great gulp from his beer. "Well, I think they're right. What do we need another parking lot for? Sometimes I think the administration wants to cut down every tree on campus and pave the entire damn — " He coughed, then coughed again. Bob started to stand, but Paul waved him back, turning away.

"It's just..." he coughed yet again, and gasped, "...something caught..."

The boy was turning red. Linda, alarmed, put an encouraging hand on his shoulder. "Do you want me to — "

"No, I — " Paul jerked under her hand and made a terrible choking noise. He put his hands to his throat, gagging — when he coughed again, he sprayed blood down his shirtfront.

"This is serious." Bob pushed her away, stood behind Paul and locked his hands under the boy's breastbone. A convulsive hug, then another, did nothing for the choking lad.

"Maybe we should get him to the infirmary...." Cathy suggested helplessly.

Paul was actually turning blue, gasping to breathe but getting no air. He pawed at his throat, and with each spasm of choking he coughed up more bright red blood. Linda felt the merciless hand of terror at her own neck. The wards trembled in the summer air, and glyphs traced on ancient stone burned with orange fire.

This wasn't an accident — no more than David's experience in the Rathskeller had been accidental.

"Cathy, Mark, give me your hands," Linda whispered. The other two slipped their hands into hers, cold as marble against her burning skin.

Paul was crumpled to the ground, and Bob stood helplessly above him. Linda closed her eyes, stood up straight, and concentrated.

If there's any power in this place, anything I can draw on — help me.

She felt as if she had been kicked in the head. Stars spun around her, and she started to faint...then she pulled herself back to consciousness and took a deep breath.

Breathe, Paul.

Paul looked up at her, his eyes wide with panic. He seemed to sense that she was trying to help, and she felt him making yet another effort to gasp for breath.

Pain.

Breathe!

There was agony in her throat, the taste of blood in her mouth, and the awful smothering sensation of suffocation like a black cloud over her eyes.

Cathy's cold hand gripped her hard, and Linda came back to herself. Reaching forth with a power that came from beyond her, she touched Paul's neck, his heaving chest, drew a line of icy blue from mouth to lungs and back.

Breathe.

Paul coughed again, spat a mass of blood, then breathed — gasped — then fell back against Bob's legs, gasping. It was over.

Linda let Cathy's and Mark's hands fall, settled to her knees. She looked up at Bob. "You'd better get him to the infirmary." Her voice was hoarse, but she shook off Cathy's concerned hand.

Paul looked into her eyes. "Hey, thanks. I..."

"Never mind. Get back to campus. We'll straighten things up here, and we'll meet back at my room." Bob didn't move, his face lined with concern. She nodded at him. "Go."

He shrugged, helped Paul up and half-carried him to his car. A minute later, the two boys roared off in the direction of the university.

Linda stood, feeling shaky. The others stared at her with a concern that made her uncomfortable. "Come on, let's get this stuff into the car." She waved at the cooler and food.

Cathy and Kevin took the cooler between them, and Mark knelt, examining the ground. After a second, he held up his hand. "Look."

In his palm, still wet with blood and spittle, was a beer-can pop-top. "This is what Paul had stuck in his throat."

Linda shivered in revulsion, still feeling the pain in her own throat. Would she ever forget? "That poor guy."

"Yeah." Mark looked at the bit of metal again, then wrapped it in his handkerchief and put it in his pocket.

"Mark, that's sick. Why are you saving it?"

"I thought David might want to see it," he whispered. "In connection with what happened in the Rathskeller the other day."

She shook her head. "I thought for a second it was something like that. But this — it was just an accident."

He met her eyes. "Yeah?"

"Yes."

"Linda...they don't *make* cans with pop-tops any more."

The glyphs flared, the wards shimmered, and within her stomach, Linda felt the stirring of a primal fear.

Wordlessly, she followed Mark back to the car.

Chapter Seven

(Bob Toland)

Bob had to be convinced to leave Linda.

"I'll be all right," she said, raising herself up on an elbow. She was stretched out on her bed, a red-and-brown afghan thrown across her despite the fourth-floor heat. Magical energy stole body heat, and it would be a while before Linda's temperature reached normal levels again.

"I don't want to leave you here alone," Bob protested.

Linda shook her head. "I'm not the target. Nothing's going to get me here in the dorm." She narrowed her eyes. "But somebody has to tell David what's going on."

Bob felt torn. If only Mark hadn't left — but the younger boy had to get home to take care of his brother. And Linda was right, Cathy shouldn't go to David's trailer unaccompanied. There was no telling what might happen....

We're scared, Bob thought. And we don't even know what we're scared of.

And I don't like being scared.

"Come on." Cathy tugged at his arm, and Bob let himself be pulled away from Linda's side. He picked up his beer can, drained it with one last gulp, and threw it into the overflowing wastebasket.

"All right, I'm ready."

The sun had just set; an orange haze still glowed over the river in the west and a bloated almost-full moon was visible through treetops beyond the parking lot. Frowning at the shadows, Bob followed Cathy across the road and into the woods behind Evett Hall. "Maybe we ought to go around Davis Avenue," he suggested as trees closed behind them.

Cathy shook her head. "It's further that way. And with our luck, we'll get hit by a car."

She was right. The ceiling fan in the Rathskeller, and then the pop top this afternoon — it seemed that machines had suddenly taken a dislike to Bob and his friends. No, Davis Avenue wasn't a good idea at all.

For a while they walked in silence, then when Cathy reached the fence of the Levengood farm she stopped. "We turn right here," she said. The Levengood cows were nowhere to be seen.

"Bob," Cathy said after a second, "I want to talk to you about that grave I saw."

"That again? We've been through —"

"No. Linda didn't want to talk about it, she didn't think it was important — so I didn't push it on her. But I think it is important."

"How so?"

Cathy spread her hands. Her mousey hair was disheveled, but her face was serious. "Doctor Whitlow was killed, and we've run into harmful supernatural influences several times since then. I don't know, but the way that grave was disturbed...it *felt* wrong. Like it wasn't just kids fooling around."

"You think we ought to make an investigation? Maybe a few Holzer tests?"

"Don't make fun of me, Bob. I can't tell you why, but I think there's some connection. It scares me."

Bob snorted. "Yeah, well, the whole thing scares *me*. I didn't sign up to be chased by supernatural beings."

Cathy looked back at him. "You've worked with this kind of stuff. You cast spells, and you've done things with magic. I'd think an opportunity like this would be right down your alley."

They came to the end of the Levengood property, and Bob helped Cathy over the token fence that marked the Gas and Electric Company's right-of-way. The sky was dark now, and the moon rode low on the treetops, wrapped in a shroud of mist.

High-tension supports towered over them, and the distant hum of wires set Bob's nerves on edge. "The things I've done aren't like what we're facing now," he said. "The school teaches organic magic, spells that fit in with the real world and only do good things. I don't know anything about how to use magic to hurt somebody — or to *try* to hurt them." He grunted. "That's why I want to talk to David. See what he has to say about it. And you're right, we should tell him about the grave."

"Do you really think something's after us?"

"I think we ought to stop talking about it, that's what I think." For an instant, Bob was acutely aware of the mounting darkness, the electric towers, and the woods surrounding them. To his left, towers marched down a grassy path to the banks of the Patapsco itself; to his right they leapfrogged across Davis Avenue and climbed upward across the land, going...who knew where?

I've lived on this campus for three years, Bob thought, and I still don't have a picture of the surrounding geography. To the north are farms, tiny suburban developments, and more open space than I'll ever get used to.

They were almost to David's trailer park. Bob didn't want to walk along Davis Avenue, but all at once he wasn't keen on the idea of cutting through the woods again. We're out in the open now, he thought — what might be waiting among the trees?

Cathy, too, seemed reluctant to continue. "What do you

think we ought to do?" she asked.

Bob forced himself to calm down. It was the beers he'd had, making him a little crazy. He'd been through these woods a hundred times before, visiting David for a beer or a poker game, or advice about schoolwork. They had only to walk through a hundred years of woods, and they'd be on the grounds of the trailer park.

"Going through the woods is still safer than walking on the road. Come on, there's a path." He strode ahead confidently into the darkness of the woods. Drama classes had taught him one thing, at least — if you *acted* brave, then you became brave.

About fifty feet into the woods, the moon went behind a cloud and it suddenly got very dark. Cathy gasped, and Bob had to talk to himself very sternly to keep moving forward. A low-hanging branch touched him in the face, and he whacked it aside with a panicked slap before he realized what it was.

He forced a chuckle. "Grown man, jumping at twigs," he muttered, more for Cathy's benefit than his own.

Something moved in the underbrush ahead, and Bob stopped. Cathy pressed close to him, and he felt her shivering.

"Nothing," he whispered. "A squirrel or a bird, or —"

The moon appeared, and up ahead, no further than six feet away, Bob saw a grey furry creature bigger than a large dog. He froze, his heart immobile in his chest, even as he managed to recognize it.

Wolf.

"Cathy?"

"R-right here."

The wolf's eyes gleamed in moonlight. They were fastened right on Bob's face, and he couldn't turn his gaze away. My god, what am I going to do?

"Do you suppose it's friendly?" Cathy whispered.

"How do you tell? Uh...I think we should have gone by the road." Bob kept his hands low, kept them visible just that way he did when he was meeting a new dog. Maybe this wolf was

someone's pet, maybe it was escaped from the zoo, maybe....

Damn it, there weren't any wolves south of Canada!

The beast took a step forward, and Bob braced himself to jump. There was a trick, he remembered, for dealing with an attacking dog — let it bite on your forearm, then bring your other arm behind its head and snap its neck with one convulsive movement.

If you were strong enough.

If you could stand the pain.

If....

The wolf moved again, Cathy screamed, and Bob jumped for it.

He reached past the jaws and got a firm grip on its neck, then the beast twisted free.

Cathy screamed again.

There was a flicker in the light, another cloud dashing past the moon — and then Bob blinked.

The wolf was no longer there. Where it had stood, there was now a heavily panting man dressed in nothing but his own fine coat of dark blond hair.

Bob looked again, and then his legs wouldn't support him any more, and he fell to the ground in an urgent need to sit down.

It was David Galvin.



David's trailer was air-conditioned, and there was strong black coffee in the kitchen. After letting Bob and Cathy in, he excused himself and went into the bedroom. Half a cup later, he emerged wearing jeans and a Patapsco University tee shirt. His hair was hastily combed, his feet bare.

Bob and Cathy were sitting on the couch; David took a chair from the kitchen table and sat down in it backwards. He gave them a rueful smile.

"Sorry about scaring you like that," he said. "You surprised

me.”

“We surprised *you*?!” Bob said, nearly spilling his coffee.

David nodded. “I guess it was a shock for you.”

“You’re a werewolf?” Bob couldn’t believe what he was saying.

“I am.”

“How...?” Bob didn’t even know what questions to ask. How often did one of your favorite instructors turn out to be a werewolf?

David leaned forward. “My folks are werewolves. It’s been in the family forever, as far as we know. My great-grandparents left the Old Country for the same reasons that everyone else’s great-grandparents did. They settled in the United States, and we’ve been here ever since.”

“How many...werewolves are there?”

David spread his hands. “I don’t know. A few of the old families still keep in touch, and every now and again I hear of someone through...research. Maybe a few hundred of us.” He cocked his head. “That’s like asking how many red-haired, blue-eyed people there are. Nobody knows.”

Cathy put down her cup, obviously ashamed of her earlier screams. “I don’t suppose it’s the kind of thing that you publicize.”

“No ma’am,” David agreed. “We keep it pretty quiet.”

“Werewolf,” Bob repeated. The excitement of the afternoon, the beer, and now this latest shock — all went to his head. The coffee was no help at all. “Are you telling me full moons, silver bullets, all that stuff?”

David made a gesture of dismissal. “That’s the movies. Real werewolves can make the change whenever we want to. It’s just a little easier when the moon is near full. Like tonight.”

“And I guess you don’t go around killing...”

“Don’t be ridiculous.” David took a breath. “Look, Bob, do you remember when you met your first witches? Your Freshman year, in Intro to Comparative Religion?”

"Yeah." He had fond memories of the old ladies, their coven, their white magic, and the magnificent food they had served.

"You found out that all the things you'd heard about witches...the brews, the warts, the wicked magics...were all just stories. Witches are people like the rest of us, with a little more practice in the Arts."

"Right."

"Werewolves are like that too. Just people. We have a skill that not a lot of others have — but we're not monsters."

Bob could see wheels moving in Cathy's head. "I'm sorry, I can't help being intrigued. Stop me if I ask too many personal questions."

"Go ahead."

"When you're...when you're..."

"In wolf form?"

"Is that the right way to say it? Okay, when you're in wolf form, what do you think? I mean, do you keep your own thoughts, or..."

He chuckled. "I think I know what you're trying to say. No, Cathy, a wolf's brain isn't constructed to hold all the thoughts that a human brain does. I can't verbalize too well when I'm a wolf — even in my head. But I retain my intelligence. It just finds different ways to express itself." He scratched his neck, stretched. "That's why it took me a while to react when you ran into me. You see, wolves recognize people mostly by smell, and I'd never scented you two when I was in wolf form. So it took me a moment to figure out just who you were. And to decide that I could change back to myself."

Bob shook his head. "No wonder you know so much about the supernatural."

David grinned. "I do have a little more experience than most people." He stretched again. "You two must have been on your way out here — what did you want to see me about?"

Cathy related the events of the afternoon, including the disturbed grave.

David frowned. "When you stumbled across me, I was just returning from a trip down the valley. I sensed something going on, and I thought I could track it down better as a wolf. I had no idea that you were involved." He tugged at his lower lip. "I don't like this. I think I'll have to take a look at this grave, and the old church."

"Tonight?"

"No, not tonight." David stood up, gestured for Bob and Cathy to get up as well. "I'd love to have you guys stay, but I'd feel better if you were back on campus. And I don't like the idea of leaving Linda alone." He looked at his watch. "I'll give you a ride back to school. You guys be careful this weekend, and don't go poking around these things. I'll see what I can find out, and I'll report to you Monday morning in class. How's that?"

He looked questioningly at Bob. He expects me to ask if I can help, Bob thought.

Well, this was one time when I'm content to let him do the work. I think I'm involved in this thing too much already, and I have a feeling I'm going to get deeper into it a lot sooner than I want.

"Fine with me," he said.

He followed David and Cathy to the car, shivering at the cold light of the moon.

How was he going to explain this to Linda?

Chapter Eight

(Mark)

Naturally, Cathy and Bob told the others. And so at Monday morning's class, behind the closed doors of Purnell Hall room 302, David had to demonstrate his remarkable ability.

Mark knew what to expect, but still he was shocked when blond, lanky David turned into a large grey wolf in the blink of an eye. It was even more disturbing when the wolf turned back into naked David. Calmly, as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened, David put his clothes back on and told them what he'd found out over the weekend.

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing. I talked to a few practitioners of the Arts — some felt a stirring of power Friday afternoon, but no one could pinpoint it."

"Did you check out the grave?" Cathy asked.

David nodded. "Still there, the dirt still disturbed. But I couldn't sense anything more to it, and I tried the most sensitive spells I know. A lot of magical energy tied up in the old church, and of course every graveyard has its centers of power. But I'm sorry, Cathy, I didn't uncover any supernatural entities."

"How could there be no trace, after what happened to us

Friday?" Linda said. "I don't understand."

David shrugged. "Really powerful magic might not leave any traces that I can read. I might be looking for the wrong thing. I wish I could catch it in action."

"You *did*, in the Rathskeller," Mark pointed out.

David smiled. "I wasn't prepared to make an objective analysis then. Next time I'll do better."

"What do we do now?" Bob asked.

"Be alert." David wrote on the chalkboard. "This is my phone number...call me if something else happens. No matter when, no matter where. If I can catch whatever this is while it's performing its mischief, then maybe I'll know where to look for an answer." He turned to his book. "I know it was a busy weekend, but I hope you've all read the chapters."

Linda groaned, and the class returned to normalcy.

For the moment.



That afternoon, a distinct cool breeze developed as Mark was driving home. The radio station WIYY was having a Doors festival, and at the top of his lungs Mark sang along with Jim Morrison. By the time he pulled into Amram Court he was happy, the frustrations of his computer science class completely forgotten.

Neither of his parents' cars were in the driveway when he pulled up, and he couldn't prevent a smile from creeping onto his face. Mark had long ago given up all hope of being a dutiful, loving son; he felt guilty, but what could he do? Just make sure that Peter made out okay, and that he and his brother weren't hurt too much.

Peter didn't answer when Mark called for him; Mark checked his brother's room and then looked in the kitchen for a note. There was no note, but Mark found dirty dishes in the sink and a carton of milk still cold on the counter. He took a swig from the carton, grabbed a few cookies from the cookie

jar, and returned the milk to the refrigerator. Then he went out the back door and started down the hill.

At the rear of the Evans backyard was a three-foot wooden fence; beyond that the land fell steeply to the banks of the Patapsco River. The River was about thirty yards wide and two to four feet deep — in good weather Mark could wade across and climb up the opposite bank onto the grounds of the University. Today the water ran swift and muddy, and Mark wouldn't try crossing it on a bet.

As he expected, Peter was down by the water, throwing sticks and rocks into the River. "Hey," Mark called, "How ya doin'?"

"Hi." Peter didn't look up from the water. "There are some fish under these rocks," he said, "And I'm trying to get them to swim away."

Mark knelt next to his brother. Nearly-clear water eddied in a relatively calm pool in the rocks. "I'm not surprised that they don't want to leave. Can you imagine swimming in all that mud?" He peered into the pool, saw a few tiny fish darting here and there.

"One of 'em's that big old catfish," Peter said. "I haven't seen him for weeks."

"What did you do in school today?"

Peter made a face. "In Social Studies we started a unit on careers. I have to do a booklet." He threw another rock into the water. "How am I supposed to know what I'm going to be? I'm just a kid."

Mark laughed. "When you were little you always wanted to be an astronaut."

"That was a long time ago." He looked up into Mark's face, his hair falling into his eyes. It was high time, Mark decided, that Peter had a haircut.

"What are you going to be?"

"I don't know," Mark answered with a shrug.

"You're in college. You gotta know." He frowned. "What kind of job do you get when you major in Comparative

Whatever?"

"I wish I knew."

"Come on, Mark. I could do my report on you. What are you going to be?"

"I honestly don't know, kid." Mark flopped down on the grass and looked across the River. The University bell tower was just barely visible over the trees. "I'm hoping to use my computer background to go into psychic testing and counseling, but I'm not sure."

Peter threw a stick into the water and watched it as it slowly twirled. "Some of the kids at school say that your department works with magic."

"Do they?"

"Yeah. Billy Trummer's brother goes to Patapsco, and he says that you guys play around with all kinds of magic stuff." He concentrated on his dirty tennis shoes. "Bad stuff," he said in a voice that was just above a whisper.

Mark forced a smile. "What, you mean like Dracula, Frankenstein, the Wolfman? That kind of thing?"

"I don't know what I mean." Peter looked at Mark again, and Mark sensed the lad's effort. "Billy's brother said that the stuff you guys fool around with is awful. Like it's against God and all that. And Billy says that you're all going to get in trouble because of it."

Mark slipped an arm around his brother's shoulder. "There are a lot of things that we don't understand about the world, Peter. A lot of people lump all those things together, and they call them 'magic.' Most of those things are just silly superstitions and headlines in those newspapers that Mom reads. Some of the things are really true, but nobody's ever studied them, least not in a systematic way."

"And some of them are bad?"

Mark had to nod. "Some of them are bad. We don't fool around with the bad stuff. Everything we study, everything we learn, is all harmless." That was the first oath of anyone studying the Arts — not to misuse knowledge or power. That

was the statement I signed when I decided to major in Comparative Religion, and it's implicit in all my training.

"You mean...you mean God isn't punishing us because you're playing around with magic?"

"Whatever gave you that idea?"

Peter blushed. "Well, Mom and Dad, and all that. Billy said..."

"Listen, you tell Billy that he's wrong." He sighed. "Look, Peter, suppose someone is majoring in medicine, so that they can be a surgeon. That's good, isn't it?"

"Yeah."

"But if somebody's a surgeon, then they could use their knowledge to kill people, couldn't they?"

"Like the Nazi doctors in war movies. Yeah." Peter frowned. "No real doctor would ever do that."

"Right. The Arts are just the same. No practitioner of the Arts would ever use his ability to hurt people. God gave us the Arts just like He gave us everything else — and if He didn't want us to use them, He wouldn't allow it." Mark shook his head. "And I'll talk to Billy Trummer's brother tomorrow." He hugged his brother. "Come on, how about if we start on our homework? I have some books that might help you decide what career to write about."

"Okay."



After dinner Mark sat down before his Commodore computer, plugged in the modem, and dialled into the Patapsco University computer.

Mark had been interested in computers since his father gave him his first personal computer on his fifteenth birthday. Even before he went to Patapsco University, he hung around the computer science building and picked up what tips he could from the CompSci majors and graduate students. He thought his life complete on the first day of the semester when

he received his first computer account.

He signed on, then used a combination of passwords to gain access to areas of the school computer that were ordinarily barred to common Freshmen. In particular, Mark was interested in the computer's link to various large databases in other parts of the country.

For the next three hours, he scanned two dozen medical databases for information about werewolves, lycanthropy, and related topics. His printer chattered constantly, and soon a long ribbon of continuous-feed paper overflowed his desk and pooled on the floor. He finally halted his search when Peter stuck his head through the door.

"There's a call for you on the basement phone." With a grin, Peter said, "It's a girl."

Mark signed off, shut down his computer, and raced downstairs. Cathy was on the phone.

"I'm sorry I called you on this line, but your number was busy."

"Yeah, I was on-line," he said. "What's up?"

"I'm at the library. I just finished work. Do you think you can come over for a while? There's something I think you ought to see." She lowered her voice. "I've called David and the other guys."

He checked his watch. Eight-fifteen. "Sure, I'll be right over. Hey, I found out a whole bunch of stuff about...David's people."

"Bring it along."

"Where you gonna be?"

"In front of the Special Collections Room."

"Okay. See you when I get there. Don't start without me."

By the time he got there, the others were waiting. Bob and Linda were dressed in the ultra-casual style of resident students on campus: Linda in a leotard and faded jeans, Bob wearing gym shorts, a tee shirt and sandals. David had on slightly better clothes, and Cathy was garbed for work in dark slacks and a light blue blouse.

Bob folded his hands. "All right, the prodigal son is here. What's this all about, Cathy?"

"Come on in." Cathy had the key to the Special Collections Room; she pushed the door open and switched on the lights. The others entered, single-file.

Mark looked around with interest. He had only been here a few times, and it was fascinating and more than a little spooky. Most of the books were in glass cases lining the walls — thousands of decaying volumes in obscure languages, centuries-old books beside popular paperbacks. Display cases held the most rare volumes along with an incredible and gruesome array of magical instruments, Inquisition torture devices, and lithographs big on images of the Devil.

Although the air was fresh, the room breathed of magical power. Strong wards circled the room, amulets hung on the walls, and the very books themselves radiated ancient magic.

"What's up?" David said.

"Look here." Cathy led them to a bare brick wall, where three narrow ceiling-to-floor windows looked out on the Faculty Apartments. She knelt in front of one window, pointed.

At the bottom of the thick glass was a hairline crack. Mark had to look three times to see it, and even then he wiped off his glasses twice.

"So?" He asked.

David waved him quiet, traced the crack with a finger. Where his finger touched, the crack glowed briefly.

David looked up. "You were right, Cathy. Something's trying to break in here."

"What?"

"I don't know. I'm afraid to think about it. So far the wards have held, but..."

Linda frowned. "You don't think there's any chance that it might get in?"

"I don't know." David stood up, crossed to one of the display cases. "I do know that we ought to take more

precautions." He opened the case, took out a gold-and-amber amulet about the size of a large walnut. "Can you guys help me cast a stronger set of wards on the windows?"

Linda looked from face to face, nodded. "Sure."

"Good." He turned the amulet over, passed his hand above it. Faint letters appeared, finely etched into the gold. "The spell is written right here; I'll need three strands of hair to lay across the sills."

Linda shrugged, then with an exaggerated gesture plucked three hairs from her head.

David laid the hairs across the three windows, then took three steps back from the windows. "Join hands in a circle around me," he directed.

Mark put his left hand in Cathy's, his right in Linda's. As soon as the circle was closed, he felt an electric tingle.

David held up the amulet in both hands, facing the windows, and spoke a single word. The feeling of electricity in the circle strengthened.

Eyes fixed on the amulet, David called out a few long words in a language Mark couldn't understand. There was a thunderclap, and the amulet dissolved. When Mark looked closer, he saw a single bit of amber embedded in the brick next to each window pane.

David nodded, and they broke the circle. "As long as the spell is in force, the gems will stay in the wall. Once it's broken or dissolved, the amulet will re-form."

Bob reached out gingerly, laid a finger on one of the amber bits. "It's cold," he reported.

"And it better stay that way," David said.

"Where did you learn that?" Linda asked.

"Graduate students have some privileges. I've spent more time in this room than I like to recall. Couple of years ago, when I was still an undergraduate, Doctor Nacht had me catalog all the items here. I've learned a thing or two." He sighed. "All right, I'm hungry. What say we go to the snack bar for hamburgers — I'll buy."

The idea was a popular one. As Cathy turned off the light and shut the door, Mark saw the three bits of amber glowing dusky yellow in the night. The spell was strong and firm, and it protected the Special Collections Room faithfully.

Against what?

Mark was afraid he'd find out, all too soon.

Chapter Nine

(David)

In the end, David had to go to the faculty. Doctor Faring taught a class right before the Independent Study session that David had inherited from Susan Whitlow; in the few minutes between classes David requested a meeting with Faring and his associate Monroe Quaile.

Both men were free at noon. David met them in Quaile's office, a small crowded space that reeked of incense and other more obscure odors.

Quaile and Faring couldn't have been more different. Monroe Quaile was short, balding and ethereal; Anton Faring was a tall man with salt-and-pepper hair, who would have looked at home in the board room of any major corporation. Both of them had forgotten more about the occult than David would ever know — yet surprisingly, neither fully believed in the Arts that they studied. David had taken great care to hide his identity as a werewolf from both his teachers.

Faring leaned against the door and crossed his arms. "Well, David, you can't be concerned about your thesis, can you? Monroe tells me that your work is excellent."

"That's not why I asked to see you, Doctor Faring."

"Why, then?" Quaile asked, looking over the tops of his

wire-rimmed glasses. "You're the best student the department has ever had, David. After Susan's unfortunate accident, you're the best choice for a teaching position next year. I hope you're not going to tell us that you've decided to switch to another line of work." He laughed.

David forced a chuckle. "No, nothing like that." He frowned. "It's about Susan. I think there was some supernatural involvement in her 'accident.' I think it's still going on."

Quaile laughed again. "David, David, always ready to call in the unexplained." He steepled his fingers, his elbows squarely in the middle of his impeccably-clean desktop. "I admit, I was concerned when Susan died. So I did my own investigations, cast a few of the classic spells. There were no indications of supernatural interference." He shook his head. "I know how tempting it is to make Susan's accident into something more significant...but it was nothing more than a terrible accident."

"But sir — "

Faring raised his hand. "Now, David, I think you can take Doctor Quaile's word for it, no?"

David lowered his head. "I suppose so."

"Good." Faring slipped a chummy arm around David's shoulders. "Monroe, I know you have work to do. David, come to my office and I'll tell you more about what we're planning for next year."

When they were safely in Faring's office, with the door shut, the man gave David a nod. "I'm sorry I had to cut you off in there. Monroe — well, he's scheduled for sabbatical next year, and he should have taken it years ago. I'm afraid he's getting too involved in the Arts...and he believes too much in his own mastery of them."

"Doctor Quaile *is* a master."

"True, of course. But even the greatest master needs a vacation. Monroe is overdue for time off."

David made a gesture of dismissal. "I'm quite sure that

Susan's death wasn't completely accidental, you know."

"That again? Lad, where is your scientific objectivity?"

"Doctor Faring, things have happened..."

Faring frowned. "I don't like to hear you talking this way, David. I've always liked the way you're able to divorce your sense of wonder from your studies. Don't get caught up in all this mysticism."

David sighed. It was no use; Faring wasn't going to give in. "You're right, Doctor. I'm sorry I took up your time."

"Not at all. I'm serious about next year, David. We want you on the faculty."

"I appreciate it, sir. Honestly I do."

Faring stretched out his hand and David took it. "Come back whenever you have problems." Faring opened the door, and David took the hint and left. Out in the hallway he shrugged.

Well, he had to try.

Now it was up to him and the kids...



After her history class on Wednesday, Cathy went to the library with Kevin to study. On the way he took her through the Residents parking lot. With a twinkle in his eye, he showed her a sleek, dark Firebird. "What do you think of it?"

"Nice car," she said, not sure of his point.

Kevin smiled a self-satisfied smile. "It's mine."

"Really? Where'd you get it?"

"Used to be my Mom's. When she died, I...inherited it." He opened the door and Cathy made appreciative sounds.

"I thought Freshman residents weren't allowed to have cars on campus," she said.

"I got a special waiver." He shrugged. "I guess they felt sorry for me. It was delivered this weekend, but I haven't had a chance to show it off until today. What do you think?"

"Great." She touched his hand. "I know it doesn't make up

for your mother, but....”

His face fell. “Yeah, I’d rather have her back than a thousand cars.” She could feel him forcing himself to smile. “But hey, what a car. Right?”

“Right. It’s wonderful.” She looked at her watch. “You said we were going to study chapter fifteen, and there’s only forty-five minutes to go until your German class.”

“Right. Let’s get to the library and get cracking.”

After studying, she walked with him to Stanwick Hall and waved as he entered the German classroom. On her way out, she ran into Mark Evans.

“Hi, Cathy.” Mark waved, then skidded to a halt. “Hey, what are you doing in about an hour?”

“Nothing. Why?”

“Bob’s in Drama and Linda said she has to work on her paper. Do you want to grab a pizza or something? I’m starved. Did you eat?”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Good. Don’t. My car’s in Lot C — meet me there at two, okay?”

“Okay.”

Cathy went to the student center and did some more studying. When the two o’clock bells sounded over the campus, she closed her book and started strolling toward the parking lot. Mark’s car was at the far end of the lot; she hadn’t been waiting ten minutes when he showed up.

“I’m starved,” Mark said, unlocking the car and throwing his books into the back seat. Cathy followed suit, and soon they roared out onto Davis Avenue. “Where do you want to eat?” Mark asked.

Cathy rolled down her window and turned on the radio. “You *did* say something about pizza, didn’t you?”

“Pizza’s fine with me. But no mushrooms.”

“Half mushrooms?”

He considered. “All right, half.”

Cathy smiled. The snack bar in the Student Center served

something that they claimed was pizza, but to her it always brought back memories of awful grade-school cafeteria lunches. "Where are we going?"

They sailed past the trailer park, and Mark gave a tap on his horn. "Just in case David's there," he said with a twinkle in his eyes. "I figured we would go to Sorrento's. They have the best pizza around."

Cathy shrugged. "Fine with me. You know the area." She sat back and let the wind blow against her face. It felt good, even though it was hot as sin. "And cold drinks. With lots of ice."

"Lots of ice, definitely."

When they approached the old church, Cathy noticed a slight frown on Mark's face. She didn't say anything, but she couldn't help looking toward the graveyard. She wasn't surprised when Mark pulled the car off in front of the church.

He gave a self-conscious grin. "I guess I want to take another look at that grave. You want to come along?"

"You bet."

They dodged cars, and then as they entered the graveyard there was a sudden silence. As always in this place, Cathy felt the brooding presence of magical power. Before, it had seemed totally out of her reach, like the ethereal energy of the moon — but now she felt that she could almost hold a hand out and touch whatever magic emanated from this ground.

A few parched weeds grew around the edges of the disturbed grave. Mark bent to the worn headstone and brushed at it, then his frown deepened. "Can you make it out?"

"Not really." The letters were just too eroded.

Mark looked her in the eyes. "You know that spell Dr. Whitlow taught us for reading — the one that helps you concentrate better?"

"Y-yes." It was a simple spell, and Cathy used it often to study. With it, she didn't take nearly as many notes.

"Well?"

She hesitated. She was sure that David didn't want them investigating on their own. No telling what they might turn up.

Mark's face convinced her. "Okay, let's give it a try."

The invocation was an easy one; when it was done, Cathy noticed an improvement in her eyesight. Things were sharper, brighter. She looked again at the headstone, and some of the barely-legible etchings seemed to make sense.

"A date," Mark said.

"Right. I think." She ran her fingers over the sun-warmed stone, tracing forgotten numbers. Then she looked up, puzzled. "Nineteen sixty-seven?"

"That's what it looks like. You're sure it's not *eighteen* sixty-seven?"

She shook her head. "That's a nine if I ever saw one. Mark...why would this stone be so worn if it dates from 1967?"

"I don't know. Can you make out the name?"

Cathy concentrated until her head hurt. "No."

"I can't either. At least we have a date." He stood up and stretched. "Now I'm *really* ready for that pizza."

"Right. And then I think we should call David."

"Fine with me. Let's go."

Back on the road, with the radio blaring, Cathy almost forgot the grave. While Mark made his left turn onto Old Frederick Road, she found a radio station that was playing top forty, and busied herself trying to tune it in. Finally she looked up and saw a black Firebird with Texas plates approaching in the opposite lane.

"That looks like Kevin Judd's car," she said. "His mother left it to him, poor guy."

"Nice car." The Firebird was going at quite a clip; as it went past Cathy glimpsed two people in the front seat. Mark's head spun about, then he slammed on the brakes and cursed.

"What?" Cathy said, alarmed.

"That was Peter in that car!"

Cathy turned to look; the Firebird was turning onto Woodstock, headed toward the school side of the River. "Couldn't be."

Mark turned the car around and set off in pursuit. "What's Peter doing in Kevin's car?" They turned onto Woodstock with a squeal. "Sorry, Cathy, but the pizza will have to wait."

"Don't worry about it."

Over the bridge and past the old church, they caught up with the Firebird. Cathy expected Kevin to turn into Davis Avenue, thus heading for the school; when he didn't, she said, "Damn, where does he think he's going?"

"I don't know, but I want to find out."

The two-lane road was narrow; there wasn't any traffic at this time of day. Mark swung out to the left and passed the Firebird. As he eased back into his lane, he glanced in the rearview mirror. "That's Peter, all right. And your friend Kevin."

Now that he was leading, it was easy for Mark to bring the Firebird to a halt. The two cars pulled onto dirt shoulder and Mark jumped out. Cathy followed almost as quickly.

Mark's brother opened his door slowly and stepped out of the car with a confused look on his face. Kevin stayed in the car, smiling.

"Peter, what are you doing?" Mark said, holding back anger. "You *know* you're not supposed to take rides from strangers."

Kevin coughed. "Don't be mad at Pete, Mark. I saw him walking home from school and I thought I'd give him a ride home. It was the least I could do for the brother of a friend."

Mark stopped, then shook his head. "Home isn't this way."

Kevin's smile didn't waver. "I'm sorry, Pete seemed interested in the car and I guess I wanted to show it off. I didn't mean to get you in trouble, Pete."

"Stop calling him Pete."

Peter spoke up, "I'm sorry, I don't want to cause problems."

Mark gave him a look that Cathy had often given her sister: We'll talk about this later. "All right, Kevin, thanks for the favor. We'll take Peter home now. I appreciate what you were trying to do, but Peter has strict rules about accepting rides."

Kevin spread his hands. "Hey, whatever you say. Sorry." He started up the car, backed a few feet away, then waved. "Bye, Pete." With that, he was gone.

Things were strained in Mark's car on the drive to his house. Peter sat between Mark and Cathy, head down and wringing his hands. Finally, halfway there, Mark gave Peter a brotherly squeeze. "I'm not mad at you, I was just upset. What came over you, kid? You know what we've told you about taking rides from people."

"I know." Peter still seemed a little puzzled. "He called me by name, and I knew he was a friend of yours, but I still wasn't going to do it. Then...I don't know what happened. He smiled, and even though I knew I shouldn't, it didn't seem like it could hurt anything."

"Yeah, well stay away from...." Mark stopped, then gave his brother a stronger look. "How did you know who he was? You've never met Kevin."

"Why, sure, I...." Peter stopped as well. "You're right. I never saw him before today."

Cathy shivered.

Mark couldn't let the point go. "And I know I've never shown him any pictures of you. I don't think I've even told him that I *have* a brother. Cathy?"

"Don't look at me. I haven't told him anything."

"Then where...?"

Now it was Cathy's turn to give the look. We'll talk about this later.

With David and the others.

Suddenly, she knew that a cold drink and a pizza with half-mushrooms wasn't going to be nearly enough....

Chapter Ten

(Bob)

Bob didn't usually get up early on Sundays. But since Susan Whitlow died, nothing had been normal.

He stood under the shower and threw back his head, letting too-hot water strike his face and hoping it would wake him up. His alarm clock had jerked him out of the best dream he'd ever had; now dream-memories faded and ran down the drain with the water.

By the time he got back to his room, towel wrapped around his waist and hair dripping wet, Bob felt ready to face the day.

Linda wasn't here, that was what felt wrong. Lately they'd taken to sleeping together on Saturday nights, cozy in Bob's narrow dorm bed, and then cuddling half the morning away. No cuddling today, that was for sure — this was business.

And I hope it gets solved today, Bob thought. I sure want to get back to normal.

At nine o'clock he was in the dorm parking lot, as instructed. Mark pulled up a few minutes later, with David in the car — they wore matching Patapsco University tee shirts and Bob felt his stomach turn. No one would ever catch *him* in one of those travesties of fashion.

"The girls aren't here yet," he announced, when David glanced at his watch.

"They know they're supposed to be here, don't they?"

Mark said, worried.

David chuckled. "They know. Cathy called to remind me last night." He looked around. "Things never change. This place is dead on Sunday morning."

Bob shrugged. "The Christians are all at church; everyone else is sleeping off last night. There was a frat party in one of the apartments; from what I heard of people coming in, there won't be many survivors." He looked upward, at the bloated sun; it was going to be another hot one today. "Did you bring the stuff you need?"

"I have everything."

"Good." He smiled at Mark. "How about you, buddy? Ready to learn some high-level magic?"

Mark nodded. "Ready."

"Sorry we're late!" Linda and Cathy came running up, Cathy out of breath. Linda had on a halter top and shorts; Bob looked her over with an approving grin. "I couldn't find my key and I didn't want to leave without it."

"Never mind," David said, "You're here now. Let's get going."

The parking lot at Saint Gregory's was full, but further down the hill the ruin of Saint Zachary's was deserted. Far off in the distance, Bob heard the wail of fire sirens, then there was only the muted chirping of locusts. David gave him a leather satchel to carry, and led the way across Old Court Road to the graveyard.

"It's this grave, right?"

Cathy nodded. "It's hard to see now how the dirt was disturbed."

"Never mind, I believe you." David frowned at the headstone, brushed it with his hands. "I'm surprised you even managed to see a date. Are you *sure* this is the one?"

Mark stepped forward. "I'm certain. Try it."

"Oh, I'll try better than that." He held out his hand, and Bob gave him the satchel. "Now don't freak out on me, okay? This isn't going to be pretty." He took a mortar and pestle

from the satchel and sat down before the headstone. "Will you guys cast some wards for me? I don't care to be disturbed or I'll have to start over."

Bob joined hands with Linda and Cathy, and together the four undergraduates spoke the words of the warding spell. At exactly the second when power peaked, they loosed their hands and each one drew a glyph in the air with his hands. The symbols glowed briefly, then faded.

Interested, Bob turned to see what David was doing.

He had mixed dirt from the grave with some scrapings of the headstone; next he took out a fever thermometer and broke it above the bowl. Heavy and bright in the sun, quicksilver poured out and started to soak into the dirt.

"An awkward spell," David said sheepishly.

"As long as it works."

Next, David reached into his satchel and brought out a plastic bag. At first Bob thought it was just a bag filled with water, then he saw a flash of orange and realized that a small goldfish was swimming in the narrow confines.

"This is Aristophocles," David said. "He was the best I could do on short notice."

Linda shook her head. "Oh, ick."

Mark frowned. "I don't understand."

David gave him a sympathetic look. "This spell, unfortunately, requires a sacrifice." He shrugged. "Aristophocles isn't going to last long, anyway — the store I bought him from said that their whole tank had been contaminated with disease. The man wasn't going to sell him to me until I told him it was for a biology lab. I guess he thought I was insane."

"You *are*. That's crazy."

Cathy put a hand on Mark's shoulder. "It's necessary. You know that there are spells like that."

"I know, but why couldn't it be...I don't know, a cockroach or something disgusting?"

"This is the best we can do," David said. He untied the bag

and started pouring out the water.

Bob had to help him keep Aristophocles in the sacrificial bowl. He noticed, however, that Mark kept his head turned during the process.

When the deed was done, Bob thought he felt a flash of magical energy; for an instant it was as if a strong wind tore the curtain of their wards, and heat lightning flashed in the clear sky. Then things were back to normal, and the feeling ended before he could be sure it had actually occurred.

"Watch," David directed. With a few unintelligible words, he sprinkled the mixture in the bowl over the headstone. Blood-red liquid ran in rivulets across the eroded marble, then settled into the faint channels of carved letters and numbers. Slowly, the headstone became easier to read.

As Cathy and Mark had said, the date was indeed "1967." Bob expected to see another date...but there was just the single one.

Then the rest of the stone came clear, like a polaroid picture emerging from a blank square of film. There was just one name, and the date.

JUDD, 1967.



The crumbling walls of Saint Zachary's seemed comforting and protective. David sat astride one of the fallen roof-beams, dangling his feet above weeds that filled the basement of the old church. It was almost like class — the four undergrads faced David, sitting on or leaning against the demolished west wall. The entrance loomed stark against the blue sky, two large holes where stained-glass windows had once been fitted.

"It's just a coincidence," Linda said. "There are a lot of Judds."

"I'm not so sure," David answered. "Cathy, what do you know about your friend Kevin? Especially his family

background.”

“He was raised around here.” Cathy wrinkled her brow. “His father lived nearby...I don’t know what’s become of him. Kevin lived with his mother in Texas before he came here.” She spread her hands. “I don’t know any more.”

“When you say he came from around here...you mean this area. Granite, Woodstock, the Patapsco Valley.”

“That’s the impression I got.” She shook her head. “But what does it mean? What connection does it have with Kevin?”

“Maybe none. Linda, you could be right. The name is a common one.” David lowered his voice. “But look at what we’ve been through.” He ticked off on his fingers. “Susan’s death. That weird incident in the Rathskeller. Paul Mazeika nearly choking to death. Mark’s brother in a car without knowing why he’d accepted a ride. Three times out of four, your friend Kevin was there.”

“And we don’t know about Dr. Whitlow,” Bob said. “He might have been there *then* as well.”

“It still doesn’t make sense,” Cathy said. “What could be happening with him?”

“And,” Mark said, “What are we going to do about it?”

David jumped down from the beam, dusted off his hands. “I know one thing — we need more information. And I know just where we can get it.” He glanced at his watch. “If we’re lucky, nine o’clock Mass at Saint Gregory’s is just about over.”



Father Platero was a stooped, bald man in his sixties — but his voice was strong and his movements steady. Bob decided that he liked the old priest as soon as the man invited them into the rectory for lemonade. By ten o’clock, the temperature was over eighty and getting hotter.

“So you want to know about the cemetery,” Father Platero said, rubbing his hands together as if warming them before a

fire. "What is it, a class assignment?"

"In a way," David said. "We're trying to learn for... a friend of ours. We think one of the graves belongs to his family."

The priest scratched behind his ear. "All the records at Saint Zachary's were destroyed in the fire. It's been seventeen years this February; don't know if I can remember back that far." He laughed. "The brain is the first thing to go, you know." His eyes twinkled. "What's your friend's name? I'll see if I can remember."

"Judd."

"Judd...Judd. Do you have any dates to go along with it?"

"Just one — 1967."

"Judd. Nineteen sixty-seven. Hmmm. You say there was just one date?"

"That's it."

"Let me think." Father Platero sipped his lemonade, then set down the glass and snapped his fingers. "I remember now. A young couple, name of Judd...they lost a baby. Stillborn, I believe. I performed the funeral myself. Didn't know them too well, but they were local. Came to Mass every so often — but after the funeral, they were steady. Went on about, oh, two years." He shook his head. "Then they stopped coming. Got too busy with their other little one, I suppose." He sighed. "Few years later, the husband showed up at church again. It was right after Agnes hit...oh, I suppose that was back in '72. The whole valley was pretty much devastated, and lots of folks were turning to the Lord for help."

Mark piped up, "I was six. I remember that we had to go to the school one night, and Dad was afraid the house would get washed away."

"Lot of folks lost everything. I guess that might have happened to this Judd fellow. Anyway, he came to Mass a few weeks, then disappeared again."

David leaned forward. "I don't suppose you remember any first names?"

"Not a one."

"Not even the baby?"

The old priest took another sip of lemonade. "Didn't have a name. Poor thing wasn't even baptized."

There was a minute of silence, then Cathy spoke. "You said the Judd couple had another little one. I don't suppose you know *his* name?"

"Can't remember it. But I can see his little face as clear as if it was yesterday, smiling over his mother's shoulder as they left the church. Had the brightest red hair you've ever seen. A little cherub, that one was."

"I don't suppose his name was Kevin?"

Father Platero spread his hands. "I wish I could help you, but I honestly don't remember. I had three hundred parishioners even then...and I can't remember the names of half the *regulars*."

David stood. "That's okay, Father, I think you've given us enough information. At least we can carry it on from here."

As he showed them to the door, Father Platero gripped David's shoulder and faced him straight on. "Young fella...if there's any trouble...if you need help...remember that I'm here. I may be an old man, but I'm still a servant of God."

Bob shivered, and wondered how much the old priest knew. His own family didn't go to church, and Bob had always felt a little uncomfortable in houses of religion. Could the priest sense an aura of magic around David? Did he see, for example, that David was a werewolf and a sorcerer?

David bowed his head. "I'll remember that, Father. I...I'd like your blessing, if I may."

"Of course." The priest muttered some words and made motions with his hands, and Bob felt a little more peaceful. It was almost like David casting a spell.

Back in the car, David just shook his head. "If you don't mind, Mark, I'd like another look at the gravestone. Now that the spell has had some time to work, maybe we'll see something that we missed before."

"Right."

At first glance the stone was back to its original worn condition, a bit stained now with David's potion. But when David waved his hands over it and spoke a single word of command, the former images sprang into sharp contrast.

JUDD, 1967.

What could it mean?

Standing completely still before the grave, David took out a pocket knife and pricked his thumb. He squeezed it, then let a fat drop of blood fall on the stone. Then he lowered his hands and passed them over the marble surface.

"This is an oracular spell," David whispered. "Coupled with the original one, it should reveal any secret or hidden names, or any..."

He stopped, because the name and date had vanished. The headstone was like a pool of murky water, then ripples raced across the stone surface and briefly spelled an unfamiliar word: "ZWILLING."

Then, once again, it was as if heat lightning danced in the sky for an instant, and the headstone was just a stone. David drew back his hands slowly.

"What does it mean?" Linda asked. "What's a Zwilling?"

"I don't know," David said. "But I'm going to find out."

Bob shivered. It didn't look like things were going to get back to normal very soon.

Chapter Eleven

(David)

Volumes were missing from the library. David stood by the card catalog and frowned. All the standard references that might have explained the word “Zwilling” — all were missing the crucial volumes. Even not-for-loan books had vanished from the shelves.

This, David decided, was no longer funny.

The word was a legitimate one, he discovered from the foreign-language dictionaries. In German it meant “twin.” But where was the sense in that? There had to be another meaning, something in magic or folklore that would shed some light on David’s problem.

In desperation, he signed out the key to the Special Collections Room and immersed himself in old manuscripts for five solid hours. Finally a librarian knocked on the door and apologetically told him that they were closing. Empty-handed, he got into his car and drove back to his trailer, scowling all the way.

The clutter that met him was discouraging. With a shrug, he took off his shirt, switched on the air conditioner, and started putting things away. The television tried its best to entertain him, but he paid no attention to it.

One thing was certain...he was on the right track. The absence of necessary books told him that right away. Whatever the Zwilling was, it was one step ahead of him.

Something supernatural, something connected with the University. What? David threw some papers into the trash can and shook his head. There was magic enough in the land, ancient mystical energy beating like a healthy pulse down the length of the Patapsco valley...but it simply wasn't the kind of magic that went on killing sprees or disturbed graves. The River bore a benign magic that had always served as a gentle, supportive undercurrent to operations in the Comparative Religion department.

Now something was twisting that energy, using it for destruction and fear. And judging by the crack in the Special Collections Room window, this something wanted the arcane knowledge and deeper power that waited there.

In spite of himself, David shivered.

I don't know enough.

And I'm the only one to stop this Zwilling, whatever it is.

Eventually the trailer was straightened up, the dishes washed and put away, and David couldn't keep his eyes open any longer. He stripped off his clothes and crawled into bed, pulling only a sheet over himself. As soon as the light was out and soft moonglow illuminating his bedroom, he fell asleep at once.

David dreamed that he walked the ground of the University at night, with clouds hiding the moon and stars. It was gloomy, and all the lights were out. He found himself in Bob Toland's dorm, but there were no students in the rooms — everything was bare and lifeless. The Student Center was a vast dark cavern that echoed his footsteps, the gym was hung with cobwebs and dust, and the pool was covered with algae and slime.

Moving with dream-swiftness, he was suddenly in the library. The shelves were toppled, books lay all about in random piles, and the door of the Special Collections Room

hung open, half off its hinges. When he looked in, he found that the room itself had been ransacked — windows broken, loose pages flapping in a decidedly putrid breeze.

Desperate, now, he ran through the campus, calling for his friends, the other members of the Department, anyone at all. He stumbled downhill and found himself on the banks of the Patapsco. Trees hulked around him, and in the distance sounded an eerie cry that belonged to no animal he dared name.

In despair, David dropped to all fours and gave voice to the age-old howling lament of the wolf.

In answer, there was a sound like thunder, and he turned in horror to see the River itself rising against him. A vast wave, twenty feet high, moved downriver with all the violence of a hurricane...and David was rooted to the spot, unable to do anything but watch the approach of destruction.

The wave crashed, and instead of water David realized that it was blood, the blood of all the students and all the teachers, blood spilled by a nameless evil thing that he, David, had failed to stop....

Screaming, he woke in his own bed. The moon had set and it was dark; only the glow of his bedside clock was visible. He waited a few moments, working up the courage to turn on the light — when he did, he found nothing amiss.

A dream, that was all.

David pulled the sheet around him and turned off the light. Then, on second thought, he stretched out and made the mental effort necessary to change form. There was the usual moment of extreme agony, then the peace of wolf-form.

Curled up in his bed, the sheet casually draped across his hindquarters, David slept.



The next morning, he knew what to do. The four undergraduates awaited him anxiously in Purnell Hall room

302; they were disappointed when he told them that he had learned nothing new.

"But," he said, "I know where to go. Cathy, you're the only one who has a class right after this, correct?"

"History, right."

David nodded. "You'll have to get it from Linda, then. The rest of you, come with me when class is over. We might get some answers yet." He sighed. "All right, in case you guys have forgotten, this is a seminar on mystery cults. Linda, you were supposed to do some research on the spells used by the Delphic oracle — what did you find out?"

Linda managed to look bored as she opened her notebook. "Johnson hinted that the spells were variations on the sixth standard divination spell, but...."

Soon enough the class was over. Cathy scurried to her History class, and David led the others at a more leisurely pace.

"Where are we going?" Bob asked, in a tone that made it sound more like a demand.

"To the one person who can tell us what Zwilling means. Your German teacher, Mark — Frau Zunge."



David hadn't seen Gretchen Zunge for a good handful of years, since his own days as an undergraduate. Then as now, she was one of the more popular faculty members; he kept intending to drop by and pass the time of day, but one thing after another got in the way, and...

He made himself a vow that he would do better in the future, fully aware that he would probably not keep his promise.

He knocked on her office door, and her throaty, cheery voice answered at once, "Come in!" As David and his students entered, Frau Zunge looked up from her desk and her face lit up.

“Goodness, to what do I owe the pleasure of all these young people? Come in, come in.” She waved at Mark. “Sit down, Herr Evans, and make some room. I am sorry it is so cramped in here, an old lady keeps too much clutter.” Frau Zunge moved her wheelchair back from her desk and gestured to Linda. “Here, fraulein, stand next to me. Good.”

As far as David knew, no one had ever discovered exactly what condition had withered Frau Zunge’s legs and kept her in a wheelchair. Some said it was a nerve disease, others whispered tales of injuries suffered in the war. In truth, it didn’t matter — after ten minutes in her company, her chair was so natural that the visitor began to feel incomplete without one. She had such an infectious enthusiasm for life, that even students she failed loved her.

David leaned against a dark wooden filing cabinet, and Frau Zunge looked at him with a trace of sadness in her clear blue eyes. “Let me express my sorrow about Doctor Whitlow’s death,” she said. “It must be awful for you, Herr Galvin.”

He smiled. “Thank you. You called me ‘David’ when I was in your class.”

“But now you are not a student, no?” She waved her hands. “No matter, I will call you David again.” She looked at the others. “And you must call me Gretchen.” Then, with a twinkle in her eye, she said to Mark, “Not you, of course. Not until you are out of my class. We mustn’t have rumors of fraternizing with the instructors, yes?” She laughed, and Mark laughed with her. After a moment, everyone joined in. Even dour-faced Linda was beginning to warm to the old woman.

Frau Zunge clasped her hands before her on the desk. “But what can I do for you, David? It is not a social call that brings the future of the Comparative Religion Department to my room.” She cocked her head, inviting him to answer.

David took a deep breath. “I’ve run across something in research...a term that I don’t recognize. I was hoping you

might know something about it.”

“Ah, I know many stories from the old country. Doctor Faring is always after me to write a book, but who is interested in the old stories of a boring old woman, eh? What is this term you do not know?”

“Have you ever heard of something called a Zwilling?”

She closed her eyes, then reopened them. “It is German for “twin,” but then you know that, else you would not be here.”

“Isn’t there some other meaning?”

She patted Linda’s hand. “Excuse me, child.” She rolled her chair back another foot and leaned back in it. “This is a strange thing that you ask me about, David. Some people will tell you that it is folklore, just another silly German story, like vampires or werewolves.” Her penetrating eyes met his on the last word, and he shivered.

She knows, he thought. And she knew even when I was her student, years ago.

But the knowledge is safe with her.

“We deal with the old stories all the time,” David said. “We know that they often contain...some truth.”

She nodded. “Then I will tell you what I know.” A breath. “Zwilling means twin, as I have said. And there is a dark side to the word.” Her voice was hypnotizing; David felt himself being lulled into a half-trance. “Sometimes a child will have an unborn twin — one who died, or who never managed to develop properly at all. This is not that uncommon, even today.” She took another breath. “Most of the time, the unborn soul is simply taken back to where it came from, and that is the end of the matter. But there are times when the spirit cannot go back, when it is caught in this world, entwined with the soul of the twin who lived.”

She shifted in her chair, spread her arms. “Again, it does not matter. Often the two spirits become one. Or the unborn one stays about its twin, as a guardian angel, perhaps, or a voice of conscience.” Her voice lowered, and David found himself leaning closer to hear. “But once in a long while, the

unborn spirit goes bad. It desires life, and becomes jealous of its sibling. Then it is as if a dark angel hovers over the living twin. As years go on, the Zwilling becomes more twisted, more desirous of the life that was denied it. In the end, it may try to destroy its twin...or it may seek power, so that it can actually take the place of its twin."

Linda gasped, then covered her mouth.

"C-can anything be done to stop it?" Mark asked.

"Of course." Frau Zunge laughed, breaking the tension that had gripped them all. "But you know more of that than I do. I am only a poor language teacher, not a practitioner of the Arts."

David stood up straight, gave Frau Zunge his hand. "Thank you, Gretchen. You've helped us out a lot."

She narrowed her eyes. "You say that you need to know this for research? You have run across the term in one of your books and you wish to know what it means, yes? Purely academic interest?"

David nodded, not trusting himself to lie out loud.

Frau Zunge patted Linda's hand again, then released it. "I am glad I could help you. And if you need me...for anything...I am here."

"Thank you."

They filed out of the office. Just before David left, he heard her whisper, "David?"

"Yes?"

She made a sign of warding, one of the simplest spells that any practitioner learned. "Good luck."

"Thank you."

He closed the door, then leaned against it, feeling weak.

"What do we do now?" Bob asked.

David looked at his watch. "You three have classes to go to. And...I've got to get to the library. There must be something in the Special Collections Room that can help us."

"I hope so," Linda said.

"You and me both."

Chapter Twelve

(Linda)

Midterm exams kept everyone busy, and it wasn't until Wednesday that David was able to follow up the conversation with Frau Zunge.

That morning, Linda was surprised when Cathy demanded to come along. "Don't you have to go to History?"

Cathy shook her head. "Nothing important today. And...I can't face Kevin until I know for sure what's going on."

"All right, but it's your own neck."

Linda yawned all through Doctor Faring's seminar. The class was billed as an investigation of folklore and traditions involving the "White Goddess" of the Celts and other ancient peoples...but in the last few weeks it had turned into a seminar on Welsh poetry. Linda couldn't care less about the Goddess' appearance in literature — she wanted to learn some good, honest magic that she could use later in life.

Faring caught her yawning and, after the third time, gave her a warning frown; she sat up straighter and fought to look attentive. But she couldn't help doodling little gravestones in her notebook.

Damn it, they were on the verge of something really fascinating — a challenge that would take all their energy to

meet — and she was sitting here listening to a stuffy old man spouting off stale, over-chewed ideas from thirty-year-old books. No wonder the Department had such a reputation for boredom!

And Cathy, as usual, looked perfectly attentive — probably having the time of her life. This sort of thing was right down Cathy's alley: dull, studious work bearing no relevance to the real world. In an earlier age, Cathy would have gone into a nunnery. Today, she would probably get her Ph.D. in Comparative Religion, and spend her life writing scholarly papers for obscure little journals.

Not for Linda. She and Bob had not quite decided what they were going to do when they were finished school — but they were agreed that it would have nothing to do with universities or academia. She had dreams of opening a consulting firm, an exclusive little operation that would deal in questions of magic. Nothing illegal or immoral, of course — no soap companies making deals with the Devil or computer-dating concerns using love potions in their envelope-flap glue. She wasn't sure exactly *what* kind of clients she pictured...she just knew that they would be there.

One thing for sure, she thought, looking at her fingernails...a study of the Arts leads to a concern for the good of humanity. Look at what other graduates had become: priests, government advisors, ambassadors, scientists, physicians — the list was short but impressive. So far as she knew, not *one* graduate of the Department was using the Arts to win heavy in the lottery, or make a fortune in industrial espionage, or any of a dozen other shady dealings she could think of.

As a matter of fact, practitioners of the Arts generally —

Faring closed his book with a perceptible yet controlled slam, and stood up stiffly. "That's it for today. I certainly hope that you will all find it within yourselves to be a little more attentive next class — especially since we will be having a quiz on today's lecture. Good day."

As soon as he was gone, Mark leaned back and clasped his hands to his head. "That's it, I'm ruined. Did anybody take notes?"

"Ha!" Bob said. "Who can take notes, with all that's going on? Linda?"

"Don't look at me," she said, even though that was just what they were doing. "How about you, Cathy?"

Cathy blushed. "They're not complete, but I think I got the gist of what he was saying."

Bob nodded. "Well," he said, in an imitation of Faring's stentorian tones, "Perhaps we can find it within ourselves to get together for a study session some time before next Monday. Or we're all dead meat."

"Let's see, Friday is midterm holiday," Linda said. "We'd better do it tomorrow night. How about our room? Mark, can you make it?"

"I'll be there, all right."

"Good."

David appeared at the door carrying his leather satchel and looking like a law school student in his grey suit jacket and uncharacteristic tie. He looked at the faces, and then shrugged. "All right, I give up. What's going on?"

Mark sighed. "Quiz Monday in Faring's class."

"Oh. I see." David smiled. "Then I guess none of you are in the mood for class today? How about if we go down to the computer center instead?"

"The computer center?" Linda asked.

"That's right. Mark, I want to know some things about our friend Kevin Judd. And you can probably find them out for me."

"I'll give it a try."

The computer center, in the basement of the Helbran Science Center, was as white and antiseptic as a dentist's office. Desks bearing white clamshell terminals lined the walls, and three massive printers stood in their own alcoves at one end of the room. Among the usual messages on the

bulletin boards — “Nuclear Freeze Forum”, “Typing by Debbie” and the inevitable magazine subscription ads — were notices like “ACCOUNTS NOT PROPERLY SIGNED OFF WILL BE TERMINATED” and “THE WORD OF THE SYSOP IS LAW” as well as the more helpful schedules of hours and classes.

This early in the morning, only two students were in the computer room. Mark sat down at a desk far away from them, and the others gathered chairs around him. David sat right next to him, right on top of the grey screen.

“Use the Department account,” David said, handing Mark a slip of paper. Mark’s fingers flew over the keyboard, and pale blue letters zipped across the screen. Whatever it was that he was doing, Mark was good at it.

“What do you want to know?” Mark asked, fingers poised.

“First, where was he born?”

Mark frowned for a second, then bent to his work. “I can’t get into his academic records, but I can tie into the Vital Records database. Hold on, it’ll take a minute or two.” After a few seconds, he looked up and said to no one in particular, “Anybody know how old he is?”

“Eighteen,” Cathy answered.

Mark mumbled to himself, then pointed triumphantly at the screen. “There we go. Kevin Anthony Judd, born March 16, 1967. He was born in Baltimore — at Granville Pattison Memorial Hospital. That’s right downtown.”

“Good,” David said. “Now I want to look at his medical records. Can you do that?”

Mark slid his chair back. “Medical records?! Are you kidding? They have better security than banks. Nobody can get into medical records.” He sighed, and turned back to the terminal. “I might be able to get a printout of his birth certificate through Vital Records...”

“Better than nothing. Give it a try.”

As Mark worked, Linda looked around the computer room. She didn’t understand most of the stuff she saw, and

that bothered her. She didn't like knowing that there were things she couldn't understand.

"Isn't this weird?" Bob said, gesturing around the room. "Using computers to track down supernatural creatures. I wonder what Doctor Faustus would think?"

David grinned. "I think he'd probably be right in the middle of the movement. There's nothing new in this — Duke University used computers in their ESP studies, and that was a long time ago." He lowered his voice. "I wonder if we could use them to do simple spells?"

Mark looked up. "With machines like this, who needs magic?" He pressed a button, and one of the printers leapt into action. "The birth certificate is coming in on the laser printer right now." He went to the printer, tore off a sheet of paper, and proudly handed it to David.

Linda looked over David's shoulder. It was a perfect copy of a birth certificate, down to the curlicues and flourishes around the edges. Only the tiny footprints were distorted by the computer print. "That's scary," Linda said.

"Look," David said, pointing. "Here's the name of the doctor — Anthony Lamakis." He put the paper down in front of Mark. "Can you find out if he's still around here?"

"I can try. There's a directory of medical professionals in the area — I'm not sure how easily I can tie into it."

"Give it a try," David encouraged.

"What good will this do us?" Bob said, leaning against the wall with arms crossed. "Suppose we find out where this doctor is — then what?"

"Then we talk to him," David said. "If Kevin Judd had an unborn twin, who would know better than the doctor who delivered him?"

"I don't know." Linda brushed her hair back. "How is he going to remember one baby eighteen years ago?"

David shrugged. "Otherwise we don't have anything. You heard Mark — there's no chance he can get into Kevin's medical records."

"And I don't think we'll be able to locate his father to ask *him*," Cathy said. "It's worth a try."

Mark looked up. "There's no Anthony Lamakis listed on staff at any hospital in the area."

David frowned. "Is it possible that he's retired? Or not a doctor anymore?"

"Anything's possible. Maybe he's dead. Or moved away."

"How do we find out?"

Mark tapped on the terminal some more. "I can do a search through the *Sunpapers* database. If there's an obituary, or any other news about him, we could catch it that way."

"Go ahead."

"Easy to say, but not easy to do." Mark sighed and bent once more to his work.

It was fully a half hour before he had results. "No wonder we couldn't find him. He *was* at Pattison Hospital all right. But twelve years ago he lost his license to practice because of unethical behavior. Something about divulging patient records during a court trial."

"Where is he now?"

"I did a check on the phone book — he's still in town. Lives on Clinton Street, down off of Eastern Avenue. I have a phone number if you want it."

"Thanks." David looked at the others. "I know you all want to come — so what's on your schedules for today? When do you finish your classes?"

"I'm in Drama until three," Bob said. "Cathy, do you have to work at the library tonight?"

Her face fell. "Yes. Until eight."

David nodded. "All right. I'll get in touch with this guy and see if we can talk to him tonight." He picked out Linda with his eyes. "Call me this afternoon and I'll know more. All right?"

"Okay."

"Mark, we can use your car? It'd be a little crowded in mine...."

"Sure. Are we done here?"

"Far as I know." David grinned. "Anyone else have any questions for the oracle?" When no one answered, he nodded to Mark. "We're done."

"Good." Mark typed some more, then moved back from the terminal.

"Get to your next classes, then," David told them. "And hopefully I'll see you again tonight."



The houses on Clinton Street were all two- and three-story rowhouses of dark grey stone, with lots of projecting cornices and marble stoops. It was a warm night, and it seemed to Linda that the entire population of the neighborhood was out on the sidewalks, or lounging on the front steps. These were mostly working-class people; balding fat men in white tee shirts with cans of Bud or National Bohemian, equally-chubby women in flowered house dresses working on their fifth cigarette of the evening. Children were everywhere, on roller skates and skateboards, or just running in between the parked cars. All in all, it was a friendly-looking area — but not one that Linda would choose for herself.

Doctor Lamakis' living room was even worse than a college professor's, Linda thought. Floor-to-ceiling bookcases were packed three deep with medical tomes, and a stack of journals totally concealed a small table in the corner. Almost as if he had never given up being a doctor. The furniture was old and worn: an easy chair, a nondescript lump of a couch, and a few stained dining room chairs piled with newspapers and old issues of *TV Guide*.

Lamakis himself was a little old man in his sixties. His white hair thinning and he looked distinctly uncomfortable in his business suit. His voice was thin and heavily accented, and he chewed on a foul-smelling cigar the whole time they were in his office.

After introductions, David said, "We're looking for information about a friend of ours. It's...well, it's for a kind of hazing stunt, and we thought it would be neat to have something from the doctor who delivered him."

Lamakis coughed. "I would be glad to help you, my friend. What can it cost me now? But I've brought thousands of babies into this world. I can't be sure that I'll remember yours." He waved the cigar like a scepter. "Tell me about him."

"His name's Kevin Judd, and he was born at Pattison Hospital."

"Yes, yes, well, you've not managed to narrow it down much. Can you be more specific?"

"He was born on March 16, 1967 — we're pretty sure his mother's name was Angela and...."

Doctor Lamakis leaned back in his chair. "She was a large woman, dark-haired and unpleasantly loud. Child screamed from the moment I delivered him. I remember."

Linda narrowed her eyes. "How can you be sure...?"

"Because, young lady, your friend Kevin chose to make his first appearance on my twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. At six-fifteen in the evening, as I recall...I was at a show with my wife, and your friend ruined what was to be a wonderful evening. Mary never forgave me that night. I assure you, I remember *everything* about that delivery."

"Then you'll remember," David took a breath, "If there were any complications?"

"How could you know that?"

"Something Kevin once said," David lied. "What happened?"

"There were two placentae. A growth on the lad's back...two days later we had to perform surgery. The undeveloped body of a twin, connected by flaps of skin on the back. I was sure we would lose the baby."

"But you didn't."

"Of course not."

“What happened to the twin?”

Lamakis waved indecisively. “No idea. Woman brought her priests in, there was a funeral.” He took his cigar from his mouth and regarded the wet, sloppy end. “The thing was never really alive — I’d say it hadn’t survived past the second month. Tried to tell her that. Tried to make her satisfied with the baby she *did* have.” He shook his head. “Woman insisted on mourning.”

“What happened then? Did you see Kevin later?”

“I’m afraid there’s nothing more to tell. After what happened, she refused to have me as her obstetrician. Went to another hospital, I have no idea where. And good riddance, I said.”

David stood, and the others followed. “Thank you, Doctor. You’ve given us enough information.”

“If you see the kid, send him to me. I want to look at my handiwork.”

“I’m sorry?”

“Scars. It’s been nearly twenty years — I want to see how my scars have developed. I was careful with him...should me nothing more than two lines on his back, almost invisible.”

“I’ll tell him. Thank you again, Doctor.”

On the ride back to school, everyone was silent. Linda couldn’t help a feeling of apprehension. The old lady was right, she thought. Kevin Judd has a Zwilling chasing after him.

And we’ve got to stop it....

The lights of the interstates were left far behind as Mark drove out Old Frederick Road and then made his right turn onto Woodstock Road. Past farmland, the road began to drop as it raced down to the Patapsco valley. Linda hated this road — it was narrow and filled with curves, and she was always afraid that the car was going to go out of control or something.

Halfway down the hill, with the Woodstock Bridge ahead and beyond it, the old church, the engine coughed and Linda

gripped the seat with white-knuckled hands.

"Uh-oh," Mark said.

Bob forced a chuckle. "I don't think any of us wants to hear that right now, buddy."

"I can't help it. I swear, it feels like — " The car bucked, and red lights flashed on the dashboard. Mark coasted to a stop and turned on his emergency flashers. He tried to start the car, but the engine just ground helplessly.

"This isn't funny," Linda said.

David, in the front seat, turned to look at her. "Let's not panic. The Bethel Inn is ahead, we can always go in there and call for help."

"Right," Linda said, throwing up her hands. "Walk right in between the rednecks and the bikers, up to the bar where Bluebeard the Pirate is pouring Old Rot-gut. 'Excuse me, sir, I'm a helpless co-ed who's car is broken down a mere hundred yards away.' No, thank you."

"What do you think it is, Mark?"

"I don't know. I'm going to have to take a look. There's a flashlight in the glove compartment...thanks."

"I don't like this," Linda persisted, as Mark got out and opened the hood. Bob wormed his way past her and went to look also.

"Don't worry," Cathy said. "We'll survive."

Linda met David's eyes. "What kind of spell can we use here?"

"I'm not sure that...."

"Come on, David. We find out that Kevin is the source of our troubles, and here we are near that grave with our engine out. It's not just coincidence. I wouldn't be surprised if a runaway truck..." she stopped, dread gripping her stomach.

"I wish you hadn't said that," Cathy remarked, turning to look out the rear window.

Far away from up the hill, there was the rumbling sound of a massive engine, and then the blaring noise of a truck horn.

Linda didn't wait to see the headlights. "Get in the car!"

she screamed.

Bob looked up, his face puzzled for a second. Then he touched Mark on the arm. "Let's go."

Mark slammed the hood and the two boys piled into the front seat. "Put it in neutral," David said. "We can coast down the hill."

"Hurry!" Linda said. Far up the hill, she saw lights flash and then turn as the oncoming truck went around a curve.

Mark needed no encouragement. He pulled off the parking brake and the car started to drift. Gaining speed, it rolled toward the bridge as there was another horn blast from behind.

The truck was getting closer too quickly.

"Hold on!" Mark shouted, gripping the wheel hard. They hit the railroad tracks and everyone bounced high, then they were on the bridge and losing speed.

"You can turn off next to the church," David said, pointing.

Linda looked behind and screamed. A huge eighteen-wheeler had just negotiated the last turn, and was swooping down toward them like a speeding express train. Even as she watched, the truck hit the railroad tracks and rumbled across.

Going far too fast, Mark's car hit the dirt apron next to the church and skidded. David threw open his door and fell out, rolling. Linda threw her arms up as tall weeds came toward them fast, and then she looked to see the truck's cab and the frightened face of the driver only twenty feet behind them.

A Word echoed through the night like a flash of lightning, making Linda's hair stand on end with the sudden release of magical energy. For just an instant the whole structure of the old church glowed, then the glow raced forth and splattered against the truck.

Five feet from Mark's back bumper, the truck stopped. And suddenly, the night was quiet once again, as if nothing had happened.

Cathy and Bob were the first ones out of the car. The truck driver started his engine and pulled away, driving up the

road toward the school; Mark turned the key and his own engine roared to life as if it had never stopped.

When Linda managed to get out of the back seat, David was sitting on the ground with Cathy and Bob on either side of him looking concerned. He looked up, and gave a wan smile.

"I didn't...expect that spell to work," he said. "I guess it was...the church."

"Or another warning," Linda said, fighting to regain her composure.

"That's it," David said, with a hostile glance across the road toward the graveyard. "Now that we know what this thing is, and who it's after, we're going to stop it."

"How?"

David stood, walked to the car. "I'll figure something out," he said. "Come on, let's get back."

Linda shook her head, crawled into the car.

She didn't like this, not one bit.

Chapter Thirteen

(Bob)

Bob lay still, listening, as the room spun around him.

It had been a mistake, he decided, to go to the Drama Department Midterm party. The music was loud and the beer plentiful, and Linda hadn't helped by casting a glamour over the evening before they even started. Before he knew it, Bob's brain was totally fried and he was having a wonderful time.

And now he was paying for it.

Across the room, Mark's slow, deep breathing was punctuated by an occasional quiet snore. There had been no question of the younger boy driving home, not when he'd nearly matched Bob beer-for-beer; as soon as Cathy and Linda dropped them off at Bob's room, Mark fell into his sleeping bag and happily passed out. It would be midafternoon, Bob estimated, before he would hear from Mark.

Scratch, scratch, scratch.

There it was — the sound that had awakened him. Bob lifted himself up on an elbow, swaying unsteadily, and peered into the darkness. His eyes didn't want to focus, and in the pit of his stomach was an uncertain feeling that seemed to suggest that a trip to the bathroom might be a good idea. He ignored his stomach and held his breath.

Scratch, scratch.

Bob shivered. Something was moving in the wall next to him.

“Mark?”

Mark didn't answer — he was dead to the world. Cautiously, Bob turned on the light.

Nothing. Bed, desk, bureau and bookshelves, and the closet half-open; Mark curled up beneath the window. Otherwise he saw nothing.

Bob pressed his ear against the wall and waited. Confused images of the party, mixed with the day's classes, pulsed through his mind like debris-laden waves on the seashore. With a phantom memory, he felt Linda's lips against his and her arms around him, and he sank unknowingly into sleep.

Scratch, scratch, scratch.

He bolted awake, and was sorry. His head spun, and his stomach let him know that it was displeased. Swallowing, he kept his viscera under control and looked around.

It was dark...had he turned out the light? He couldn't remember.

Scratch, scratch. The sound was close, right next to him — like something clawing at the wall, trying to get through...

Stop it, Bob told himself. With a trembling hand, he reached out and turned on the light again.

Still nothing.

He thumped the wall gently, then knocked on it more solidly. There was no response.

An animal, of course. A squirrel, most likely, come in through the attic and trapped in the space between the walls. Two years ago a skunk had got itself trapped the same way in Kolton Hall, and residents had to move out for a week while the offending animal was found and disposed of. The rodent would probably find its own way out — it was just scared and panicking in the dark.

The room was spinning; Bob closed his eyes and held onto the bed. Should he wake up the R.A. and tell him? Better not,

he thought — Dave had been at the party was was probably in worse shape than anyone tonight.

When he opened his eyes again, his stomach rolled, and he knew that he had to get to the bathroom. He grabbed his bathrobe and stumbled out the door.

When his stomach had emptied itself, he felt better. He sat down on the cool tile floor, laid his head back, and closed his eyes. Things were spinning less rapidly, now.

Scratch, scratch.

Bob opened his eyes, then smiled wryly. You're drunk, he told himself. All this Zwilling stuff has you spooked, and now you're hearing things.

Picking himself up, he threw his robe over a hook and entered one of the shower cubicles. Cool water, that was the ticket — it would fix him right up and put him in the mood to sleep. No more mysterious scratchings, no more bad dreams.

Bob stood still, letting the lukewarm torrent wash over his face, his shoulders, his back. His stomach was completely settled now, and he didn't have even a trace of a headache. Just to make sure, he would take some Tylenol when he got back to his room. In tomorrow's bright light, he would have forgotten tonight's silly fears.

Water...it was so nice, so relaxing. So cool. He ran his hands over his body, smoothing the water into his skin like a rejuvenating unguent. Indeed, there were spells that could work healing with nothing more than clear water; Bob remembered the first words of a few but his head was too cloudy to come up with any more.

No matter. He didn't need magic. He was doing all right on his own. With a grin, he slumped to the floor and sat down, splashing in the water like a little kid. He leaned forward, feeling spray on his scalp and his wet hair falling forward over his face. It tickled, and he laughed.

Linda should be here with him. They had showered together once or twice, but never drunk. They could cling together, watch the water swirling down the drain, and laugh.

Spinning, twirling, twisting, swirling — Bob's eyes followed the whirlpool down the wide-open drain in the center of the tile shower floor, and he didn't even feel dizzy. Everything was spinning — the dorm, the University, the world itself, the entire universe. And he was spinning with them, Bob Toland on the wildest merry-go-round ride ever. And the center point of the whole mad ride was right between his knees, a vortex of water rushing down the drain, through sewers and treatment plants, eventually to join the mighty Patapsco and roll down the Chesapeake Bay to the ocean....

He threw his head back and drank the falling spray, and in spite of himself he felt the stirring of elemental power. He was drunk, and not just on beer. Another substance exhilarated him, filled him with joy and happiness. Water!

Scratch, scratch.

Startled, Bob looked down — and yelped in surprise.

Something was moving, struggling against the flow to pull itself up through the drain. He saw wet fur or feathers, the twitching of tiny legs, and heard the frantic scratching and scrambling of a little beast.

In a last, horrified flash of rationality, Bob imagined some poor animal, a squirrel or bird, perhaps, that had become lost and accidentally entered the drains: desperate, half-drowned, straining with its last energy toward light and air. He actually leaned forward in fascinated sympathy, urging the creature on.

With a sound halfway between a cry and a triumphant snarl, the creature pulled itself up out of the drain, and Bob's rationality and sympathy vanished in a wash of sheer terror.

Half rodent, half bird, it had claws and sharp white teeth and tiny yellow-red eyes that fastened immediately on Bob. It was brown, about the size of a large rat, and as he watched the creature spread leathery wings and shook itself under the shower's unending spray.

The only thing in Bob's head was the urgent need to get away. Without taking his eyes off the creature, he crawled

backward, opened the shower curtain and pulled himself onto the damp tile floor of the bathroom. As steam rolled out into the room, Bob reached blindly for his robe.

Giving a banshee scream, the beast jumped. Flapping its wings, it headed right for him.

Bob ducked, but not quickly enough. As the creature flew past he felt a sting at his right shoulder, and when he touched it his hand came away bloody. The bird-thing circled the bathroom twice, then dived again at Bob.

He covered his head and was rewarded by a long scratch on his right arm. Still flapping, the thing flexed its claws to find purchase on his injured shoulder; he smacked at it with his left hand and it skidded across the floor, wailing as it went.

Before it could attack again he was on his feet. He grabbed his bathrobe, the terrycloth satisfyingly heavy in his hand.

Naked and alone, with only a damp robe for a weapon, he faced a supernatural beast that was intent on injuring him — at least. Through the drunken haze of his thoughts, he appreciated a certain ironic hopelessness in his situation.

Wings flapped, the creature attacked, and Bob was too busy to appreciate irony.

It came close, and he batted it away with the bathrobe. But it recovered at once, flew past him again, delivering a painful slash along his left hip. Cursing, Bob flailed at the beast — then lost his footing on wet tiles and fell heavily to the floor.

At once the creature was on top of him, snarling and biting, flapping frantically. It was everywhere — on his chest, snapping at his face, raking claws across his belly and groin. He spun madly, trying only to protect himself from the creature's attacks.

This thing means to kill me, he thought wildly. And it's going to do it unless I get some help.

A lucky blow threw the thing against the wall and left it stunned for a second — quickly as he could, Bob threw his robe on top of it and wrapped it up. Holding tight to the

wailing, thrashing bundle, he kicked open a toilet-stall door and thrust the animal — robe and all — into the water.

Blood spread...whether it was his own or the creature's he couldn't tell. Still holding it under with his right hand, he pulled the handle with his left and pushed the deadly bundle deeper into the surging flush.

The water frothed like storm-tossed sea and an unearthly gurgling came from beneath it. Then robe and all were gone, probably to jam in the drain and stop up the whole dorm.

Panting, Bob backed away from the toilet and leaned against the partition wall. He tried to clear his mind and remember the words of the help-summoning spell.

Damn, I've never tried to do magic when I'm drunk.

First time for everything.

Linda, Mark, Cathy — help me!

There was an awful noise from the toilet, and the fell creature appeared again, jumping out of the water like a deadly missile fired from a nuclear submarine. Bob batted it off with his hands, but it was back in a second, grabbing at his neck, groaning and growling as it bit him again and again.

"Bob?" Thank God, it was Mark's voice.

The beast stopped and looked up, its eyes holding an unnatural cunning and intelligence. As soon as the bathroom door closed behind Mark, the thing was in the air. Bob could only shout, "Watch out!" as he raced out of the toilet.

"Whoa." Mark ducked, then cried out in surprise as the beast swooped down on him. He was dressed in his blue pajamas, which afforded him more protection; he swatted the creature away and then scrambled to Bob's side. "What is it?"

"Something that the Zwilling sent," Bob gasped. His wounds burnt like fire, and his head spun worse than ever. The beast sat on the floor between the two boys and the door, watching them as if it couldn't decide which one to attack.

"You look terrible," Mark said, offering Bob his arm in support.

That was all it took. The bird-thing attacked again, and

before they got away from it both boys had more scratches and Mark's right foot had been badly bitten.

"What are we going to do?" Mark shouted.

"Wards," Bob said, taking his friend's hands. "Give me your power."

Bob was practiced with the spell; in only a few seconds he had drawn shaky, glowing designs in the air. The creature tried to fly at them, but stopped as if it had hit a pane of glass.

Bob slumped to the floor and Mark knelt beside him. "Those won't last long," Mark said. "I don't think either of us has the strength to keep them up."

"I know a destruction spell...but I c-can't cast it. Need more energy."

"We'll have to ward that thing *in*," Mark said. "You'd better let me do it. Give me your hand."

Bob watched with approval while Mark cast the ward spells again, drawing glyphs about the bird-thing. It flapped and screamed, but it couldn't break the invisible bonds that held it.

The spell, though, was only temporary. Now that his adrenalin-rush was over, exhaustion was creeping up on Bob, and he knew he couldn't sustain even this simple spell for more than a few minutes.

"Wh-what now?"

"We've got to get David. Or someone else — "

The door burst open, and Bob looked up to see Linda and Cathy, both hastily dressed in jeans thrown over their nightgowns. "Close the door!" Mark shouted.

Linda skidded to a stop, swaying a little. Her eyes widened at Bob's wounds, then she pointed to the beast and said, "What's *that*?"

"It's something bad," Mark said quickly, "And it's going to break loose very soon."

The creature flapped and screamed as if it had been mortally wounded.

"Linda," Bob said, "I need help with the destruction spell."

Linda shook her head. "We're both drunk. We're in no condition — "

"Damn it, that thing — "

It was suddenly too late, for the bird-thing broke the wards with a flash of eldritch light and the explosion of a terrible odor. It flew toward the students, and Linda screamed.

Cathy alone stood firm, raised a hand, and spoke a Word. And the creature flew aside as if shooed away by an invisible fly swatter.

Mark's eyes were wide. "What did you do?"

"Hold on." Cathy pointed toward the windows and fixed the beast with a stern gaze. "*In the name of the Goddess,*" she intoned in a clear, strong voice, "*And the mother of us all: depart this plane, thou unnatural beast, and trouble us no longer. Her protection is with us, and your spirit is hence banished into the night from which it came.*"

"Aawrrkk!" The creature cried, flapping its wings as if to attack again.

"*Begone, in the name of Isis, Ishtar, Freya, Brigit and Anahita. In the name of Hou Tou and Cybele, begone!*"

For an instant, a magical radiance seemed to play about Cathy's form; then the bird-thing rose on its wings and flew out the window to the sound of breaking glass.

It was long seconds before Bob could catch his breath. He looked up at Cathy, admiring yet with a touch of fear. "What did you just *do*?"

All radiance and mystery was gone; she was simple Cathy Vovcenko with her hair mussed and her glasses slightly askew. "Doctor Faring has got me interested in the White Goddess...I've been doing some extra reading." She sighed deeply. "I wasn't sure it would work. Come on, we've got to get the two of you back to your room and get some disinfectant on those cuts."

They huddled in Bob's room while Linda and Cathy set stronger wards. Then Cathy brewed tea on the hotplate, and added some herbs from Bob's collection, while Linda

bandaged his wounds. It was three in the morning, but the darkness outside was held at bay by light and warmth and the fragrance of healing tea. Bob laid on the bed and rested his head in Linda's lap, and while the others talked over him, he settled into an exhausted but peaceful sleep.

Chapter Fourteen (Cathy)

David was not going to be happy.

"We've got to tell him," Cathy said as dawnlight streamed in the windows. "He'll be mad at us, but we've got to let him know what happened."

Linda snorted. "Mad at *us*? Why should he be mad at us?" She took Bob's hand and held it next to her cheek. "It's not *our* fault that some creature decided to go crazy and attack Bob." She sighed. "It's not our fault that we got involved in this in the first place. David ought to be mad at himself — he's the one who almost got Bob k-killed last night...."

Bob patted her shoulder tenderly. "Don't, Linda. David needs our help — this isn't *his* fault either." He looked ruefully at the scars on his arms. "Even if we hadn't gotten involved with David, don't you think that the Zwilling would have found us anyway? It's after something, and we just happen to be in the way. David's experience and power are the only things we have going for us now."

Mark looked at Cathy and cocked his head. "*Might* be the only things we have going for us. I still think that was a pretty impressive display last night."

"The fact remains," Cathy said quietly, "That we're all a

team, David and the rest of us, and we've got to stick together." She stretched. "Everybody try to get some more sleep; I'm sure David won't be up this early. We can go see him in a few hours, and I think he's going to be more disappointed in himself than mad at us."

"I hope you're right," Mark said with a yawn.



"Let me look at your scars." David took Bob's arm in his hands, nodded. "All right. Watch these to make sure they don't fester. It wouldn't hurt all of you to practice some healing rituals for the next few days." He snagged a chair from his kitchen table, sat down heavily.

"What are we going to do now?" Mark asked.

David looked at his watch, then at Cathy. "Is the library open today?"

She thought for a moment. "Yes, it is. Hardly anybody's working — midterm and all that. But they're open."

"Good." David regarded his hands. "It's plain that you guys are going to need more protection. We can't have this sort of thing happening every night."

"I'll say," Bob quipped. "The other guys on my floor would start to talk." His smile was obviously forced, but Cathy was glad to see it. As long as he had kept his sense of humor....

Linda, on the couch next to Bob, leaned forward with her hands on her knees. "What sort of protection did you have in mind? We've already decided to set up stronger wards on all our rooms and Mark's car."

David nodded. "That's a first step. You guys do that — it's a good project to keep you busy today. Meanwhile, I have to get some stuff together and make some preparations." He stood. "It's almost ten now; let's say we'll meet outside the library at, oh, five this afternoon?"

"Do you need any help?" Cathy offered.

"No, thanks. I know just what I need to do, and frankly,

you're needed for setting the wards. Don't forget, you *were* the one who drove the creature away."

Cathy felt herself redden. "That wasn't my doing. I just...felt inspiration. I wasn't really sure what I was doing." She shivered. "And it scares me."

David put a hand on her shoulder; it was warm and comforting. "It's a scary thing. Don't be ashamed to admit that you're afraid — but don't let your fear stand in the way of developing whatever powers you might have. We've all faced the fear, finding and developing our gifts. You're not alone, no matter how much you might feel that way." He smiled, then withdrew his hand and waved to the door. "All right, you four get on your way, and I'll see you at the library this afternoon."

Linda cocked her head. "It's plain that you're not going to tell us anything more..."

"That's right."

"...So I guess we've got no choice." She stood, tugged Bob's hand. "Come on. It's going to take a while to set all the wards, and then we might as well finish studying for Faring's class."

"Oh," David said, "And don't eat anything between now and five."

"You don't think we'd try casting spells on a full stomach, do you?" Linda said, attempting to sound haughty but failing.

"I just don't want you going out for hamburgers afterward. Keep yourselves reasonably pure, and we'll eat when I'm all done what I have to do."

"All right."

Bob and Linda left the trailer, followed by Mark. Cathy gave one last look at David — who shrugged, looking enigmatic — and then she followed her friends out into the morning heat.

Around midafternoon, just as the kids were casting wards on Mark's car, dark clouds rolled over the sun like mounds of earth pushed by a heavenly bulldozer. A stillness settled over the University, and although it was no cooler, Cathy shivered. As the sun dimmed, Bob faltered in his recitation of magical words, and preliminary wards fell with an abrupt release of power like a crash of malevolent thunder.

Linda looked at her watch. "Let's finish up and wait for David at the library. I don't like the looks of this." The others nodded agreement, and soon the spell was complete.

They busied themselves with studying. By the time five o'clock arrived it had begun to rain: heavy, warm drops that left splatters on brick and concrete. From the recesses of a comfortable chair, Cathy watched the door, and sighed in relief when David showed up at last.

He was carrying a large canvas bag, and he wore faded jeans and a hideous green pullover shirt. His hair was unkempt, and somehow Cathy knew that he had just recently been in wolf form.

"Okay," Linda whispered, "What's up?"

"Come with me." David stopped at the desk and signed out the key to the Special Collections Room, then led the kids down the hall and into the chamber. The door swung shut and David turned the lock with a decisive click.

"What's up?" Mark asked hesitantly, as David opened one of the wood-and-glass display cases.

David nodded. "Good, they're here. God knows where the Department got some of this stuff." He looked at the kids' faces, saw their puzzled, desperate expressions, and smiled. "All right, I won't keep you in suspense any longer. You remember that I said you need some more protection?"

"We've put up stronger wards," Bob offered.

"I was thinking of something a little better than that. The best kind of protection I know, right now." He bent over the display case and pulled out what appeared to be a belt of dark grey fur. "You need to be able to defend yourselves, in case

you're attacked again."

Bob looked from the belt to David's face, and then he grinned widely. "Are you talking about what I *think* you're talking about?"

"Probably." He handed the belt to Bob, then produced one more for each of the kids. "In any case, this is a much easier way to do it than the traditional method of biting each victim."

A wave of numbness washed over Cathy as she realized what he meant. "Y-you're going to make us into —"

He nodded. "Werewolves," he finished. "Don't worry, it's a temporary effect. It will last only as long as you're wearing the belts, and I can withdraw the spell when we're certain that you won't need protection any more."

Bob was still grinning. "I think it could be a real kick."

"It can be fun," David agreed, "But you all have to promise me that you won't abuse the privilege. If I'm to be your pack leader, you're going to have to listen to me and do things my way. And that includes following all the laws of my people. I won't have a bunch of wild wolves as my responsibility."

"Wait a minute here," Linda said. "Are you sure this is safe? I mean, I'm not sure that I want to...." she stopped, a confused look on her face. "Okay, it's safer than getting attacked by crazy critters in the middle of the night. I'll shut up. Tell us how to do it."

"This is the simplest way to try being a werewolf," David said. "Only one of my people can cast the spell, and it only works with belts of true wolfhide."

Cathy shuddered. "If you don't mind my asking, where did you get belts of wolfhide?"

"They've been in the collection for twenty years," David said. "I think they came from Eastern Europe originally — sometime a few centuries ago, someone caught and killed a wolf and skinned it." There was a look of distaste on his face. "I don't know whether it was a werewolf; there's no way to tell now."

"What do we do?"

"Stomachs empty? Everyone pure?"

"As pure as we *can* be, under the circumstances," Bob said.

"Good. I have to re-enchant the belts, then I'll teach you the spell for making the change. The first time I'll do it for you — after that we'll try having you change on your own."

Bob was enthusiastic, Linda trying to act reserved. Cathy felt a little nervous, but told herself that David wouldn't do anything to hurt them or expose them to danger. Only Mark looked doubtful.

David picked up on his uncertainty right away. "You don't seem eager, Mark. What's wrong?"

Mark shook his head. "I don't know. It's just that all this doesn't seem quite...natural." He looked away, anxiously, as if afraid that David would misunderstand.

"It isn't." David stroked wolf fur and stared into the distance. "You're engaged in an unnatural undertaking, you know. That creature that attacked you last night — it wasn't natural either."

"That's just what I mean." Mark spread his hands. "All the other stuff — casting wards, working white magic, playing around with crystal balls and such — it's been fun. But now, things are getting serious. Last night and all, and now you're talking about spells to turn us into werewolves." He sighed. "I guess I don't know if I'm ready to get involved in something like this."

"You don't really have a choice," Linda said as gently as she could. "We're in it, and we have to get out alive now."

David leaned against the display case, arms at his sides. "I think I know how you're feeling, Mark." He frowned. "When I was sixteen — about the time that I became completely aware of what I was, and what it meant to be a werewolf — I was really confused. And a little bit angry. I just wasn't sure that I wanted to be involved in the whole thing. I wanted to be like all the other kids, and suddenly it was clear to me that I would *never* be normal. I spent a lot of time avoiding the

metamorphosis. Then, when I finally went back to wolf form, I went out on my own and wandered, every night for months at a time. I was lonely — and that's a terrible thing for both a wolf and a boy." He shrugged. "A lot of my folks never pursue a study of the Arts. They just want to blend into society, except for occasional periods when they meet with other werewolves. I don't think my mother has been in wolf form since I was ten. I was different, all right — I guess I thought that if I studied the Arts and learned all about magic then I would understand why I'd been stuck with this destiny that I didn't want."

Everyone was silent. Linda, embarrassed, looked at the floor; Bob was staring at the window where heavy raindrops drew streaks in summer dust. Mark was lost in the spell of David's story, his mouth slightly open and his eyes fixed on the older man. After a few tries, Cathy found her voice and asked, "Did you find out?"

"No." David smiled, as if benevolently looking back on his younger self. "I eventually decided that I *liked* being the way I was, and I didn't need to understand." He closed his eyes, then reopened them and looked directly at Mark. "Like Linda says, you're involved whether you want to be or not. I'm betting that you might just find what you've been looking for, if you relax and go with it. What do you say, want to give it a try?"

Mark nodded. "I'll try," he said, quietly and with conviction.

"Good man." David offered his hand, and solemnly the two shook, sealing a private bond whose nature Cathy didn't completely comprehend.

"How do we get started?" Bob asked.

"The first thing," David said, pulling himself to his feet and crossing to the door, "is to make sure that we're not going to be disturbed." He ran his hands over the door, and silence fell in the room. Even the rain, which had increased to a positive shower, made no noise as it splattered against the windows.

"Neat trick," Linda said.

"It's an easy one for a room like this. I'll teach it to you if you're really interested. I used to use it for studying when things got too crazy in the dorms." David slipped his shirt over his head, stood barechested for a moment with his light, pale body hair glowing red in the fluorescent light. "I'm afraid you're all going to have to strip for this one."

Cathy bit her lip and peeled off her jeans and tee shirt, feeling more than a little bit self-conscious. This was not the first time — many spells called for nudity, and she had usually not minded. But today it was different; today David was here, today they were going to practice strong magic that might change her life forever. She felt...vulnerable, that was the word.

Wordlessly, David handed each of them a belt. Cathy's was about an inch wide, and it was too big for her; she tied it around her waist and let the overlap dangle at her side. Linda looked even more ridiculous — the tail of her belt fell almost to her knees. Cathy almost expected her roommate to balk at wearing anything so unfashionable, but Linda held her tongue.

"The spell is a simple one," David said. "The only version I know is in medieval Hungarian — it's a jaw-breaker but if you practice it with your belts off, you'll find that it'll roll off your tongues in no time." He showed them some papers. "I xeroxed it this morning; we'll go over it in a few minutes." He took a breath. "But first, let's get the transformation done so you'll know what it feels like."

Cathy swallowed. All at once, her throat was dry, and she wasn't sure that this was such a good idea.

David raised his hands and spoke a series of guttural words. Then one at a time, he touched each of the kids on the head.

For a second or two after the touch, Cathy felt nothing. Then her stomach moved, and there was a moment of blinding pain throughout her body. She felt as if she were

fainting...the world grew dark, and she felt her consciousness go spinning away into a shadowy maelstrom.

Smells — the smells! They dominated her awareness. Linda and Bob, the acrid tang of Mark's aftershave lotion, and from David the fragrance of strength, of commanding power, an underlying trace of male sexuality. Her sight was indistinct; the quiet about her was startlingly unnatural. The wolf's world, she realized, was a world of smell.

Wolf. She was hungry, and she was deeply aware of the presence of her friends, fellow members of her pack. She felt an overwhelming sense of freedom from time — all that mattered was *now*. Her life as Cathy Vovcenko at Patapsco University seemed as far away as her childhood in sleepy old Kinwood. Even her fears of the Zwilling, and her anxiety about the werewolf spell — even these were gone. All she needed was a good meal, a place to sleep, and the continued presence of the others.

David was next to her, a strong, massive wolf. She felt a wash of emotion— affection, pride, happiness. David was her pack-leader...and for a wolf, there could be no stronger bond.

He touched her, and there was another second of pain, another instant of blackness and disorientation. When the feeling passed, she was once again human, surrounded by other human beings.

Even Linda had nothing to say, as David waited with an expectant look on his face. It was Mark who finally broke the silence. "That was neat," he said with a wide grin.

"I..." Cathy tried, but words failed her. She had full memory of her experience as a wolf — the smells, the feelings — and although she was relieved to be human once more, inside there was a tiny longing to return to the animal state.

David once again leaned against the display case. "You guys will want to do some experimentation. Until you learn the trick of returning yourself to human form, you ought to do it all together. Or at least in pairs."

"Right," Bob said.

"And listen." David fixed each one of them momentarily with an intense gaze. "Don't play around where other people can see you. It'll start a whole lot of trouble that you don't need. Remember what I told you: I won't have any of you bringing disgrace on this pack."

Her pack-leader's voice. Now Cathy recognized the hint of wildness in David's eyes, and his words touched a responsive chord deep within her. When David spoke this way, she would obey.

He looked at Bob and Mark. "You two particularly are going to feel the need to challenge me. Sometime in the next few days we'll get together in wolf form and have it out...that's the only way. But meanwhile, don't decide that you can go against my commands. Talk to me first."

The boys were quiet, and Cathy could see that David had touched something in them too. "Are you going to give us some more instruction?" Linda asked.

"Yes. We have a few more hours here, and all day tomorrow to experiment in the woods." He handed them copies of the spell. "Let's try it with *you* casting the spell now. Bob, you first."

The rain continued, drumming silently against the windows...and soon, Cathy knew that she was hooked. She'd had her first taste of truly powerful magic, and she could never go back to mundane life again.

Eventually hunger got to be too much, and they adjourned to the local Burger King to feast on the nearest approximation to red meat that they could find. Cathy had to fight a temptation to remove her hamburgers from the bun and consume only the beef.

Over her second cheeseburger Linda said, "Well, what do we do now?"

David fidgeted with his french fries. "We've been attacked. Now that I've given you guys a defense against this thing, I think our next step is to take the offensive."

"How?"

“We know that Kevin is involved in this — probably as a gateway for the Zwilling to enter our world. You keep an eye on him, and I’ll work on a few exorcism spells that I think might help him. Then it’s just a matter of waiting until the time is right.”

Lightning flashed, and seconds later a loud thunderclap rattled the Burger King windows. Cathy shivered. “That’s all very good,” she said, “But what do we do until then?”

“Watch. Wait. And protect yourselves.”

“You’re not much help,” Linda said...and for once, Cathy thought that her roommate had captured the situation perfectly.

BOOK TWO:
Danse Macabre

October 1985

*I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black
It's hard to dance with the Devil on your back
They buried my body and they thought I'd gone
But I am the dance and I still go on.*

—*The Lord of the Dance*
(traditional)

Chapter Fifteen

(David)

What am I doing here? David wondered.

The Student Center was crowded tonight. Everyone, it seemed, was at the Welcome Back mixer sponsored by the Student Government. David leaned against a brick wall and watched dancing students, and thought.

He should be home. If not for the Zwilling, he *would* be. But he didn't know what to expect, when there would be another attack — and he had committed himself to protecting these kids that he had chosen as his pack.

What was happening to him? This Zwilling thing was suddenly taking all his time and energy. Five hours with the cubs today, wandering through dripping woods under dull, rainy sky, teaching them to be good little wolves. Only enough time for a quick shower before coming to the dance.

And meanwhile, his master's thesis sat totally ignored on his dining table, where it had been since Susan's death. He was stumbling along with his classes in a haphazard fashion, no time even to plan...what was happening to him?

The band started another number, and David shivered. He was getting too old, that was it. At twenty-seven he was already out of touch with the kids. He didn't listen to their

music, he didn't know their heroes — he was becoming the same sort of stodgy old faculty member whom he had always despised.

He was beginning to wonder if his thesis would ever be finished. Faring and Quaille were prepared to offer him a faculty position, to confirm his degree without the formality of a thesis. Was he ready for that?

He sighed, and squinted across the dark room at his charges. Linda and Bob were dancing, oblivious to the rest of the world; Cathy and Mark sat at a table, laughing with a few other students. They were so innocent — nobody would ever guess that these four kids had been chasing birds in the woods just a few hours ago, their fangs bared and the scent of blood in their heads. Did I do the right thing?

Bob tossed his head, and David caught sight of still-unhealed scars on his neck. That's why I did it, he thought. Because if I hadn't given them a way to fight back, these cubs would be dead.

David looked toward the band, where he had been keeping his eye on one particular table all night. Kevin Judd was there, with a few of his friends. He had only left the table a few times — once to dance, and twice to visit the men's room. Still David hung back in the shadows, unwilling to face Kevin. He noticed that his pack-members were also avoiding the boy.

Did Kevin know what was going on? Or was he as much a victim as David and the others? It was hard to see how he could be responsible for atrocities like Susan's death without knowing; but perhaps the when the Zwilling took control of Kevin, he lost consciousness and retained no memory of his possession.

"What's up, Mr. Wizard?" a very nasal voice said from behind him.

David turned slowly, groaning inside. The voice belonged to a short, dark-haired girl named Glenda Romali — she was a graduate student in the English department, and for a number of years she had been carrying on a relentless

campaign apparently aimed at seducing David.

He'd dated her once, but her off-campus apartment was filled with ill-mannered cats, her home cooking was redolent with garlic, and there was a large and very conspicuous crucifix on the living room wall. By the time he found out that she was growing wolfsbane in her herb garden, he'd already decided that Glenda wasn't the girl for him. Unfortunately, she had not yet managed to take the hint.

"Why aren't you dancing?" Glenda asked, a twinkle in her eye. She held a plastic cup of white wine, obviously not her first of the evening. David waved a hand vaguely. "I have other things on my mind."

"Like what?"

"This and that." He waved his hand vaguely. "Worrying about my thesis. That sort of thing."

Glenda rolled her eyes. "I know what you *mean*. Do you know how hard it is to come up with something original to say about the Victorian poets?" She shrugged. "So what's the trouble? Running out of ideas?"

"Running out of time. I haven't had a chance to work on it for weeks, and I can't see when I'm going to be able to."

"You're teaching Doctor Whitlow's class now, aren't you?"

"That's right."

"No *wonder* you don't have time." She pondered for a second. "You know, if you need someone to help you out, typing or whatever —"

He suppressed a shudder. "I appreciate the offer. But, to tell the truth, I'm not at all sure that I want to pursue it. I was getting bored even before...before Susan died."

"This is a little late in the game to think about switching your thesis."

He looked back at the band, who were winding up their current number with a twang of electric guitar and synthesizer. "I'm not even sure that I want to finish my degree. Maybe I'm not cut out for the university world."

She looked as if he had suggested that he was considering

suicide. "David, everybody feels that way sometimes. Don't let it get you down. And don't do anything stupid." She put her hand on his shoulder and rubbed gently. "Why don't we get out of here and go someplace quieter? Then you can tell me all about it."

In his present mood, he might have fallen victim to her invitation; but fortunately, David was saved by Cathy Vovcenko's surprise arrival. "Excuse me," she said, "But we were wondering if you'd like to dance?"

Glenda gave her a look far more noxious than anything David had ever seen cooked up in a cauldron, and Cathy returned it with a puzzled smile. "The band is just about to play a special song for you," she explained.

Turning to Glenda, David shrugged, then let Cathy drag him onto the floor. The others were already in position, sweaty and grinning. David gave Cathy a friendly hug. "Thanks a lot, you saved me from a fate worse than...."

Before he could finish, the band started their next number, and David whooped with laughter while the kids beamed. The other students, he thought, must have wondered what was so funny about the song "Leader of the Pack"....



Glenda left him in peace for the rest of the evening. David joined the cubs at their table, and for a while he almost managed to forget the Zwilling in the swirl of conversation, music and laughter.

Eventually the noise and the crowd got to be too much, and David excused himself. "I'm going to take a walk outside and clear my head. I'll be back."

Outside the student center, the night was quiet despite the echo of thundering music. The sky was overcast and each gust of wind brought a shower of drops from the tall oaks that flanked the building. Off in the distance of the grassy Quad, a group of students were carrying on among the statues in front

of the Roth Gallery; hands in his pockets, David headed in the opposite direction, toward squat, lonely Ziegler Hall and the Patapsco River.

A clump of trees stood atop the steep hill that led down to further vegetation and the river. When he was among the trees and shielded from the University's lights, David felt a little better. What the hell, he thought — if he lived through this encounter with the Zwilling, and managed to defeat the creature...what a Master's thesis *that* would make! His academic career would be assured. And anything else he cared to do with magic, for that matter. True encounters with supernatural entities were rare enough, anyone who survived them could be sure that he would gain a lot of power and valuable experience. Maybe he wouldn't *have* to teach at Patapsco University, maybe he could start his own department at another school, or even —

A scream brought him out of his reverie and sent him skittering down toward the river. Halfway there he collided with a running body who nearly knocked him down.

"Whoa."

She was an undergraduate, blond and wild-eyed. David knew that he had seen her before — was she a friend of Cathy's, or a classmate of Mark's? Her name was Kim...Kim...? Kim Richter, that was it.

He gave her a hand to steady herself, and she clenched it tightly. "I know you," she said, her voice filled with confusion. "You're..."

"David Galvin," he prompted. "What's going on?"

"I...I don't know. C-can we go somewhere else? Please."

"Come with me." David led her up the hill toward the Student Center. The wet grass was slick, and she wasn't too careful about walking; several times he saved her from taking a nasty spill. She was trembling, and now and again she gave out with a little sob. David held his curiosity in check until they reached the Student Center and she drew back.

"No, please, I don't want to see anyone. Not yet."

"All right." He held the door for her, then led her up broad stairs to the second level. Here, between the bookstore and the vending machines, were comfortable chairs and tables arranged in artificially-casual conversation groups. The day-hop students used this area to camp between their classes; tonight it was dim and undisturbed by the crowds below.

David sat Kim down in one of the chairs and fetched her a paper cup full of water. She swallowed it gratefully, then closed her eyes and groaned. "Thank you. You don't know what you've done for me."

"What happened? You're still as white as the moon."

"He asked me to come down to look at the river with him. I figured it would be...you know, romantic. We hadn't been down there five minutes before...before he —" She shook her head. "It was *horrible*."

David sat down on the chair next to her. It was a familiar story. Another Freshman who had gone too far and panicked. He sighed. A year from now she would be sleeping with every guy in her class. For now, she needed to be calmed down.

Damn it, he thought, I'm too old for this kind of thing.

"You don't have to tell me anything you don't want to," he started.

"No, it wasn't anything like *that*." Color was returning to her face now, and she actually blushed. "I...I guess I was ready to go along. I mean, he's a nice guy, and I *did* go down to the river with him. Of my own free will, you know? But then," she shivered, "His face. It was like...like he was an animal. And I was scared, and I asked him to stop, and he wouldn't. I-I had to scratch him. And he...he *laughed*."

David frowned. This was no matter of an over-amorous Freshmen. Something serious was going on here. A sudden dread hit him, and he asked, "Who was this?"

"Don't get me wrong, I don't want him to get in trouble or anything. He just scared me."

"Who?"

"I don't think you know him." She didn't want to tell — and it wasn't just reluctance to cause trouble for a classmate. David knew the signs: something had put a glamour on her. And who else could it be...?

"Was it Kevin Judd?"

Her eyes answered even though she remained silent.

David stood. "Look, you know Cathy Vovcenko, don't you?"

"Yes."

"I'm going to take you to her and her friends, and they'll take care of you. Er...what dorm are you in?"

"Setter Hall."

"Well, I think it would be best if you stayed with Cathy and Linda tonight."

"You don't think he's going to...?" she left her suspicions unvoiced; David was sure that she didn't fear the same thing he did.

"I think you'll sleep better if you stay with them." Behind the protection of secure wards. "Come on, I know where Cathy's sitting."

By the time he got her downstairs, David had managed to settle his own racing thoughts a little bit. "Kim's had something of a scare," he said, "And I offered your room for her to stay tonight. Maybe you should take her back and make her some tea to calm her down." He met Linda's eyes, and hoped she would read his meaning. "I'll send Bob over in a little while to make sure that everything's all right."

A little puzzled, Linda nodded. "Whatever you say." She turned a quiet smile on the Freshman. "Come on, Kim, let's get you back to the dorm."

David waved the boys to follow. When they were out in the warm, wet night, he let the girls go on ahead and strolled past the dimly-lit windows of the Science Center.

"What's up?" Bob said, his voice alert.

The bell in the bell tower began to chime eleven; David motioned the boys closer and lowered his voice.

"Kevin...or something with Kevin's body...just tried to rape Kim Richter," he said. "He cast a glamour on her, and she barely managed to break it. I thought it was best to send her to sleep behind Cathy and Linda's wards tonight."

"I don't get it," Mark said. "Why would the Zwilling try to...."

"Babies," Bob answered hesitantly. "Right?"

David nodded. "That's my guess. The Zwilling thought it could get Kim pregnant, and then possess the child." The Science Center was made of dark brick; he thudded his fist against it and felt better.

"What are we going to do?"

"I want you two to help me set wards around Kim's room." Only temporary — they couldn't ward the entire campus. And they had only a limited amount of power; each new set of wards weakened all that were already established.

What am I going to do?

I wish I knew.

There has to be an answer somewhere in the Special Collections Room. Something that would stop the Zwilling once and for all. But what?

"Suppose it tries again, with a different girl?"

David shook his head. "I don't think so. The Zwilling knows that we're alerted to that possibility, so it'll try something different next time."

There had to be an answer.

And he'd better find it soon.

Chapter Sixteen

(Linda)

Mark was late with the car Monday afternoon; Linda huddled close to Bob in the dorm lobby and watched the rain fall. It was a torrential late-summer storm, complete with lightning and world-shaking thunderclaps. Ever since she was a little girl, Linda had been secretly frightened of thunderstorms...she remembered cowering under her covers more than one night, as late as high school. Once, lightning had struck a tree outside her house, and until it fell down the next spring she always hesitated to walk too near the blackened trunk and seared limbs. Later, when she learned about fire elementals and storm demons, she thought that her caution had been justified.

When Mark eventually pulled up, his green Dodge all but obscured by sheets of rain, Linda raced beside Bob and quickly scrambled into the front seat before the two boys. Running didn't help; she was soaked to the skin, and her hair was a mess. It was going to be frizz city when it dried, she thought.

"What took you so long?" Bob asked.

"Mom's away somewhere. I had to pick up Peter at a friend's house, and then he needed help with his algebra

homework. Then I forgot my belt, and then when I finally got on the road, I was behind the slowest lady you've ever seen. I swear, people don't know how to drive...the slightest little bit of rain, and they all go crazy." He slewed out of the parking lot and sped out of the University, splashing high walls of water onto the already-soaked grass. "Anyway, that's my sad story. Do you think David's going to be mad because we're late?"

Bob grinned. "Sure, he'll be furious. You know David."

"All right, all right." Mark clicked on the radio, and whistled along with the commercials until they reached David's trailer park. Linda nervously pressed against Bob, shivering a little each time thunder crashed outside.

The gravel of the trailer park was flooded; on her way into the trailer Linda got her feet soaked. David was waiting for them with the door open, and with a smile he handed each of them a towel as they entered. Linda solemnly dried her face and hair, then took off her jacket and sat down heavily on the couch.

"I'm glad you could make it," David said with a trace of good-natured sarcasm. He waved Mark and Bob to seats, then leaned against the door and looked toward Mark. "I don't suppose you saw Kevin today?"

"He wasn't in German. I spoke to Cathy for a few minutes between classes, and she said that he hadn't shown up for history either."

"And Kim?"

Linda answered, "By this morning she didn't remember much of what happened last night. Cathy says she'll keep an eye on her for the next few days. I think she'll be all right." She wrinkled her brow. "As much as anybody *can* be."

"Don't worry, we're going to do something about that very soon."

"What?"

David sighed. "I'm still not sure. I'm going over to the library and look through everything in the Special Collections

Room until I find something that'll help us defeat the Zwilling."

"And what are we going to do?" Bob asked, his arms crossed.

David reached to a bookshelf, produced a slim leatherbound volume. He handed it casually to Bob. "You're going to take more lessons in being good little wolves."

Linda peered over Bob's shoulder at the cream-colored title page, where the title was printed in English, German and French. "'*The Wolf-Cub's Handbook*,'" she read. "Where did you get this?"

"A small publishing house in northern Bavaria prints them. As you can imagine, it's a rather limited edition. My father gave it to me when I was a lot younger than you three."

Bob leafed through the book. "Hunting, Responsibilities of the Cub, Duty to the Pack — I guess you want us to learn all of this before tomorrow?"

"Just read it over. And practice your transitions. I want you to get perfectly comfortable with changing to wolf-form and back again."

"Okay. We will."

"Good." He picked up a windbreaker and shrugged into it. "I'll be back later tonight, and I'll bring Cathy with me. Hopefully I'll have something more concrete to talk about then." His face softened. "Look, you guys, I know this isn't what you had in mind. I'm sorry, I really don't know what I'm doing. Don't worry, it'll get more exciting."

Mark smiled wanly. "I don't know how much more excitement we can stand."

David laughed. Opening the door, he looked back over his shoulder and said, "Don't leave the trailer. If you need me, call the library." He looked from Mark to Bob, back again. "You hear me?"

"Yes, sir." "Yes, David." Just a few days before the two boys, in wolf form, had finally challenged David's authority as alpha male. Both of them now bore various scratches and

bites, including a nasty chunk taken out of Bob's left earlobe, and the matter was apparently settled to the satisfaction of all.

"Take care, and have fun." David ducked out into the storm, and the door slammed solidly behind him.

A massive thunderclap rocked the trailer, and Linda squealed in spite of herself. Bob squeezed her hand. "Don't worry, hon. Here, let's get to work." He pulled his wolfskin belt from the pocket of his jacket. "Come on, Mark, let's get the furniture moved so we'll have enough room."

For a few hours the kids practiced the exercises recommended by the handbook, turning from human to wolf and back again on command, jumping and slinking, growling and barking. The storm didn't frighten Linda when she was a wolf, although the thunder hurt her ears and the electrical smell of ozone irritated her nose. Whenever she returned to human form and became conscious of the rain, the lightning and the thunder, she wished that she could remain a wolf forever.

At almost six o'clock, panting, Mark became human and looked at the large kitchen clock. "Can we take a break? I'm worn out." His words reached Linda clearly, through the acute senses of the wolf, but their meaning was very hazy to her.

"Good idea," Bob said. He stroked Linda's fur, and she took the hint. With a mental effort, she became human once again.

"We're going to take a break for a while," Bob repeated.

"*Star Trek* is on," Mark said. He turned on David's small black-and-white TV, fiddled with the dials for a few minutes until he eliminated most of the static in the picture. Then, yawning, he took a seat in David's easy chair.

Bob settled on the couch, and Linda stretched out next to him, head on his lap. She was exhausted; changing forms took a lot of energy, and she'd done it at least half a dozen times that afternoon. To the voices of Captain Kirk and Mister Spock, she drifted off to sleep before she could even complete

another yawn.

When she awoke it was dark outside, and the storm raged more intensely. The television was off, and the boys were talking, but she was too drowsy to follow their words. There was a hunger in her stomach and another in her loins, and she snuggled close to Bob, seeking reassurance in his touch.

The trailer shook and the wind howled, speaking in a language that was almost comprehensible to one who knew the song of the wolves. There was a flash outside and a loud roll of thunder made Linda jump.

Bob ran his fingers through her hair. "There, there, don't be upset."

Linda stretched sleepily. "What time is it?"

Bob looked at his watch. "It's nearly eight. You've been a little sleepyhead."

"I'm tired." She rolled over. "When will David be back?"

"Cathy's working until eight-thirty. David said he'd bring her back here when she's done."

"Do you really think he's going to find something that will help us against the Zwilling?"

"He'd better," Mark said. "If he doesn't we're in a lot of trouble." Mark also stretched. "I wonder if there's any food around here? I'm starving."

"I'll look." Now that she was awake, anything was better than laying here listening to the storm. She went into the kitchen and started looking through cabinets and the refrigerator. "Potato chips, Coke, what looks like iced tea, and something green in a plastic bowl. I wonder who taught him to keep house?"

"Let's get into those chips," Mark said eagerly. She tossed him the bag and he began eagerly devouring them.

After a second there was another flash of lightning, and then the trailer went suddenly dark. Unable to help herself, Linda screamed.

Bob was next to her in an instant, his arm around her shoulder. Lightning strobe-lit the kitchen, making garish

shadows that became slowly-fading afterimages.

Mark struck a match, touched it to a large candle on the coffee table. There were many candles scattered about the room; he went about lighting them. Soon the trailer was bathed in a friendly yellow glow.

"I don't like this," Linda said.

"It's just a power failure," Mark said, unconcerned. "They'll have the lights back on in a while. Settle down to enjoy it. Here," he offered the bag of chips.

"Look." Bob pointed at the door. A delicate tracery of fine glowing lines was visible, the shape of a complicated glyph of warding. "Do you suppose that's some effect of the storm?"

Linda shook her head. "You know what it means. There's evil nearby. Something...awful." She held tighter to Bob's arm. "The Zwilling is out there."

Bob straightened. "Rather it be out there than going after David. If we can keep it busy while he's finding a way to defeat it, so much the better."

"You don't think that David planned —"

"Of course not. That's the situation, though."

"What are we going to do?" Mark's eyes were wide.

"First, make sure you have your belt on. Linda?"

"I've got it." She tried to keep her voice from trembling. Most of all, right now, Linda wanted to speak the words that would change her into a wolf. That way, she felt, nothing could harm her. But she resisted the temptation, holding her fear back by an effort of will.

"Me too," Mark said, touching the strip of wolfskin tied around his waist.

"Good. Be ready to change if we need to." Bob went to the door, and Linda clenched her fists. "No, don't. David said to stay inside."

"Right." With a fingertip he followed the lines of the glyph. "As long as we stay inside the wards, nothing can harm us." He peered out the window. "That's funny. All the other trailers still have power."

"You're kidding." Mark crowded into the window with Bob. "Look, he's right. Everyone else is lit up."

"Never mind." Linda hung back, standing in a corner in the kitchen. "David'll know what to do when he gets here." There was more thunder, and she shivered at a sudden thought. "If Kevin — if the Zwilling is out there, what happens when David and Cathy come back?"

Bob shook his head. "We have to let David take care of that. I don't think he'll be caught by surprise. He's been expecting another attack ever since...."

An unearthly howl split the night more violently than any thunderclap could. It wasn't the voice of another wolf, nor any creature that Linda could imagine. She froze.

"Mark! Mark, help!" The voice from outside was thin, almost lost in the wind.

Mark paled. "That's Peter." He peered out the window. "I don't see him."

"Mark, where are you? I'm lost. I can't find you."

Mark took a step toward the door, and Bob stopped him. "That's not your brother," Bob said. "It's a trick."

"Mark!"

Mark shook. "It sounds like him."

"Think. What would Peter be doing here? You left him at home — what would he be doing here?"

"He rode with Kevin once. What if — ?"

"Mark, where are you?"

"I've got to see." Mark reached for the doorknob.

"No." Bob clasped Mark's wrist, pulled the younger boy back. "Sit down, and ignore it."

Nervously, Mark sat. Linda roused herself and sat down next to him. She took his hand from Bob. "Listen, kid. Why don't you call home — then you'll know that Peter's safe there."

"Good idea." Bob handed Mark the yellow trimline phone. With shaking hands, Mark dialed. He listened a moment, then frowned. Without a word, he tried again, then hung up

the phone.

"All I'm getting is a disconnect signal," he explained.

"Mark, help me."

Mark turned pained eyes on Linda, and she squeezed his hand. "Try not to pay attention. It's going after you by picking on your weaknesses. Don't let it."

"What does it hope to gain?"

Bob stood against the door, arms folded. "It wants to scare us away. It must think that we threaten it. That's encouraging, if you think about it the right way."

The awful cries continued, blending with the wind and sounding of agonized torment. Mark stood it for long, long minutes, then he stood and faced Bob. "I've got to see. Let me go."

"No."

"Bob, let me go. What if the Zwilling has Peter? What if my brother is getting hurt?"

"Mark — "

"I'm going out there, Bob." Mark took a deep breath that was almost a growl.

"Sit down, Mark."

"No!" Mark jumped, pushed Bob aside, and thrust the door open. Before Linda could cross the room, he was out in the stormy night.

"Stay here," Bob shouted. He scrambled out of the trailer. Linda, her fear forgotten, followed him at once.

Rain blinded her, and crashing thunder deafened her. She could think of nothing else; the spell came as second nature to her lips, and she became wolf.

Scents. Her world was a world of smell — the earthy scent of the storm, the friendly smell of Bob and Mark ahead of her, and a totally unexplained and unpleasant odor, menacing and sickening.

She caught up with Bob, still in human form, and barked in his direction. *Go back. Go to safety.* She didn't wait to see if he obeyed, for mixed with Mark's scent was the smell of terror.

A member of her pack was running unheeding into danger; she had to save him.

There was something ahead of Mark. She didn't want to know *what* it was — no matter how much it might look like his brother, her acute sense of smell told her that it was not human. It smelled old, decayed, musty —

She caught up with Mark, tangled herself in his feet and made him stop. He looked down at her, exuding surprise. Then, as if comprehending her growl, he spoke the spell and became wolf.

The...thing...moved toward them — but the two wolves ran, and it could not catch them. In less than a minute, they were safe within the wards.

Linda crowded next to Mark, and the two of them laid their chins in Bob's lap. He scratched them behind the ears, speaking gently; Linda couldn't understand his words, but their sense was clear: friendliness and relief.

Soon the lights came back on, and the storm's violence waned. First Mark changed back to human, then Linda followed him.

Bob kissed her. "Good to have you back."

Mark was on the phone. "Peter?" he said. "I just wanted to make sure you're okay. You haven't lost your lights or anything?" He listened a moment. "Okay, take care of yourself. I'll be home in a few hours. Bye." He looked sheepishly in Bob's direction. "You were right, he hasn't left the house."

"Electricity's back," Linda observed.

He nodded. "I think the Zwilling is gone. David's right — it fails at one thing, and it goes away to plan something else."

"And what will we do when it succeeds?"

"It won't." He looked at his watch. "David and Cathy should be back soon. Let's set the clocks right and see if we can't rustle up some better food than potato chips, eh? Trouble's over for the night."

She glanced at the door. "Right." Over for the night,

maybe. But she knew that in the long run, their trouble had just begun.

Chapter Seventeen

(Mark)

For the first time in weeks, both Mark's parents were home for dinner at the same time. He wasn't sure he liked the change.

"I hope you're going to stay in tonight, Mark," his father said over the dinner table. "I swear, I don't see how you have the time to get all your homework done."

Mark shrugged. When his father was in a mood like this, it was best to keep answers quick and not to argue. "I do a lot of it at school." He took a bite. "This steak is delicious, Mother."

His mother scowled, and Mark knew that things were not good.

"When I was in school," his father started, "I studied hard. And worked hard — I didn't have parents who could afford to keep me in school, I had a job to go to every day." Almost savagely, Mark's father sliced his meat and swallowed a bite. "And I knew the meaning of gratitude, too."

Peter was looking down at his plate, a quiet little mouse absorbed in his ration of cheese. But Mark knew that his brother was paying full attention. This sort of argument had occurred all too often in the past year, yet it was still disturbingly new to the young boy.

Mark sighed. "I am grateful, Dad. It means a lot to me." He took another bite. "But you forget that I *did* work all summer at the — "

"Ha." With a single wave, Mark's father dismissed three months of hard work. "I never finished college, but you can be damn sure that I took subjects that would help me get a job. Lord, boy, what kind of job do you expect to get with this comparative religion crap? There's no money in being a preacher, you know."

Quietly, calmly, Mark said, "There are a lot of things I can do with my major. And the University has a placement department...."

"What kind of jobs? Name one."

Briefly, Mark considered mentioning Patapsco alumnus Jose Gonzalez, who had put his magical skills to work making several fortunes as a stockbroker, then donated millions to charity. Then he thought better of it. "It's good preparation for a career in politics." He shrugged. "If nothing else," he said with a smile, "I'll have a firm grounding for law school."

"Law school?" Mark's father threw up his hands. "Now I've heard everything."

"Alan, leave the boy alone," Mrs. Evans said.

"You keep out of this. God knows, if you hadn't filled his head with all your ridiculous — "

"That's right, blame everything on me." She slammed down her fork. "That's what it all comes down to, isn't it? Always my fault."

"At least you're right about *that*."

Peter looked up at Mark with an expression of agonized helplessness. Mark in turn put down his knife and fork with a disgusted expression. "Can't you two stop this for *one* evening?" As soon as the words were out, he was surprised that he had said them.

His parents, at least, were equally astonished. His mother simply stared, and his father sputtered a few times before pointing toward the stairs. "Get to your room. I don't want to

hear anything else out of you tonight.”

“I — “

“You think you’re too old to hit? Just stay here another second, and you’ll find out.” His father half-rose from his chair, and Mark thought it best to make a strategic retreat.

In his room, safe behind the faintly-glowing glyphs of warding outlined on his walls, Mark paced. He felt like donning his belt and speaking the words that would turn him into a wolf; he longed for the simplicity of animal life.

After a while, bored with pacing, he sat down at his computer and established a link with the University computer. A few Comp Sci majors were in the computer room, and Mark exchanged messages with them, chatting about various problems they were working on and suggesting a few possible solutions. Being confined to his room was not quite the punishment his father intended — through the keyboard and screen he could contact any computer anywhere in the world.

Maybe he could become a new type of computer scientist, bringing together electronics and magic. He already had a few ideas about how new technology could help the age-old study and practice of the Arts...and he hadn’t yet begun to imagine how magic could change technology.

He sighed. He could just see his father withdrawing all support from him. If that happened, Mark knew that he couldn’t afford to continue at Patapsco University — and nowhere else could give him the training he needed. There was so much that he didn’t know....

At a tap on his door, he looked up from the screen. “Yes?”

“Can I come in?” Peter asked, in a small voice.

“Of course.” Mark signed off, then shut down the computer. Peter edged open the door and crept in, looking worried.

Mark forced a smile. “What’s up, kiddo?”

Peter flopped down on Mark’s bed and rested his chin in his hands. “They’re still fighting.”

"Is it bad?"

Peter's round little face was tight, and his eyes sadly intense. "Awful. Mark, why do they fight like this? Do you...do you think Mom and Dad don't love each other any more?"

Mark moved to the bed and sat down next to his brother. "Sometimes married people can fall out of love."

"How?"

"That's a hard one, kid. I don't know. It just happens."

"Did Mom and Dad ever love each other?"

"I think they did." Mark looked off into the distance, remembering. "When I was a little kid — younger than you are now — we had really happy times. And when you were born, man, they were both as proud as they could be. And times were even better." He turned excitedly to Peter. "Do you remember when we went down to Disney World? That was the best."

Peter smiled. "I remember. We laughed so much." His face became serious again. "They didn't fight back then."

"Yes, they did. You just don't remember. Dad used to come home drunk, and Mother would scream and yell. That's when *she* started drinking so much. To get back at him, I guess." He shrugged. "But that was only once in a while. Most of the time, they were happy. Yeah, I think they loved each other. And I'm not sure they stopped. It's just that, sometimes, you can love somebody without liking them very much."

Mark could tell that his brother was puzzling over the concept; he gave Peter time to think. Finally the lad said slowly, "I guess that's how I feel about Mom and Dad right now. I love them, but I don't think I really like them."

Mother, Dad, Mark thought — if you could only see what this is doing to him.

Or would you stop, even then?

"I'm not going to get married," Peter announced, "Until I'm sure that I'm in love. And then I'll *never* fight with my wife."

Mark smiled, trying not to look patronizing. "I hope it turns out that way, kid."

"Are you and Cathy going to get married?"

"Wait a minute." Mark shook his head. "Where did you get an idea like that?"

"I thought she was your girlfriend."

"Nah. We're friends, sure, but she's not my *girlfriend*. We're not in love." He stopped himself — this was not the time or the place to try to explain his bond to Cathy and the others in his pack.

Pack. How much, Mark wondered, had he changed in the few short days since David had taught them all to be wolves? Cathy used to be a classmate, now she's part of the pack. God, I'm thinking like a werewolf.

I *am* a werewolf.

"If you and Cathy got married," Peter said shyly, "Then I could come live with you. It would be great."

"That's not the way it works. I'm your brother, not your parent. We already have parents."

Peter nodded. "I guess you're right." He stared at the ceiling, then looked back at Mark. "I'm glad you're my brother. You're the best one in the world."

"You didn't think that last week, when I used your pencil."

"That was silly." The boy lowered his eyes. "I guess it's like Mom and Dad, sometimes you and me have fights."

"You and I."

"Right. You and I. But we're still brothers, and even when I'm mad at you I still love you. And I wouldn't trade you for anybody."

"Well, I wouldn't trade you either." He grinned. "Unless it's a pretty good offer."

"Aw, quit it." Peter stretched out, his head resting on the mattress behind Mark's back. "I think Mom and Dad are going to get a divorce."

"What?!" Mark spun, feeling an odd sickness in his stomach. And yet there was a shock of recognition: he'd been

expecting this for a while.

"I heard Dad tell Mom that she ought to get a lawyer to talk to his lawyer." Outwardly Peter seemed calm, but Mark could see real anxiety just below the surface. "Lawyers means divorce, doesn't it?"

"You sure they weren't talking about what I said about law school? Maybe you didn't hear — "

"I heard." He looked away. "What happens to us if they get divorced? Will I have to go live with Dad, and you stay here with Mom? Or will we have to go back and forth, like Tanya McDermott and her sister do?"

"They don't decide that kind of thing until a lot later. Don't worry about it, Peter. Dad might be talking about lawyers now, but he'll cool down in a few days."

"Maybe you're right." Again the boy was silent...and then, in a completely different voice, he said, "Oh, neat. What's that?"

"What?"

Peter pointed to the door, where lines of pale blue fire revealed one of the magical symbols that held Mark's wards. "What is it?"

"Never mind."

"No, really. It's cool." Peter moved closer, reached out with a tentative finger to touch the symbol. Mark knew what he would feel — just the wood of the door. Magical glyphs had no physical existence, they were just markings that showed where lines of magical energy intersected.

"That's something I did for school." Mark said, hoping Peter would lose interest. "Remember, we talked about this."

"Is it magic?"

"Kind of."

"Wow." The lad was fascinated, and Mark knew he would never hear the end of it unless he could explain the glyph to Peter's satisfaction. "How come it's glowing like that?"

"I'm not really supposed to talk about this." Mark sighed. "That's what we call a glyph of warding. It helps establish an

area of protection.”

“Like a force field?”

“Sort of. It keeps bad things out.”

“What kind of bad things? Monsters?”

“More like feelings. Magical things, if you want to call it that.”

“Evil spells and bad wizards?”

“You might say that.”

“Come off it, Mark. There’s no such thing.”

“Whatever you say.”

“What makes it glow?”

“Whenever the wards are doing their job, keeping out bad things, then the glyphs show up. If you look close, you can see one in the middle of each wall.” Mark pointed, and watched his brother’s eyes get wider as he picked out the glyphs.

“You mean there’s bad things around here now?”

“Bad....” All at once, Mark had a vivid flash of memory. Once more he was outside David’s trailer in the rain, moving toward something with Peter’s voice and form. Again he felt that thing reaching for him — if not for Linda’s sudden arrival, it would have touched him.

The Zwilling. It was still reaching for him, still trying to touch him, this time at his most precious and most vulnerable spot: his family.

Everything was suddenly clear to him — the arguments tonight, the threats of divorce, the glowing glyphs giving their silent warning of evil forces at work. And Mark knew that to protect his family, to stop all this before it was too late, he had to leave.

With exaggerated calmness, he patted Peter on the shoulder. “Listen, kid, I’ve got to go to school. You just reminded me that I have...a meeting tonight.”

“Aww. When will you be back?”

“I’ll probably stay with Bob in the dorm tonight.” And for a while, until we can figure out how to stop the Zwilling. Otherwise, it just isn’t safe for everyone else.

Mark took his overnight bag from the closet and started throwing clothes into it. Peter frowned. "Who's going to help me with my algebra?"

"Yesterday you told me that you understood it."

"Maybe I don't anymore."

"I've got to go. Honestly." The bag was full; Mark zipped it and hefted it. "You can sleep in my room tonight if you want."

"Can I play with the computer?"

"All right. As long as you stick to games. I don't want you using the modem and running up my phone bill."

"Okay."

His head spinning, Mark hugged his brother. "Okay, get to work on that algebra. I'll see you tomorrow."

His father was sitting in the living room, the television on and a bottle of whiskey before him. He looked up as Mark walked down the stairs. "Where do you think you're going?"

"To school."

"The hell you are. I told you to go to your room."

Mark said nothing, but merely went to the kitchen to get his jacket. When he returned to the living room, his father was standing in front of the door.

"You're still not too old for a beating," his father said. In his Dad's eyes, Mark saw a blurred reflection of malevolent hatred, and he knew his guess was right.

"Don't do this, Dad," Mark said. "Let me go."

"You think you could beat me? Come on, boy, give it a try. Come on." His father dropped into a stance like that of a professional wrestler. When Mark simply stood still, his father took a step closer. "Now get up in your room before I give you a thrashing you'll never forget."

"Dad, for your own sake...."

"Get!" His father raised a hand, and Mark ducked. "Damn you, I've had just about as much as I'm going to take."

When his father lunged at him again, Mark raised a disciplined hand and spoke a single word. The spell was a

minor one, nothing more damaging than a little electrical shock — his father jumped back as if stung, and for an instant the cloud of madness over his eyes parted. In that instant, Mark opened the door and ran to the car.

As he sped away into the sunset, he thought he heard his father's voice shouting after him. But he kept his eyes firmly on the road, not looking back.

Chapter Eighteen

(Bob)

David had nothing new to tell them. Bob noticed that the pack-leader looked tired, with drawn face and dark circles under his eyes...but he said nothing about his research in the Special Collections Room. Class continued with a desultory discussion of the previous night's readings, and David disappeared as soon as it was over, without waiting to answer questions.

That afternoon, Bob decided to skip his metaphysics class and take matters into his own hands. At twenty minutes before noon the library was all but deserted; he signed out the key to the Special Collections Room under the watchful eye of the head librarian, and then nervously let himself into the room. David, luckily, was not there.

First, Bob inspected the cracked window. He couldn't tell for sure, but it seemed that the hairline crack was a little longer than before. Besides wreaking havoc in Mark's life, was the Zwilling also focussing destructive magical energy on the library?

One thing was certain — this creature had a lot of energy. For the first time, Bob began to wonder if he and his friends had enough power to defeat it. If we're just kidding ourselves,

he thought, the consequences will be disastrous.

He shrugged. No way to know, until they tried. He went to a shelf and, one by one, took down the ancient printed books and manuscripts, then carefully replaced them. This was one of the largest libraries of magic on the continent; somewhere in all these musty pages there *had* to be an answer to the problem of the Zwilling. Maybe David couldn't find it — maybe he had found it, and was afraid to try. Either way, Bob was certain that *he* could find some solution.

Hours later, his eyes were burning and his head ached from reading nearly illegible script in a variety of unfamiliar languages. One more book, he thought, and that would be it. David had a lot more patience than he thought.

The next book was a large leatherbound volume with illuminated vellum pages. Sitting next to it on the shelf was a tattered looseleaf binder crammed full of inexpertly-typed sheets, now yellow with age and dust. More than a dozen years ago, a forgotten graduate student had prepared this "Incomplete Translation of the Kalocsa Codex" — now Bob settled down happily to reap the benefits of the man's work.

Even with the translation, it was still slow going. Much of the book's meaning was dependent upon the diagrams and sigils that appeared in its pages, and Bob found himself obliged to keep flipping back and forth from translation to original. There were places where pages were in the wrong order, and the grad student had skipped entire sections of the Codex. Still, Bob could decipher meaning, and the longer he read, the more excited he became.

His stomach reminded him that he hadn't eaten since breakfast, and he was astonished to find out that it was quarter past five. Carefully, he replaced the Kalocsa Codex and its translation, then gathered up his notes and dropped off the key at the front desk.

He had to find Linda....

"So that's the story," Bob finished, handing his notes to Linda. It was hot in his room, even with the windows open — there were no nearby trees to provide shade, and all afternoon the sun had shone right into the room. But Bob didn't want to involve Cathy, so they *had* to talk in his dorm. Luckily, Mark was not here: he'd left a note saying that he'd gone to the Student Center for dinner, and then intended to drive over to Security Square Mall to shop. He invited Bob along, but Bob didn't think he'd be going.

Linda looked through Bob's notes, then frowned. "Are you sure this is it?"

"I copied down everything I could. It looks as if it'll work." He shrugged. "What do we have to lose?"

"A lot."

"Look, Linda. The Zwilling is trying to destroy us. It's making things miserable for Mark, and God knows what it's done to David." He touched her hand. "And I don't think David has what it takes to fight back."

"David's — "

"Yes, David's an expert. But what does he know about demonic possession? How much experience has he had with this sort of thing? No more than you or I have." He tapped his notes. "I think this spell will banish the Zwilling from our plane of existence. I think we should try it."

"I still don't know. This is some pretty high-level magic."

"Linda." He took her hands between his, looked into her eyes. "We can *do* it. We can do it now. Don't you see what this means to us? Casting a spell like this, using the mystical power of something on this level — it would be like finishing up three years of graduate work in a single evening."

"Suppose we screw it up?"

"How could we? You saw the instructions — a child could follow them. We *know* we can handle magic...it's not like we're Freshmen just diddling around with the basic spells."

She turned her head away. "I'm just not sure."

With his finger against her palm, Bob traced a series of magical symbols — love signs, sufficient to create an electrical tension of magical energy. He felt her shiver in response. “Think of the power. The knowledge.”

She nodded. “All right, you’ve convinced me.” She looked again at his notes. “I suppose this would work best if it were cast at the gravesite?”

“That’s what I was thinking. That way we can draw on the power of the old church.”

“All right. Let’s go, then.”

“Right. I’ll get the supplies, then we’re off.”



The air was motionless, and hot as a blazing furnace. Bob wore gym shorts and a tee shirt, and Linda was similarly dressed...nonetheless, both were drenched in sweat by the time they arrived at the cemetery.

The Judd grave appeared undisturbed in afternoon sunlight. Bob and Linda sat down on either side of the patch of bare dirt, and joined hands. Bob faced the old church — power emanated from it like a strong steady light.

“Ready?”

“Ready.”

The preliminary steps of the spell involved placing the four elements at the four cardinal points. Bob reached into his knapsack and took out a shallow bowl, filled it with water from a canteen, and carefully set it down at the west side of the grave. “Water,” he said, “in the name of Gabriel.”

Linda produced a candle and set it down at the south, breathed a quick spell and then touched a match to the wick. “Fire, in the name of Michael.”

A test tube filled with pure oxygen, obtained from the Chemistry department, served as a better symbol of air than anything known to medieval alchemists. Bob placed it reverently to the east of the grave. “Air, in the name of

Raphael.”

The final step was up to Linda — with a single movement she gathered a handful of sand from the grave, then let it fall through her fingers in a neat pile to the north. “Earth, in the name of Uriel.”

As soon as the square was complete, Bob felt the touch of otherworldly energy. He felt stronger, more confident. The bright look in Linda’s eyes and the smile on her face told him that she felt the power as well.

He set the pages of his notes down on the grave, and raised his hand. Linda touched it with her own, and together they drew the first of seventeen magical symbols in the air. Where their hands passed, fine lines of fire glowed.

Bob read aloud, pronouncing the unfamiliar syllables of the spell with a quiver in his voice.

Linda followed along with the translation. *“Ye demon, ye unnatural travesty of life, hear me and fear. By the first sign of the enchanter Vaclav of Tergovist, whose sign is the quiet snows of winter, attend to these words and obey them.”*

The earth of the Judd grave suddenly felt cold, as if a February wind had decided to pay a visit. In between Linda and Bob, the ground seemed to move, rippling like the surface of a lake in a quiet breeze.

Bob nodded, and the two moved their hands once again in an intricate pattern of fire. Again he spoke, and this time his voice was more steady.

“Foul demon, creature from beyond the threshold of death, hear me. By the seventh sign of Danuta, witch of Sarmixegetusa, whose sign is that of all the beasts of the deep, feel the strength of the depths.”

Bob strained his ears, for it seemed that there was some sound from the grave. A grating, scraping sound — almost as he had always imagined human bones would sound as they scraped together.

He felt exhilarated now, filled with power. Nothing could go wrong — he felt that his hands held the ability to move

mountains or part seas. Already he had learned so much...with each mystical symbol and each magical syllable, it was as if a veil lifted in his mind, showing him hitherto unexpected vistas of knowledge. Right now, where he sat, he felt that he could turn the direction of the spell, use it to bring powers from the earth, call strength down from the heavens, or summon the storm and all its force.

Moving smoothly and almost without thought, he and Linda traced the third sign.

"Vile spirit of hate and pain, see this, the sixth sign of Chosroes the Magus, whose sign is the sigil of —"

"Stop!"

Bob halted in mid-syllable and looked up to see David standing over him, panting, his face red and his shirt wet with perspiration.

There came a roar from below the ground, and Bob felt himself thrown backward as the candle blazed up into a column of flame. At the same time, the grave itself stirred and tiny pale fingers, looking for all the world like worms, emerged from the heaped earth.

"Damn," David said, and held out his hands, palms down. "Help me," he cried, his eyes wild.

The clutching fingers now pulled at Bob's notes, and David bent to pull them away. "Stop it." Then David tumbled back, thrown away by a tremor in the ground.

Bob didn't know what was going on, but he abruptly suspected that he had made a mistake. Without understanding, he thought it best to follow David's orders.

Power still surged within him, and he reached over the grave and snapped his fingers. At once his notes burst into flame, and in another second there were only ashes.

"Give me your hands," David said urgently. The three joined hands across the grave, and David chanted a spell that Bob didn't know. The power of the spell built upon itself, gathering power with each repetition.

The wiggling fingers withdrew, and the grave stilled.

David's spell built to a frenzied crescendo, and then a blast of palpable energy leapt from their hands into the earth.

Exhaustion washed over Bob. The evening was once again still, and there was no trace of magical energy in the air.

Linda squeezed Bob's hands, then looked at David. "What happened?"

"Come away from there. The church is warded — we can talk there."

In the ruins of the old church, Bob and Linda sat on a scorched wooden beam while David leaned heavily against the stone wall and folded his arms. "What were you up to?" he asked.

"I found a spell of banishment, and I thought it — "

"What spell?"

Bob hung his head. "From the Kalocsa Codex. It was — "

"I know." David sighed. "Why didn't you ask me before you did that?"

"I thought we could..." Bob trailed off, uncertain of his reasons.

"It seemed a good idea at the time," Linda said. "What went wrong?"

"The spell you were using, for your information, is not a banishment spell at all."

"Not a banishment spell? What is it?"

"When completed, it opens a gateway to the demon's plane and allows free passage back and forth. That's just the spell that the Zwilling *wanted* you to cast." He picked at flaking mortar with a fingernail. "It's not your fault. I should have cautioned you. I ran into that spell three days ago, but I checked further and found out why it shouldn't be used." He stood, and hugged Bob and Linda to himself. "I'm glad you two are okay. From now on, will you please let *me* do the research? I promise I'll let you know as soon as I find something we can use."

Bob looked up into David's face. "I don't know what came over me. I'm sorry."

“It was the influence of the Zwilling, I’m sure. Our wards are getting too extended, too weak — and the Zwilling is getting too strong.” He squeezed Bob’s shoulder. “You two must be hungry after such a use of power. Let’s get back to the trailer, and I’ll feed you.”

“Thanks.”



That night, Bob slept fitfully. His dreams were all bad ones — over and over again he saw the Zwilling’s pale fingers creeping from the earth, and felt the malevolent attention of the Zwilling upon him.

Mark’s breathing was slow and steady across the room, and when Bob looked up he saw the glyphs of his wards shedding a reassuring glow in the darkness.

He slept again, and this time he dreamed that the Zwilling had entered his room. Kevin Judd had broken through the wards, and he was even now moving toward Mark. And Bob was frozen, nailed in place in the curious immobility of nightmares. He strained to see, and there was nothing but shadows...until a glowing-eyed form loomed above him.

He tried to move, tried to scream — then Kevin jumped upon him. He felt hands around his neck, and he struggled, trying to throw the Zwilling off him. His mind was cloudy, and he couldn’t seem to make his limbs obey him. He kept telling himself that he was in a dream, that Kevin was not really trying to strangle him...but he could not make himself wake up.

He could not catch his breath, his vision went dark, and he felt a great weakness steal over him. He felt himself falling, into death...no, into sleep.

Abruptly he awakened, fully aware of himself. The night was calm, the wards undisturbed. And...and Mark was in bed with him. His friend was pressed up against him, arms about each other, the two of them huddled together like Arctic

explorers in a snowstorm.

Bob eased back from Mark, gingerly disentangling himself from the younger boy's arms. Bob was hot, and Mark's body warmth made him hotter. Then he became aware that between them was something warm and wet...blood?...no.

Oh, God, what have we done?

Bob reached to wake Mark, but again weariness overcame him, and he tumbled into the abyss of sleep.

On his walls and ceiling, glyphs of warding continued their steady pulsations.

Chapter Nineteen (Cathy)

Cathy wanted to help Mark. The problems with his parents hurt him, and she didn't like seeing him hurt. But all she could do was offer sympathy, and listen when he talked.

At least Bob had talked him into going back home. Mark had made the announcement Thursday morning before David's Symposium on Sympathetic Magic class.

"If I were you," Linda said, filing her nails, "I would stay away a while longer. Make them suffer. God knows they've put *you* through a lot. Sooner or later parents have to learn that you're not their property, and they have to get used to the idea that you're going to leave for good before long."

Bob shook his head slightly. "Not this time, hon. Mark's not ready to leave home. Not yet."

"Besides," Cathy said, "It's not like this is all your parents' fault, Mark. They're being influenced by..." she lowered her voice, "The Zwilling. You have to forgive them."

Mark was even quieter than usual. "That's one reason I went away. It...it was trying to strike at me by attacking my family. B-but I talked to Peter last night, and he said the fighting is still going on as bad as ever. I have to go back, because if I'm there maybe I can fight what Kevin's trying to

do to my folks.”

“It’s not Kevin,” Cathy said.

“What?”

She shivered. “I don’t like what’s happening any more than the rest of you. We keep blaming Kevin — yet he’s more of a victim than we are. He didn’t ask to have this thing following after him, working through him to hurt people.”

Linda threw up her hands. “Now I have absolutely heard everything. Cathy, dear, I don’t see you hanging around the boy after classes any more. Or have you had a sudden change of heart.”

Cathy felt herself blushing. “I’ve tried. I just can’t get close to him. Not knowing what he...what he’s involved with. That doesn’t mean I can’t feel sorry for him. Or that the rest of us shouldn’t.”

“Feel sorry for whom?” David asked from the doorway. He entered and put his books down. “I apologize for being late. Who are you feeling sorry for?”

“Kevin.”

David gave a short nod. “I’m glad you can do that, Cathy. I think I tend to forget that he’s just another kid, besides being the gateway for the Zwilling.” He yawned. “Keep reminding us.”

Later that afternoon, she recalled her defense of Kevin, and wondered that she’d had the courage to speak out that way. A few months ago — even a few weeks ago — she would never have dreamed of arguing with Linda or Bob.

She had been changing, lately, and she knew it. She could feel a difference within herself, something that came from her brain as much as it came from her heart.

She brought her attention back to the biology lab and the half-dissected foetal pig that lay before her.

Biology. She hadn’t wanted to take this class, but she had to take a science and Astronomy didn’t fit into her schedule. She’d faced her first lab experiments with reluctance. Now, however, she was glad she’d signed up. Working in the

biology lab wasn't all that different from working with some of the more intricate spells.

And biology was all tied up with the changes she was feeling. The things she'd learned already, in just five weeks, were amazing. She was conscious, as never before, of all life as part of a single system...of the earth and all its creatures as one interdependent entity.

Odd, she thought, how science and magic met in this awareness of the unity of life. Cathy had continued her reading about the White Goddess and all Her mysterious manifestations — the concept of a mother goddess, with all living beings as Her beloved children, was one that would be familiar to the authors of her biology texts.

There was a certain magic to life, an underlying current of mystical energy that ran through all living things. Cathy had felt it when she was a child — with her face pressed against the bark of a tree she was climbing, or when she ran through a wide-open field with her dog at her side. As she grew older, she had just about lost her awareness of life's magic.

Now, the Arts had brought that all back to her. Recently she had begun to feel the magic in ordinary things, and she knew that somehow the White Goddess was alive and still cared about the world.

As she maneuvered her scalpel, the tip of Cathy's tongue crept out of her mouth and poised at the corner of her lips. She glanced at her biology text, open on the counter beside her...a drawing of the pig's anatomy was supposed to help her identify particular body parts. It wasn't much help — instead of the bright colors indicated in the book, everything was a rather drab grey and the whole thing smelled oppressively of formaldehyde.

Cathy raised her head from her work, looking for the instructor or a lab aide. They were all busy with other students, so she went back to her work, carefully removing the different pieces and arranging them on the surface of the lab table.

Suddenly her head was spinning, and it seemed as if the organs before her had come alive and were moving of their own accord. Cathy tried to pull back — but it was as if time was frozen in the room, and she felt herself falling deeper and deeper into a state of trance. A wave of blackness washed over her eyes and then receded, leaving her vision much clearer than before.

This is some trick of the Zwilling, she thought. Everyone else has been attacked, and now it's my turn.

No.

There was *meaning* in the pattern of entrails on the table. Cathy remembered what little she had read of divination, and she felt the touch of power. This could be nothing else: she was being given a glimpse into the possible futures.

For a moment, the meaning of the signs before her remained unknown but vaguely familiar, as if she were trying to read a book in dim light, or through dark sunglasses. She knew that there were letters and words on the page, but she couldn't manage to interpret them. She squinted, and she tried to open her mind to magical influences, but to no avail — the symbols remained unfathomable.

With fascinated horror, Cathy prodded a bit of intestine with her scalpel. Goddess, she thought — if you're trying to tell me something, you're going to have to make it plainer. I don't know anything about reading entrails; I don't even know what to look for.

There. She poked at the body cavity, and found a group of five shriveled organs all together in a tight group. These are us, she thought with a shiver. David, Bob and Linda, Mark...and me. What's ahead for us?

Frightened, Cathy reached forward with her bare fingers. The liver was the key body part, in divination; she prodded the pig's liver, then turned it over and gave a gasp of horror. The small grey lump was pulsing, and its surface was acrawled with tiny, pale grubs. As she watched, the thing moved of its own accord, drawing a trail of mucus across the table in the

direction of the tiny bits that represented Cathy and her friends.

"No!" she cried. The scalpel lay on the table; she raised it and stabbed at the hideous slithering liver, stabbed again and again in blind rage.

Unharméd, it continued to crawl like some maddened, diseased animal.

Cathy took a breath, trying to be calm. Think, girl, she told herself. Think of the magic. Remember the good in life, the things that are under the power of the Goddess. Autumn fields in a gentle breeze; the wet tongue of a friendly puppy; Mom's hot chocolate and warm hug on a frigid winter day.

Her hand was steady now — she thrust with the scalpel, and the quivering liver fell apart into inert fragments. She had destroyed it.

The lab table wavered, and Cathy felt faint. With a little cry, she fell forward, and her vision went black.

When she came to she was sitting on the floor with the instructor looking into her face with a worried expression. "Are you okay?"

"Yes," she stammered. "I just felt faint. I guess it's the heat." She took the instructor's arm and stood. On her table, the foetal pig lay as she had left it before the vision — the liver was still tucked safely into the body cavity, and there was no trace of any untoward events.

"Do you want to leave?"

"No, I'm feeling better. Really, it was the heat." One of her classmates had fetched her a glass of water; she accepted it gratefully. "Let's get back to work, everybody, okay?"

One by one, the students drifted back to their tables, and Cathy turned to her pig. The heaped organs now had no trace of divinatory magic about them, but Cathy smiled.

I won, she thought. I won.

There's hope.

Next morning in class David announced, "We're going on a field trip."

"Where?" Bob asked. Since the affair at the gravesite, Bob had been unusually agreeable and co-operative with David.

"To the lab." A forgotten chemistry lab in the basement of ancient Helbran Hall had been appropriated by the Comparative Religion department, and set up as a facsimile of a medieval alchemist's laboratory. Cathy had been there once or twice, and didn't feel at all comfortable in the dark, foul-smelling room.

"Why?"

David grinned. "I'll tell you when we get there."

David had to brush dust off the doorknob before he unlocked it. Linda drew back, her face lined with distaste.

"When was this place last *used*?"

"A few months ago, I guess."

"I'll get filthy." Linda was wearing her best blouse, in a doomed effort to persuade her history teacher to give her a "B" on her term paper.

"Trust me."

The lab was not only dark, it was more cluttered than any place Cathy had ever seen. For every rare book in the Special Collections Room, there were a dozen not-so-rare volumes down here — all the same shade of dreary off-beige, some missing covers or with pages torn out and piled helter-skelter on the shelf. The room was an absolute treasure-trove of worthless miscellanea: phials of unknown substances, hideous stuffed animals, a few wall-charts crammed with astrological and alchemical symbols, enough antiquated laboratory equipment to outfit a dozen horror films...and that was only the stuff in plain *view*. There were also chests, cabinets and trunks that Cathy was sure held tons more worthless equipment.

Oddly, though, Linda's fears were unfounded. Although dust caked the outside of the door, the inside of the lab was

nearly spotless, and it smelled faintly of aromatic herbs and incense.

David still wore his grin. "It helps to have a few tame poltergeists and such around...when Doctor Nacht acquired this place, he arranged that it would be kept clean."

Bob whistled. "He must've been some kind of guy."

"The Department has had its characters, all right. And not all of them students." David sighed. "Time to get to work."

"What are we here for?"

"A spell. It's a heavy one, and I'll need all of you to help."

"What kind of spell?" Mark asked.

"It's an enchantment." From a hook on the wall, David removed a key ring containing scores of keys. He selected one and used it to open a dark wooden chest. "You're all wearing your school rings — will you take them off and put them on the table, please?"

With a concentrated tug, Cathy pulled the ring from her finger and placed it on the table. Meanwhile, David brought out a set of hanging bells, and started some incense burning.

Linda put her ring down next to Cathy's. "These aren't gold, you know."

"I know."

"You're going to enchant *duralite*?" Linda said, disbelieving. Mark silently put his ring on the tabletop.

"With the spell I've found, I can enchant anything. I thought your rings would be good because they're always with you, and they're common enough to go unnoticed."

Bob dropped his ring with a clatter. "What's the nature of this enchantment?"

"Very simple. It keeps away all evil influences. Demons, black magic, curses — everything."

Bob whistled, and Linda put her hands on her hips. "No enchantment spell is that powerful. You must have something to link it with."

David nodded. "I located the Key of Basilides."

Mark whistled, Bob grinned, and even Linda looked

impressed. Cathy remembered reading about the Key of Basilides...it was for magic what supercomputers were for science: it made everything go much more quickly and raised the efficiency of any spell. If David said that an enchantment using the Key would stop all evil forces, then it would.

"Well, then," David said, "Let's get started. I'm afraid I'll have to hypnotize you — I need your unhindered help."

"I don't see any reason..." Linda started. David looked into her eyes and said "Sleep," and her voice trailed off into a distracted murmur.

The last thing Cathy remembered was David's smile, and then she was asleep.



"Wake."

Cathy was exhausted — and yet, she also felt quite rested, as if she had finished a long term paper and knew she was going to get a good grade. The others looked sleepy, just coming out of a trance; but David was smiling broadly.

"Did it work?" Bob asked.

David pointed to the pile of four school rings. His own was on his finger. "They're all set." He held up his hand. "Here, try me. Send a magical attack against me."

"Like what?"

Linda took Bob's hand. "I know what. This is going to be fun." Still holding Bob's hand, she raised her other arm, closed her eyes and spoke a few words.

A great cat, twice the size of a lion and ten times as fierce, suddenly appeared in the air, leaping toward David with jaws agape. David simply raised the hand that bore his ring — and the cat dissolved like tissue paper in a strong rain. In a second, there was no trace of it.

"Wait a minute," Linda said, "That was one of my best thought-forms."

"Try something stronger," David said. He pointed to a

bookshelf. "There's a wax figure; use it against me."

Cathy shivered. "That's not something that we're supposed to..."

"I'm not asking you to turn down the dark path," David said. "I just want to test this spell."

Bob picked up the wax figure. "I know this one — it's simple. I must admit, David, you're not the faculty member I would most like to use this against." He held the wax figure at arm's length and stammered his way through a rather long spell in ancient Greek, sensitizing the tiny doll to David. When it was done, he lit a candle and then, flinching, held the wax figure close to the flame.

David nodded. "It seems to work. I can't feel anything — and right about now I should be running a fever of 105. Go all the way."

"David..."

"Go ahead. Do it. You can pull it back if..."

Convulsively, Bob thrust the doll into the flame. It melted and the flame rose higher. After a second or two the wax figure broke in two, no longer recognizable as anything resembling a human being.

"Well, that clinches it," David said. "You all agree, I should be in the hospital after a demonstration like that."

Bob let out a tremendous sigh. "That was the hardest thing I've ever done. Please, don't make me cast a spell like that again."

"You won't have to." David waved at the rings. "Come on kids, put on your rings. Then you'll be safe from the Zwilling's tricks."

"And now what?" Linda said after her ring was safely on her finger. "Now that we're immune to the Zwilling's attacks, when do we attack *it*?"

"And how?" Mark asked eagerly.

"I-I haven't quite decided. Give me some more time to play around with the Key of Basilides. I hope to have a method figured out by the end of the week."

“And meanwhile?”

“Meanwhile...learn more. I gave you all the Key when you were under — use it to study whatever spells you can. The more magic you’ve mastered, the more help you’ll be.”

Linda wrinkled her nose. “More studying.”

David smiled. “And take some time to enjoy yourselves. You deserve it.”

Chapter Twenty

(Mark)

The Saturday afternoon sun was warm and the water cool; Mark stretched out with his hind legs in the water and rested his chin on a sun-warmed rock. He was content.

When a wolf is fed and sleepy and warm, there isn't much that he asks from life. As he drifted in and out of dreams, Mark was aware of Bob nearby, sprawled on another rock; he felt the slightest twinge of discomfort at the collar from which his school ring dangled, but it wasn't enough to rouse him.

He dreamed of being Mark — strange dreams for an innocent wolf cub, odd visions of the world of men beyond his knowledge. Classes, and family...and his little brother. Mostly his little brother. Peter's face swam before him, seen as a human would see him, not in the distorted sight of the wolf. Mark was aware of a little sadness: Peter was a boy and would always be a boy, he would never feel the *rightness* of four legs instead of two, the sheer joy of ranging the hills and baying at the moon.

That was wrong. Peter was Mark's brother...flesh and blood, hide and hair — his smell was the smell of Mark's family, he belonged in Mark's pack.

Bob sneezed, startling Mark. Then, slowly, Mark lowered

his chin back to its rock. It was a golden day, a warm day...and if he had been thinking of anything, well, it was gone now.

Eventually Bob lazily pulled himself to his feet and stretched, then plodded over to Mark's rock. He nuzzled Mark gently, then gestured toward the westering sun. Then he tossed his head toward the pile of human clothes on the bank.

The language of the wolf is only partly one of sound — it depends as much on gesture and odor as it does on whines, barks and yelps. Mark understood Bob's meaning as clearly as if the older boy had spoken in human tongue: *It's getting late, and we ought to be going.*

At first Mark made no move to get up; he simply sighed, and twitched his foot in the running water of the Patapsco. When Bob gave him a whine and a quizzical look, he panted. *Not yet. Just a while longer.*

Bob nipped Mark's ear, and Mark jumped to his feet. *All right. I'm going.*

It took a definite effort to make the switch back to human form. Mark watched his buddy transform, then he gave a low groan.

Naked but for the collar around his neck and his wolfhide belt, Bob put his hands on his hips. "Come on, Mark. It's time to go. Linda and Cathy are going to be worried about us already."

Only a little of Bob's meaning penetrated Mark's mind — but the boy's tone told the wolf everything he needed to know. There would be no arguing. It was time.

Reluctantly, Mark made the effort. As always, there was an instant of blinding pain as the transformation came upon him with the suddenness of a light bulb coming on. Then he was uncomfortably human once again.

"Well," Bob said, cocking his head, "You certainly didn't want to come back this time, *did you?*"

"I couldn't help it. It feels so good when...when I don't

have to worry about anything.”

“One day I guess you won’t come back at all, eh?” Bob deliberately made his remark sound like a joke, but Mark knew he was concerned as well.

“No,” Mark answered, “I wouldn’t want that. Don’t worry, I’m not going to go all weird on you. I guess I like being a wolf for the same reason that it’s nice to get really drunk once in a while. It lets you forget about everything.”

Bob took a grey tee shirt and a pair of jeans from the clothing pile and handed them to Mark. Then he started pulling on his own clothing. “I guess you have a lot to forget about, too. Are things still bad at home?”

Mark pulled on his jeans, then fumbled at the catch of his collar. “It was better last night. I don’t know if that has anything to do with David’s enchantment, though. Since I stayed away for so long, I think they’re afraid to let me see them fighting. They know that next time I might not come back.” The collar wasn’t co-operating; Mark threw up his hands and said, with an imploring look, “Would you help me with this?”

Bob went behind him, and Mark felt his friend’s fingers struggling with the catch. Bob’s hands were cold and he shivered.

“Stand still.” Bob steadied him with a hand on his bare shoulder. Mark felt himself blushing, but there was nothing he could do to stop it.

Bob removed the collar and handed it to him, then sat down and started pulling on his tennis shoes. Without raising his head, he mumbled, “Hey, I guess we need to talk about...what happened the other night.”

Mark froze in the process of slipping his ring back on his finger. The pit of his stomach held the same feeling that it did when he glimpsed police-car lights in the rear view mirror. “Yeah,” he answered quietly. “I guess I figured that you were asleep.”

“Look, we’re pretty good friends — so I have to ask you

this one thing. Was it the Zwilling, making us do that...or was it you?" Bob looked up, and his face was so intense that Mark had a sudden insane desire to giggle.

"You know, I've been wondering the same thing," he said. "I didn't want to say anything." He lowered his eyes. "I don't know. It *could* have been the Zwilling."

Bob smiled. "We weren't ourselves." He made a gesture as if erasing a chalkboard. "Okay, forget about it. It's over, and I'm not going to let Kevin get me bothered by — "

"But I'm not *sure*." Mark swallowed. "I guess I should tell you, I've never...you know, slept with a girl. I don't have any basis for comparison, is what I'm trying to say, and...." He pulled on his tee shirt, trying miserably to say what was on his mind.

"And you enjoyed it, is that what you're saying?" Bob guessed.

"Yeah, that's it. Do you suppose that means — "

"That means that you're a healthy American boy, that's all that means. Didn't you...fool around with other boys when you were little?"

"Yeah, but — "

"And we were playing around pretty seriously just a while ago."

Wolf-memories swam in Mark's head, the scents and feel of tumbling with Bob, animal joy, animal arousal....

"That's different."

Bob squeezed his shoulder. "Is it?"

Mark looked into Bob's eyes. "What are you saying?"

"That you're my friend. That we're pack-mates. That I love you and you love me. Wolves don't care about anything else, and I don't see why *humans* should, either. If we want to have a little fun together now and again, that's perfectly fine with me."

They hugged, tightly, and for a long moment Bob rested his cheek against Mark's. In a whisper, Bob said, "Guy, be whatever you *are*. It doesn't change a thing."

"Thanks. You're the best." The hug melted apart, and Mark stepped back. "I guess we should go."

"Wait a minute," Bob said, walking to the water's edge. "I want to wash my hands off." He crouched on a flat rock and swirled his hands in the eddying river. "I hope Linda's finished working on her term paper — I don't think I can stand another night watching her sit there and type." He started to stand, then said, "Whoops," and fell to his knees.

"What's up?"

"Dropped my ring." As Bob felt about in the shallow water, Mark carefully stepped over rocks to stand by his side. The ring was a silver glint between flat rocks on the sandy bottom; it seemed to dance teasingly just out of Bob's reach. "There it is."

"I'll get it for — ulp!" Mark reached for the ring, and his foot slipped on a wet rock; he tumbled into the cool water with a tremendous splash.

Laughing, Bob offered him a hand. "Are you all right?"

"Okay." A few curious fish tickled Mark's hand, and he wiggled his fingers to drive them away. "Damn, now I lost my ring."

Bob's face went suddenly very serious, and he lunged to snatch up his own ring. "Get it and put it on, quick."

"Why?" Mark grabbed the ring and slipped it on his finger, then took Bob's hand and stood, dripping.

Bob shivered. "David told us not to take the rings off. Now both of them fall off at the same time." He looked around, squinting. "I just hope it wasn't long enough for...."

"For what?"

"I don't know. Let's get home."

They were no more than a quarter mile from the University; Bob led the way along a path that climbed steeply between huge evergreens, and Mark did his best to keep up.

It was quiet — not even a birdcall broke the steamy silence. The bright sun was hot against Mark's cheek, and as he trudged on he had to keep swatting away tiny gnats. After

about fifteen minutes, Bob stopped and looked up at the sun, shielding his eyes. "I can't believe we're lost."

"How can we be lost? The campus is just over..." Mark stopped, confused. The terrain seemed familiar, but the path was gone, the trees were somehow different, even the soil was muddier than before. "Bob, what's happening?"

"I don't know. Let's go back to the river and follow it up to the road. We can't go wrong that way."

As they walked, Mark fought a nagging suspicion that something was dreadfully wrong. "Bob, do the trees look right to you?"

"What do you mean?"

Mark waved his hands to indicate the soaring trees. "These are mostly evergreens. Aren't most of the trees around here oaks?"

Bob gave a nervous little giggle. "Shows you how much we know about trees. I've never really paid attention; I guess the oaks are higher, up near the school."

"Maybe you're right." Mark kept his eyes open, and he noticed more things that seemed out of place. There were furry little animals in the trees, but they weren't squirrels — at least, not any species of squirrel that Mark had ever seen. But they wouldn't stay still, and he had trouble telling exactly *what* they were.

The air was too humid...when they'd set out that morning, it had been hot but not terribly muggy. Now, it seemed like August again, and both boys were drenched in sweat. A low mist hung over the forest, and although the sun shone brightly, it was a blurred circle of light in the sky.

"It's quiet," Mark said.

"Too quiet," Bob answered automatically, in the style of a hundred bad cowboy movies.

"No, I mean it. No jets, no cars, not even a train whistle. I don't like it."

"Maybe you would be happier if you were back in wolf form," Bob suggested. "There's nothing wrong — we've just

gone off the path, and pretty soon we'll hit the road." He wiped his brow. "I don't mind telling you, I'm not looking forward to walking down Davis Avenue in this heat. What say we go out for milkshakes when we get back to the dorm?"

"When we get back," Mark answered dubiously.

After half an hour, Bob's optimism had faded and he had to admit that something strange was happening. There was no sign of the road, the railroad tracks, or the massive steel-and-cement bridge. There were no telephone wires, no microwave towers perched high above the valley, and no trace of the University.

"Look," Bob said, pointing. "That's the rise where the county jobs center is. So *that* must be the old church. The Bethel Inn's over that way."

"I don't understand." Only huge trees stood where buildings and roads were supposed to be.

A roar startled the boys. Mark looked in the direction of the sound, and his eyes flew open in amazement as a huge hairy beast came lumbering through the trees.

"My God, what is *that*?"

"Don't ask." Mark shivered, and drew Bob behind a large tree trunk. "Just stay out of its way."

The curious creature — part bear, part ox, mostly nothing Mark had ever seen — moved to the river and drank. Mark pulled Bob up the hill, keeping his eye on the beast.

When they were out of sight of the river, Bob folded his arms. "What's going on here?"

"You're not going to like it if I tell you."

"Tell me."

"That was a prehistoric cave bear. I should know, my brother has enough models of critters like that."

"What's it doing *here*?"

Mark shook his head. "You mean what are we doing here? Don't you see? I think...I think we've been sent back to prehistoric times." Mark tried to keep his voice calm. We'll get out of this, he told himself.

Sure we will.

Bob swallowed. "How could that happen?"

"How could it happen? It's magic. David once said that there were time-travel spells, but they were hard to cast and needed too much power." The full reality of their position was just now coming clear to Mark, and he knew that he was close to panic. "It was just a moment that we had our rings off, and in that time the Zwilling cast us back."

Bob seized him by the shoulders. "Wait a minute. What if this is just a projection? A dream? Jesus, Mark, do you have any idea how much *power* it would take to throw us back in time? Even a ninth-circle wizard couldn't survive the backlash."

Mark took a breath. "So what do we do?"

Bob pointed. "We climb up to where the old church should be. It's warded, maybe it'll be easier for us to break the spell there."

"Lead on."

The terrain was slightly different, but Bob managed to find the site of the old church. "Look," he said.

Mark squinted. At the edge of sensation, like a pale wisp of air-upon-air, he thought he saw the outline of Saint Zachary's. "Okay, I see it. What do we do now?"

Bob brushed at the dirt with the toe of his tennis shoe. "You know the spell for setting things right?"

"You mean this one?" Mark spoke the first few words of the spell.

"That's the one."

The spell was not a very useful one — he'd employed it once or twice for getting to sleep on restless nights, and repairing minor dents in his car.

"If this *is* just an illusion, I'll bet that spell can throw it off." Bob shrugged. "And if we've really been thrown back in time, maybe it'll take us back where we belong."

There was another growl, and the sound of splintering wood. Both boys turned to see the giant cave bear struggling

up the hill in their direction.

Mark forced a grin. "One way or another, it's probably our only hope. I don't think we could outrun that thing."

"All right. Give me your hands."

Fingers clasped and eyes closed, the boys chanted aloud the words of the spell. Mark kept his mind on the enchantment, imagining himself standing in the middle of the ruined church, with the road nearby and train tracks snaking along the Patapsco. There was no cave bear, he told himself, no strange furry things, no hulking evergreens. Oaks and squirrels and a perfectly normal Autumn afternoon.

The last syllable of the spell hung in the air for a second, then went away with a shattering quiver. Slowly, Mark opened his eyes.

Tumbled grey stone walls were about him, and the reassuring sound of traffic came from the road. The bloated sun hung over tall oak trees, and Mark gave a sigh of relief.

"Come on," Bob said. "I could really use that milk shake now."

Chapter Twenty-one (David)

"That's it." David slammed his fist down on the table, making silverware jump. Sunday breakfast was not a well-attended meal in the Student Center cafeteria, but a few students turned to look. He ignored them. "This time I'm ready for the Zwilling. It thinks that it can play with us — now I'm going to show it that it's underestimated us."

"How?"

"Using the Key of Basilides. And this." From his hip pocket, he produced a rough gold ring, and cradled it in his palm for the others to see.

Linda squinted. "It's not pretty."

"I have to apologize for the workmanship. I made it myself. I was lucky to find enough gold in the lab. Etching the designs was a bitch."

"And what are we going to do with it?"

"First, we're going to enchant it — just like we did with *your* rings. And then...well, we're going to put it on Kevin's finger."

"How?" Bob said, at the same time Linda asked, "Why?" David chose to answer Linda's question; he didn't yet have an answer to Bob's.

"Kevin is a gateway — it's through *him* that the Zwilling is able to influence events in this world. From the way you say he spoke, Cathy, his mother was the only thing standing between him and the power of the Zwilling."

Cathy nodded. "That's the impression I got."

"Then all we have to do is close that gateway. If the Zwilling's influence can't touch Kevin, then it can't get through to hurt the rest of us."

Bob leaned back and rested his knee in cupped hands. "You make it sound simple. Just slip the ring on Kevin's finger, and all our troubles are over. It isn't going to be that easy."

"I don't mean to pretend that it *is*. He's going to fight us, and the Zwilling is going to fight us." David narrowed his eyes. "As long as all of you have your rings on, though, it can't touch you."

"What can we do?"

"Bob, you're familiar with the books in the Special Collections Room. I want you and Linda to prepare a couple of spells — write them up on parchment, get the necessary materials together, the whole thing."

"What kind of spells?"

"A few general defensive spells, something for communication, the most powerful geas you can find...but stay away from the Kalocsa Codex." He gave Bob a teasing smile, which the younger boy answered. "Mark, I'll need you to help me prepare for the enchantment. It's going to be a lot of scutwork, the lab is in bad shape and we need to straighten things up. Everything depends on this enchantment being done perfectly."

"What about me?" Cathy asked.

David rested his chin in his hands and looked right into her eyes. "You're going to be our insurance policy. You've been doing a lot of reading about the White Goddess...?"

"Yes. It's interesting."

"Good. See what you can dig up in the way of protection

and banishment routines. Or anything else that you think will help people going into the face of danger. You called on the Goddess once before — “

“That was an accident, kinda.”

“Sometimes accidents are the best source of spells. Do what you can to prepare yourself for another ‘accident’ like that.” He glanced at his watch. “Why don’t you all show up at the lab by four? That’ll give us enough time to finish the enchantment and still cope with Kevin before nightfall.”

“How are we going to get him to come to us?” Linda asked. “Engraved invitations probably wouldn’t work.”

“I also need your thoughts on that.” David toyed with cold scrambled eggs before pushing them to the side of his plate. He’d forgotten how terrible the cafeteria food was. “We need to draw Kevin’s attention, and yet not let him know what’s going on.”

“How about attacking the grave?” Mark asked, his voice charged with innocent enthusiasm.

“I don’t know if that’s a good idea,” Bob said, leaning back in his chair. His plate was clear — David imagined that undergraduates built up a tolerance to the food. “When Linda and I...when we were at the grave, I got the feeling that the Zwilling could defend itself without Kevin’s physical presence.” He took a swig of Coke from a sweat-beaded can; David repressed a shudder.

“But I thought that a possessed creature could only....”

“Usually it’s true that a possessed creature can only act on its immediate neighborhood,” David interrupted. “But this isn’t an ordinary case of possession. The Zwilling is more powerful than a standard demon, and it’s also much more closely linked to Kevin. Since they were twins, it can use Kevin’s brain and body to cast stronger spells and call on other malevolent forces. It’s as if Kevin is an intensely powerful sorcerer — without being aware of what he does.”

“So you’re telling me that the Zwilling *can* strike at us even if Kevin’s not there.”

"That's right." David sighed. "Which still leaves us with the problem of how to get close enough to Kevin to put the ring on him."

Cathy had also left half her breakfast untouched. "Never mind," she said. "I'll take care of getting Kevin close enough. Where do we want him?"

David shook his head. "I can't let you do that. If the Zwilling suspects anything, then you would be in danger."

She held up her hand. "Not with this ring on, right?" She didn't wait for an answer. "It's the best way. Kevin knows me, and I think *he* trusts me even if the Zwilling doesn't. So where should I bring him?"

David spread his hands. "Saint Zachary's is the best place."

"So near the graveyard?" Linda asked.

"The site has been warded continuously for more than a dozen years, and it's a reservoir of magical energy. If nothing else, it's a safe retreat if anything goes seriously wrong." He shrugged. "Besides, I'm not going to allow Kevin access to the things in the lab and the Special Collections Room. The old church is neutral territory."

"That's it, then," Cathy said. "We'll meet at four to enchant the ring, and then you guys get the site ready while I get Kevin."

"Fine." They all joined hands for a moment, silently wishing each other luck, then they stood and went in different directions.

With Mark following him toward the lab, David frowned. His plan seemed a good one, but he couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong. It was all too simple.

"Is this going to work?" Mark said, voicing David's thoughts for him.

He turned and smiled encouragingly. "It better, kid."

"What if it doesn't?"

His smile, against his will, faded. "I don't know. I just hope we'll be around afterward."



In the red light of the westering sun, the gold ring took on a shining sunset glow of its own. It lay like a circle of cold fire in David's palm, seeming almost to pulse in eager anticipation of the coming conflict.

The walls of Saint Zachary's stood firm around him, while glyphs of warding glowed the color of dawn. Bob and Linda had strengthened those wards, drawing on the power of all those who had died here — to David's inner sight, the wards were thicker and more impregnable than the stone walls themselves. Linda and Bob sat, hand-in-hand, a few feet away on an old, blackened timber, the two of them shedding a happy aura of contentment. Mark was next to them, his face blank and his breathing deep and slow; building up his energy. For a second, David felt a wash of pride: these were his students, the members of his pack — and they were ready.

But where was Cathy? David looked at his watch...ten after seven. They'd been waiting an hour already, more than enough time for her to get Kevin and bring him to the church. Sooner or later, David thought, I'm going to have to go after her. And that means moving the battle to a site of Kevin's choosing.

Linda looked into his eyes, nodded. "She's okay."

"How do you know?"

"I know. She'll be here. Just give her a little more time."

"I'm worried that..." he trailed off, unwilling to voice his fears in front of the kids. Besides, they knew already.

The sound of car tires on gravel roused David, and he peered around stone walls to see Kevin's black Firebird. "This is it," he announced. "Good luck." He took a breath. "Remember," he said, "A wolf serves no master but the pack."

Linda stood, smoothed her jeans. "What does that mean?"

"The Zwilling might try to tempt you away — any of you. Remember that you're wolves as well as human beings...and

both races are proud. That pride might save you where your reason can't." The car engine stopped, and David felt a sudden onrush of panic. There was so much he hadn't told them, so much he hadn't done to prepare them. Then he calmed himself with a deliberate effort. They were good cubs, and talented. They would come through for him.

Cathy left the car first, and David relaxed; she was unharmed. She started moving toward the church as Kevin got out of the Firebird, hefted a brown grocery bag in one hand and a six-pack of Coke in the other.

David looked closely at the boy. Kevin wore tattered cut-offs and a yellow tee shirt; on his feet were tan sandals. His hair was the color of burnished gold, with red highlights that caught and reflected the setting sun. His eyes were shadowed.

"Where is everybody?" he asked Cathy. "I thought this was supposed to be a party?"

"T-they're here. Studying, probably." She raised her voice. "Hey, you guys, we're here. Come on out." Cathy crossed the mystical line of the wards, and David nodded to Mark. The younger boy stepped into view, pushing overgrown weeds aside with his tennis shoes.

"Here, let me help you," he offered to Kevin, taking the grocery bag. He tipped it, and David saw that it was filled with cellophane bags of pretzels and potato chips.

Kevin stopped just outside the wards, and a nimbus of magical light danced around him for an instant. He frowned. "What's going on?"

Cathy turned and held out a hand to him. "Come on, Kevin. Please."

The copper-haired boy shook his head, then took a step backwards. The six-pack of Coke dangled unregarded in his left hand. "No. What are you doing?"

David moved into Kevin's view, holding the newly-enchanted ring closed in his right fist. "We want to help you. Give me your hand."

Kevin looked from face to face, panic growing in his eyes

— then he screamed, threw the six-pack at David, and turned to run.

"Neti!" David gestured, and the six-pack broke apart as if it had hit a concrete wall, splattering brown liquid and shards of red-and-white aluminum on the gravel.

Kevin stopped and, very deliberately, turned. His face was clouded, his eyes dark as a stormy night. In a voice much deeper than usual, he said, *"You think you can stop me?"*

"I do."

"Then try."

Kevin raised his hands and stood frozen, his eyes fixed on David's face, his mouth a thin angry line. David felt a quiver of magical force, which quickly subsided.

David took a step forward. *"You can do better than that."* His ring felt warm, and he knew that the protection enchantment was working. *"Come to me."* Another step.

"If you insist." Kevin's eyes flared with eldritch brightness, and David felt himself thrown backward as if he had been hit in the chest with a twenty-pound sack of flour. He staggered, but managed to keep his footing.

"Look!" Cathy pointed to the sky, and David shivered.

A great flock of birds descended, darkening the sky and the treetops. Then one of them dived, and David realized they weren't birds — they were some mad composite creatures, part bird and part rodent. Their cries were like the chittering of rats, the flapping of their leathery wings like the skitter of claws on bare floor. They swarmed around the church and through the woods, they made a living, slithering carpet of flesh over the graveyard.

David swallowed. With more bravado than he felt, he pulled himself to his feet and said, *"That's your best? They can't hurt us."*

"Not yet. But I am their master, and when I strip you of your defenses, they shall strip your bones clean." Now it was Kevin's turn to take a step forward, menacingly, his eyes burning with a fathomless darkness.

"Not bloody likely," Bob said. He and Linda stood hand-in-hand next to the stone wall, their faces calm. Just seeing them gave David courage — he knew that they were linked to the reservoir of energy stored in the old church, and that they would stand firm against anything the Zwilling could throw.

Kevin took another step, this time moving toward Cathy. David tried to move toward him, but felt his way blocked. He struggled as if against a rising gale.

Kevin held out his hands. "*Come with me, Cathy. You have talent, and power — I need you.*"

Lips pressed together, Cathy shook her head.

"*Mark,*" Kevin said, with a twisted smile. "*You want to help your brother, don't you? Aid me, or I'll send these creatures after him. Do you want to see his little fingers gnawed, his eyes chewed out? Only you can prevent that.*"

Cathy looked pained. Mark shivered, but squared his shoulders and looked into Kevin's face. "We'll prevent it, all right," he said.

Kevin shrugged. "*So be it.*" He waved, and a dozen or so winged creatures took to the air, then arrowed off across the river.

"Stop it." Bob released Linda's hand, raised his fist toward Kevin. His school ring was like a band of molten silver around his finger, the stone like the angry red eye of a striking cobra. "*By the power of —*"

"Oh shut up." Kevin gestured, and Bob was thrown back against the wall. Kevin turned his attention to Linda. "What do you need these fools for? You need power...and I can give you more power than you have ever imagined." He held out a hand. "Come to me, Linda Falk. I will teach you things you can never learn here. Together we will..."

"Save it." Linda clenched her fists and raised her head, looking down her nose at Kevin. "You have nothing to teach me." She turned her back on him and went to help Bob up.

David grinned. "Well, it looks like you've failed. None of us is going to help you. Now stand still and I'll — "

Kevin snarled and jumped far more quickly than a human had any right to move. Too quickly for thought, he was on David — a moment later, the enchanted gold ring went flying off into the undergrowth. David's own ring flared in a blast of sunfire, but still Kevin tore it from his finger and held it high, screaming.

Flame engulfed the boy's upraised fist, then the ring too fell to the ground and David felt hands at his throat.

"Come to me, David Galvin." The Zwilling's words burned into his ears, wiping out all other sounds. *"I will make you my lieutenant. I know magics greater than the Key of Basilides or Cathy's charms of the White Goddess...and I will teach them to you. You can be the greatest sorcerer in history."*

David had a vision of himself standing tall, wrapped in luminescent robes, in his hands the power to bring down storms, to lay whole forests waste with a gesture...or to make wasteland green, to bring health to millions.

"I will be a benign master. Use your power as you will — heal if you must. All the same to me. Just join me now, and pledge me your abilities..."

A wolf serves no master but the pack.

David shook his head. "You'll have to kill me."

"So be it." The face, like that of an inhuman beast, moved closer, fangs bared. David felt the Zwilling's fetid breath hot against his throat.

"Neti!" Linda and Bob spoke as one, and Kevin stiffened; before he could recover himself, a snarling wolf jumped atop him and buried fangs in his shoulder. David rolled away, gasping for breath, as Kevin and Mark tumbled in bloodstained gravel.

"Stay. In the name of the Goddess."

David raised his eyes. Cathy, a vision in blinding white, stood before Kevin and Mark. The boy raised his head, then scrambled away from Mark's snarling, hairy body. Kevin crawled backward, unable to keep his eyes from Cathy.

"Here," Bob whispered, pressing something into David's hand. It was the gold ring, still glowing the color of sunset. David took a breath to steady himself, mouthed a quick invocation, and then jumped.

Kevin was slippery as an eel, strong as a bear. A hundred winged beasts attacked David, swarming over him with claws and teeth...but he ignored them, letting Bob and Linda's quick spells cast them away. He reached forward, locked Kevin's burned hand in his own powerful grip, then moved the ring toward the possessed boy's fingers.

"No!" Kevin bucked and almost threw David off. His face was livid — whether with fear, pain or hate, David couldn't tell.

"Now," David said. He was conscious of four pairs of eyes on him: Cathy, Mark, Linda and Bob, all funneling their energy and their strength toward him. His head was light, and the next step seemed almost too easy.

The gold ring slipped onto Kevin's finger, and all at once magical tension shattered like a sheet of ice. The road, the graveyard and the old church were at peace, the bird-creatures gone as if they'd never existed — and David was holding Kevin's limp body.

He lowered the boy to the gravel, pressed his ear against the scarred chest. Then he looked up into Cathy's expectant face.

"He's all right," he said, nodding. "We did what we came to do."

The setting sun flared blood-red through dense treetops, and for the first time in months a cool breeze stirred in the Patapsco Valley.

Chapter Twenty-two

(Bob)

They called it Witches Moon, the late October moon of magic and nature's benevolence. It floated above the treetops, a perfect silver half-circle sharing the southern sky with yellow Jupiter.

Bob shivered as he stripped off his tee shirt. It felt good to be chilly; he'd had enough of the heat.

"Here, let me help." Linda reached up with slender fingers and took the shirt from his hands. Her fingertips brushed for a moment against his chest, tickling the soft light fuzz there. Linda was drunk with the elation of victory; it danced around her body like an electric field, flowed like a current between their bodies whenever she touched him.

"We ought to do this kind of thing more often," Bob said with a grin. "It makes you hot."

"Let me keep you warm." She pressed herself against him, their bodies joined under the crystal stars. The shell of the old church rose around them, grey in the moonlight, with glyphs of warding outlined in silvery light. Linda's body was warm, and he hugged her tightly.

"Do you really think we've won?" she whispered, as if afraid of his answer.

“David thinks we have. He should know.”

“It seems so...easy. That we could defeat something with that much power, just by putting a ring on someone.” She was dressed only in a leotard, her skin moon-white against black nylon; she stretched with the fluid grace of a dancer, and shook her head. “Bob, I want to see.” She nodded in the direction of the graveyard.

He took her hand. “David didn’t say we couldn’t.” In truth, David hadn’t said much of anything — he congratulated the kids, thanked them, and then asked Mark to drop him off at the trailer. He looked more tired than Bob had ever seen him; Bob knew that he would never fully comprehend what the struggle against the Zwilling had taken out of David.

With a quick look for oncoming cars, they scrambled across the road to the cemetery. Even in the dark, it wasn’t hard to find the Judd grave — Bob thought he would never forget that grave as long as he lived.

Hand-in-hand, Bob and Linda stood at the foot of the tiny rectangle of sand; they could almost have been conventional mourners. Bob kicked a clod of dirt and watched dust settle.

“Do you feel anything?”

“Yes. Here.” Linda took his hand, and in the wake of the electric tingle that danced between them, he felt it too: a sense of brooding hostility, as if the Zwilling regarded him from behind an expanse of thick, smoky glass. It was imprisoned, unable to get out — he sensed that clearly. But he also sensed its hatred, and the certainty that if it *did* get free, it would hunt him down and kill him.

“It’s not gone,” Linda said. “It just can’t get at us.”

“Thank God for that.” He squeezed her hand, and then shook his head. “Come on, let’s get away from here.”

Linda agreed, and together they crossed the road once again. Safely behind the wards, Linda put her arms around Bob and hugged him tightly, resting her head against his chest. Tranquility washed over him as he stroked her hair, bestowed a faint kiss on the top of her head. She looked up,

smiling.

"Here." Their wolfskin belts hung from the protruding half of a fallen roof beam; Linda wrapped his around his waist and knotted it, then with a quick movement she slid his gym shorts from his hips, tossed them to the ground.

Bob spread his arms and turned slowly, bathing himself in the magical power of the place. He felt as if he had just finished a five-kilometer run — tired, but relaxed and charged with energy. He traced a hand down Linda's body, leaving a pale glimmer of mystical light.

She shrugged out of her leotard and donned her own wolfskin belt. Naked, they embraced, and their lips met in a long, passionate kiss.

Linda backed away, a twinkle in her eyes, and a second later she was a wolf. With a sly glance over her shoulder she scampered away into the woods.

Bob grinned. "I'm right behind you," he shouted. A momentary effort, an instant of blinding agony — and then he too was wolf, his nostrils filled with the scent of her and the smell of the woods, the soil soft under his paws. His mate was running away; he leapt after her, happy.

When he caught up with her, Linda had just made a kill. The body of a rabbit was before her; she looked up at Bob and panted, her stance inviting him to join her. *This is for you, my mate.*

He nuzzled her in thanks for the offering, then the two of them fell to their meal. The flesh was warm, the blood hot and tasty, and as Bob ate he felt the a new vigor rise in him.

This was something he had never known as a human: the thrill of the fresh kill, the magic that still lived in newly-slain flesh. Even this mere tidbit left him refreshed and alert, raised his senses to their highest level.

Another hunger came upon him, fueled by hot blood's tang, the day's witchery and Linda's nearness. He ran his flanks over hers, nipped at her ear — she answered with a seductive growl and a languid stretch.

Bob Toland...wolf...slayer of demons...triumphant, he mounted her, and their souls mingled as their bodies met. The hunger was strong as swift river-currents, now, and it took both of them, carried them away into the mysteries of the cool, clear night.

Beneath the Witches Moon, Bob and Linda joined their voices in a single howl of victory.



Cathy heard the distant howl, and smiled. Bob and Linda belonged together, and Cathy was happy that they were able to have this night of peace and achievement. She wished, a little, that she could be with them in the glorious lonely night. Then she laughed at herself. She had other responsibilities, other things to do tonight.

Her room was quiet; her own enchantments kept out the noise from the hall, and only the sound of crickets and cicadas came from beyond the open window. Cathy had closed her door and turned off her lights, signalling to the rest of the dorm that she wanted to be alone and undisturbed — now she lit a single candle and placed it in the middle of the floor, just beyond a patch of errant moonlight.

Cathy didn't know any formal prayers for the Goddess...they hadn't been included in her Sunday School classes, and the ones that were recorded in the literature seemed too sycophantic or too simpering. The prayers of men, she thought, trying to placate the White Goddess or to defuse her wrath. No one had bothered to record the prayers of the gentle women who served her....

She made up her own prayers, then, and they were nothing more than vague efforts to thank the Mother for what she had done this evening. For whatever reason, She had revealed some of Her majesty to Cathy, and had given the girl some of Her strength to defeat the Zwilling. Whatever else had happened, wherever else her studies led her, Cathy knew that

she was now a servant of the Goddess.

She bowed her head. *I will serve you gladly, Mother. I only hope I can serve you well.*

The candle flickered, then its flame strengthened. Cathy stared deep into it, and felt peace settle upon her.



The Sunday night football game was in the last quarter, and for once Mark's mother hadn't made any comments about how much she hated football. Instead, she was only on her second gin-and-tonic of the night, and she'd progressed a full two inches in her current needlework project.

Mark's father carefully folded the Sunday *Sun* sports section, placing it on top of the rest of the paper, and then finished his beer. Mark caught his eye and nodded toward the empty mug. "Do you want me to get you another one?" he asked timidly.

"No, thank you. This is it for the night." His father frowned. "We missed you at dinner, son."

Mark didn't know how to reply. He didn't want to cause trouble or get in an argument. "Yeah," he said, "I'm sorry I couldn't be here."

"Next Sunday...why don't we plan to do something together? All of us."

His mother looked up from her needlework. "That would be nice."

Mark exchanged glances with Peter, who lay on the floor in front of the TV. The young boy shrugged and rolled his eyes.

"How about going out to dinner?" Mark's father proposed. "What do you say to Haussner's?"

I can't believe this, Mark thought. Haussner's, with its almost-infinite menu and wacky decor of paintings, curios and objets d'art, had been a family favorite since before Peter was born; they hadn't eaten there in more than a year. "That sounds great."

"Great," Peter echoed.

"It would be wonderful." Mark's mother sighed. "Mark, we can bring home a strawberry pie, and you can have your friends over...."

"It's settled, then," his father said decisively. "Dinner on Sunday. Plan on it."

Later that night, when all the lights were off and everyone retired to their rooms, Mark heard his door open and the tread of slippers on his rug. He sat up in bed and saw Peter, clad in pajamas, looking pale in the moonlight. "Mark, can I talk to you?"

"Sit down." Mark patted the mattress, and Peter plopped down next to him. "What's up?"

"What's going on here? Mom and Dad didn't fight. Dad wants to take us out to dinner. Mom stopped drinking after two glasses."

Mark chuckled. "I know. For a while I thought maybe I was in the wrong house."

"What happened?"

"I don't know, kid," Mark replied, guardedly. "Maybe they were just as scared as we were, and they decided to make up."

"I don't think so."

"Oh, you don't?"

Peter stuck his chin forward. "No. I think you did something. I think it has to do with *them*." He gestured to the walls.

"With what?"

"Your funny designs. G-glyphs. They aren't glowing any more — but they're still there, aren't they?"

"I can't fool you, can I?" He sighed. "They're still there. I don't think we'll be needing them, though."

"What did you do? Are the bad things still trying to hurt us?"

"The bad things are...gone away. They can't get to us any more."

"So we don't need your designs. And when there's no bad things around, they don't glow. Is that it?"

"That's right." Mark hugged Peter's shoulders. "If you see those designs start to glow again, you'll know that we're in bad trouble." He grinned. "But don't worry, it isn't going to happen."

"Things are going to be okay now?"

"I think so."

"And Mom and Dad aren't going to get divorced?"

"I can't say. That's for them to decide. You know, it might be that they still can't live together. There were problems a long time before the...bad things showed up." He shook his head. "I can't make you any promises. At least, though, Mom and Dad will be able to make up their own minds. And I think they're both trying. Which is more than I could say yesterday."

"You've made me feel better." Peter hopped down from the bed, then paused at the door. "Hey, are you going to see Cathy and Bob and Linda tomorrow? And Mr. Galvin?"

"Of course."

"Tell them...tell them thanks. From me. Okay?"

"I will. Now get on to bed."

"G'night."

"Night." The door closed, and Mark turned over. The glyphs hadn't vanished completely: they were still faintly visible to his inner vision, like the muted midnight glow of a television screen when the set was turned off. There was still evil in the world, after all, and the wards were sensitive enough to react to the dream-passions of more than two million sleeping citizens. However, Peter was essentially right...the "bad things" were gone.

Smiling, Mark curled up and drifted into tranquil sleep.



The moon had set, and David still couldn't sleep.

He was exhausted — *too* exhausted. Although his body ached, and he was filled with lethargy, his mind wouldn't keep still. He drifted in and out of fitful waking dreams, now hearing the voices of his early instructors, now conversing with the kids, yet again roaming the valley with only the disorganized thoughts of the wolf.

He'd even tried switching to wolf form to deaden his racing brain; it only made things worse, as human ideas tried to dance in a canine skull. Eventually he could only stretch out full-length in the bed and attempt to slow his breathing, force his mind into a relaxed trance.

A coherent dream came upon him. Without warning, he was sitting in Susan Whitlow's tiny office...the sun was streaming in the window, just as on the awful day he had found her dead. But she was *not* dead, she sat behind her desk with the draft of his thesis in one hand and a glass of iced tea in the other.

He wrinkled his brow. "Doctor Whitlow? But you're...."

She waved the typewritten sheets at him. "You call this a thesis? Is this how you prove yourself, Galvin?"

"Doctor, I..." He struggled to move, but he was held by dream-paralysis, and he couldn't form his racing thoughts into words. Meanwhile, Susan continued to harangue him, the terrible dream-Susan who was so unlike the gentle, scholarly woman he'd known.

"Imagine! You're faced by a demonic presence, and all you can think is to set up an enchantment to keep it away. That's a *wonderful* solution." Her voice dripped with sarcasm, sticky and sweet as the iced tea.

"It worked," he protested. "The Zwilling is gone."

"Gone? Gone? It's not gone. It's just out of reach. That's *sloppy*. A sloppy solution from a sloppy wizard." She threw the papers down on her desk. "I'm ashamed to have you as my graduate student."

"You're dead!" David screamed.

"Yes, dead." She stood and leaned across the desk, her

bright green eyes pinning David to his seat. "And I trusted you to find my killer and do what was right. Instead, the Zwilling is still at large."

"But trapped on its own plane. It can't reach into our world."

"The boy is still alive. The Zwilling is strong as ever. Do you believe that it won't find a way to get at him?" She threw her head contemptuously. "A band of gold...that's all that stands between you and disaster. And you think you've beaten it. Ha!" She slapped him, and the dream dissolved.

David found himself back in his bedroom; outside, trees stirred in the wind and there was a howl from the direction of the river.

Miserable, drenched in cold sweat and tired beyond endurance, he stumbled to the bathroom and washed down a sleeping pill with tepid water. Magic and mental discipline had failed to banish the visions; maybe chemicals would help.

Eventually he slept...but did not rest.

Chapter Twenty-three

(Mark)

The change in Kevin was astonishing. In the three days since the Zwilling had been banished, he had become a lot nicer — Mark had always hated to talk to Kevin, and now he almost looked forward to German class and socializing with the boy afterward.

Kevin didn't know what had happened to him; he had no memory of Sunday evening, and Mark didn't think that he even *knew* he was wearing David's gold ring. The enchantment that they'd placed on the ring included a geas — a powerful compulsion that prevented Kevin from ever removing it. However, Kevin must have had some subconscious memory, for he turned away from his Freshman friends and began spending time with Mark and his friends. Most of all, though, he seemed fascinated by David.

Tuesday night, for example: with Halloween coming up soon, the kids had met after classes in the Student Center to plan the Comparative Religion Department party. Kevin tagged along, and during the discussion he sat quietly next to David, his eyes shining with barely-disguised admiration.

When they were finished talking, Kevin sighed. "Comparative Religion is such a great department. Sometimes

I wonder if I should transfer.”

“No!” Linda answered at once, then looked a little embarrassed at her quickness.

David grinned at Kevin. “Comparative Religion isn’t an easy program, and we can’t guarantee that a major will lead to good jobs. The University placement department can’t do much for our graduates. We usually advise people to think very seriously before transferring into the department.” He waved around the table. “Look. Two Juniors, two Sophomores, and about a dozen Freshman in the program now. Most of those will leave before the year’s out.” With a shake of the head, he said, “No, I can’t say Comparative Religion is the best choice for a major.”

David’s words seemed to placate Kevin; but Mark noticed that the boy still hung around whenever he could, and in class Wednesday morning David cautioned them all about Kevin.

“He doesn’t seem to be aware of what happened. He’s enthusiastic enough, and friendly enough — but just the same, I want everybody to be careful with him.” He glanced at Cathy, then looked away quickly. “And I definitely want to keep him out of the lab and the Special Collections Room. There’s a lot of stuff there that the Zwilling could use against us — ”

“I thought the Zwilling couldn’t get at Kevin any more,” Bob said, his brow furrowed.

“It can’t. But...let’s play it safe, okay? The lab and the Special Collections Room are warded with our strongest spells — I want each of you to promise that you won’t take *anyone* in there who isn’t a member of our pack.” He sighed. “That includes Doctor Faring and Doctor Quaile, I’m afraid.”

Mark shivered at the thought that the Zwilling might get ahold of some of the powerful magics that were stored in the lab, or the awful spells in dusty tomes in the library. He gave his word, and followed it up with a wolf-promise. Kevin would not get at these things through *him*.

At lunch that day — while Cathy and Kevin were in their

history class — Mark went with Linda and Bob to the lab. Among ancient retorts and half-erased chalk pentagrams, they ate lunch and talked. Mark had a jelly sandwich and chocolate Tastykakes in a crumpled paper bag; Bob wolfed down a hot dog that he'd purchased from the snack bar and washed it down with a can of Coke. Linda made do with a container of yogurt and a diet Sprite. While they talked, Bob conjured up a golfball-sized patch of greenish light and made it dance around the scarred wooden tabletop.

"Do you think David's right about Comparative Religion?" Mark asked. "I mean, that it's a major without a future?"

"If you were worried about getting a job," Linda said offhandedly, "You should've majored in computer science. Or biology."

"No, it's not that I'm worried about getting a job." Mark felt himself blush. "That's why I'm taking a minor in CompSci. It's just...." He struggled, trying to fit a difficult concept into words. "Just that I'm suddenly wondering what kind of people we are, to be involved in something that so many others don't want to have anything to do with."

"Lots of people take the Intro classes," Bob said. "Just like lots of people take Intro to Computers, or Western Civ."

"But nearly nobody *majors* in Comparative Religion. What's so different about us?"

Linda finished her yogurt and set the plastic container down with a sigh. "Most people don't believe in the things we do. Sure, they take Intro, and they learn all about the history of witchcraft, and Faring or Quaille teach them how to go into trance and maybe a few learn to feel magical currents...simple tricks. But if you told them we could do things of this sort — " she waved at Bob's dancing ball of light, " — they'd tell you you were insane."

"So what is it that makes *us* so special? Why are we so ready to believe?" Mark folded his arms across his chest. "Why did you two decide to major in witchcraft and wizardry? Why did David get so involved in it?"

They exchanged glances, and then Bob settled back, dispersing his sprite with a wave. "I know what you're asking, Mark. And I don't know the answer." He spread his hands. "What is it that makes you able to do tricks with computers, things that I could no sooner do than fly to the moon? What is it that makes me able to get up on stage and hold an audience? We have talents, all of us — and we four just happened to have the kind of talents that made us good with the Arts."

Linda shook her head, almost imperceptibly. "I don't know if that's all there is to it. David...he went into the Arts because that's how he was raised — I imagine a werewolf gains a healthy respect for wizardry pretty soon. When I was a kid, I was always interested in ESP and fantasy novels, and I always got a little tingle inside when I heard someone talking about witchcraft or magic. When I found out that Patapsco University had a program that taught magic, I knew it was what I wanted." She shrugged, and gestured toward her empty yogurt container. "And I stick with it because it's right for me. It *works*. I have a spell that makes yogurt taste like chocolate bars. So I don't ever have to worry about dieting. When I get homesick, I can fill a bowl with water and go scrying, and get images of what's happening back in Minnesota." She traced her finger along the tabletop, and tiny points of light danced in its wake. "Little things like that. It's like they tell you in Intro, the Arts are a way of life — and if you're not suited for that way of life, then it won't attract you. Sooner or later, you'll even stop believing in it. We're the lucky ones."

Mark sighed. He wasn't quite sure that Linda was right...at least, not all the way.

Bob put a hand on Mark's shoulder. "This is a problem that we all have to wrestle with. We're a minority, and we always will be. No matter how much we went through the other day, defeating the Zwilling and freeing Kevin — nobody else on this campus had any idea of what was going on. That

anything was going on at all. We can work the most powerful magic we know, and do wonderful things that no one else could ever match, and they're never going to believe us. Like it or not, we're outcasts, and we'll stay that way for the rest of our lives."

They were all silent for a time and then Linda, looking out into the sunny landscape beyond the windows, mused, "I know what Cathy would say, if she were here."

"What?"

"That we're all here as a part of some plan — that that Goddess of hers brought us all together and arranged for us to be trained in the Arts just so that we could defeat the Zwilling."

Mark felt a moment of electricity, a feeling that caused people to say "someone's walked over my grave." For just an instant, he had a vision of five lives — six, counting Kevin — converging in an intricate pattern towards the events of last Sunday afternoon.

Or perhaps some other goal, as yet unknown?

Lunch was over; he packed up his books and strolled to German class, pondering all the way.



Frau Zunge seemed to have noticed the change in Kevin; during class she kept looking at him with cocked head, and once or twice she glanced at Mark as if wanting an explanation. Mark remembered that she had seemed to know what the kids were about, and had offered her help — he wondered just how much she *did* know.

After class Kevin said, "Do you have to go home right away?"

"No."

"I have to do some work on my car, and I'd sure like to have company. Want to come along?"

"What kind of work?"

“Put in some oil, add antifreeze, that sort of thing.”

Mark thought for a moment, then agreed. “Sure.”

There was a distinct cool breeze, and Mark could easily believe that it was time to put antifreeze in the car. He made a mental note to get some for himself. The way Maryland weather was so changeable, it could easily be below freezing in a week or so, then shoot up into the seventies in November.

The Firebird’s radiator drained quickly, spilling crimson coolant like blood in an ever-spreading puddle on the black macadam of the parking lot. Kevin’s hands were already filthy from working with the engine; with a grin he thrust them under the radiator flow and wiped them clean.

“Now we have to get water.” Kevin produced a couple of plastic gallon jugs from the trunk, and the two boys made a few trips back and forth to the dorm bathroom. By the time they were finished, both were soaked and laughing, and Mark was glad he’d decided to help.

“What now?” he asked.

“I’ll start the engine, and then we pour in the antifreeze.” Kevin slid into the driver’s seat and the engine roared to life.

Kevin leaned over the engine with the bright yellow bottle and thick, green antifreeze poured out into the radiator, splattering in the wind from the fan blades. As Mark looked closer, he could see the water circulating and bubbling in the radiator, churning like the river after a heavy rain.

“How do you know when you’ve put in enough?” Mark asked. He had never done much with the car, besides changing tires and adding oil — his father always took care of things.

“There’s a chart on the back of the bottle. I figure about a gallon and a half, and then pour the rest into the overflow tank.” Kevin finished the first antifreeze bottle, and set it down on the ground. “Get me the other bottle, will you? It’s in the trunk.”

Mark came around the car, bearing the heavy plastic jug, just in time to see what happened. As near as he could tell,

Kevin knocked something off the right fender — a screwdriver, perhaps, or the cap to the antifreeze bottle. As he reached for it, balanced on one foot, he slipped.

His feet seemed to go out from underneath him, as if he were on skates. He reached forward to steady himself, and then Mark saw his hand make contact with the invisible blades of the whirling radiator fan.

Before he could cry out, run, or do anything but watch in sick horror, blood splattered in every direction, a sudden shower of bright red rain. With a grating noise that hurt his teeth, the blades hit Kevin's ring — and in a flash of gold sparks, the ring went flying.

Kevin fell to the ground, holding his hand, and crumpled into a ball. In a second Mark was kneeling next to him, hands on the boy's shoulders.

"Are you all right?" It sounded stupid...of *course* Kevin wasn't all right. And yet the boy hadn't screamed; maybe he was in shock. Mark's thoughts raced as he tried to remember what he knew of first aid. Kevin should lie down, he knew that much, and he'd need bandages for...

Kevin turned his head, slowly, until he looked into Mark's eyes. The boy's face was calm, his mouth twisted in what was almost a sneer, his eyes completely clear. Mark fell backward as if Kevin's gaze were a physical blow, then from the ground he watched as Kevin held up the hurt hand.

There was little blood, even at the stump of the third finger. The wound seemed to have healed already, in an evil-looking pucker of red-streaked pink. Mark shook his head, suddenly very afraid.

Kevin smiled.

Mark's head felt light. With an abrupt sickening clarity, he knew exactly what had happened — the Zwilling had won. It must have taken all of the creature's energy to set up this accident. Now, with Kevin's ring gone, there was nothing to prevent the Zwilling from taking over, from using its full strength. Mark looked into Kevin's eyes, and he saw the cold

hatred of the Zwilling.

I've got to let David know, he thought.

The soft purr of the Firebird's engine was the only sound, and it filled Mark's head like the buzz of an enormous insect. Then, abruptly, Kevin laughed.

"Go find your friends," he said in a terrible deep voice. *"Go find Galvin. Tell what happened. Then make yourselves ready."* The engine stopped, and Kevin walked away, leaving Mark shaking in a puddle of engine coolant and blood.

Chapter Twenty-four

(Linda)

Quietly, Linda eased out of bed and slipped into her jeans, wrapping her wolfskin belt around her waist. Cathy snored gently to herself, face turned toward the wall and covers wrapped tightly around her. Without turning on the light, Linda pulled on a tee shirt and sandals, and let herself out into the hall.

At three in the morning the dorm was silent, even though hall lights were brightly lit. Linda moved like a ghost down the stairs, nodded to the single security guard, and went out into the night.

She didn't like the campus this late — there were shadows everywhere, and no people in sight. Even the fraternity houses were quiet and dark. Fighting the dreadful conviction that she was being followed, she walked along cracked sidewalks to Purnell Hall.

Wards, which prevented an ordinary person from even noticing the laboratory door, didn't even stop Linda. The door was locked, but that didn't bother her; long ago she'd memorized the spell for opening locks, and she spoke it with a practiced voice. The door opened easily.

Once inside, with the wards wrapped safely around her,

Linda began to relax. She knew just what she was looking for, buried in a stack of coverless books with yellowed pages, obtained decades ago from private libraries and obscure mail-order houses, and never properly cataloged. Brittle pages turned under her deft fingers, and mystical diagrams surrounded by Latin inscriptions followed one another until she reached the chapter she wanted.

The routine — one couldn't really call it a spell, since it was a haphazard collection of techniques, lacking all internal organization — was simple yet powerful; she'd run across it two weeks ago, and hadn't thought she'd need it. Her translation of the accompanying text showed that this routine was not just another banishment spell...it actually gave the caster the power to bring final death to undead creatures.

Just the thing, she thought, to get rid of the Zwilling once and for all.

Someone had to do it. Neither Cathy nor Mark had the ability; David was too gentle and too cautious. She would have liked to have had Bob's help — but he was too spooked from their last encounter, he would never do something like this without David's permission. It was up to her, and her alone.

The magical routine required that most cliché of props: a wooden stake. Linda found one in the lab, a good six-foot length of strong mahogany, sharpened to a wicked point at the end; she took a wooden mallet out of a toolkit, slipped the book into her back pocket, and then started on her way.

It was a long walk to the graveyard, even longer since she avoided the shadows of the woods and kept to the roads. Only two cars passed her during the whole trip, both of them zooming by without even slowing. Did the drivers wonder what a college girl was doing in the middle of the road in the dead of night? Or did they see her at all?

There was an odd scent, like honeysuckle, in the air, carried by a gentle breeze that hardly seemed to stir tree branches. Linda breathed deeply, trying to still her thumping heart; as

she made the turn onto Woodstock Road and started down the hill toward the graveyard, she thought wildly of abandoning her mission, going back to the dorm and crawling into her warm bed. After all, how did she think she could succeed where David had already failed?

She shook her head and swore under her breath. This was the Zwilling's doing — already it sensed that she was coming, and it was trying to keep her away. Well, she wasn't going to allow herself to be turned back; one way or another, she was going to face the Zwilling tonight. She gripped the wooden stake more firmly, holding it like a walking stick, and started down the hill.

The wind began slowly, with merely a rustle of branches and the slow pirouettes of dropping oak leaves. It rose as she walked forward, showering the road with bouncing acorns which rolled furiously downhill. Linda was surprised at the chill in the wind; it was almost like an icy gust from the middle of February. She shivered, but continued walking.

When the thunder came it startled her, and she looked reflexively at the sky. Only a few wispy clouds hid the bright stars from view, and there was certainly nothing large enough to be a thunderstorm. Yet again the thunder crashed, and this time Linda caught sight of a bright jagged lightning bolt as a momentary flash brightened the night. Half-bare trees stood in brilliant black relief against the light, then faded to afterimages on her eyes.

"You're not going to make me turn back," Linda said, to no one in particular. The Zwilling would hear her, she knew.

Her answer was another flash, an ear-splitting crack of thunder. Then without warning she was in the middle of a snow squall, her face and hands stung by icy pinpricks, the road all but lost in white nothingness.

Linda stopped, planted her feet firmly and faced into the storm. She held tightly to her stick and lowered her head, then spoke the words of the only weather-spell she knew. Her voice faltered, and she had to start again; she shouted to make

herself heard over the force of the wind. For an instant she was afraid that she'd spoken the spell wrong, or that it wasn't powerful enough to defeat the Zwilling's magic — and then the wind stopped and the snow disappeared, and she was once again in the quiet night of the Patapsco Valley. She left crescents of piled snow behind her, and trudged forward confidently.

It was snakes next. Halfway down the hill, where the road narrowed and high weeds closed in on both sides, Linda heard a soft rattling, and she froze. It happened again, this time stronger, closer. She raised her eyes to a long oak branch that overhung the road; wrapped around it and dangling right over her head was a banded rattlesnake. It swayed slowly, hypnotically, and Linda slowly became aware of other serpents on the branch, twined about the tree trunk, and slithering onto the road before her. In pale shadows, it was almost as if the entire tree had come alive and was wriggling inexorably toward her.

Her heart pounded, and she shivered with revulsion at the sight of undulating flesh. But she forced herself to take a deep breath, and she faced the snakes with a feeling that bordered on nausea.

There was no help for it: she was going to have to move on. Gingerly, she nudged her stick forward, pushing snakes aside; they rattled and hissed, and the one above her started a slow descent like a bit of viscous slime dripping from a dark cave roof.

I don't believe this, Linda thought. She closed her eyes and tried to ignore the rattling around her, even though it sounded as if it were right next to her ear. Damn it, she had nothing to fear. Her school ring would protect her from evil attacks. However frightening the snakes seemed, they could not harm her.

Still her feet would not move; she couldn't force herself to take a step. She looked behind, and the road behind was also full of snakes. Forward or back, there was no escape...and

they were getting closer.

With a hiss like an angry cat, the snake above her dropped, falling with gaping jaws directly at her upturned face. Linda didn't have time to think, didn't have time to prepare a spell — she simply moved, swinging her arm to throw the attacking reptile away.

Her hand made contact with the rattlesnake, its hot dry flesh quivering at the momentary touch. Then, miraculously, the creature firmed under her hand, and she was batting away a falling stick. It landed in the bushes with a rustle of dry leaves and lay there harmlessly as another snake crawled over it.

Linda grinned, and took a step. Deliberately, she brought her sandalled foot down on the back of a snake; this one, too, turned into a fallen stick. Another and another, and then she actually giggled. The ring on her right hand seemed to beat like the pulse of a long-distance runner, and by the time she reached the end of the gauntlet of snakes, she was almost skipping with elation. David's spell had worked, protecting her from harm! She touched the spell book in her hip pocket and felt a heady rush of giddiness. She was actually going to defeat the Zwilling. Linda Falk, the unregarded Junior, was on her way to becoming a sorceress of the first order.

The Zwilling seemed to have exhausted its energy; as she came to the graveyard and the old church, everything was quiet but the crickets and an occasional susurrus of wind in yellow-red leaves. Midway between the cemetery and the ruin of Saint Zachary's she paused, and stood listening, indecisive.

There were the crickets, there was the wind — and under it all, there was the gentle gurgling of the River as its waters raced along their journey to the Chesapeake Bay and ultimately the ocean. It was a cold sound, an unconcerned sound, a sound that had nothing to do with Linda and her mission tonight. Yet at the same time it was the sound of power, a power that had patiently carved this valley over a

million years, a power that brought life to all the creatures of wood and water. A power that, if harnessed, could give her strength enough to defeat a thousand creatures like the Zwilling.

Lost in the spell of the River, she sensed another sort of power from her left, and turned to regard the old church. Dawn was still hours away, and yet a pale brightness like approaching sunshine was visible in and around the tumbled walls of Saint Zachary's. For a moment Linda simply basked in the ghostly magical glow, then she squared her shoulders and firmed her grasp on the stick. It was time.

Darkness hung like deep fog over the graveyard; as soon as her feet left the road, she felt as if she had crossed into a different world, a world ruled by deep starless night and endless silence. Even the crickets had lost their voices. She stumbled as she moved forward, and caught herself with the stick; the ground was damp and the end of the shaft sank a few inches. For the first time since she'd left the dorm, Linda felt tired, wanted to lay down and go back to sleep. Her eyelids drooped, and she moved slowly, almost in a daze. Before she knew it, she was at the edge of the Zwilling's grave.

Linda shook her head and reached into her pocket. The touch of the spell book brought her to full awareness. She had a job to do, and nothing was going to stop her from finishing it.

The page was traced with tiny letters in an almost-illegible hand, and miniscule diagrams that seemed more like marginal decorations — but Linda passed her hand over it, and the yellowed paper shone with a soft glow, allowing her to see and read. As soon as she spoke the first words of the routine, and made the first hesitant motions with outstretched fingers, the brooding calm of the night was shattered by a low rumble and a groan that seemed to come from the dirt beneath her feet.

She smiled. The Zwilling knew she was here, and knew

what she was trying to do.

Let it try to defend itself.

The entire routine took nearly fifteen minutes; by the time she was finished, Linda was shaking with barely-controlled energy, and she felt a confidence and a strength that came from somewhere beyond the gloomy graveyard. When she thrust the sharp stake into the center of the grave and drove it four feet down, the moaning stopped and all at once the night was once again clear and still.

For a moment Linda was motionless, still holding onto the shaft of the stake. Slowly the full import of her victory hit her, and she rose on unsteady feet. She had done it! She stamped the ground, and there was no response from the vanished power beneath. The ancient spell book fell unregarded from her hands and she turned to the old church. Its power had aided her; now she had an irresistible compulsion to be there, to drink in that pale light that shone like a faint beacon through darkness.

She crossed the road and picked her way carefully around weed-covered stones, then balanced on a blackened beam and ran to the center of the fallen church. She was happy, she was triumphant, she felt that there was nothing she couldn't do. Linda stretched out her arms over the burned-out remains of the church cellar, and put forth her will: the old wooden beams groaned and shattered brown stones stirred, and for an instant she had the ability to raise the fallen church. She felt the souls of its dead around her, those who had perished in one night's inferno...she raised herself on their insubstantial breath, until she floated a dozen feet above the ground, in what had been the very clerestory of the tiny church. Night air whipped her hair, the rushing of the river filled her ears, and she was flushed with excitement and fulfillment. She had done it, done what none of the others could do. And it had been easy for her! She had felt this before, when she was dancing, when she was before an audience and she had them under her control...but always before the feeling had faded.

This time, it was forever. Her power was at its height, and now she could command it, shape it, become what she had always dreamed —

A flash of light caught her eye, she turned to the cemetery, and her breath caught in her throat.

Her stake, rooted in the Zwilling's grave, had become a pillar of red-orange flame.

Soft as a dandelion seed, she settled to the ground. Through windows like empty eye-sockets she saw the flame; it lit up half the sky. She twisted around to peer out the window, her heart thudding. She had seen pictures of oil refineries burning off natural gas — that was how *this* flame looked, rising ten feet out of the grave. Then, even as she watched it, the flame leapt up and jettied toward her. She fell back, landing with a scream among the debris that filled the church's collapsed cellar.

Her right leg was twisted underneath her, and when she tried to move it pain lanced through her ankle like the clapping jaws of some terrible beast. Slowly, Linda raised herself up on an elbow, reaching for the blackened eight-by-eight roof beam that had long ago wedged itself across the broken foundation. The beam was a good foot and a half out of her reach.

The ground rumbled, and before Linda could do anything but gasp for breath, she saw the wards flare up like searchlights — then they went out all at once, and another bolt of flame blasted through windows, walls and heaped earth.

Too late, Linda recalled how Saint Zachary's had met its doom...with the explosion of a boiler, and a catastrophic fire that raged all night.

Weeds and wood burst into flame. The fire was all around her, above her, dancing on the walls and sending sparks high into the night. It was worse than summer's heat, worse than the coal-burning furnace in her grandmother's basement, worse than an accidental spill of scalding water or hot grease.

This was hell, and she knew that even without a hurt ankle she would never be able to escape. She shielded her face with her arms, and tried to think of a spell that would help her.

The heat...the flames...suddenly there was nothing in her world but fire and a terrible panic that grabbed her by the throat and wouldn't let her think. Dead souls were all around her, laughing at her, urging her to join them. And the Zwilling laughed hardest of all.

"Linda?"

"Help! Who's there? Please, help me!"

"Oh my God." It was Bob. He had come to find her, to save her..."Honey, you've got to get out of there."

"Where are you? I can't see you."

"I...I can't get near. What's going on?"

"Bob, please. I can't move, I think I've twisted my ankle. Everything's on fire."

"What are you talking about? What fire?"

What fire? "You idiot, the whole church is..." The quick flash of anger broke her panic, and she stopped. The flames felt real, the smell of charred wood seemed real — but was it any more real than the snakes had been? "Come get me."

"I can't. I'm not with you. I'm in my room. I heard you call and I'm using a projection spell."

"What should I do?" Her skin was red and she felt as if she were sunburned. She kept her eyes closed; the heat was too much.

"Your belt. Turn wolf, and get away."

"I...I don't know if I can."

"I'll help you." His voice was very near, and he started saying the words of the shapechanging spell. She took her ring from her finger and held it tightly in her teeth, then muttered the spell with him.

Fire...and pain. Humans were stupid, but wolves had the wisdom of instinct — fire meant run, run as fast as you could and as far as you could. Run to the River, and follow it to safety.

Even with a hurt ankle, she was able to scramble up out of the doomed cellar, and then she was free, running, with the precious bit of metal secure in her teeth. She didn't look behind herself, she just ran, down to the River and actually into its cooling waters. She sensed the ghostly presence of a beloved Human, part of the pack, with her — but she didn't try to ponder mysteries beyond her ken. Wolves knew better than that.

A friendly voice beckoned her, and she followed it home.

Behind her, something awful and frightening roared its anger and hatred.

Chapter Twenty-five

(David)

“Twenty-seven...twenty-eight...” With each push-up, David grunted out the number, and swore to himself that he would find some other way to keep in shape. Swimming, now, that was a good exercise — and it wasn’t like the University pool was so far away. It was just finding *time*.

“Fifty.” Gratefully, he collapsed on the floor, panting. It was good, for a moment, to have nothing on his mind but breathing.

He rolled over slowly and flicked on the TV. George Jetson was losing an argument with his wife — what was her name? He hummed the theme song...Jane, that was it. Amazing the worthless details that the human mind could hold.

David gave a sigh. Afternoon sunlight slanted through evergreens outside, falling in his window onto the kitchen table. His thesis lay in the pool of light, covered by several mornings’ papers and lesson plans. He’d intended to get some work done today, but after Linda’s news in seminar this morning, he’d been unable to think of anything else. In Susan’s Intro classes he’d slavishly followed her outline, actually squelching a potentially interesting discussion of Torquemada’s politics because he didn’t want to think.

So the Zwilling was back. Worse, it had never been defeated — David saw now that his clever spell was just a temporary setback for the creature. There was no easy way out; now the Zwilling had to be met, had to be grappled with and destroyed. And David wondered if he had the ability to do that.

Impatient, he struggled to his feet and barged out the door. The trailer park was lively, now that the weather was nicer; Gloria Silverman and her two toddlers were taking a walk, and old man Hautz stumbled about with his sour-faced beagle, muttering to himself. David ignored his neighbors and plunged into the woods at the edge of the park. Irritated, trying to keep his mind busy with the walk, he headed down, toward the river. He walked swiftly, hands thrust into the pockets of his tattered jeans.

Damn Linda, he thought, kicking aside dead leaves. She knew the danger she was facing — but she imagined she could handle it. She knew just enough about magic to feel confident, not enough to be petrified with fear.

He grinned wryly. Well, that was changed now. Linda knew the Zwilling's power, and he doubted that she would set off on another solo expedition for a long while. Bob...Bob deserved the real credit, for keeping his wits about him and choosing an appropriate magical response when Linda was threatened. David liked to think that he had at least taught the cubs something: a few months ago Bob wouldn't have hesitated to go dashing off for the church, and both of them would now be dead.

But at least Linda had done something.

He shook his head and breathed in the crisp Autumn smell of the woods. Trees were half bare, and with each gust of wind more leaves spiralled down around him. Fall had come so quickly, this year, after the protracted summer heat...or had that been just another trick of the Zwilling's, a deception designed to convince David that he'd won? He was beginning to wonder now just how far the Zwilling's power stretched.

Were they all pawns of the thing, playing out some infinitely cruel game to make its final victory all the sweeter? Was there, in fact, any hope at all that they might win?

David had gone far enough by now that he could hear the distant gurgle of the river, and he smelled water. Bending, he ran a hand through the detritus of the forest floor, and opened himself to the nature-magic that always lay close to the surface in areas like this.

The past of the Patapsco Valley was rich and lengthy. For a hundred generations and more people had lived here, practicing their gentle earth-magics by the side of the rushing water. This was knowledge from the very earliest history of the Human race, knowledge that had arisen in the grasslands of Africa and the primeval forests of Europe; knowledge that was old when Egypt and Babylon were young. This wisdom, these spells, had been passed from father to son and mother to daughter, since before man had come to the Americas across a land bridge that magic had later torn down.

An age ago, wolves had wandered in the valley and all but a few men had cowered from their hunting cries. As David touched the soil, he knew that another young man had stood here, a man who was brother of wolves and birds. On this very spot, perhaps, that unknown man had followed a pack to the river, had drunk with them and become their friend. Great magic had passed back and forth between them, the wolves and the man — and together they had faced great evil. Something as dark and powerful as the Zwilling had arisen in those days before history, and it had been beaten back by an inexperienced shaman and his lupine cousins.

The young sorcerer had left his mark, written in deepest emotion on the very soil of the valley, in the very hearts of living trees, in the very course of the eternal river. It was a mark that could only be read by one with the most acute sensitivity, since it had faded much over millennia. Still, David read it, and he took encouragement from the story of that long-ago magical warrior. *He* did it, and so can I. The

Zwilling can be defeated, obliterated forever.

Beyond a tangle of undergrowth, David reached the river. He scampered down the steep bank and took off his shoes, then sat with his bare feet dangling in the water. Afternoon sun made long shadows, and David watched the gnats that hovered above the surface, trying to rid his mind of thoughts and open himself to the faint magical traces that the river carried from further up the valley.

Time and again, the Patapsco Valley had been witness to the same struggle that David and his pack fought now. The world of the living held a great fascination to malevolent supernatural beings...and here in the valley the boundary between mundane and supernatural was very thin; century after century evil powers had arisen, perhaps even ruled briefly...but always, they were defeated. There was a great brooding mystical strength in the valley and the river. From its source in the northern Piedmont plateau, the Patapsco carried the ageless, gentle magics of health, life and prosperity all the way to Baltimore harbor and out into the Chesapeake Bay. Early settlers, living in a less secular world, had felt the magic even though most had not identified it. Even as the old pattern of evil's rise and fall continued, explorers and traders, millers and farmers had come to live on the banks of the river, had become part of the eternal drama. Patapsco University, with the nation's only university program in wizardry, was just the latest step in a movement that had started before the first man set foot in the valley.

Bob picked up a stick and threw it into the river; it spun slowly as it drifted downstream. In only a few minutes it was out of sight. David shrugged, stood, and stripped off his shirt. The sun felt good on his chest, and for a few moments he simply stretched, enjoying his first instants of peace that day.

He was certain of it: the Zwilling could — and *would* — be defeated.

But how?

It's not fair, David thought as he hung his shirt on an

obliging nearby tree. I'm only twenty-seven. I don't know enough. I'm not powerful enough.

The voice of a long-ago shaman and wolf-friend seemed to echo on the gentle breeze. *I had seen scarce two dozen winters*, it said. *Did I know more than you? Was I more powerful? Yet I succeeded. What did I need of power, knowledge, age? These things are in the land, and in the river.*

"I don't know!" In one violent movement, David picked up a small rock and threw it out into the river. It hit with a tiny splash, and then it was gone.

The voice didn't answer. Compulsively, David tore off the rest of his clothes, left them in a heap at the roots of the tree. His shirt fluttered like a flag of defiance.

The change came upon him with more pain than ever before; as if his body were trying to tell him that he must remain human to grapple with the problem of the Zwilling. David clenched his teeth, snarled — and was wolf.

If he'd wished for solace and forgetfulness, he was disappointed. Anxiety stalked him like a bear on the trail of blood, and he had a compulsion to run...anywhere, for no good reason but to escape a nameless dread. David scampered up the bank on all fours, threw back his head and sniffed the wind.

Danger was all about. Only the river itself was untouched by the odor of evil. David howled, sending his lonely voice out over the valley, crying for others of his kind...

There was no answer but the wind.

He ran, panting, struggling to lose himself; but the smell of fear closed around him like a suffocating blanket, leaving no escape. He ran from tree to tree, stumbling on rocks and blundering into brambles — finally he topped a rise and found himself at the feet of a white-clad human woman who had appeared from nowhere.

Shock rippled through his body, bringing with it the transformation back to human form. "Susan?" he said, his head spinning.

"David." She reached toward him, then turned away. It was Susan Whitlow, that was undeniable; the greying hair, the solid yet attractive body, the controlled movement of hands. But she looked different than the woman David had last seen nearly two months ago. Her eyes seemed tired...haunted, as if she had looked into the face of mysteries beyond her comprehension.

"You're..."

"Yes," she answered. Now that David looked closer, he saw that the edges of her form were indistinct, her pale shadow slanted obliquely to the westering sun, and she glowed with an inner light all her own.

"You came to see me before — in a dream."

"No." The word was final. "Only now has the barrier between our worlds become thin enough for me to pierce. If you saw me before, it was a sending from the Zwilling, to confuse you." She brushed at her hair. "Would that I could have seen you earlier."

David was wracked by an enormous shiver. "Wh-what...?"

"You must act quickly, David. Others will die." She shimmered like autumn wheatfields in an unfelt breeze. "And none of us will find peace until the Zwilling is defeated."

"None of you?" Reason had deserted him; he could only echo her words dumbly.

"The Zwilling's victims. Kevin's mother. Me. Others you may never know...and more who will come. We are trapped — we cannot return to the world of the living, and we cannot go on to the realm of the dead as long as the Zwilling survives."

"Suppose it...wins?"

"Then our souls — and the souls of all who perish trying to defeat it — will belong to the Zwilling." She shook her head, and for an instant her eyes cleared. "David, you've got to save us. Kill the Zwilling, and kill it fast."

"How?"

"You have the answers. You *know* how."

“Damn it, Susan, this isn’t a final exam from the book. Tell me what to do!”

“I can’t. I have no more power. In life, I didn’t truly believe in the Arts, and even though I died by them I can never use them. *You* can. You know more than I ever did. I guarantee you, you have the power. Use it.”

“How?” His cry was a howl of despair.

But she was gone.

Chapter Twenty-six

(Linda)

David had flipped.

Linda knew the signs. He was behaving like a Freshman with three term papers due and final exams looming, and no studying done since Midterms. The pressure was getting to him, and his little mind had snapped.

The only question was, what could she do about it?

Even Cathy was worried. Thursday night, David barricaded himself in the lab...and while a whirlwind of magical power surrounded Helbran Hall, the girls sat in their room and talked in hushed tones.

"What's he doing?" Cathy said, peering out the window. Helbran was just visible off to the left, brick red against the dark foliage of the valley.

Linda glanced at the bureau, where flames of a dozen candles danced their own intricate gavotte. Beyond, the mirror was dark, reflecting the starry sky rather than the room. She scowled. "He's opened the Grimoire of Armadel. There's a lot in that book — including preparations for magical war. I think David's decided to take the offensive." Remembering how Saint Zachary's had become a flaming

prison, she shivered. "I hope he isn't in over his head."

"I wish he'd talk to us."

There was a knock on the door, and Linda sprang up to open it. Bob stood there, hair wet and panting. Linda offered him a glass of water and he drank it gratefully, settling down on her bed.

"What's up?"

"I went to the lab." He gulped down the rest of the water, put the glass down with a sigh. "I thought David would speak to me, tell me what's happening."

"And?"

Bob shook his head. "Nothing. He let me in, and he was trying to pretend that he was just doing research. But there were things boiling in bottles, and a pentagram chalked on the floor. He had the Books of the Dead, and I'm sure he's brought the Grimoire of Armadel over from the library."

Linda nodded, gesturing to the mirror. "He has." She stood before the bureau, waved her hands over flickering candle flames. Indistinct images chased one another through the mirror's depths like the patterns of light inside closed eyelids. "On the mystical planes Helbran Hall is starting to look like a castle. I wonder what weapons he's constructing in there?"

Brooding, Cathy stared out the window. Linda didn't like the way her roommate sat, with her arms around her and her legs tucked up underneath her. Cathy looked like a Midwest farm-mother contemplating the approach of a twister. "Something awful's going to happen," Cathy said.

"What?" Bob asked, reaching for Linda's hand. She joined hands with him, but found no comfort in his cold grasp.

"I don't know." Cathy shook her head, sending waves through her long hair. "Just something awful."

"That's not fair. David can —"

"No he can't!" Cathy sounded almost panicked. "I love him as much as you do, but he's not omnipotent. I...I just wish he would let us help him."

"What did David say?"

"Nothing much. Asked me how I was, that kind of thing. He made it pretty obvious that I'd interrupted him." Bob lowered his head. "He just about kicked me out. I'm worried."

Linda rubbed his back. "There's nothing we can do tonight. If he needs us, he'll call. Otherwise — I think we ought to try to sleep. So that we'll be rested when he *does* need us."

She was surprised that the others agreed, and even more surprised when she managed to fall into sleep as soon as her head hit the pillow.



When David didn't show up for class Friday morning, Linda knew that something had to be done. She left the others arguing among themselves, and slipped down the hall to Doctor Faring's office. The man responded to her knock at once, and smiled in greeting. "Come in, Ms. Falk."

Linda swallowed and stepped into his office. Faring should have been an attorney; everything from his precise pin-striped suit to his elegant walnut file cabinets spelled successful middle-aged lawyer. A dark brown briefcase sat open on the corner of his desk, bulging with papers. He closed it and waved Linda to take a seat. He settled into his own padded swivel chair and steepled his fingers. "What seems to be the trouble, now?"

"It's Da— It's Mr. Galvin. We're worried about him."

Faring's face settled into a hint of a frown, suggesting that he disapproved of fraternization between graduate students and undergrads. "Go on."

"We're involved in something supernatural, and I think it's gotten too big for us." His frown deepened. "David's going out of his mind trying to cope. He really needs help, but he won't ask for it."

Faring nodded. "Suppose you tell me more about this...supernatural affair?"

Linda explained about Kevin, the Zwilling, and David's new determination. As she spoke, Faring nodded his head, but he didn't look truly convinced.

"So David needs help," she finished lamely, "And I thought I would come to you and...."

For a while Faring said nothing, merely stared at his blue blotter. Then, finally, he raised his eyes and looked into Linda's face.

"I'm not very good at this sort of thing, Ms. Falk. You say you've got a...Zwilling, is that the right term?" She nodded. "And that Mr. Galvin has decided to unleash high-level magic to deal with it." He spread his hands. "Frankly, such a thing is completely beyond my experience. I'm afraid I wouldn't know where to begin."

"But *someone* has to do something. Or else we're all going to wind up like Doctor Whitlow."

As soon as she said it, his face changed. It was only for an instant, yet in that instant Linda knew that Faring would never help her...and she knew why.

He was afraid.

Oh, he knew how Doctor Whitlow had died. Knew that the Zwilling was a threat to them all. But he was too frightened to deal with it, and he hoped that David would solve the problem and spare him the necessity of getting involved.

"Well, now," Faring began. Linda shook her head.

"You're right, Doctor Faring. You'll have to forgive me, I'm...tense. Too much work all at once, and I guess I panicked." She stood; to stay in the office a minute longer, to listen to his cowardly evasions, would make her sick.

He shook her hand. "Feel free to come by if there's anything I can help you with. Are you having any trouble with the workload for seminar?"

"No. None at all." She hadn't read a thing for the class in three weeks. Somehow, the concept of the White Goddess didn't excite her the way it did Cathy. "Thank you." She fled, almost running blindly down the hall. She ducked into the

small ladies' room and stood before the mirror, shaking.

Damn him. She'd risked her life, had played with magic a thousand times more deadly than any spell he'd ever tried — and yet he sat behind that desk and hid behind his smile, trying to pretend that nothing was going on. And he wouldn't even admit that he was afraid. Linda had felt the touch of evil in the Zwilling's wrath, and she thought she knew what wickedness was about. But this...this pretended indifference to mask terrified weakness...this was worse than anything the Zwilling could throw. It was downright ignoble, nasty and pitiful.

When she'd calmed down, Linda squared her shoulders and strode back down the hall. Doctor Quaille's office was in a little cul-de-sac to the left, sandwiched between the supply room and a locked, never-used door to the roof; his door was ajar and she knocked gently, almost wishing he wouldn't answer.

"Come in," he called. Timidly, Linda entered the darkened office.

If Faring looked like a lawyer, then Quaille should have been a drama coach. He was short and thin, with classical features and long white hair. As soon as he saw Linda he grinned, and his eyes sparkled. "Miss Falk, what a pleasure." He had taught Linda in two classes last semester, and suddenly she realized that she missed his jovial wit. "You have no idea what it's like to deal with introductory classes exclusively — I long for just a taste of our discussions in Philosophy of Animism. Most stimulating." He looked at her over his glasses. "I trust you are well?"

"Fine, thank you."

"Do sit down. Is this a social visit, or...?" He left it open, encouraging her with his eyes.

In a few minutes she had blurted out the whole story of the Zwilling and David's involvement.

"I see." Quaille took off his spectacles, polished them with an embroidered handkerchief, then perched them on his beak

of a nose. "You say that David has opened Armadel's Grimoire. Hmmm. And you're quite certain that this Zwilling is a supernatural manifestation."

"I'm sure of it." She told of her visit to the grave, the horror in the church.

Quaile frowned. He seemed to be groping for words. "Linda," he said, "I am sorry to hear you say this." He sighed heavily. "David came to me with his concerns last month, and I'm very much afraid that I put him off. You see, I've never been much of a believer in the supernatural. So much of what we teach can be explained by modern psychology and biology, and I've fallen out of the habit of keeping an open mind." He shrugged. "More the fool me. Since David spoke with me, I have noticed stirrings of mystical force in the area — the sort of thing that disturbs the sleep, if you know what I mean."

He paused, and Linda gestured encouragement.

"It is no joy to admit that one has been lazy." He reached to the corner, where an elegant walking stick was propped, then stood. "I have neglected my duty. I thank you for awakening me to it before things get worse." Quaile opened the door, ushered Linda out into the hall. "Come with me, my dear. Together, we will go to the lab and talk with David. Whatever help he needs, I will give."

The lab was locked and Doctor Quaile's key would not open it; Linda tried an opening spell without success. "David's got it sealed with his own spells," she said.

Quaile shook his head slowly. "I don't like to see him come to this. Whenever a practitioner starts being jealous of his own knowledge and his own Arts, then he has begun to move the wrong way."

"What can we do?"

"Come with me. If we cannot open the door, perhaps we can force a window. I must confront David."

Outside, in the sun and fresh air, Linda felt a little better. Doctor Quaile was here, and he would take care of

everything. A few students were about, talking in groups or just strolling; Linda saw a flash of red-blond hair and anxiety gripped her throat. She touched Doctor Quaile on the arm. "That's him," she said, nodding. "Kevin Judd. The student I was telling you about."

Kevin was leaning against a tree, his attention on the building. Something in his stance, his unseen eyes, chilled her — she knew that the Zwilling, not Kevin, looked out of that half-smiling face.

"He knows that he's driven David to desperation," Quaile whispered. "And now he's waiting for David to make a mistake...or to learn something. I wonder what?"

"The Zwilling wants to have a body of its own. It can only take over Kevin for a while. Maybe it thinks that David is going to come across some magic that can help it."

"I *must* get into the lab." Carefully, Quaile and Linda picked their way across the dirt border in which ornamental shrubs grew, until they were next to the building. The frosted windows of the lab were a few feet above Linda's head.

"How are we going to get up?" Linda said, feeling stupid. Kevin showed no sign of seeing them.

"Here." Doctor Quaile thrust his walking stick into the soft ground, then stepped right up to the foundation. The bricks were worn and broken, and there were places that could serve as footholds. "If you will steady me, I am sure I can reach the sill. David will not have thought to place special wards on the windows, I'm sure."

"He might have. He's very thorough."

"Then I will break the glass, if need be. Stand there, and lend me your shoulder."

Doctor Quaile struggled, grunting; between the pitted brick and Linda's support, he managed to get his head and half his torso on the level of the window. "Good. Now if you can hold me a while longer, we shall see what we shall see."

"Go ahead." Linda tried not to think of the spectacle she was creating — crouching under a window with a geriatric

professor balanced next to her, his hip pressing against her shoulder. Pretend this is part of your homework, she thought, and maybe no one will notice.

"David doesn't appear to be there," Quaile said, his face up against the window. "Wait, I think I can jimmy the latch." He grunted again, and squirmed, then Linda heard him swear under his breath. "I am sorry, my dear. You must forgive an old man his language. Can you reach me my stick?"

By stretching, Linda was just barely able to get the cane. It was straight and tapered, with a simple brass top and a small rubber tip on the end. She handed it up to Quaile, and heard him poking at the window. After a second, he said "Ah, yes."

"You got it?"

"The latch is open." Quaile dropped the stick; it landed top-first in the dirt and stood like a drunkenly-angled radio transmitter tower. Quaile pushed the window open, and Linda felt him shift his weight.

"That's much better. No, David isn't here." He coughed. "Whatever he's been doing, it has certainly left a foul smell. Let me get in, and I will open the door for you."

He scrambled up onto the ledge, and Linda backed away to watch him. It was a ludicrous sight; Doctor Quaile was no acrobat, and Linda could tell that it had been a good many years since he'd climbed into a window. Still, the old fella was certainly enjoying himself. When he paused for breath, seated on the sill with his legs dangling, he looked back at Linda a grinned.

"This is more exercise than I've had in twenty years," he said without panting at all. "One gets out of practice." He turned to the window, and pushed on it with his shoulder. It moved reluctantly, with a screech of rust. "Let's see what David has been up to."

Quaile shifted his weight, swung up his legs, and for a second he was balanced on one hand and one foot. Then, abruptly, he seemed to lose his grip, and Linda gasped. She ran forward, but it was too late to save him from a tumble.

It was only eight feet or so — but Doctor Quaile's fall seemed to take as long as a drop from three stories. Linda had plenty of time to see, feel shock, and scream. She couldn't reach him, but almost reflexively she felt a spell leap to her lips, a spell of protection that couldn't possibly help....

Quaile fell, heavily, like a sack of flour dropped off a truck. His walking stick was directly beneath him, and as Linda watched the point of the cane penetrated his back, then thrust through his chest in a hideous explosion of red. He fell to the ground and lay there twitching, his hands clawing at the stake through his torso.

Linda was on her knees next to him in a second. Quaile's eyes fluttered, and he struggled to speak. A wet slurping accompanied his words.

"I...That was stupid. Your spell...saved my life."

"Don't move."

He forced a grin; it came out more like a grimace of agony. "I shan't. It...missed my heart. Call...ambulance. I will be all right. Get help."

"Wait." Linda touched his forehead, traced the lines of mystical force down his body. His heart was strong, his life-energy high. Quickly, she cast a healing spell. It would have to keep him until paramedics could get here.

"Th-thank you. Go."

She turned and ran, blindly, for the entrance and a phone. She didn't even notice her tears. Only one sound penetrated through her haze of fear and sickness.

Behind her, Kevin Judd was laughing.

Chapter Twenty-seven

(Linda)

Doctor Quaile's accident, at least, shocked David out of his shell. Linda and the others were waiting for him by the door of the lab; he sighed heavily and, with a gesture of resignation, let them in.

"He's in the Shock Trauma center at Pattison Hospital," David said, settling into a metal chair. "They think he's going to come through alive. Apparently your healing spell helped a lot, Linda."

Linda shook her head. "I think he knew what was coming. He was prepared, and the stake missed his heart."

Bob touched Linda's right hand tenderly. "You helped him." He looked at David. "What about Doctor Faring?"

David shook his head. "What happened to Susan scared him...and this made it worse. He's not going to have anything to do with us. He told me point-blank that he isn't going to help against the Zwilling."

Linda glanced around the lab. Half a dozen conjurations were in progress, and their separate powers hung in the air like an admixture of noxious scents. Her gaze lighted on a large leatherbound book which lay on a table in the center of an intricate chalked circle; various sigils and signs were drawn about the circumference.

David followed the direction of her eyes, then shrugged. "I was trying to work out a way to attack the Zwilling. Now," he lowered his head, "I don't think it's going to help." He looked up, fire in his eyes. "But we've got to do *something*."

Cathy answered him quietly, sincerity burning in her voice. "Tell us what to do."

"I don't know. Damn, I wish I did. I've tried magical attacks, banishment spells, exorcism and mystical barriers. Nothing works. The Zwilling cuts right through them."

"Because we can't touch it," Bob said suddenly. "It's on another plane, working through Kevin. Every time we throw something at it, it withdraws."

"Then why can't we fight it on its own plane?" Mark asked.

"Won't work." David's tone was flat and firm. "We're rooted here on earth, we draw all our power from *this* plane." He drew circles in the air and lines of green light faded slowly in his fingers' wake. "That's the trouble with the kind of white magic we know — it's all earth-based."

Linda narrowed her eyes. "And we can't use the darker magics."

"No. If we do that, we're playing into the Zwilling's hands." He looked sheepish. "We've both found *that* out."

Mark's brow was furrowed. "What about drawing the Zwilling down to this plane completely? Would we be able to fight him then?"

"What did you have in mind?"

"I don't know. I guess there isn't any way to make the Zwilling deal with us here on earth...?"

"Not without giving it exactly what it wants: a body to live in. And we can't unleash that sort of evil power in this plane."

"We're stymied," Cathy said after a few moments. She stood, stretched, and touched Linda's forehead. Linda felt a happy drowsiness settle over her. One by one, Cathy did the same for the others. "Let's call it a day and get some sleep. Let our unconscious minds work on the problem. Maybe we'll find a solution in our dreams."

David yawned. "That's a great idea. It's Friday...why don't we meet back here tomorrow night? Then we'll know if anybody's figured anything out."



Linda couldn't go to sleep. She lay awake for a long time, then finally got up and pulled on her clothes.

"Where are you going?" Cathy said sleepily.

"Just out. Over to see Bob. Don't worry about me."

Cathy turned over, and before Linda reached the door she was again asleep.

Bob didn't answer to her knock, and when she peeked in she saw his room dark and empty. For a time she strolled around the campus, listening to the innocuous sounds of the night; then she knew what she had to do.

Trees and heavy undergrowth screened her from the campus and the fraternity parties; a low-hanging branch held her clothes. She raised her hands to the gibbous moon and made a silent invocation...

The ground was firm under her four paws, the night alive with a million different scents. Linda howled at the moon, just for a moment, then set off along the hills that lined the river.

She didn't know what she was looking for — didn't even know that she *was* looking. She was free, and for a wolf that was enough. The powerful scents of the woods surrounded her and buoyed her up; she raced up and down hills and through moonshadows, heedless of direction or distance.

In time, Linda came to a place where raw granite rose, the bones of the Earth projecting beyond the soil. A trickle of a waterfall fell eight or nine feet into a wide pool, where the water collected before pouring over rocks toward the distant river. She drank from the pool, then sat back on her haunches and stared into the water.

Star-strewn darkness was mirrored in the pool's shifting surface; Linda cocked her head and sniffed. Wolves pay little

attention to the stars, but odd feelings stirred within her and almost against her will she reverted to Human form.

Naked in the cool night, Linda leaned over the water and brushed it with her fingertips. Where her hand passed, the water stilled. Gazing into the pool was like looking at the sky and beyond. Stars danced, and a pale fog moved across them.

Tell me, Linda thought, are we going to get through this? Will we defeat the Zwilling?

The stars didn't answer, and she snorted. She started to turn away, then motion caught her eye.

Fog stirred, made shapes — and all at once, Linda felt she was looking into the face of a shrouded and veiled woman. The figure seemed to be reaching her arms out wide, and two of the brightest stars shone where her eyes would be.

Cathy's Goddess? Linda reached out, stopped with her hand just an inch from the water. *Mother*, she thought. Where is my mother now? In Idaho, I suppose, still married to George. And Dad has has a succession of sweethearts since they broke up, none of them that I could call Mother.

Is that why your power means nothing to me, strange hooded woman in the pond? Because I have no mother, because I can't feel your power?

Will you care for me, anyway?

She shook her head. I came to find Bob, for an evening of sport — not to look at the stars in a pool of water. But she couldn't take her eyes off the image of the Goddess.

Why do you haunt me? Linda asked silently. I'm not your worshipper, I'm not your servant. I don't even know you.

But the Goddess, she remembered from Faring's class, was not simply the mother figure. She was also the eternal, fascinating lover — and she was the malevolent old crone who brought death. Before Linda's eyes, the image in the pond shifted, changed, became darker and more menacing. Involuntarily she looked up, but there was no change in the sky. The Goddess gazed at her from the pool, hair aflame and fire in her eyes.

Do you like *this* Goddess better?

Linda bowed her head. This was a power she could relate to. The hot-blooded lover, the angry avenging angel. My power is within you and with you, the Goddess seemed to say.

She crouched, whispered, and became wolf. At the same time the image of the Goddess changed until she wore the face of a fiery she-wolf. My power is with you always.

Linda touched the water with a forepaw, and the lady was gone. She mounted the rocks and stood above the pool, turned her face up toward the sky, and sniffed.

Strange scents were on the wind. Scents of power, scents of magic, and the scent of the wolves' love-dance.

The dance of wolves is conducted in a realm that few Humans experience: smell and sound are far more important than sight and touch. Linda smelled the detritus of the forest floor, the strong aroma of the change of seasons...and over it all, the heady scent of a fellow wolf on prowl.

Linda howled, and was rewarded by an answering howl far off to her right. Further up the valley...but coming closer. The message was clear: Come find me.

Linda leapt from the rocks and trotted off toward the other wolf. The dance drew her closer, and she stopped every few minutes to howl. Each time the other answered her, more strongly. She recognized the voice, and bared her teeth in a wolf's smile. It was Bob, her mate, her lover. And very soon they would meet.

They came together beneath the bloated gibbous moon, in a wide clearing on the banks of the river. Among tall grass and swamp cabbage they circled one another, moving in the age-old instinctive ritual of the dance. Linda and Bob sniffed one another; the scent of lust rose in the valley like a powerful incense, and it went to Linda's head like a strong drug.

She lost herself in the dance, and all trace of words went out of her mind. There was only lust, and her overwhelming love for Bob. When he mounted her, she howled in joy and

gave herself over to sensation, nothing more.

It was better...better than it had ever been. Linda cried out in ecstasy, her call echoing in the valley. Then there was an instant of joy so intense it was like pain, and even sensation ceased.

It was over.

Bathed in moonlight, she nuzzled Bob happily, then changed back to Human form and stroked his fur. He stood over her, licked her face, and then his body, too, started to shift and change. Paws became hands and feet, muzzle mutated to face, grey fur became red-brown hair...

Linda screamed. Above her, arms on either side of her head and mouth split in a wicked grin, was Kevin Judd.

She struck out, lashed at him with her nails. He jumped away, laughing, and then did what no wolf or human could — he became a giant black bird, and flew off into the sky.

His cruel laughter stayed behind, mocking her.



She had to tell. By the time she got back to the dorm, she had cried all her tears and she was weak with disgust and self-hatred. As soon as she stumbled through the door, Cathy sat up in bed and turned on the light. "Linda, what's wrong?"

What was it, Linda wondered? Her expression, her disheveled clothes, some trace of evil magic still clinging to her? Whatever, Cathy knew something was not right.

Linda stood still, unable to speak. Cathy was up in a second, nightgown clinging to her body, and threw her arms around Linda.

Without speaking, Linda clung tightly to Cathy. Fully ten minutes passed, and finally Cathy whispered, "Do you want me to get Bob?"

"No!"

"What is it? Please, you've got to tell me." Cathy guided her to her bunk, made her sit down. "Linda, how can I help

you if...?"

Linda shook her head. "I c-can't — "

Cathy looked into her eyes, and for just a moment Linda saw again the hooded face of the Goddess, compassionately looking into her soul. Cathy touched Linda's brow, rubbed for a minute. It felt good, and Linda closed her eyes.

Before she knew it, she had told Cathy all about her experience. Cathy held her, rocked her like a baby, and cried. "I'm sorry, Linda — my God, I'm sorry."

"Just don't...don't tell Bob. I know him, he'd rush after Kevin in a rage, and get himself killed. Or worse. So don't tell him."

"I won't." Cathy lowered Linda to the bed, helped her take off her clothes. "David's going to have to know. But he won't say anything to Bob."

"I want him dead." Linda grabbed Cathy's hand, almost crushing the younger girl's fingers in her grip. "I hate...hate what he did to me. I want him to suffer, and I want him dead."

"Hush. Go to sleep now. We'll get him, I swear to you." Cathy's face flared with the power of her Goddess, the angry avenger.

Still holding onto her tightly, Linda went to sleep.



The next morning Linda felt miserable. She lay helplessly in bed, wracked by alternating chills and fever. At least it was Saturday — no classes, and by the time Cathy awoke, maybe she would feel better. She closed her eyes to the bright sunlight, and murmured what healing spells she knew.

She must have slept, for the next thing she saw was Cathy leaning over her bed. "How do you feel?"

Linda stretched, experimentally. "Better." She felt a twinge of nausea. "But still not perfect." She tried to sit up, then fell back against her pillow. "I don't know, I feel...weird."

Cathy passed her hands over Linda's body; faint lines of energy glowed in the air. When she reached Linda's abdomen, she frowned.

"What is it?"

"I'm not sure. I think we should get you to the clinic. Here, let me help you sit up."

Linda shrugged off Cathy's hand. "I can sit up by myself." She pulled herself up, then swung her feet to the floor. She really did feel stronger. She took a breath, then stood. "See?"

"All right, you're fine. I *still* think you should get checked out. I'll come with you."

"If you must. Just don't say anything to Bob."

Again Cathy frowned. "If that's what you want."

The nurse asked her questions, and Linda told her symptoms without mentioning the night before. Then there were a few tests, blood pressure and pulse and blood samples and all the rest, and then they told her to wait. She and Cathy thumbed through old issues of *Time* magazine, rating the guys in the advertisements, until the nurse asked Linda to step into her office.

"Ms. Falk, I'm afraid our tests show that you're pregnant."

"Pr— that's impossible. How long?"

"About three months, give or take."

"It can't be. I'm on the Pill. I haven't missed..."

The nurse shrugged. "I recommend that you go to your gynecologist, get a second opinion. But I'm sure you'll find..."

"No, I don't mean to say...I just don't understand..." Three months? That would make it the middle of summer — when she and Bob met in New Orleans for that week, that was the only time she'd...

"Th-thank you." She shook the nurse's hand, then went out to tell Cathy the news.

But how was she ever going to tell Bob?

Chapter Twenty-eight (Bob)

Bob didn't know what to do. When Linda told him early Sunday morning that she was pregnant, he didn't know how to react. "Honey...how do *you* feel about this?"

"Strange," Linda answered. "I...oh, Bob, I swear I didn't know. I've been taking my pills, and — oh, God, I had a checkup just before school started, they didn't tell me..." she stopped, confused. "I'm just afraid that you'll hate me." She lowered her head.

"How could you think that?" He hugged her. "So we both made a mistake. Don't worry."

"Bob...what do you want me to do?"

How could she ask him that? "It's got to be your decision. What *you* want is what I want." He sighed. "If you don't want it, there are ways...."

"Cathy's told me already. She knows a spell, she says she can brew an infusion that will...will abort...."

"Is that what you want?"

"Bob, I don't know. I think I'd like to be alone for a while, if you don't mind."

"Sure." That was fine; Bob wanted to be alone too. "Whatever you decide, kid, I'm behind you. Come get me when you need me."

Bob locked himself in his room, then. His two goldfish, Fred and Fred, swam loops in their bowl, and Bob watched

them while thoughts spun in his mind.

Pregnant. How could she be?

Stupid, the fish seemed to say. You know damn well how. Birds do it, bees do it....

But we were so careful! Linda took the pills, and we always — always — used that spell, the one that she dug out of the *Sepher Raziel*. And yet both science and magic failed us at last.

What if she decides to keep it? I'm not ready to have a child. What will Mom and Dad say? God, Linda's father'll *kill* me....

After a while he got tired of staring out his window and muttering to the fish. All this brooding wasn't good; he had to talk to someone who would give him advice — or at least listen. Mark? David? No, they were friends but in a case like this, Bob needed someone who'd known him longer. He needed his family.

But who? Not Dad, certainly...and he couldn't talk to his mother. He hadn't ever felt close enough to his sister....

He thought of his brother-in-law, and smiled. Danny would understand. Danny the stockbroker who played a mean bagpipe on the weekends. Danny, who had taught him to drink beer at a family reunion when he was fourteen. Danny, who had a smattering of the Arts which he'd learned on his old grandmother's knee. Danny, the only one in the family who truly understood what Bob was doing at Patapsco University.

Bob left the dorm and marched across campus to the Student Center. As he let himself into a phone booth, he fished his parents' telephone credit card out of his wallet. Emily answered and, after exchanging pleasantries, said "I'll put Dan on."

"Hi, Bob."

"You don't sound surprised to hear from me."

"I've been wondering if you might call. I've dreamed about you lately. Is everything all right?"

Bob told him about Linda. For a few moments Danny was silent. "You still there?"

"Yeah, I'm thinking." A sigh. "Does she want to keep it?"

"I don't know."

"Look at me." In a reflection on the glass of the phone booth, Bob saw the outline of Danny's face. A fine, strong face; Emily had chosen her husband well. "Bob, if she goes ahead and has this baby...do you know what it's going to do to you? You're too young to start a family."

"Are you afraid I won't be able to support a kid?" Danny, of all people, should know better — half his success in the stock market came from what little he knew of the Arts.

"No, of course not. I've seen some of what you can do. No, all I mean is...well, if you have a wife and a child, all at once you've given up a certain measure of your own life. I know you have dreams of what you'd like to do when you graduate; take it from me, after you've worked eight hours a day and then put the rest of your emotional strength into the family — you won't have anything left for your dreams. And then before you know it you're forty-five with two kids and a house and you're so far away from your dreams that you'll never find your way back to them. I don't want that to happen to you."

Bob shrugged. "What can I do?"

Danny tilted his head. "She doesn't need to know." He lowered his voice. "There's a spell I know...I used it when Emily was pregnant the third time, when the doctors were afraid another pregnancy could damage her...it's quick and simple."

"I don't want to know." Do I?

"I'm not saying you have to use it. That's a choice that's up to you. But don't you at least think you ought to have the option?"

He swallowed. "All right."

"Good. You don't need to write it down, it's very simple. First you need a good long straight pin, and a piece of bone.

Then....”



It was high noon when Bob set out into the woods. He strolled along the riverbank, stooping now and again to pick up a stick or a rock and throw it into the water. He tried not to think of anything in particular, but just let his mind wander where it wished. His wolfskin belt was looped around his waist, and in his pockets he carried a piece of bone and a corsage pin left over from the last Drama department party.

A baby. He didn't intend to *use* the spell Danny had taught him. After all, the decision was Linda's to make. When she'd had some time to think, she would find him — and then they'd talk. But he wanted to be ready, just in case she decided to get rid of the baby. Damned if he'd let her go through an abortion, like some silly teenager at a public-health clinic; Danny's spell would do if Linda had none of her own.

The sun played hide-and-seek with fast-moving clouds, and trees danced to the touch of a playful wind. Here and there, a few leaves spiralled down into the river; it wouldn't be long, Bob thought, before all the branches were bare. Already cancerous spots of yellow and red blossomed amid curtains of green. It was the end of October, and the long unnatural summer was over.

Bob shook his head. This thing with Linda — this was just one more way for the Zwilling to strike against them. He had to resist. He and Linda had to keep together, had to remember their love for each other. That was the only way for them to survive.

Bob didn't pay attention to where he was going; he just strolled upriver, letting the breeze play with his hair and allowing his thoughts to flutter like the gnats that still danced over the water. After a while he came to some rocks, and climbed them. At the top he had a good view of the river, and

he sat down heavily on a large slab of granite.

Linda, I wish to *hell* you'd tell me what I'm supposed to do now. Lord, I know you need your time to think. But I need you. Where are you?

Unconsciously, he moved his hands over the rock, tracing the lines of a spell that might put him in contact with Linda. He stopped in mid-movement.

Ye gods, we're getting audacious. A month ago I'd never have thought of that spell. A month ago I'd never have been able to remember it. That was before we started messing around with high-level magic. There's a collective wisdom involved in the Arts, and now I'm tied into that wisdom...we *all* are.

But do I want to bother Linda before she's ready?

No. She has to be the one to —

He was interrupted by the nearby call of a wolf. And not just *any* wolf: he knew Linda's howl as well as he knew his own. "Come to me," that cry said. "Come to me, my mate."

Bob stripped quickly, all but his wolfskin belt and his school ring on its chain around his neck. Linda gave another cry, and by that time he was mouthing the words that caused his flesh and bones to change. Before the echo of her summons died, he was in wolf-form, and he answered her.

He came upon her in a clearing halfway up the hillside, and he marvelled. She had never been as beautiful as she was now, with the sun on her fur and her eyes fairly glowing with happiness. As he came closer he smelled the joy that radiated from her. It was no small thing, for a wolf to be pregnant. It was the wondrous culmination of the mating dance; dimly Bob was aware that he would never know such happiness as when he beheld his cubs emerging into the world.

She circled him, nipped his ear, and rolled languidly in the tall grass. The aroma of passion was all about, and he responded as any wolf would to his mate. He sniffed, made a friendly growl, and mounted her.

She started to change beneath him, reverting to Human

form. This was something they'd done before, so he changed with her, suffering the instant of agony but still holding onto her as her forelegs became arms, her hindlegs extended, her fur became naked flesh hot against his own.

In shock and horror, Bob drew back with a scream on his lips. It wasn't Linda at all.

Kevin.

The younger boy laughed, the hard, cruel laugh of the Zwilling. Bob quivered with rage and terror. His stomach heaved, and for a moment he was afraid he was going to be sick.

Kevin crouched, then rolled back onto the grass, pointing at Bob. "*Surprise,*" he said, his voice gravelly.

"You bastard!" Bob shouted, jumping to his feet. He clenched his fists, ready to pound Kevin to a pulp. "You bastard."

Kevin pouted. "*Upset because I'm not your sweet one? Poor Bob. Think how upset Linda was Friday night, when she found out I wasn't you.*" He smiled. "*Of course, she found out too late....*"

He knew he was going to be sick. But he was going to kill Kevin Judd first. "What do you mean?"

"*Poor, poor Bob. Thought the baby was yours, didn't you?*"

The creature's meaning penetrated only slowly. Linda and Kevin — and something growing inside her, some unnatural spawn of the Zwilling...she wasn't three months pregnant, it was just that *thing* feeding on her, getting bigger with each passing minute —

Bob gave an incoherent cry of rage and jumped at Kevin, fists flailing. He knocked the younger boy down, then fell on top of him. They struggled for long minutes, rolling downhill. Bob felt Kevin's hands around his throat, broke his hold, then felt fingers like claws digging at his eyes. Unthinking, he lunged forward and bit — as he moved, he made the change into wolf-form, and his fangs sank satisfyingly into blood-filled flesh.

Kevin growled, and changed. Bob was face-to-face with another hostile wolf, teeth bared, hackles raised. Then Kevin scrambled away, and Bob gave chase.



Linda raced to the phone in the hall, with Cathy a step behind her. She still couldn't believe what Cathy had shown her in her bureau mirror, but if it was true she had to act *now*. Her finger shook as she punched out David's number. Please, please, let him be home.

"Hello?"

"David, this is Linda. Something terrible's happening. Bob's in trouble. He's in the woods, down by the old church — and Kevin's with him."

David didn't ask how she knew. "Right. Where are you?"

"In the dorm, with Cathy."

"Call Mark, and tell him to drive down to the church right away. I'll start looking for Bob. Do you have any more definite idea where he is?"

"We only saw him for a moment. He's by the river, on this side of the church. That's all I know. We'll meet you there."

"No, it could be too —"

"We'll meet you there," she repeated, in a tone that allowed no discussion. This was her mate in trouble; she wasn't going to stay in the dorm while he fought the Zwilling all alone.

Without waiting for an answer, she hung up the phone, then dropped in another quarter and dialed Mark's house.



Bob was exhausted. At first it had been easy to track Kevin; then his bleeding stopped, and Bob lost the trail. Dark clouds covered the sun and a high keening wind made trees sway alarmingly. Bob sniffed, and found only the diffuse scent of

evil. Kevin was somewhere about, but he was hiding.

Bob bared his fangs and growled. Let Kevin hide. He would find him. And this time, nothing would stay him from his kill. Boy, wolf, or monster — this day Kevin would die.

He heard a splash, spun, and spied his enemy on the riverbank. Kevin, panting, stood in the shallow water, his fur dripping. Bob crept slowly, noiselessly, until he crouched behind a tree only five feet downwind of Kevin. He took a breath, then pounced.

The two of them went down again, snarling and biting. Bob felt claws along his side, but he lunged for Kevin's neck and buried his fangs. Blood spurted, hot and delicious with the taste of revenge.

The other wolf thrashed like a fish, and scratched at Bob with all four paws. But still Bob held on, shaking his head and growling but never for an instant letting go. He slipped on mossy rocks, and hit his right hip so badly that it flared with pain — yet still he did not release his hold. Sooner or later, Kevin would have to give up fighting, and die.

Suddenly Bob felt hands on him, Human hands, hands trying to pull him back. He turned, growling, and saw a naked David Galvin standing tall over him.

David grabbed him by the neck and foreleg and dragged him off of Kevin. On the bank, Bob dimly recognized Cathy and Mark. What were they doing here? And why was David pulling him away from Kevin, now that he was finally so close —

David spoke, and Bob felt the agonizing change to Human form. He sat down, hard, on the rocks next to David.

"Let me go! You've got to let me finish him, you've — "

David slapped him. "Look. Look, damn you. *That isn't Kevin.*"

"Oh my God." Bob looked. The other wolf lay quivering in six inches of red-streaked water, its flanks bloody and its neck a gaping wound. Even as he watched the body blurred, stretched...and where had been a dying wolf, now Linda lay.

The valley was suddenly quite still, but for a queer taunting laughter. Somewhere, just out of sight, Kevin Judd was enjoying himself.

Bob crawled toward her, blind with tears, but he didn't make it. The taste of blood was still strong in his mouth, and he bent to vomit uncontrollably. When he finally looked up, Cathy and David were kneeling beside Linda, while Mark had his hands on Bob's shoulders.

David and Cathy had joined hands, and they were both chanting — but Bob already knew that their healing spells had come too late. With Mark to steady him on the slippery river-bottom, he moved forward until he touched her head.

"Honey," he whispered. "Oh God, Linda."

She didn't move, didn't breathe, didn't hear him. There was nothing of her left to listen.

Mark touched him again. "I'm sorry."

Bob shrugged off Mark's touch, pulled Cathy's hands from David's and stopped them in mid-chant. "Stop it, stop it, it's too late. She's gone. Leave her be." He knew he was hysterical, and he didn't care. Linda...what was he going to do without Linda?

"Look." Cathy, her eyes wide with fear, pointed to Linda's bulging belly. Something moved beneath the surface, then broke her skin like a baby chick emerging from an egg...a bloody, horrible egg.

Bob had only a glimpse of the tiny head, the little clawed fingers. Then David lunged forward, pulled the thing away from her, and thrust it under the water. He grabbed a fair-sized rock and pounded, chanting the words of a banishment spell, until the water ran crimson and the Zwilling's tormenting laughter had turned into a cry of rage and pain.

David picked up Linda's lifeless body and started off up the hill. "Bring Bob," he said. "We're not safe here."

Unknowing, uncaring, Bob let Cathy and Mark lead him to the waiting cars.

BOOK THREE:
Giant's Dance

October 1985

*We dance round in a ring and suppose,
But the Secret sits in the middle and knows.*

—*Robert Frost*
The Secret Sits

Chapter Twenty-nine

(Mark)

There would eventually be the tasks of notifying Linda's parents, and the police. All of them would have to testify, Mark was sure — David was already working on a cover story, a picnic and Linda being attacked by a fierce wolf or mad dog, coupled with the best persuasion spells he could find. The story wasn't particularly plausible, and each of them would come under suspicion. But the marks on Linda's body could have come from nothing else than the claws and teeth of a beast, and the police were unlikely to think of examining the kids for evidence of lycanthropy.

Mark shrugged. That was all for later. Now, as the sun set and the nearly-full moon peeked in and out between fast-flying dark clouds, they had to say goodbye to Linda.

Every coven had its own way to deal with death, its own rites. And all came about in the same way: through stark necessity. Mark shook his head sadly. I never thought we'd need death-rites this soon.

The matter was complicated by the fact that they were werewolves. Wolves had a different attitude toward death; wolves grieved for one night, howled the departed one's soul to the moon, and then they did their best to forget. Although

he appreciated the simplicity, Mark knew that wasn't the Human way.

Bob wouldn't leave her. It was scary, looking at Bob's eyes; something far worse than hysteria was very close to the surface there. For the moment, grief held it back — but Mark didn't know when it might erupt, and what might happen when it did.

David put her body in the back seat and let Bob crawl in next to her. He clasped Mark's hand as he crossed to the driver's side. "Cathy'll ride with you. We're going to the lab. Stay behind me and don't stop for anyone."

"Right." Mark and Cathy got in the car. Mark's heart stuck in his throat when the engine failed to start, then he relaxed as it caught on the second try. He drove carefully, following David's Honda at a respectful distance. He noticed that David kept within the speed limits; no point in taking a chance of getting stopped by the cops.

"How are you doing?" Cathy asked. Her voice was faint.

"Fine, I guess. How about *you*?"

She waved off his concern. "The one I'm worried about is Bob. He's in shock now...what are we going to do when he comes out of it?"

"I don't know." God, think how Bob must feel! Bad enough that Linda was dead, but to have *caused* it himself...

He must be going mad.

"What *can* we do?" Mark asked.

"One thing's for sure, we can't let him alone. Did you see his eyes? There's no life in them at all. As soon as he's by himself, I'm afraid he's going to...." She didn't finish. Mark shivered at the image of Bob standing before a mirror, razor blade in his hand and defenseless wrists turned up.

It had happened. Three weeks after he'd started at Patapsco, some kid in the Junior Class had killed himself, taken too many sleeping pills and collapsed in the second-floor bathroom of Kolton Hall. His roommate had found him the next morning.

Cathy sat up straighter. "We're not going to let that happen to Bob."

"I'll stay with him tonight. For the next few nights."

She nodded. "But sooner or later we're going to have to leave him alone. And what happens then?"

"I don't know."

He breathed a sigh of relief when they arrived at the lab.

David had wrapped Linda's body in a blanket, and now he carried her across his shoulder into Helbran Hall as if he were bringing in a new rug or a sackful of junk. Bob plodded after him, a wind-up toy soldier whose spring had begun to wear down.

Mark left the car and followed them in. Here, in the familiar setting of the campus, the lab — here it finally hit him that Linda was dead. It just hadn't seemed real before; make-believe, like all the rest of the magic stuff. But when David lowered his awful burden to the very same table where Linda had stood doing experiments only a month ago, then Mark suddenly realized that he would never see her again. And he cried.

Cathy squeezed his shoulder, then walked past him to where Bob sat, blank-faced. She crouched beside him.

"Bob? Do you hear me?"

He turned his face to her, red eyes empty of feeling. "Leave me alone for a while, okay?"

She hugged him. "I'm here when you need me," she whispered, and planted a soft kiss on his forehead.

"David?" David stood over Linda's body, his back to the rest of them; Mark approached him hesitantly and laid a hand on his shoulder. "You okay?"

"Stupid question," David answered without turning around. "Of course I'm not okay." He left her covered with the blanket, started fumbling blindly in drawers.

"What are you looking for?"

David turned to Mark, and at the sight of his face Mark drew back. David's eyes burned with a ferocity that Mark had

never seen, even lately when David was acting so strangely. This was worse than anger toward the Zwilling; this was a rage turned inward, and Mark knew that if David couldn't find a way to express it, the feeling would consume him.

We're worried about Bob...who's going to worry about David?

"I caused this, don't you see? I should never have dragged you four into it all." He gave a single short hate-filled laugh. "I thought I could do it. Take some undergraduates, teach them enough magic, and stop whatever the creature was. Except I didn't know how bad it could be. I should have given up right then."

"What do we do now?" Cathy asked.

"Nothing." David shook his head, slammed the drawers shut. "You go home. Leave me here."

"To do what?" Mark took a step closer to David. David's hands shook with barely-controlled emotion; in a flash of clarity Mark knew that he had to help David get that emotion out. "Fight the Zwilling alone?"

"Fight. Or give up. Either way, I want the rest of you safe."

"There isn't anyplace safe." Mark gestured around the lab. On the walls, glyphs of warding glowed with bright blue electric fire. "If we step outside this room we're stepping into the Zwilling's power. There's no place to hide, even if we wanted to."

"Then stay in here." David moved toward the door. Mark grabbed his arm and pulled him back.

"What do you think you're doing? Are you going to march out there and give the Zwilling what it wants? Let it kill *you*, so that there's nothing to protect the rest of us?" Mark was shouting, but he didn't care. "Look what it did to Bob — used him, turned his power against him. Do you want it to do the same thing to you?"

"What else is there? We're beaten."

"The hell we are. We're beaten if you want us to be."

"What movie did you steal *that* line from? Look around

you, Mark. Linda's dead. Dead as Susan Whitlow. Look at this." He snatched at her body, held up a chain with Linda's school ring dangling from it. He grabbed Mark's right hand, held it up so that the two rings touched. "She was wearing this. Did it help her? So much for my magic." He threw the ring down in disgust. "Might as well just let the Zwilling take over and —"

"No!"

Cathy's shout echoed, for a second the lab felt much larger than it really was. She stood next to Bob, her head high and her hands raised before her. It seemed to Mark that a faint pearly radiance played about her.

She walked forward, until she was only steps away from Mark and David. "You can't give up now, David. Things are getting difficult...well, you knew that would happen. We all knew it was going to be hard, and we all signed on anyway. We were ready to give our lives if necessary. Linda knew. Linda chose her danger, and she chose her death."

"Right," David said, voice dripping with sarcasm. "I'm sure she's very happy now."

"She *is*. You stand there and talk about giving up, you talk as if the Zwilling has won. It hasn't. Linda beat it today — Linda gave her life to beat it. And Bob, you don't care about what *he* gave. Look at him, do you have any idea what it cost him? Yet he did it, fulfilled his part without any complaints. After what they sacrificed, you're ready to give up just because things are getting a little difficult?" Her words stung like a whip...and Mark wasn't even their target.

Or was he?

"Cathy, what do you mean? The Zwilling won this time. It killed Linda."

"Oh, Mark," she said with pity. "It didn't intend to kill Linda. It wanted to *use* her. And Bob. To feed on their hate, their rage, their disgust. It wanted to bring its horrid child into the world surrounded by those emotions, blanketed with power gone astray." She smiled. "But Linda beat it. She

fought off the Zwilling, rather than fighting off Bob the way it intended. She died before that awful creature was born." She looked around, at the glowing glyphs, the dark clouds that now smothered the silvery moon, Bob's blank eyes turned toward her like a moth drawn to flame. "The Zwilling is furious. Because of what Bob and Linda did. Because you killed its child, and it isn't going to have a chance for another."

She threw back her head, and bright sparks of intense white light flew from her hair. "Ready to give up. David, we can *win*...we have the help of the Goddess and the power of life on our side, and all the Zwilling has is hate and death. But we're not going to win if we lose our nerve, and we're certainly not going to win if we give up. The road ahead is darker and steeper than the way we've come — but we're almost to the end. Stick with it."

Her eyes locked with David's, and Mark looked from one to the other as if he were watching a tennis match. For long breaths they stood that way; then David lowered his eyes and nodded.

"You're right. But damn! — it makes me so *mad*." He smacked his hands together, and lightning jumped to the floor with a clap of thunder. David shook himself and looked back at Cathy.

"Good. Keep the anger. But use it against the Zwilling, not against us. And not against yourself." She held out her hands. "Come here, both of you."

Mark reached for her, felt her cool hand around his own. He felt as if he'd just had a refreshing swim on a hot day, or slept a good sound ten hours in his own bed. Somehow, Cathy's touch recharged him, sent away his sorrow, and made him ready for whatever had to come next.

She clasped hands with David, and the pearly glow expanded to cover the three of them. Then David turned toward Bob.

"He's our first order of business, I guess."

"No," Cathy said gently. "Linda first. Bob's never going to know peace until he's sure that she's found hers."

Mark bowed his head, content to let Cathy lead. Whatever power was with her — the Goddess or whatever you wanted to call it — she knew what she was doing. She uncovered Linda's body, straightened her limbs and closed her empty eyes.

Touching Linda's head and belly at the same time, Cathy raised her eyes. *"Our sister gave her life for the world of life. You who were with her at the end, grant her the rest that she deserves. Receive her, Goddess, and keep her safe in your dark embrace."*

"No, Cathy."

Bob raised his head, and now Mark saw life in his red-rimmed eyes. Slowly, shaking, he stood and walked over to Linda's body.

"She's not going to find peace until the Zwilling is defeated," Bob said in a hollow voice.

"Is that right?" Without realizing it, Mark looked to Cathy rather than David for the answer.

"I..." Cathy's glow faltered.

"It's true." Bob lifted one of Linda's limp arms, pressed it to his lips. "Don't worry, we're going to win. Then we can have this ceremony and send Linda on her way in peace." He laid her hand across her chest. "Until then, Cathy's right. We can't give up. You most of all, David. You know more than that rest of us, you've got to show us what to do."

"Bob...I don't *know* what to do."

Bob took David's hand. "Yes you do. You've been afraid of it, because of what you thought it would cost. Well, Linda's paid, and I've paid, and we're all ready to pay whatever it takes to get rid of this thing once and for all."

"Th-there are dark magics that I haven't looked into. They might give us a way to challenge the Zwilling. Especially if you're right, Cathy, and its power is ebbing."

"It put forth an awful lot of effort to snare Bob and Linda.

And it failed; all that power was pretty much wasted. It will take a while to build up again." Cathy sighed. "But first we're going to have to live through its rage. The next few days aren't going to be easy."

"We can do it," Mark said, surprising himself. He put his hand over Bob's and David's; Cathy covered them all with both her hands. Mark felt the way he did when he was in the living room at home, watching a storm gather outside. Safe, but uneasy all the same.

David nodded. "Here's what we're going to do, then. Until this business is over, we'll put Linda's body under a stasis enchantment. She won't change. When we have time, we'll announce her death, and mourn properly. Meanwhile, you three go home and get some sleep."

Cathy squeezed Bob's hand. "Are you going to be all right?"

"Yes. Thanks to you. Thanks to all of you."

"The Library should be open late tonight," David continued. "I'll find out what I can in the Special Collections Room. We'll meet there for class tomorrow...there and here are the only places I can think of where the wards should remain secure."

"If the Zwilling breaks through the wards on the Library," Cathy agreed, "Then we're lost for sure."

"I'll find a spell that will help us. And then we'll prepare it perfectly."

Thunder rumbled outside. Mark looked anxiously out the window. "Are we going to be all right when we leave here?"

Cathy and David nodded simultaneously. "Losing its child was a big blow to the Zwilling," she said. "As long as it could feed on our anger and fear, it had a weapon against us — now we've deprived it of *that* power as well. I think it'll be at least a day or so before it can gather energy for another strike."

"But when that strike comes," David added, "It'll probably be a big one."

Cathy nodded, squeezed their hands and then released

them. "We can handle it."

Mark only hoped she was right.

Chapter Thirty

(Cathy)

Taking on the aspect of the Goddess and then arguing with David left Cathy exhausted, and she fell asleep as soon as she tumbled into bed. Once she awoke in the middle of the night, and the absence of Linda's steady snore reminded her of what had happened. She cried a little, but then she felt the calm presence of the Goddess and she rolled over and drifted back into sleep.

It was a bleak, cold Monday morning. The sky was completely overcast with rolling black clouds, and the air had that peculiar smell that presages rain. Cathy pulled on a sweatshirt and her warmest jeans, considered Linda's knitted leg-warmers for a moment, then dashed across campus to the Library. She stopped at the Student Center long enough to check her mail and grab a Three Musketeers bar from a vending machine; she arrived just in time to make class.

She was glad to see Bob looking rested. His face still held a haunted look — she suspected he would be a long time getting rid of it. He hovered near Mark, and she noticed that the two boys were almost constantly touching: Mark had his hand on Bob's shoulder, or Bob's arm lay on the table next to

Mark's, or their legs pressed together as they sat beside one another. So, Cathy thought, would Mark be there with constant comfort for his little brother.

It was just the right medicine for Bob, who seemed in fine enough spirits, completely ready to do whatever was necessary.

"You're not going to like this," David said to the three kids. "Today we have to dig through these books." He waved at one of the large bookcases crammed full with ancient tomes. "I can't find the right spell, but it has to be in here. So we'll divide up the work."

Mark took down a large leatherbound book, coughed when he opened it. "Somebody should catalog all these spells and put the whole thing in a computer database."

"That would make a great Senior Project," David said without humor. "Let me know if you're interested."

"Thanks a lot, but never mind."

"What are we looking for?" Bob asked.

"One of the Conjurations that was edited out of the *Grimoire of Honorius* and the *Angelos Conjuraciones*. You'll recognize it when you see it, it follows the same pattern as the other spells in the grimoire."

"That's dark stuff." Bob frowned. "Exorcism, bloody sacrifice, rods of human bone...."

David nodded. "That's just the beginning. Luckily, we have a rod that'll do right here." He patted a display case, "And I found a ninth-century Omayyad manuscript that outlines a similar method. I just don't trust the translation."

Bob ran his fingers over the Kalocsa Codex. "There are a dozen spells in here that should serve. Why not use them?"

David narrowed his eyes. "Because that's precisely what the Zwilling wants us to do. I'm beginning to think that the power behind the Zwilling — whatever it is — authored parts of the Kalocsa Codex just for a case like this. We're going to have to be careful not to use any spell that we can't verify in at least three sources. Which is why I need you three to get to

work right now.”

Cathy took time for just one more point. “David...has it occurred to you that Friday night is All Hallow’s? Could there be a better time?”

“I agree — but if we don’t track down that spell, we aren’t going to have time to make all the preparations.”

There was no way to answer, except to bend her head to her book, and start reading.



Cathy stumbled to her classes in a daze. Kevin wasn’t in class; he hadn’t been attending lately, and she didn’t mind. She listened to lecture with only half an ear, and when she looked at her notes later she found nothing but an array of confused magical symbols doodled all over the page.

She couldn’t face lunch in the Student Center, even if Bob and Mark were there, so she strolled out to Davis Avenue and started walking with no destination and no purpose in mind. She just needed to get away for a while.

It was good to see David with a purpose. She didn’t know if he would really manage to get spells together by sundown Friday, but she rather thought he would. One way or another, things were moving.

Cathy crossed the street and turned right. Davis Avenue rose gently, leaving the busy campus behind as it cut through a patch of woods and then levelled off on a tree-lined rolling crest. Gravel driveways, roadside mailboxes and an occasional fence revealed the presence of huge estates and farms. Here, within a stone’s throw of the University and just a mile away from Granite’s trailer park and rundown stone-and-shingle houses — here were the mansions of Old Money, tucked into a secluded valley or hidden behind a forested hill. A few well-kept lawns fronted on Davis Avenue, leftovers from an age ago before Patapsco University disturbed their sleepy isolation.

Cathy had never met the people who lived at number 9963, had never even seen their house — but she had a friend there. A white stallion lived in a sturdy barn not too far back from the road, and he often stood at his fence watching cars drive past. She didn't know his name, but she greeted him whenever she passed.

"I'm sorry, fella," she said as she approached, "I didn't think to bring you anything." As she came to the corner of the yard, the big horse plodded to greet her. Cathy reached her hand over the fence, but before she could touch the stallion he pulled back, snorting, and reared up. Kicking and whinnying, the horse backed off further.

Then, without warning, he stamped and started toward Cathy at a dead run. Powerful muscles strained beneath his flesh, his eyes were demon-red, and flecks of foam danced on his taut lips. Cathy stood rooted in shock; by the time she could turn or run, the horse would leap the fence and be upon her.

"Merciful Goddess!" she cried, dropping to a crouch and throwing her arms up across her head. She felt the whoosh as the stallion passed over her, hooves just barely clearing her body. The horse stopped in the middle of the empty road, turned, and faced her, a ghostly white silhouette against angry black clouds. His eyes, the set of his jaw, the tenseness of his muscles all spelled death.

What to do? No magical shield could protect her, she didn't know any flashy pyrotechnic spells that might turn the beast aside. Instead, Cathy rolled out of the way; when the horse rushed past her she grabbed at his mane and pulled herself up with all her might. He twisted, trying to dislodge her, but she mounted him and gently patted the horse's throbbing neck. "Calm down, boy. Everything's okay."

He reared up once again, and Cathy felt herself slipping off. She held tight to him, still saying the words of reassurance. Some terrible magic had taken possession of the horse, something that had turned him into a demon.

The Zwilling had strong magic — but Cathy had stronger. The magic of grass and wind and cool rain, the magic of the river, the magic of the world as it was meant to be. Horses are not demons, she whispered, stroking the stallion's mane. Horses are kind, gentle creatures. By all that is right in this world, cast off the Zwilling's spell.

The horse stopped, shook, and then calmed. All the terror went out of him; Cathy dismounted and carefully led him to a gate, put him back in his yard. As she turned back toward campus, a distant thunder rolled and the first large drops of rain began to fall.



She got to the Library about two o'clock, ready to put in her four hours of work a little earlier than usual. Cathy was drenched when she arrived; the radio said that a tropical storm was on its way up from Florida, and the rain was expected to continue well into the week.

David was hard at work in the Special Collections Room. Cathy looked in on him and waved, then went to work. Her job was simple — she shelved returned books, tidied up and helped the Librarians with whatever they needed. Today only three carts of books awaited her; she put them back in their places while she listened to the drumming of rain against the windows and the growls of ever-nearer thunder.

The afternoon darkened into a premature night, and Cathy worked as in a dream. It was very quiet, only a few students in the whole building. When she glanced out the windows, she saw only rain and darkness split by bright flashes of lightning. About four she took a break and slipped in to see David.

She found him sitting before one of the room's narrow windows, frowning. A three-foot-long staff lay across his lap and he fingered it absently. "Hi," Cathy said, pulling an aluminum chair next to him and sitting down. "What's up?"

David held up the staff. "I'm part of the way there. This is our weapon. I'm still working on the spell."

"You look tired."

"Yeah." He stared out the window; his reflection in the glass showed drawn features, tight lips. "I don't like this storm. I think the Zwilling is behind it. I have a feeling this is the start of its next big assault against us."

"Are we ready to strike back?"

He didn't answer.

There was a sudden crash like an avalanche, an enormous flash of blue-white lightning — and the lights went out. On the walls, glyphs of warding blazed with their own magical light. After a moment the electricity came back on. The door swung open, and Cathy gasped.

Kevin Judd, dripping wet, stood on the other side of the open doorway.

David faced him calmly. "What do you think *you're* doing here?"

"*You know.*" Lightning, all but lost in the gloom outside, punctuated Kevin's statement. The windows rattled as heavy rain lashed against them.

"You can't come in here." David said it flatly, allowing no argument.

"Not yet," Kevin agreed. He held out a hand. "*I thought this might interest you. Here, catch.*"

He tossed a small object at David; it flashed as it crossed the threshold. David snatched it from the air with one hand, opened his palm. It was a man's Patapsco University school ring, pale green stone set in a massive ring of dull silver duralite. David frowned, lifted the ring to look on the inside — then he went pale. "Where did you get this?"

Kevin laughed. At the same time, the brightest flash of lightning yet lit up the sky, accompanied by thunder like a passing freight train. The lights went out, and this time they didn't come back on. Kevin was gone.

David passed the ring to Cathy; she held it up and in the

dim glow of warding glyphs, she struggled to read the name engraved inside.

"Th-this is Mark's ring," she said, feeling a cold hand around her throat.

David nodded. "The power's out for good...they're going to have to close the Library." He gripped his staff and stood. "Come on, we've got to find Mark."

"What if the wards don't hold?"

"We can't do anything else, if they don't. Mark probably needs us — let's go."

Together, David clutching his staff and Cathy holding Mark's ring, they set out into the teeth of the storm.



(Mark)

The storm hit while Mark was in German class. Frau Zunge took advantage of the dark sky and thunderclaps to lead a discussion of German terms for states of weather; Mark felt rather cozy sitting in a circle in the well-lit classroom, while outside the elements raged. And Frau Zunge was very reassuring. She treated the storm as if it were a scheduled audio-visual presentation designed to give her students conversational practice.

"Enough of this," she said after a half hour, when they had exhausted talk of the weather. She wheeled her chair toward the windows. "Paul, Mark, would you please close those shades? *Danke*. I think we can get more done if we don't have distractions."

As he went back to his seat, Mark felt himself caught in Frau Zunge's gaze; he lifted his eyes and for a moment they stared at one another. The old woman's brow was wrinkled, and her eyes held a concern that went beyond the bad weather.

This is no ordinary storm, Frau Zunge seemed to say. Then she shifted her eyes to Kevin Judd's empty seat. Kevin didn't

come to classes very often any more; when he did show up, his presence was like a dark brooding cloud that dampened everyone's spirits.

Was Kevin — or rather, the Zwilling — responsible for this storm? What was going to happen? Mark shivered as he sat down.

He wanted to talk to Frau Zunge...he felt safe around the crippled old woman...but he'd promised Bob and Paul Mazeika that he would go swimming with them after class. And he didn't want to disappoint Bob or leave him alone too long.

Since Linda died, Mark felt that Bob was his own special responsibility. He'd stayed near the older boy as much as possible, half the time in wolf form — not speaking, just being there, offering whatever strength and support he could.

It was worst for Bob at night, especially the first few nights. Bob clung to him in pain, in loneliness, in desperation, and Mark did his best to comfort his friend. And all the time, he felt sad and guilty, that he couldn't be Linda.

So as soon as class was over, Mark and Paul dashed toward the gym, trying to dodge raindrops and ending up soaked after the first fifty feet.

They had the pool to themselves. The warm dampness felt good after cold rain; Bob was in the best mood Mark had seen since Linda died. And Paul kept them both laughing with his mad antics.

"This was a good idea," Mark said as he floated, his head and toes above the waterline. "It feels great to relax after all that work we've been doing."

Bob stretched, then dove into the deep end with hardly a splash. He surfaced right next to Mark. "Paul got some beer this afternoon...why don't you come back to the dorm with us and have a few?"

"Nah." Mark shook his head. "Mom and Dad are going to a show in town, so I have to be home to take care of Peter." He grinned. "Thanks for the offer, though. You guys...gonna

be okay?"

"We'll be fine," Paul said, and Mark sensed his forced cheerfulness. "I'm bringing over my Devo and Talking Heads albums, and we're going to cut loose."

Bob smiled. "I'll be okay."

"Good." Mark looked at the clock and swore. "It's quarter to three. I'm late — Peter'll *kill* me." He pulled himself out of the pool and dashed into the locker room. Bob came along.

"He'll have sense enough to wait in the school until you get there," Bob said. "Peter's a good kid."

"I hope so." Mark stripped off his bathing suit, towelled himself quickly, and pulled on his clothes. His wolfskin belt went around his waist under his shirt, and last to go on was his school ring.

He missed the characteristic tingle of the ring's enchantment. Guess I'm getting used to it, he thought. "You guys have fun."

"Okay. Thanks. Drive carefully."

"I will."

It was almost impossible to see, even with his windshield wipers on the highest speed. Mark drove slowly, his headlights and emergency flashers on. As he passed over the Patapsco on the Woodstock bridge, he was surprised to see the river running so high; it was almost up to the railroad tracks, halfway to the bridge itself. On the radio they were talking about flash-flood warnings.

"Petey," Mark said, "I hope you have enough smarts to stay in out of the rain."

He followed Woodstock Road upward out of the valley, while lightning and thunder raged behind him.

Chapter Thirty-one

(Mark)

When Mark picked his brother up at school, the rain had grown even worse. Mark couldn't see the tail lights of cars ahead of him, and every few seconds he had to wipe the window with his handkerchief.

"What's going on?" Peter asked as he climbed into the car, dripping. "The teachers said we're having a tropical storm. Is that like a tornado?"

"It's more like a hurricane," Mark answered. Through static, he listened for weather reports on the radio. Flood warnings, storm watch, and other phrases of doom. "I know I told you I'd take you to McDonald's, but do you mind if we go straight home? I'd rather not be driving in this."

"Sure. No problem. We can heat up a pizza or something." Peter stared out the window, distracted; Mark paid attention to his driving. Making his right turn onto Mount Hebron road, he was almost sideswiped by a skidding car that hit its brakes too late. He was relieved when he pulled up in front of the house.

Amram Court, a broad circle of macadam lined with tree-strewn lawns and two-story Cape Cod houses, was three inches deep in water. They always had this problem when it

rained heavily: with the Patapsco only a few dozen feet down the hill, the developers had not bothered to put in an adequate drainage system, and half the roads in Mount Hebron drained right into Amram Court. Mark shook his head; between the rain and the rising river, it was going to be wet for quite a long while.

He and Peter ran for the front door, then stood in the front hall futilely wiping their feet. "Remember in August when it was so dry?" Mark said with a chuckle.

"Yeah."

"Well, now I'm sorry that I asked for rain then." He looked upward. "I take it back."

The house was cold and dark; while Peter fetched towels, Mark turned on a few lights. They dried themselves, then Peter said, "The lights went out at school for a while...what do we do if that happens here?"

Mark shivered. "You're right. Why don't we make a fire in the fireplace, and have a few candles handy?"

Peter warmed to the idea right away. "A fire would be neat. And maybe we could pop some popcorn? Or roast marshmallows?"

"Good idea."

"And we could turn all the lights off, even if the electricity doesn't go out. And..." Peter's face fell. "Mark, all the wood's wet. We can't make a fire."

"Nah." Mark pulled off his tennis shoes and rolled up his jeans. "There's got to be some dry logs in the middle of the pile. We can start it with them, and then bring in some more to dry off."

"You think it'll work?"

"Sure." And if it doesn't, Mark thought, well, I know a spell or two that will help. If I can just remember how they go....

"Let's go, then." Peter opened the closet and took out their yellow rain slickers, then kicked off his own shoes. "It's not getting any drier out there."

The woodpile was stacked at the rear of the back yard, in a corner of the wooden fence next to the shed. Mark started pulling logs free, looking for dry ones; he found three or four in the lee of the shed, and carried them to the back door as quickly as he could. On his return trip he stood pondering which of the remaining logs were least damp.

"Mark, c'mere!" Peter shouted from the fence.

"What — Good Lord." The river, usually only three feet deep or so, was a rushing torrent that filled the valley; it was almost up to the fence and rising even as he watched. "Hey, Pete, get back from there. Don't stand so close."

"Sorry." Peter moved back a few steps, his bare feet lost in muddy earth. The back yard was completely waterlogged, and huge puddles stood as if waiting for the river to join them. Mark looked upstream and downstream, and shuddered — the edge of the river was only about twenty feet from the house, and if it rose another four feet or so it would be lapping at the kitchen stairs. Already the sump pump was doing constant duty, spewing out a continuous stream of water.

What if the electricity *does* go off, Mark thought. The batteries will only power the pump for an hour or so. Will the basement flood?

"Look." Peter pointed across the river; through a dense curtain of raindrops Mark saw the trees that lined the University property, and thought he glimpsed the Faculty Apartments. Great surges of water pushed against the bank, and suddenly a huge oak tree tumbled with a mighty crash. The tree seemed to topple slowly into the water, almost as if trying to avoid its fate — but in the end it fell, and the river gobbled it up like a hungry beast.

"Get back!" But it was too late; a great surging wave tugged around Peter's feet, pulled grass and dirt away from the foundations of the fence, and all at once Peter was sliding down the too-short hill right toward the water.

"Merciful Mother." Without thinking, Mark lunged

forward and caught Peter's wrist in his right hand. He slipped in the mud, and felt himself skidding toward the river — but he held on, and forced himself not to panic. "Hold on, kid. Can you dig your feet in?"

"Everything's slippery. I'm trying."

"Don't be scared." He pulled, and Peter moved closer. "Give me your other hand."

"I...can't...reach you."

"I've got you. Hold on tight." Goddess, can you hear me? I'm slipping — but I've *got* to get him back. I can't let go.

Damn it, the Zwilling is doing this. He tried to get Peter once before, and now he's trying again.

My ring should protect us....

His ring glowed an eerie electric blue, and Mark felt a tingle in his right hand. Then, suddenly, it was as if the ring had shrunk three sizes — it was biting into his flesh, constricting around his finger, burning like a hot coal.

He screamed, lost his grip. Then he, too, was sliding, and the water and mud were all about him, and the river had him in an unbreakable hold. Something was chewing off his finger, he had lost Peter, and when he cried out he only swallowed water.

No.

Mark thrashed out, felt Peter's rain slicker, grasped it firmly in his left hand. He couldn't swim in this current — but he wasn't far from the bank, and there were tree roots, fence posts, any number of things to hold onto. He just had to keep from losing his head.

There. A strong tree root stopped him, and he looped his right arm around it. "Peter, hold on to this."

"What?" Peter was confused, his voice filled with fear. But he held onto the root, and they stopped drifting.

Now Mark turned his attention to the ring. His hand was bloody, and the damn thing had cut deeply into his flesh. It was pulsing with unnatural light, and it hurt like hell.

"Look away," he ordered Peter. Now if he could only

remember Cathy's incantation. "*Begone — In the name of Isis, Ishtar, Freya, Brigit and Anahita. In the name of Hou Tou and Cybele, begone!*" He took a ragged breath, and then as loudly as he could, he spoke a mystical Word straight from the old grimoires, a Word never intended to be uttered in the natural world.

It was as if a bolt of lightning struck, blinding and electric, and for an instant Mark and Peter were in the center of a maelstrom of magical energies, energies that fought one another with a sound like the end of the world. Then the powers broke, the ring relaxed its hold and dropped off his finger into his palm. Quick as he could, Mark scrambled up the bank, dragging Peter with him; he stopped for an armload of logs, then pulled his brother into the house.

"What was *that* all about?" Peter asked, breathless.

Mark was shaking with the aftermath of adrenalin shock. "Magic. Something bad is happening, kid, and we're going to have to stick it out here in the house." He pulled newspapers from the stack in the pantry, thrust them at Peter. "Get the fire started. I don't think we'll have power much longer. There's kindling in the basement."

"I know. What are you going to do?"

He looked at the broken ring in his finger. He didn't need to look too closely to see the inscribed name: Kevin Judd.

"I'm going to set some wards," he answered. "I may need your help." And then...Mark shivered...and then, we're going to wait.

And I wish I knew for what.



(Bob)

Bob had downed more than a few beers, but he sobered up at once when Cathy showed him Mark's ring. "My God, what are we going to do?"

"When was the last time you saw him?" David asked.

"About two-thirty, quarter to three. He was headed to pick up Peter at school, and then home. Did you call?"

Cathy and David exchanged worried looks. "We tried. The lines are dead. Right now, Patapsco University is cut off."

"Then...we've got to find him." There was no question in Bob's mind. After...after what had happened, Mark had been his salvation. Bob would never have made it through without Mark's strength, his support...his love.

Paul, who had finished off most of a six-pack, stretched on Bob's bed. "What's the big deal? Mark went home, let 'im stay." He inclined his head toward the window. "You don't wanna go driving around on a night like this."

Bob shook his head. "If Mark's in trouble, we've got to help him."

David sighed. "My car's parked by the lab. I don't know what to tell you, the weather's awful and it's probably going to get worse."

"I noticed." Bob pointed to his walls, where glyphs of warding glowed despite the room's brightness.

"All right. Let's go, then."

"You guys are crazy," Paul said.

Bob patted him on the shoulder. "Stay here and take care of the place, okay? With any luck we'll be back in an hour with Mark and his brother."

He didn't want to think of what might happen without luck.



They crawled into David's Honda, Cathy in the back seat and Bob on the passenger's side. David handed Bob a small looseleaf notebook — "My spellbook," he explained. "I hope we won't need it."

It was not yet five o'clock, but a darkness like midnight had taken hold under black storm clouds. The engine took a while

to catch, and when it did David spent a few minutes with his foot on the accelerator before he put the Honda in gear. Headlights on, they set forth to find Mark.

It wasn't just the beer that made Bob's head spin; there was definitely powerful magic abroad tonight. The lightning, the thunder, even the rain itself bore the scent of the Zwilling's rage.

Leaves and broken sticks covered Davis Avenue, and deep puddles ran across the road like midget rivers; David locked his jaw, put the car in third gear, and plowed through. If need be, Bob thought, he'll get out and carry us across any obstacles.

David cares about us. I never really realized that before. It's not just a matter of his professional pride, he's not simply our teacher — he'll do whatever is necessary to make sure we're okay.

And we'd do the same for him. I'm sure we would.

They heard the river even before they reached the old church and the cemetery. Two bright blue flashing lights cut through the darkness, and David hastily pulled the car off next to the old church. Reluctantly, Bob followed him out of the car.

Two State Police cars were hubcap-deep in rushing water across the road. A sodden officer in dripping raincoat and plastic-wrapped hat met them. "Sorry, boys, the bridge is out." He had to shout to be heard past the rain and rushing water.

"Out?" David echoed.

"Sure enough. The supports just gave way. You from up the University?"

"Yes, sir."

"Go on back. Stay in your dorms. This ain't a night to be out."

"Thank you, Officer."

Bob had a glimpse of the bridge — its concrete span ended after only ten feet, a jagged edge that dropped off into the

water only a few feet below. "I've never seen it this bad."

The officer nodded. "Worse than Agnes in '72. Going to be a bad night if this doesn't let up."

Back in the car, headed toward the University, they held a quick strategy conference. "Isn't there another way across?" Cathy asked.

David stared out the windshield. "If we go down as far as Ellicott City, there's no hope we'd be able to get across. I can drive back toward town and pick up Interstate 70, but that's taking us in the wrong direction, and there's no guarantee that they're letting traffic go west on...wait." He pulled off, reached across Bob to pop open the glove compartment. "Where's...here it is." David fished out a Baltimore City map, fumbled with it for a second.

"Look." He pointed, his finger following a pale line right next to the yellow area marked "Patapsco State University." Bob leaned forward, and Cathy stuck her head over David's shoulder. "We can follow Davis Avenue the *other* way, and hook up with this...Wright's Mill Road. Then that connects with Dogwood to Hollofield...and across the river."

Cathy nodded. "Mark took us that way once. Last year, Bob, do you remember? It's a big steel bridge, Mark said it was the main way across the river before they upgraded the Woodstock bridge."

"I remember. That's a bitch of a way to go — tight curves and steep roads all the way. But I remember Mark saying that the steel bridge had lasted through Hurricane Agnes and a couple of other storms that everybody thought would wreck it."

"Do you think we can make it across?"

Bob frowned. "I don't know. The valley gets a lot wider down that way, so the river shouldn't be as high. On the other hand, I don't think that bridge was more than ten or fifteen feet above the water."

Cathy clasped Bob and David's hands. "We have to try."

"Right." David left the map unfolded on his lap, turned off

the inside light and put the car in gear. "Bob, somewhere in there is a spell of strengthening and rigidity — I think we might need it soon."

"I know the one you mean."

David's lips twitched in a half-grin. "Yeah, I figured you would. Get ready to cast it."

The way was even worse than Bob remembered. Wright's Mill Road was a narrow paved road that twisted up and down the side of the valley, now crossing a surging stream on a cracked stone bridge marked "WEIGHT LIMIT 3100 LBS", now hugging jutting rocks high above rushing water, now suddenly swinging left in a blind turn next to a thirty-foot dropoff. He kept his eyes off the road, trying to puzzle out David's handwriting in the spellbook.

At times the car was almost swimming, and once or twice Bob was sure that David would lose control as they cut across three feet of raging river. But David had his hands firmly on the wheel, and Cathy chanted softly from the back seat in a language Bob couldn't understand.

Eventually, they came to the bridge.

It had probably been a railroad bridge once: it was blue and powerful as it straddled the Patapsco. The river rushed only a few inches below the bridge's latticework base, and the approach was completely under water for thirty feet or so. David drifted to a halt and surveyed the bridge doubtfully.

"Are you sure this will work?" Bob asked. He didn't remember what sort of supports this bridge had, but they were lost in the dark waters — it might be ready to collapse at the slightest added weight.

Cathy said, "Maybe Paul was right...Mark's okay, and the Zwilling is just trying to get the three of us k-killed."

"It's possible," David said. "That business with Mark's ring could have been a decoy."

Bob put his hand on David's shoulder. "If we give up on Mark now, then the Zwilling will take him. We've got each other — he doesn't have anyone. Are we going to leave him

alone in this?"

Cathy lowered her head. "You're right. I'm sorry."

"Keep thinking." He looked to David. "Well?"

"Okay. Got that spell ready?"

"I don't know how much it's going to help. But yes, it's ready."

"Cast it, then."

"Give me your hands." For the first time since Linda died, Bob gave voice to a magical incantation. As always, the power carried him after a few moments, and he felt his confidence building with the swell of magical energy within him. It would never be the same, without Linda — but he was still an apprentice warlock, and he could work magic as well as any professional.

The bridge resisted his spell. Cold steel was anathema to magic...but with patience and power, even intransigent metal could be bent to a spellcaster's will. The bridge creaked and groaned, then the spell was finished.

"Drive," Bob said. David put the car in gear, and they moved forward.

They inched across. Water now lapped over the roadway, and Bob heard the rear tires spinning as if on ice. But still they moved forward. He realized he was holding his breath, let it out, breathed again.

The sky opened, thunder and lightning, hailstones, tongues of flame dancing in the treetops. An enormous bolt seared a huge oak to the right, another tumbled a massive tree across the road they'd just left. But the steel framework of the bridge protected them, and the lightnings couldn't reach them. The bridge carried magical energy like an electric charge, and for the moment they were safe in a benevolent cage.

One last barrage of lightning flashed down, accompanied by ear-splitting thunderclaps...then, its rage spent futilely, the attack ended.

David slammed the Honda into second gear and gave it gas. They roared off the bridge, safely across the river, and

started a slow climb up the valley. "We should be at Mark's house soon," he said.

Exhausted, Bob slumped against the seat.

How much more would there be?

Chapter Thirty-two

(Mark)

The house was still cold, even with a blazing fire and the heat turned up. Mark tried to call the theatre where his parents had gone, but the phone was completely dead. At least, he thought, the electricity was still on and the basement wasn't flooding.

Peter had tried to watch television for a while, but the picture was terrible with static and even M*A*S*H couldn't hold his attention. He ended up in front of the fire with one of his schoolbooks, one worried eye constantly on the big picture window.

Mark stirred the fire and sighed. Two more dry logs left...and a dozen wet ones stacked in the laundry room. It was no longer possible to get to the woodpile; the back yard was ankle-deep in rushing water, and the last time Mark had lost his footing and was almost swept into the river. He had no idea what the neighbors were doing — the Bevinsky's house was dark, and although there were lights on at the Harter's none of their cars were in the driveway.

He looked at his bandaged right hand and smiled ruefully. You might have us trapped, he thought, but you haven't won. I've beaten you so far.

Peter stretched. "Is there any milk left?"

"I think so."

"Want some hot chocolate?"

Mark nodded. "That would be great. Be careful around the stove."

"I'm not a baby," Peter threw over his shoulder on his way to the kitchen.

"I know that." Mark looked into the fire. He made a motion with his left hand, and the flames danced in response. He frowned, clenched his teeth and concentrated. A few vague shapes formed in the fireplace, and he struggled to form them into some kind of sensible image. What is the Zwilling doing? Where is it?

Lightning flashed, and the flames sputtered. Nothing.

Mark patted his wolfskin belt, wound tightly around his waist under his shirt. If Kevin Judd showed up, he would have quite a fight on his hands. I'm not going to give up, Mark told himself. Never.

Without warning, the lights went out. "Hey," Peter called from the kitchen.

Mark was up in a second. "You okay?"

"Yeah," Peter answered. He emerged from the kitchen gingerly carrying two mugs. "Lucky thing I had the hot chocolate done. Here." He handed Mark a mug. "It's hot."

"Thanks, kid."

"How long do you figure the power's going to be out?"

"I don't know." Mark sat before the fire again, and Peter plopped down next to him. After his scare in the river, Peter seemed calm; almost as if the storm were just a lark.

"Hey, look," Peter pointed. On the walls and ceiling, Mark's hastily-drawn warding glyphs burned like cold flames. "Does that mean...that bad stuff is around?"

Mark sighed. What to tell? "I'm afraid it is. I think that's why we're having this storm. I think that's why we almost landed in the river."

At his side, Peter shivered. Slowly, the boy took Mark's

bandaged hand and cradled it in his own. "What was going on out there? Why did you tell me to look away?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"Don't you think I should?"

He had a point. "It's a dirty thing that we're involved in, and I don't want to get you caught up in it more than you are." Who am I trying to kid, Mark asked himself. Peter was in as much danger as me, out there in the river. Kevin picked Peter up in his car. For all I know, the Zwilling wants to get at me by hurting my brother. Damn it, he's as involved as he's ever going to be. "It has a lot to do with magic and evil. If I tell you everything, you're going to think I'm crazy."

"What, it's like *The Exorcist* or *Raiders of the Lost Ark*?"

"Something like that. You see — "

The house shook, and outside the sound of thunder was joined by a low wailing moan. It seemed on the threshold of being an intelligible call; there was a brain behind that sound. Mark's glyphs of warding pulsed, now outshining the captive flames in the fireplace. Then, so suddenly that it brought a cry to his lips, there was a sharp knock at the door.

Peter stood reflexively, then looked at his brother. His face shone in the firelight. "What should I do?"

"Let me look out the window." Mark needn't have tried; it was pitch black outside, as if the windows had been painted. He felt the electric presence of lightning, but didn't see its flash.

"I'm scared," Peter whispered. "Is that okay?"

"I'd be worried if you weren't."

"Good. For a second I was afraid you'd tell me that I have to be brave, and it can get at us through our fear."

"Save that for the movies. If I'm right about what's out there, it's not going to make a big difference whether we're scared or not."

"Thanks," Peter answered in a heavy voice.

Again the knock.

Mark moved toward the door.

"You're not going to let him in, are you?"

"I..." What am I going to do? "I want a better look, that's all." He peered through the peephole in the heavy wooden door. In the blackness, Mark sensed a large hulking shape on the porch.

"Is anyone in there? This is the police." The voice was muffled, and seemed to be coming from a far away.

Police? With one hand firmly on his wolfskin belt, Mark unlocked the door and turned the knob. A soaked, bedraggled police officer stood on the porch. He flashed an ID card which Mark couldn't read in the dark. "Sorry to frighten you, sir. We're taking the word around house to house — I'm afraid we're going to have to evacuate you. The Woodstock bridge is out and I-70 is closed. And the river keeps rising." The officer peered past Mark. "Is there anyone else in the house?"

"My br—" Mark stopped dead. How did he know this was really a police officer? The Zwilling had already shown the ability to change form; maybe this was a trick. Once they were out of the house, beyond the wards and in the teeth of the storm...who knew *what* might happen?

"If it's all the same to you, Officer, I think I'd better stay with the house."

"I do wish you'd co-operate, sir. We're sending people to the High School, and I wouldn't want to have to write you up a citation." The officer sounded more aggrieved than angry. "If you'll just gather up the folks inside and bring them with you, I'm sure it won't be more than a night that you'll have to stay away."

"I..."

Peter had been quiet throughout this exchange, keeping himself out of sight. Now he sneezed, and the officer stepped forward into the doorway.

Mark made his decision instantly. No police officer would ever enter a house without being invited — or without a search warrant. He slammed the door in the cop's face, and traced a quick mystic sigil on the surface of the door. It wasn't

much, and it wasn't enough to hold against a first-year wizard much less the Zwilling — but it was something.

"What now?" Peter said.

"If that *is* a cop, we're in trouble. And if it isn't...we're in *worse* trouble. Stay close to me." A circle, Mark thought. Damn, I don't have any charcoal. Or sanctified water. Who expects to draw a magical circle in your living room? He cast his eyes about the dark room, then ran into the kitchen. Flour? Sugar? Cinnamon, nutmeg, mustard seed, tarragon, garlic powder...most of his mother's spices were in small bottles that would hardly suffice.

Salt. It would have to do. He snatched the blue Morton's container from the shelf and pulled Peter into the living room.

"Mom's going to kill me if this doesn't vacuum up." He moved the coffee table out of the way, then poured the salt in a six-foot-wide circle in the center of the rug. "Don't step outside the circle," he instructed Peter. "No matter what happens, no matter what you see me do, *stay inside the circle.*"

"You're crazy, you know that?"

A thud at the door sounded like the crash of a wrecking ball. Peter's eyes widened. "In a nice way, of course. What can I do?"

"Be quiet for a second. Stand still." Mark closed his eyes, stretched out his hands, and began reciting in rusty Latin and even worse Greek. He felt a flicker of magical energy rise like heat from the circle's perimeter. It was nothing compared to what he had felt with Linda in old Saint Zachary's, but it would have to do.

The door flew open, and Peter screamed.

No police officer — this time, Kevin Judd stood on the porch. His eyes flashed with lightning, the red highlights in his dripping hair glowed like unquenchable flame. Behind him, the rain fell in a solid curtain and lightning bolts strobelit the front yard.

Mark folded his arms across his chest. His warding glyphs

blazed with intense cold light, and even his pathetic little circle radiated warmth and comfort. "This is my home," he said quietly. "As soon as you cross that doorway you're on my territory."

"*Your territory!*" Kevin laughed, gestured, and thunder split the night. "*Your territory. I have been in this valley longer than you can imagine. When the first men set foot here, I had been here ten times ten thousand years. And you call this your territory?*"

"If you're waiting for me to invite you in, you've got a long wait."

"*If you won't invite me in, maybe Pete will. How about it, Pete my boy? It's cold and wet out here. Ask me in.*"

Without a word, Peter shook his head determinedly.

"*All right, make it difficult.*" Kevin raised a hand. The air was suddenly filled with tension. Mark felt as if he were wrestling with someone, without even moving his limbs. Slowly, inexorably, that unseen force imposed itself on him, drove his will down to the carpet.

With a crack of thunder, his warding glyphs disappeared. Kevin stepped across the doorway and stood dripping on a white scatter-rug.

"*This house is my territory now, boy,*" Kevin said in a deep, chilling voice. He took a step.

"*In the name of the Goddess,*" Mark started.

Kevin dismissed his beginning incantation with a wave. "*Don't bother to try it. It isn't going to work. Even if She would deign to help you, She can't hear you. She isn't listening.*"

"Then I'll have to fight you on my own."

"*Do not flatter yourself.*" Now Kevin stood right outside the circle. He touched it with the toe of one wet tennis shoe. "*Salt? You couldn't find anything better?*"

"It'll do."

"*For a laugh, maybe.*" Kevin shook his head. "*You children. Are you really the best this time? I've faced the most*

powerful shamans, I've wrestled sorcerers whose shoes you aren't fit to shine. And this time I get a handful of children who play at being wolves and make messes on the carpet with salt."

A curious calm descended over Mark. He glanced at the fireplace, and just for an instant he saw an image in the dancing flames. It was Cathy's face, and she seemed to be telling him to hold the Zwilling, keep him busy. We're on our way, Cathy told him. Then the vision was gone.

"Maybe we aren't what you expected — but look at the instrument you've chosen." Now it was Mark's turn to shake his head. "Pathetic. He's weak, he's stupid, he's younger than we are, and he knows nothing about the Arts. How much of a struggle is it for you to work through him?"

Kevin jerked. "Soon," the strange voice said, "I won't have to work through him. Soon enough I'll have my own body."

"How? Not through Kim Richter. Not through Linda...we stopped you *there*. Where do you expect to get body that you can use as a gateway to our world? You can't use Kevin's — he's your brother, your link. If you kill him you're lost. So where do you think you're going to get a host?"

Kevin fastened his eyes on Peter, and the awful gaze of the Zwilling penetrated from its unearthly dwelling place. "There are hosts to be had. Young ones, whose minds aren't yet closed to me. I can find a way."

The circle. Mark clenched his fists, pouring all his magical energy and all his concentration into the circle.

Kevin kicked at it, and a few grains of salt scattered. There was a terrible smell, like rotting garbage on a summer day.

Mark looked at Peter — the young boy couldn't keep his eyes off Kevin. "Peter," Mark said softly, "Look at me."

"Huh?" Peter looked. "Mark, I'm sleepy. It's been a rough day. I'm going to lay down for a while." He started toward the couch — which lay outside the circle.

Mark caught Peter's arm in his uninjured left hand. "That's fine, kid. If you want to lay down, do it right here."

Responsive as soft putty, Peter sat down at Mark's feet.

Kevin grinned. *"So you think your circle is going to hold? Against me?"*

Mark didn't answer. He merely set his jaw and muttered the strongest protection spell he knew.

"This is what I think of your circle." Kevin kicked, and lightning hit the front yard. Deafened by thunder, choking on the acrid smell of ozone, Mark watched with horror as his line of salt dissolved in a wet wind from the doorway.

Kevin stepped across the circle. For a moment he hesitated while pale flames played across his face and hands — then he moved forward, unhurt. *"Wake up, Peter. Time to come with me."*

"No." Mark pointed, and spoke the same Word he had used earlier, in the river. This time there was no physical manifestation of power, but Kevin flew across the room as if punched by a prize-fighter. He landed in a heap against the stairs.

Peter was awake and fully aware now; he whistled. "Wow. Did you...kill him?"

"No." Mark gasped for breath. The Words of Power were not to be used lightly, and they were always an emotional and physical drain. He felt as if he's just swum five laps. "He'll recover in a second. Stay behind me. If you have to, run up to my room...it's warded and that may hold him off a little longer."

"What does he want?"

"He — never mind. Later."

Kevin struggled to his feet, then faced Mark. Anger flared in his eyes, across his face. *"Try that again, Mark, and it'll kill you. You're not the only one who knows Words of Power."*

"Kevin's never used them before — you'll burn his throat out if you try now." Mark remembered his own first experiences...he'd been hoarse for a week, and had to gargle with a special mixture of herbs and water for much longer.

"I don't need to. Ordinary spells are enough to cope with

annoying children like you." Kevin gestured, and Mark felt invisible hands upon him, lifting him, throwing him away from Peter's side.

He tumbled, spun — and dropped to the floor as a wolf.

Shaking off the rags of his clothing, he pounced.

Snarling, he landed on Kevin. The two went down in a tangle; Kevin's body shifted and changed, but Mark sank his fangs deeply into flesh and held on as tightly as he could. For a wolf, there was no thrill that quite matched that of the kill — even more so when the kill was an enemy of the pack.

"Mark, get back." It was the voice of his pack-leader. Without thinking, Mark obeyed, dropped his kill and drew back. David, Cathy and Bob stood in the doorway; David held a short rod and Bob had a looseleaf binder open in his hands. Cathy, meanwhile, stood in a nimbus of ghostly light, and her hair stood out as if charged with static electricity.

David pointed the rod at Kevin — but before he could speak, Kevin changed into a large black winged creature and fluttered out the door and away into the stormy night.

Mark bowed his head, and was Human again. Naked but for the remnants of his shirt and his wolfskin belt, he rose and clasped David's hand. "Am I glad to see you three."

Bob didn't say anything, just threw his arms around Mark and hugged him tightly.

Cathy nodded to him, then took Peter in her arms. "Are you okay?"

"I th-think so." He looked from face to face. "I used to think you people were weird...now I'm sure of it."

David crossed the room and crouched at the spot where Mark had fought Kevin. "What is it?" Bob asked.

"Shine your flashlight here." Bob obliged, and David smiled. "Mark, are you bleeding?"

"I don't think so." He checked. "No. Why?"

"Then this must be Kevin's." He lifted his fingers. "We couldn't ask for anything better. This'll make the spell go a lot easier, when we launch our counterattack."

Bob surveyed the room. "This place is a mess. I sure wouldn't want to be you when your Mom gets home."

Cathy, still holding Peter's hand, sighed. "We had enough trouble getting in...your parents aren't going to be home tonight. It won't take long for all of us to clean up."

"First," David said, "Let's set up some stronger wards. Then I think the house will be safe enough for us to sleep here."

"What about the storm?"

"It's going to break soon. The Zwilling tried, and didn't win. So it'll try something else, later." He slapped Mark on the back. "Go on, get some clothes on and then report back here. You know, I think we might have a chance."

"Weird," Peter said. "Just too, too weird."

Chapter Thirty-three

(Cathy)

At seven-thirty in the morning it was still raining, but the storm had broken. Cathy tiptoed into the kitchen and found instant coffee; while water heated in the microwave she popped an English muffin into the toaster.

She'd slept soundly in Mark's bed; Mark and Bob were curled up together in a sleeping bag on the living room floor, while David snored softly on the couch. The gentle patter of rain on the roof was soothing.

And how long, Cathy asked herself, will things stay this peaceful? The Zwilling tried, and none of us can pretend that next time it won't try again. So far it's run away whenever all of us confront it. How long will that last?

She made her coffee strong and spread grape jelly on her English muffin, then sat at the small kitchen table. It wasn't much of a breakfast, but it was better than she usually ate. She watched rain falling on the flooded back yard, where a few courageous birds were feasting on worms.

"Hi." Mark's little brother, dressed in blue pajamas and wrapped in a terrycloth robe, stood rubbing his eyes in the doorway. "They said on the radio that school's been called off for today. I think we're a disaster area now."

"When I was your age and school was cancelled, I rolled over and went back to sleep."

"Yeah, well, I can't sleep." He took a glass from a corner cabinet, then opened the refrigerator and fumbled with the orange juice.

"Here, sit down. I'll get that for you."

"Thanks."

"What do you want for breakfast? I was going to throw together a big bowl of scrambled eggs when the boys got up, but...."

"Aw, I usually just have a bowl of cereal." He stretched.

"How about French toast? We could make a whole mess of it, that should wake them up."

"And bacon, too," he said, hopping off the chair to help her. "I know how to use the coffee pot, if you want."

"That would be great. Where does your Mom keep her cinnamon?"

"The spice rack is inside that cupboard. That's right."

For a time they worked quietly, the gentle silence disturbed only by clinking utensils and the beginning faint sizzle of bacon in the frying pan. Finally, as he scrambled eggs, Peter wrinkled his face and said, "Cathy, what was going on last night? Some pretty weird stuff happened, didn't it?"

She nodded. "Don't worry, you didn't dream it. I guess it's not easy to deal with, is it?"

"It's not every kid who gets to watch his big brother turn into a wolf. And all that stuff with Kevin...that was scary. Mark wouldn't tell me what was happening, will you?"

"Your brother doesn't want to get you too involved. With a nasty business like this, the more you know the more you're in danger. Here, give me those eggs." She put the bowl down, stirred in some milk and cinnamon sugar. "The trouble is, you're very involved right now. I don't see how more knowledge could endanger you."

"Then tell me."

Carefully, she explained about Susan Whitlow's death, the

school rings and wolfskin belts, and the bizarre series of accidents that had led to their discovery of the Zwilling's true nature. "So you see," she finished, "That wasn't Kevin Judd at all last night — that was the Zwilling, inhabiting his body."

"If all it wants is a body to live in, why can't it take over Kevin's and leave the rest of us alone?"

"Well, it can't...not completely. Kevin's personality — his soul, if you want — is pretty firmly in control of his body. Sometimes the Zwilling can move Kevin's soul aside, like opening a door. At first, it could only open the door a little ways, enough to see our world and reach into it a bit. It gathered its strength, and it was able to take over Kevin long enough to kill Doctor Whitlow — but that effort exhausted it, Kevin's soul slammed shut across the doorway, and the Zwilling had to rest for a long time."

"And now it's gotten more powerful, right? So it can open the door wider and longer?"

"That's right. It'll never get strong enough, though, that it can get Kevin out of the way entirely." She took Peter's hand and looked right into his eyes. He looked back, unflinching. "That's why you're so attractive to the Zwilling. You're Mark's brother, so you have potential for as much magical ability as he has. And yet you're young; the Zwilling thinks it's strong enough to knock your soul completely out of the way and take over your body permanently."

The boy shivered. "Can it?"

"Not if we can help it."

"What will it do now?"

"The storm must have taken a lot of its energy. The effort would've been worth it if the Zwilling had been able to kill Mark and capture you — but your brother was stronger than it realized, and we arrived at the right time." She spread her arms. "David thinks we'll have a few days of peace before we're attacked again."

"Why can't it just take possession of a little baby? A million of them get born every day."

She dredged bread in the egg-mixture, dropped it in the frying pan. "I think it wants someone with magical ability. At first it was trying to get Kevin to father a child...that would be ideal. If not, well, it'll try getting ahold of someone else. Someone related to a strong practitioner of the Arts." Cathy thought of her sister Debbie, in faraway Kinwood. But no, seventeen was too old. And this time around, the Zwilling's power was too closely tied to the magic of the Patapsco Valley. Until its spirit found a body it could inhabit permanently, its influence would be limited to the local area.

It was up to Cathy and her friends to keep the Zwilling from ever finding a permanent home in this world.

"Ahem," David coughed from the doorway. "Is this a private party, or is that breakfast for anyone?"

Cathy smiled. Somehow, with David around she couldn't doubt that things would turn out right. "Here's coffee," she said, pouring him a cup, "And if you'll help set the table, we can wake up the other two as soon as the French toast is done."



By nine o'clock breakfast was over and the dishwasher running through its cycle. "We're going to have to get back to the school," David said with a glance at his watch. "We've been gone too long already."

Peter worried the belt of his robe. "What are you going to do with me?"

"We still haven't heard from your folks; I guess they couldn't make it back here and stopped somewhere for the night." David looked at Mark, then away. "How about if you come with us? We can leave a note telling your parents where you are."

"Okay. Lemme get dressed, and I'll be right back."

As soon as Peter left, Mark sighed. "Thanks, David. I'll feel better if he's with us."

"I don't want to alarm him, but I think it's best if he stays with us from now on. The Zwilling almost got him this time, and it'll probably keep trying."

"Fine with me."

After some discussion, they decided to take both cars back to the University. Mark led the way, with Cathy and Peter in his Dodge; David and Bob followed in the Honda. In no time at all Cathy was lost, but Mark seemed to know exactly where he was going.

By the time they made it to the old steel bridge, the rain had faded to a light drizzle and the sun was a definite brightness behind grey clouds. They glided over a hill and down toward the bridge.

The river was not quite as high as it had been last night, but still its muddy waters raced past too high and too swift for comfort. The storm had wreaked havoc: trees were down, huge holes had been scoured in the banks and the roadway was covered with mud. On the other side of the bridge, a large blue Buick sat with its nose in the water, a large tree fallen across its crushed windshield and hood.

Peter pointed to the car. "That almost looks like...Mom and Dad's...car."

"Oh my God." Mark hit the gas, and the Dodge skidded across the bridge. At the same time, Cathy reached across to take his arm.

"Stay calm. It might not be the car. It might not...."

He stopped the car and jumped out, Peter on his heels. David and Bob squealed to a halt behind the Dodge and scrambled out. "What's going on?"

Cathy didn't want to look into the Buick, didn't want to peer through those broken windows at what might lay in the front seat — but she forced herself. Mark was white, Peter shaking as she pushed past them.

Two bodies, a man and a woman, were sandwiched between the seat and the crumpled dashboard. Cathy couldn't remember what Mark's parents looked like, but one glance at

Mark's face confirmed her fears.

Merciful Goddess, let them be alive.

"David?"

"Bob, help me with this door." They gave a great heave and the passenger-side door came loose. David reached in gently, then let out a heavy sigh. "She's still breathing."

"Oh God."

"Mark, listen to me. She's still alive. But we need —"

Bob was already at the Honda, trotted back clasping David's spell book. "Here it is."

"Good." David leafed through the notebook, then placed it wide-open on the car's roof. "Remember the healing spells Doctor Quaile taught you last year? This is a slightly more powerful version. We need to join hands, and...Cathy, I want you in the middle. You'll be the pole of power."

Mark moved to comply, his face still ashen. Through tears Peter said, "What can I do?"

"Stand back. Keep quiet. And hope."

Cathy took her place in the center of the circle, felt the boys weaving a quilt of magical energy about her. The material world blurred, and she seemed to see through the bodies of the boys. She felt an unseen light emerging from the power centers of their bodies. Then, holding out her hands, she turned to the car.

Mr. and Mrs. Evans were both still alive, but their energy burned very low; she could see barely a glimmer of light from within them. She reached forward to touch Mrs. Evans, drawing power from the boys and the land.

Breathe. Heal. The Goddess is with you. Sleep.

Mrs. Evans stirred, took a deep breath. The flame of her life-energy flared up: still dim, but much brighter and much more stable.

She reached further, touched Mark's father.

Cathy closed her eyes, feeling for the pulse of life. It was pale...a few more minutes and Mr. Evans would have given up the struggle to live.

Goddess, help me.

Breathe. Heal. Sleep.

Exhausted, she fell back into Bob's waiting arms.

"Th-they're okay for now."

David nodded. "Good job." He squeezed Mark's shoulder.

"Take Bob and Peter and get to a phone. Call for an ambulance. Cathy and I will stay with them."

"Thank you...how can I ever thank you?"

David patted him on the back. "Let Bob drive. Now go."



With Mark's parents safely in Pattison Hospital, Cathy felt much better. Healing spells were fine for keeping people alive in emergencies — indeed, occasional Army medics had been using them that way for centuries — but they were no match for modern medical technology.

It was late afternoon by the time they made it back to the University. Peter was tired and a little irritable from too long in the Hospital waiting rooms, they were all hungry, and delayed shock from all the excitement was catching up with them. David treated them to McDonald's burgers on the way back.

They parked the cars, then David stretched. "Before we settle down, I want to check out the Library. Who wants to come with me?"

"I will," Cathy volunteered.

"Do you want us too?" Bob asked.

"Not necessarily."

"Then I think I'll take Mark and the kid up to my room and we can rearrange things so they can spend the night. Stop up when you're done."

"Fine. Give me the spellbook, and we'll meet you there."

David walked rather quickly; although she was tired, Cathy pushed herself to keep up with him. "What do you think you're going to find at the Library?"

"I don't want to think about it too hard. Just stay alert."

The Library was closed, but David dragged Cathy around to the back. "I thought so."

The three windows of the Special Collections Room were smashed, one completely missing.

"The Zwilling?" Cathy asked.

"What else?" David put his hand through the window, moved it. "No trace of wards. No wonder it didn't have enough power to overcome Mark last night."

"But..."

"Yes?"

"We know that the Zwilling was after some of our books. The Kalocsa Codex, the Breslau Folios, they both had spells that it could use to animate — merciful Goddess, to animate dead bodies, to open the gateway between worlds...."

"That's right," David nodded grimly.

"Then we're in serious trouble."

"We would be," David agreed, "If the Zwilling got ahold of those spells." He held out his spellbook, a tattered old looseleaf binder. Pockets in the back were crammed with yellowed paper. He pulled a handful of sheets out, held them up for Cathy to see.

She nodded. "The spells. You ripped them out of the books." She forced a weak grin. "Doctor Faring would have your head for damaging rare books like that."

"Something else would have my head if I *hadn't*. I suspected that the Zwilling was after these, and I just wanted to confirm my hunch."

"So you know what it's up to?"

"I think so."

"And what are we going to do about it?"

"Friday night, we strike."

"Ready or not?"

"We'll be ready."

"I hope you're right."

Chapter Thirty-four (Bob)

By Tuesday, the worst damage from the storm had been repaired and Patapsco University re-opened for classes. Bob's one Tuesday-Thursday class was the group's symposium with David; afterwards he volunteered his services at the library. A few hours of moving books under the supervision of a frenetic young man left Bob exhausted, and he retired to his room.

Mark showed up about five o'clock with his brother in tow. They'd all decided that Mark and Peter would sleep in Bob's room, rather than risk another visit by the Zwilling. Monday afternoon they'd strengthened the wards as much as they could.

Peter was one of the most well-behaved children Bob had ever seen, but still he felt uneasy around the little kid. He didn't have a younger brother or sister, and so Bob just wasn't ever sure how to act around kids. He was grateful when Paul Mazeika and a couple other Drama people showed up — they were enchanted with Peter and kept him busy until bedtime.

With Peter as unknowing chaperone, Mark and Bob slept separately that night.

Bob had always been a light sleeper, able to wake up

without an alarm clock any time he wanted to. As the bells from the clock tower chimed two A.M. he sat up, quietly donned a pair of gym shorts and his wolfskin belt, and let himself out of the room without waking Mark and Peter.

Kevin Judd's room was in the next dorm. Bob trotted across the grass and got his feet wet from dew. The yawning security guard didn't give him a second look. He let himself into the elevator, then as the doors closed he slumped against the back wall, trembling.

In David's book, he had found a spell. It wasn't one that David wanted them to know about, Bob was sure. He wasn't even certain that he could pronounce all the jaw-breaking words correctly or that the spell would work if he did. All he had was hope.

The spell had a simple effect: it allowed the spell-caster to sojourn in that mysterious other world whence came demons, sprites, gods and devils...and the Zwilling.

You killed Linda, Bob thought blackly. And now I'm coming to get you on your own territory.

Kevin's room was on the fourth floor, at the end of the long hall. Bob made his way carefully past closed doors, his bare feet padding silently on the bare floor. The light, from widely-spaced fluorescent fixtures, was garish and bright. Bob had roomed in this dorm during his Freshman year; the irritating lights were one of the major reasons he'd left. His shadow moved across the walls as he walked, and he jumped every time he glimpsed it out of the corner of his eye.

Kevin's door lacked the customary nametag and wipe-off message board. Bob gently waved his hand over the wooden surface, and wasn't surprised to see a complicated pentagram traced in pale green.

He doesn't know I'm here. Yet.

Bob tried the door; it was locked. No matter, that was a simple matter for someone trained in the Arts. If he'd wanted to, Bob could make a good living as a sneak thief. But before he started, he wanted to make sure that Kevin wouldn't detect

him.

With a fingertip he traced the lines of power in the pentagram. It was, as he suspected, nothing more than a watchdog spell to detect intruders. Bob took a piece of chalk from his pocket and drew a couple of connecting lines, added a single character. He felt a surge of magical energy, then smiled. The watchdog was blind.

Now Bob bent to the floor and scribed a quick circle, a smaller triangle and a square within them. His penmanship had never been the best; he took his time writing magical words around the circumference of the circle. A single incantation activated the circle. Bob stood in the center of the diagram, and felt a wind of probability swirl around him. Moving from one world to another was never easy — even here, where the Zwilling's presence blurred the boundary lines.

He gestured, whispered, and touched the doorknob. Tumblers fell obediently into place, and the knob turned.

He felt a great pressure, like the surge of an accelerating car pushing him back from the door. The world beyond was no place for living beings, and he'd expected to meet resistance. He stood his ground, softly chanting guttural syllables. When he reached the spell's conclusion, the door opened and the pressure dropped to nothing.

Cautiously, Bob stepped forward.

He was certain at once that the spell had worked. This was no dorm room, not even in Kolton Hall. Illuminated with an indistinct red light, the room was like a tunnel that stretched away and down as far as he could see. The walls were stone...or was it some kind of foam or formed plastic? The tunnel was narrow, only a few feet wide, and low enough that Bob had to stoop. It was warm and humid, much like a Maryland summer.

With a shrug, he started walking. The surface beneath his feet, which looked as if constructed of the same material as the walls, yielded as he stepped upon it. The consistency was

something like hard-packed snow; he sank a quarter-inch or so into it, but when he looked behind he saw no footprints. The diffuse light seemed to come from nowhere at all, it was just a property of the surface. Bob cast no shadow, and yet there were dark areas enough. Once or twice he thought he felt something move near him, but upon looking he saw nothing.

The tunnel continued downward, getting warmer and more humid. Now that his eyes were adjusting to the dim light, Bob looked back and saw a pale silvery thread stretching from his navel back toward the real world. I'm not truly here, he thought — my real body is back in Kolton Hall, and this astral self is *me* for the duration.

Despite the heat, he shivered. Even the lowest adept knew the importance of the silver cord that bound him to reality. If it broke he would be lost here forever.

Bob began to have second thoughts. What was he doing here? Armed with nothing more than determination and a few Words of Power, could he really challenge the might of the Zwilling?

I'm here, he told himself. Without the Zwilling even being aware, I've managed to invade its world. I don't have to destroy it...just *weaken* it. Then when we strike on Friday night, it will be easier to finish the thing.

A grim smile crept onto his lips, and in his mind he rehearsed the spell that would take him back home. A few words, that was all, and he'd once again be in the world he knew. With insurance like that, what could go wrong?

The corridor made a sharp turn up ahead, and the shadows were deep. He rounded the corner and jumped: someone was waiting for him. It was a woman, crouching against the wall and half-hidden in shadow. Strong face, greying blond hair...

"Doctor Whitlow!"

She looked up, her face lined with worry. "Oh, Bob, has it come to this? What are you doing here?"

"I came to hurt the Zwilling. I-I had to."

"Go away." Her voice was sad. "You have no place here. You shouldn't have come."

"What do you mean? *Someone* has to fight this thing. Otherwise —"

"Don't you think *I* know what's going to happen otherwise? Go back, and do what you can from your world. You were a fool to cross over. I'm telling you, you can do nothing. Get out while you can."

For a moment her admonition almost decided him, and the words that would take him home were on his lips. Then he looked beyond Doctor Whitlow, and he saw Linda.

She looked at him, then turned and ran. In a second she was lost behind another curve. Bob set off after her.

"Wait!" Doctor Whitlow called after him. "Don't follow her. Bob, listen to me. Bob!"

Her voice was lost behind, and he plunged on, chasing after Linda.

Three more sharp turns, then the tunnel opened up to a much larger space. Bob had just a glimpse of Linda's ghost amid a crowd of other grotesque and fantastic creatures — and then the lights went out.

At once, before he had a chance to orient himself, he felt hot, sweaty bodies moving around him, felt hands and claws on his feet, his arms, his chest. Something slimy grabbed his wrists and held them tightly behind his back; something with inch-long claws dug into his ankles and spread them apart.

Bob struggled as a million hairy fingers prodded his face and chest, but he couldn't break free. This was going to take something more than Human strength. He opened his mouth, ready to speak the spell that would change him to wolf-form.

Hands forced his mouth open, and something awful snatched his tongue in a firm grip.

Less than a foot in front of him, something moved in the darkness, then gradually became visible as light returned. It was a face, a distorted and demonic vision of Kevin Judd. The eyes were deep, hypnotic, and Bob couldn't look away from

them. In his peripheral vision he half-saw a dozen creatures surrounding him, each worse than the other.

"So," the mockery of Kevin hissed, "You've come to see us. Come after your girlfriend. I knew she would draw you here."

"Ahghuuhh..."

"Yes, I know. You'd love to speak one of your spells." The Zwilling reached forward — its hand was thin and bony, the fingers almost like talons. It stroked Bob's cheek, then moved into his mouth and took ahold of his tongue. The other creature let go. "I am not as stupid as all that, Bob. No, not at all. I will not let you speak your filthy words in this place."

"Mmgph."

The Zwilling bared its teeth, and tugged on Bob's tongue. Slowly, while its minions held him pinned, the Zwilling inserted a finger in Bob's mouth, then another. They followed his tongue, moving down his throat. He gagged, and tried to bite, but the hands holding his jaw open were too strong.

Bob gasped for breath, couldn't find it. The Zwilling's fingers were now lodged in his throat, still creeping downward; its eyes still held him even as his body convulsed in pain.

If only he could speak the spell. If only he could frame the words in his panic-stricken mind.

I'm going to die, he thought.

But how could a man die, when he was already in the land of the dead?

The Zwilling narrowed its eyes. "I shall tear your vocal chords out, then you won't have any power at all." With one hand still creeping down his throat, the Zwilling held up its other hand, pointed one finger. "Look, Bob. Look."

On command, Bob's eyes followed the finger down, down to stomach level. It paused just an inch away from the silver cord that bound Bob to the world of the living.

"What do you think will happen to that cord, Bob, if I pluck it like a guitar string? What do you think will happen if

I give it a good tug? If I can break it, Bob, you are mine."

"Arghhh."

"What a beautiful silver cord. And what beautiful music it makes." The Zwilling's finger touched the cord, and Bob felt as if someone had stuck a branding iron into his stomach. Bile rose in his throat, his sight went black, and he struggled to scream. When he could see again, the cord was still intact...But the Zwilling was moving to touch it again.

"Bob, I'm here." The whisper in his ear, the cool touch of hands on the back of his neck...it was Linda! "Listen," she said quickly, "And think with me." Then she launched into a recitation of the werewolf spell.

The change came as a welcome, clean pain. Bob snarled, and bit down as hard as he could — he thought he felt bones snap, but then he twisted free of his captors and bounded away, gasping in great lungfuls of air. In a moment he spun, back against the wall, to face his tormentors.

The Zwilling blurred, grew, changed into a fierce beast like a bear or dragon. Its howl shook the very walls. Heedless of Bob's bared fangs and his warning growl, the creature moved toward him.

This was no place for a wolf. Only a mental effort was necessary to reverse the spell, then Bob in Human form stood before the towering behemoth that the Zwilling had become.

One after another, he spoke three Words of Power. He couldn't stay to see their effect; even as the Zwilling fell back, screaming, Bob took time for one last look at Linda's horrified face, then spoke the words to take him home.

He stood next to Kevin Judd's bunk. Moonlight through the window turned the whole room into a black-and-white television picture. Kevin sat up, covers thrown aside and hair disheveled, his eyes fixed on Bob's face.

If I killed him now, Bob wondered, would that end our trouble? Would that close the gateway and keep the Zwilling away?

Could I kill him?

“Don’t try it,” Kevin said. For once, the voice was his own hesitant tenor. “I’m not sure what’s going on, and I’m not sure what you’ve done — but don’t try anything more.”

I hurt the Zwilling, Bob thought. Otherwise it would take possession of Kevin the way it’s done so often.

I really ought to kill him. He started to move, still uncertain.

Kevin drew back. The boy was shaking. “Stop. I’m supposed to tell you t-that he still has *her*. Remember that. He can make her suffer for eternity.”

No, killing Kevin wasn’t the answer. The Zwilling was the enemy, and until they could kill *it*, they needed Kevin as the gateway.

“I...” He shook his head. His throat hurt, it was hard to talk. “I’ll leave you alone. For now.”

“Get out of my room.”

Bob deliberately turned his back on Kevin and walked out. Pausing in the hallway, he scuffed out the marks of his pentagram, then limped off in the direction of the elevators.

Chapter Thirty-five (Cathy)

It was late Tuesday night, and Cathy had been working all day. Her bio lab ran late, so she'd had barely enough time to catch a hamburger and some fries before she showed up at the Library. Then it had been one thing after another — the storm had caused so much damage that even with twenty student volunteers it would still take forever to put everything back together. A dozen boxes of new books in the shipping room were ruined, and the wind through broken windows had toppled five shelving units in the history section. Books were soaked, display cases had been smashed, and the Special Collections Room was a disaster.

About nine o'clock the Head Librarian found Cathy knee-deep in piles of damp history books, and gave a weary smile. "You don't have to stay, Cathy. If you've got other things to do."

The man looked so miserable that Cathy couldn't leave him. Most of the volunteers had gone away, and a few of her fellow Pages had also called it quits for the day. "That's okay," she said, "I can work for a few more hours."

"You're a doll. I'm going to send someone out for food and sodas, then everybody's going to take a break. What do you

want?"

"Oh, that's okay, I can...."

"This is coming out of the Library budget. Nobody can work all night on an empty stomach."

When the food arrived, he insisted that everyone stop working and find a place to eat. Cathy joined in the conversation for a while, then she took her milkshake and two slices of pizza and went to sit in the Special Collections Room.

With the windows boarded up, the room seemed smaller — but safer. Cathy picked up a book from a shattered display case, considered setting wards, then thought better of it. She needed her energy, and there was nothing in here that the Zwilling wanted. David had seen to that.

All things considered, the Special Collections Room had not suffered too much. True, the books and priceless manuscripts were strewn about the room, and some had gotten soaked and had to be sent away to a restorer. But little was missing, and most of the books were intact.

Cathy picked up a small pamphlet: a sixteenth-century French manuscript detailing some spells for dealing with the Mother Goddess. She leafed through it and chuckled. Love potions, fertility magic, spells to rid oneself of warts, bunions and boils. A few healing spells. Just the kind of thing most witches involved themselves with nowadays.

And more power to them, Cathy thought. After this affair with the Zwilling, she would be happy to settle down to love potions and weather-divination.

Will you, Cathy?

She turned her attention to a tumbled bookshelf, volumes piled all around it on the floor. Her fingers itched; seeing that no one was around, she made a couple of slow, controlled gestures. She carefully built up a spell of affinity and restoration. The broken shelves wanted to cling to one another; the books wanted to be in their proper places. The stacks quivered, the shelves shook.

Cathy nodded her head. "Go, then," she whispered.

Slowly, in a quiet gavotte, the shelves reassembled themselves. Following her gestures, the books came together on the shelves right where they belonged. Cathy trembled with suppressed tension, then the job was done and she relaxed.

There. Two months ago, she couldn't have dreamed of making up a spell like that. Dealing with the Zwilling had brought her to a much fuller understanding of magic. Thanks to David's training and her reading — and thanks to the benevolent influence of the Goddess — Cathy knew that she was now one of the strongest magic-workers in the nation, if not on the continent.

Won't you miss all that, Cathy?

She laid her hand flat on the French spellbook. I serve the Goddess, she told herself. Whatever power I have comes from Her. If it's Her will that I keep this power and this knowledge, then I will do my best to be worthy of it. And if it's Her will that I give it up...then I will try to understand, and accept.

She shrugged. Time to get back to work.

As she worked, Cathy couldn't keep her mind on the job. This was Tuesday night; on Friday, David was going to launch his attack against the Zwilling. Bob and Mark had infinite faith in David's ability — but Cathy had seen his plans, and she knew how desperate they really were. His spells were incomplete, and they depended heavily upon the increased magical energy present on All Hallow's. If the Zwilling was stronger than they thought, or if it had counter-spells that David didn't anticipate, then all could be lost.

We will stand, she thought, on the very threshold of the Other World. When the Zwilling tries to come through its gateway, it will find us waiting. David's spells will twist reality all out of balance — if we fail, we'll vanish into that other place like swimmers swept under by a gargantuan wave. And then...and then the Zwilling will be loose on the world.

If everyone thought this latest storm was bad, she didn't

want to see their reaction when the Zwilling took over.

Cathy gritted her teeth. David's plans were desperate and chancy — but they were the best chance around. All she could do, all *any* of them could do, was to help as much as possible. To give everything she could.

Half the history section was back on the shelves when the Head Librarian tapped Cathy on her shoulder. "It's almost midnight," he said. "Go get some sleep. The rest will still be here tomorrow."

Dully, she nodded. They'd accomplished a lot today; another day or two like this and they would be done. It was nice, she thought, to have a job where hard work could solve all problems. If only their conflict with the Zwilling went that way!

The night was dark and overcast, and there was a chill in the air. Cathy followed the sidewalk toward the main part of campus, whistling tunelessly as she walked. The Faculty Apartments rose to her left, staggered down the hill that led to the River. Trees lined the walk and broad Kelsey Drive, and Cathy had to chuckle. Usually the Student Government complained loudly about faculty having the pick of the best apartments on campus — but the storm had caused more damage on Faculty property than the student apartment complexes.

"Fraulein, please wait!" Cathy turned at the call, and saw a lone figure in a wheelchair moving up the hill in the middle of the sidewalk. She trotted over to meet Frau Zunge under a streetlamp.

"I am glad to see you," the older woman said, taking Cathy's hand in a strong grip. "Are you in a hurry, or would you mind walking with a foolish old woman?"

Cathy smiled. "I'd love to walk with you."

"This way, then." Frau Zunge led her downhill, toward the River. Cathy walked slowly next to the wheelchair. "My dear Catherine, I have been worried. The storm was so terrible. You and your friends were in danger, no?"

"Yes."

"Ach, I thought so. And the danger has not yet passed."

"I think we have things under control...." At the old lady's stare, Cathy trailed off. "No, I guess we don't. Yes, there's still danger."

Frau Zunge nodded in the direction of the campus. "For a week, I feel stirrings of power. Herr David is making strong magic to fight the Zwilling."

"Yes."

"Do you think he will succeed?"

Cathy opened her mouth, closed it. "I don't know," she said finally. "David does what he can — but all of us are aware of how little we know. Yet where are we going to find an expert?"

"There are none...none who are still alive. It has been too long since this menace appeared last." They had reached the end of the sidewalk, where an iron railing overlooked the River. Frau Zunge leaned against the railing and looked out over the turbulent waters. "You have learned so much, you young folk. You are our best hope." She spread her arms. "Whatever help an old woman can offer, I will give you. When do you intend to strike?"

"Friday night."

"All Hallow's. A good time for it. But still you have doubts."

"I do." Cathy spun round, turning her back on the River. "How can we know if we're ready? We think we've been tested — but suppose the Zwilling has just been using a fraction of its real power? Suppose David has miscalculated the energies?" She clenched her fists. "We have so much responsibility, what if we fail?"

Frau Zunge's hand on her own was warm and comforting. "You are a child of the Goddess. You have felt Her power before — do you honestly think She would abandon you in your time of need?"

"Isn't it true that the Goddess is also the crone of Death?"

The dark avenging angel? How do I know that She hasn't chosen the Zwilling to do Her work?"

"A fair question, young one." The old woman was silent, and after a time Cathy wondered if she'd gone to sleep. But no, her eyes were open and alive, scanning the surface of the Patapsco. "The answer is, of course you have no way of knowing what the Goddess wills. You cannot second-guess Her. You must have faith that She will come to you when you need Her."

"Suppose I can't find that faith?"

"Look, child." Frau Zunge pointed with one bony finger, into the sky.

Clouds had rolled aside to show one patch of clear sky. In that patch, a single star burned cool and bright. "There is a beacon of faith, of hope and of calm in the storm you face. There is a token for you to believe in. Her will shall be done, child. Trust Her."

Cathy squeezed Frau Zunge's hand. "I-I have no right to ask this —"

"Do not fear. I will be with you on Friday night. I will speak with David about it. I do not know what aid I can give, my mastery of the Arts is limited to trivial spells...but I will be there with you."

"Thank you."

"Now go back to your bed, child, and sleep peacefully. Gather your strength."

"Yes."

She followed the star back to her dorm, and although it was surrounded by clouds, not once did its light falter.

Chapter Thirty-six

(Mark)

Mark would rather be at home. But the phone lines from home were still down, and he needed to do enormous reprogramming of the Patapsco University computer. So here he was, crammed into a corner of the computer center at eleven p.m., while a handful of computer-science types argued only a few terminals away.

At least, he sighed, the hackers were there if he needed their help.

"Hi!" Peter, dressed in a makeshift pirate outfit and with garish makeup spread across his face, stood in the doorway with a bulging paper sack. Mark couldn't help laughing.

"What happened to *you*?"

"Paul Mazeika and a couple other drama people took me to the Halloween Dance. We made the costume out of scraps they found backstage. What do you think?"

"I think you were probably the hit of the dance. What's in the bag?"

"Candy and fruit. We went trick-or-treating in the neighborhood. I thought you might be hungry." Peter claimed a chair next to Mark and offered the bag. Mark picked out a Three Musketeers bar and unwrapped it.

"Thanks."

"So what are you doing?" Peter peered at the screen. "That looks like one of them, what do you call it, pentacles."

"Pentagram. It is."

"On the computer?"

Mark sighed. "It was an idea I had a while ago, and David thinks it might help." He typed instructions; the computer screen cleared and then built up a pentagram in lines of green light. "See, this is a simple spell that anyone can cast. All it does is gather energy — magical energy — and focus it on someone else. In this case, on David."

"Like a little mirror reflecting the sun."

"If you want to think of it that way." Mark lowered his voice...not that the computer people were listening, anyway. "Tomorrow night we're going to need a lot of magical energy. I wanted to see if the computer could cast the spell; we tried it this afternoon and David says it works."

"So tomorrow you have it run the program, and David gets a jolt of energy, right?"

"Well..." Mark blushed. "Just one terminal won't help much. I've been reprogramming — tomorrow at five o'clock every terminal on campus will start running this program."

"How many is that?"

"About a hundred and twenty."

"Wow. You can do that?"

Mark nodded. He didn't add that he had further refined the program, instructing it to use the University's computer-linking capability.

After all, there were dozens of large companies down the length of the valley, each with its own large computer that would be doing virtually nothing on a Friday evening. If Mark could get the program working right, all the available terminals from all those computers would start running his energy-focussing program. One, two, or a dozen wouldn't make any difference — but *hundreds* should provide a reservoir of magical energy that the Zwilling wouldn't

anticipate.

It was, at least, worth a try.

"Hey, kid, I haven't seen that much of you lately. How're you doing?"

"What do you mean?"

"I'm worried about you. Most kids your age don't hang around with college students. Most kids your age are home with their families."

"Most kids my age don't have brothers who do magic."

"That's another thing. I feel like I've gotten you involved in this whole thing with the Zwilling, and that's wrong. If you weren't my brother, you wouldn't be in danger."

"It's all going to be over tomorrow, isn't it?"

"One way or another, we hope so." Mark cleared the computer screen and sat back in his chair, looking directly into Peter's face. "Look, I know that all this is scary, and I know you went through an awful lot the other night. But David...well, he thinks you'd be safer if you were with us tomorrow."

"Well what did you *want* me to do, stay in the dorm? Or go to the hospital with Mom and Dad?"

"The Zwilling almost got you last time. Petey, if the others hadn't shown up, I couldn't have held you back." He shivered. Bob's tale of the Zwilling's terrible domain was frightening; he hadn't wanted to scare Peter so he asked Bob not to discuss it. Now he wished he had. "You don't know what's at stake."

"I don't think I've ever been as scared as I was during that storm. The only thing that made it okay was that you were with me. If I had to wait someplace else, I'd be more scared than if I was with you."

"Damn." Mark turned away. "This isn't business for a little kid to be involved in. I'm so sorry."

"So what?" Peter shrugged, and pulled an apple from his bag. "This could have a razor blade in it. Somebody could come in my school and start shooting kids with a rifle. We

could have a car accident when you pick me up from school. There's a million things out there to be scared of. It's...it's a lot easier not to be scared if you're not alone." He took a bite. "So don't leave me alone."

Mark hugged him. "All right, you and David have convinced me. You won't go to school tomorrow — I'll write you a note or something. We'll spend most of the day getting ready."

"Thanks, Mark."

"Thank me after we're all safe." He looked over his program one more time, then signed off and switched off the terminal. "I've done everything I can here. Come on, let's get back to the dorm. Do you have any Milky Ways in there?"

"Uh...nope."

"I'll bet you do."

"You'll have to catch me to find out."

Laughing, the boys raced across the campus.



(David)

Night fell, and David roamed the hills. He had come far up the valley from the University, a lone wolf following night's desolate cry. He stood now at a fork in the River — where South and North Branches came together, and where jutting limestone formations had given the River its ancient Algonquian name. Patapsco: the place of the white rocks.

He scrambled to the top of a high rock, then changed to Human form. Naked to the night, David dangled his legs over the side, and pondered.

What has brought me here? The gurgling of the River, the heat from sun-warmed rock, the pungent smell of oak and pollen — none gave him a hint of an answer.

Tomorrow, David thought, I'm going to face the Zwilling. I'll be using magic that I'm not prepared for, and for helpers

I'll have three undergraduates and a grade-school kid. So tonight I'm getting far away from the school, hoping to lose myself for a while.

He loved the valley, loved the River. And never was it more beautiful than now from this high perch, with the colors of Fall and twilight painting myriad leaves dark oranges, reds and browns. With the cool breeze coming downstream. Even the distant roar of a passing jet couldn't disturb the peace of this place.

The Indians knew this. For hundreds of generations they used the power of this place to shield the whole valley from evil. Time and time again it came — and time and time again they knocked it down, sent it away, destroyed it. On this very rock, shamans and medicine men had danced and chanted. Young wizards and old sorcerers alike had summoned the land's strength, and hurled it at spirits and beasts who would defile it.

He shivered, and hugged himself. I'm just the latest guardian of peace in this valley...and hopeless as my challenge seems, it's nothing that these banks haven't seen a hundred times before.

Monroe Quaile had said almost the same thing. David had visited him earlier today, in his sterile hospital room. It was as far removed as it could be from the natural beauty of the Patapsco Valley, but Quaile's first question was for the River and its life: "Tell me of your struggle. Are you winning?"

"You'd know if I wasn't," David answered.

Quaile shook his head. "I don't know. I was a fool...still am. The abilities go with age, do you know that?"

David said nothing.

After a few moments, Quaile nodded. "You're thinking that I wouldn't be losing my abilities if I had believed in them more. Don't condemn me, David. I am of a different generation...a different world. The Arts come naturally to you young ones. The world comes naturally to you. We...we lost our ability to believe, lost it in our childhoods." He shook his

head and grinned. "No, I'm not going to bore you with tales of the Great Depression. If I helped you along the Path, I am grateful. Every teacher longs for a student who will outdo him."

"You're depressing me," David said with a chuckle.

"And you didn't come here to be depressed. What is it, David? You're edgy. Why?"

"Tomorrow night we strike for good. With one of the Missing Conjurations from *Honorius*."

Quaile raised an eyebrow, but said nothing.

"You're thinking that I'm playing out of my league."

"No. You've gone beyond me, David. You know your limitations. But the Missing Conjurations? They were expunged for good reason. Those are dark and dangerous spells."

"What we're facing is a dark and dangerous entity."

"Someone will die, you know that?"

Now, on the rock, above the River, Quaile's words came back to him.

Someone will die.

Yes, David thought. I knew that when I decided to use this spell.

He stood, stretched. The gibbous moon was low on the horizon, playing a furious hide-and-seek with dashing clouds. The water sparkled in moonlight, and the summer's last fireflies rose in the woods. If you know where to look, David thought, there's light aplenty in the world.

He turned to go.

"David."

It was Susan's ghost — thin, tormented, but undoubtedly Susan. In her taut features he caught just a glimmer of the energy it cost for her to be here.

"Is it you...or is this a sending of the Zwilling?"

"It's me, David." He believed her.

"Susan...I'm trying so hard."

"I know. I haven't come to plead. I just...I wanted to see

you one last time.”

When he was young and he shivered, his mother said someone was walking over his grave. It was an apt image for the chill that touched him now.

Someone will die.

“I don’t know if I have the courage,” he said aloud. He looked over the edge of the rock, at the River below.

Susan’s image floated in the air above the River. “You must have it.” She made it sound like a theorem in math. Pay attention, class, this is going to be on the final exam.

How many final exams had death as an essay question?

Kevin Judd, of course. David didn’t see any way to save Kevin — as long as the kid lived, the Zwilling could take refuge in his soul. For the sake of everyone, Kevin had to die.

But it wasn’t that simple. Kevin’s death would only close the gateway. And the Zwilling was already establishing other gateways; soon it would have the power to break through to the real world *without* Kevin’s presence.

No, the Zwilling had to die. Otherwise David’s duty was left undone.

“David, are you listening to me? So much depends on you. You’re our last hope.”

He spun, his fists clenched. “Do you know how sick I am of being reminded that I’m the last hope?” Maybe, he thought, maybe if you and Quaille and Faring had paid more attention...maybe if they’d helped when I needed them... maybe things wouldn’t have come to this dreadful point.

Maybe if I’d gone to them earlier....

“David?” It was a different voice, a different figure in place of Susan’s.

“Linda.” He shivered again. “Have you come to lay a guilt trip on me too?”

“No.” She reached out to him with open hands. “Stop blaming yourself. The Zwilling has been planning this since Kevin was born. You’ve done more than anyone could.”

“But there’s so much left to do.” Someone will die...he

knew that as soon as he picked the Missing Conjurations. The spell drew its force from bloody sacrifice; if he hoped to destroy the Zwilling, he had to have that energy.

He looked down, where the River curled around half-sunken rocks. Here had stood shamans and medicine men, young wizards and old sorcerers...how many had had the courage to do what David had to do?

"David? Please answer me. You're my pack leader, and nothing can change that. You'll do what's right, you have the power, you have the skill."

Power, skill? What did they mean? As a disciple of the Arts, he was sworn not to use his abilities for death and pain. The minute he reconstructed the Conjunction, he broke that oath. In casting the spell, in wielding the knife, he would shatter it forever.

"David? David?"

He only hoped that the kids would know how to use the power that his death would bring them....

He felt a touch on his cheeks: tears, or perhaps Linda's soft fingers caressing him. "Pack-leader. Friend. I wish I could take your pain away. This is a peaceful place; can't you find peace here?"

"Not until you and Susan, and all the rest, have peace."

"I — " Her voice caught, if a ghost's voice could catch. "I'll be waiting for you. Together we'll find it."

She faded, then, to nothing but moonlight and tears.

Chapter Thirty-seven

(Mark)

It was four o'clock Friday afternoon, and they were all ready.

They met at David's trailer. David had specified casual clothes, and the kids came casual as only college students could. Mark thought that Bob's jeans were a little tight, but he probably didn't own a pair that wasn't. Cathy wore a loose blouse over blue jeans; David had on pair of blue sweatpants and a tee shirt. Mark had chosen his own favorite jeans, the ones with fraying patches on the knees, and a Patapsco University tee shirt. And Peter was dressed in camouflage pants, a khaki shirt and boots.

Bob and Cathy were already there when Mark and Peter pulled up. "Glad you could make it," Bob said, waving.

David grinned. He looked as if he didn't have a care in the world; Mark envied him his composure. He knew that he and Bob had been up half the night, and he wondered if Cathy had slept as fitfully.

"I'll get the things," David said, disappearing into his trailer.

"You look ready to take on the enemy," Bob said to Peter, making a few machine-gun motions with his hands. Then he

kneeled down next to Peter and took off his school ring. "This is only going to interfere with my spellcasting if I keep it on — I want you to wear it. Will you do that for me?"

"Okay, Bob." The ring was too big, but Peter proudly put it on his finger nonetheless.

"What is this?" Cathy asked. "I feel like I'm in Vietnam, getting ready to go out and take a hill or something. We've planned everything, we know what's going to happen."

"Yeah, well," lowered his voice, "I don't think David's told us everything. I wonder if he's going to be able to handle it. All we need is for him to freak out again."

"You're a fine one to talk. What do you — " Cathy stopped herself with a visible effort. "I know. You're concerned about him. So am I. But he's our leader, what can we do except follow his orders?"

"That's fine." Bob looked toward the trailer. "I just hope you have some of your white magic cooked up, 'cause I think we might be needing it." He laughed and turned to Mark. His voice back to normal, he said, "What about the computers? All set?"

Mark checked his watch. Four-oh-six. "At five o'clock every available terminal in the valley will start iterating that spell. We ought to feel the rush of magical energy."

"Let's hope we can use it," David said from the steps. A battered leather satchel hung from his shoulder. "I think this is everything...if it isn't, we're going to be in trouble. Frau Zunge's going to meet us there."

"Let's go, then."

The rich smell of earth and humus hung over the woods. Mark's stomach rumbled; they'd all fasted since last night, purifying their bodies for the task ahead. A few birds flew overhead, and a couple of disturbed squirrels raced up trees to wait until the humans had passed.

Soon they came to the river, and turned right. Without speaking, they moved together along the bank, David in the lead and Bob bringing up the rear. It wasn't long before they

reached the old church, perched atop its hill next to the crumbled Woodstock Bridge. Cranes and highway equipment stood abandoned until Monday morning.

As they climbed the hill, Mark saw Frau Zunge waiting for them in her wheelchair. A battered old Ford van was parked beside the church. "See that?" Mark whispered. "She had it modified so she can drive it." He shook his head. "She's quite a lady. We're lucky to have her."

"Yeah, well," Bob answered in the same low voice, "I hope you're right. We're going to be dealing with some pretty high-level magic, and we won't have time to protect some old woman."

David turned with a grin. "I don't think Frau Zunge will need protecting."

The setting sun painted strange shadows across the trees and made pools of red light on the ground. It was a steep climb to the church. Peter scrambled up at once, and Mark followed him; David held back and gave Cathy his arm, and Bob just plodded up the slope with large steps.

David offered the teacher his hand. "Frau Zunge, I'm glad you could come."

"I'm not sure I'll be of any use to you," she said. "But I am happy that I can be here. And please, with what we must go through, it will be easier if you drop formality and call me Gretchen. All of you."

Mark looked at his watch. Four-thirty. "Isn't it time to start getting ready?"

"Right," David answered. He surveyed the road, the church, the bridge. "At least we won't have any traffic, with that bridge down. Cathy, Bob, start on the pentagrams and warding glyphs." He fished in his satchel and produced two large pieces of red chalk. "Draw them clear, and define me a space at least ten feet square." They took the chalk and crawled into the ruins of the church.

"Mark, I need a secure pathway from the church to the edge of the cemetery."

"Can I help?" Peter asked.

"All right." David gave them each a vial of grey powder.

"Those are consecrated ashes; Mark, you know the ritual."

"Sure." It was an easy task, but one that required exactness. Mark spoke fluid Arabic syllables and showed Peter where to scatter the ashes. They crossed the road and went to the very edge of the cemetery's grass, then stopped.

By this time Bob and Cathy were finished their job. "Okay," David said, "Everyone within the walls, and we'll start." He and Bob lifted Frau Zunge's wheelchair and placed her on a level section of ground next to the crumbled wall. "Peter, you stand next to Gretchen. Bob, Cathy, Mark — let's form a circle and get this show on the road."

David took his wand...a three-foot length of inscribed human bone...and thrust it into the soft sand. He stepped back, holding out his hands. Mark took one, Cathy the other — then Bob took *their* hands, and the circle was complete.

It was five-o'clock.

Mark felt a stirring of magical power around him. The computers were beginning their work. David nodded, and they all dropped their hands.

David reached into his satchel and took out a small squirrel. It hung limply in his grasp. Mark knew that it was alive, just drugged. They'd argued about this requirement, but there was no way around it. Holding the animal high above his head, David pulled out a knife with his other hand.

"I immolate this victim to the Gods and Powers, to the honor, glory and power of Their names, which are superior to all Spirits. O Gods, I vouchsafe to receive it as an acceptable offering." Quickly, he slit the squirrel's throat, then threw the bleeding body on the ground. A second later, the creature blazed up in a hot, white flame. David took a small vial from the satchel, discarding the bag as he did. This vial was the most precious instrument of all — it contained the few drops of blood that Kevin had left at Mark's house.

David threw the vial into the flames. The fire blazed

higher, then subsided. Only ashes were left.

Nodding, David retrieved the wand with his right hand. Still holding the knife in his left, he slowly turned west...toward the wall, toward the cemetery, toward the sinking sun.

"I command and adjure thee, Kevin Judd, by the power of the Gods and the Powers, to appear instanter, by Eloim, by Aqua, Tagla, Mathon, Oarios, Almoazin..."

Bob and Cathy's pentagram, drawn in precise red lines on brown stone wall, began to glow. The air shimmered, and then Kevin Judd appeared spread-eagled against the wall. He wore faded jeans, a deep blue sleeveless tee shirt, and a pair of dirty Nike sneakers. His face was calm. "All right," he said, in his normal voice. "What do you want?"

"You know," David answered.

"I know. You want to kill him." Kevin looked from face to face. "H-he says you won't succeed." For a moment, Mark felt sorry for the kid. They were all victims — but Kevin was the biggest victim of them all.

David lowered his arms. "Come here, Kevin. We'll protect you. We'll defeat him, and then you'll be free."

The boy hesitated, frowned, and shivered. Then a shadow fell over his face, his eyes lit up with an awful hate, and he spat. "Forget it! I've seen his power. He needs me...and when he comes for good, I'll be at his side."

David nodded. "I'm sorry."

"Not as sorry as you will be," Kevin said in the deep, booming voice of the Zwilling. He broke away from the pentagram and jumped forward, his face contorted in a hideous combination of pain and anger.

David gestured with the wand, and Kevin staggered back as if struck by a fist.

The sun had set, and the orange light of twilight reflecting from stone walls gave the scene an unreality. Mark felt as if he were watching a faded old movie print. David waved the wand, and Kevin snarled. Somewhere far away, a rumble of

thunder answered him.

"You will die," Kevin said, pulling himself to his feet.

Magical energy danced around them like a whirlwind. David thrust the wand forward and Kevin fell back against the wall. The pentagram flowed like burning blood, poured over Kevin's arms and legs, then tightened, holding him against the rough brown stones.

Kevin thrashed helplessly, as David took a step toward him, knife poised. Then, suddenly, Kevin threw his head back and screamed like a frustrated three-year-old having a tantrum. There was more thunder, then the sky opened and a dozen bright bolts of lightning stabbed against the church wall. Mark threw up his arms, but it was too late — he was blinded for a few seconds. With a sound that almost burst his eardrums, the stones came tumbling down. By the time he could see again, the wall was split and Kevin was gone.

"Come on," David urged. He helped them through the newly-fallen section of wall, Frau Zunge last. Kevin had run into the cemetery, and now he stood next to the Zwilling's grave.

Between church and cemetery, where Mark and Peter had scattered the ashes, there was a broad path of sparkling motes. *"Stay on the path,"* David warned. *"Follow me."*

They went single-file. Mark kept Peter behind him; the boy was silent and Mark wondered again if having him along was a good idea. Well, too late now.

At the edge of the grass, David stopped and held up his wand. Sparkling drops like phosphorescent dew blossomed on the grass. At graveside, Kevin lifted his head and growled a challenge.

"Stay close and keep alert," David said. *"Cathy and Mark, put up whatever kind of screens you can manage. Bob, prepare the banishment spell we talked about — that'll slow it down if need be."*

"What about us?" Peter said, gesturing to Frau Zunge.

"There's magical energy pouring down the valley — if you

can feel it, concentrate on directing it toward me and Bob." David took a breath. "Here we go."

It was like electricity, Mark thought. Hundreds of little generators — the terminals that ran his program — gathered magical energy and directed it toward old Saint Zachary's. From there, the current flowed through all their bodies to David, who was using it to fight the Zwilling.

They were about fifteen feet from the grave, and Kevin raised a hand. "*No further.*"

David took another step.

"*You were warned.*" Kevin closed his eyes, there was a rumble of thunder, and suddenly the flow of magical energy halted. Surprised, Mark looked up: the glow of Davis Avenue and campus streetlights was gone.

"Power failure," Bob whispered. "That's impressive."

David folded his arms and stared levelly at Kevin. "You think a trick like that is going to stop us?" Kevin didn't reply. "All right," David said, "If it's games you want, I'm willing to play." He raised his hands straight above his head, then brought them down in a wide circle.

He spoke a few words, and when he was finished the lights were back on. Mark held his breath, waiting...would his program recover from the power outage? Straining, he felt a tiny trickle of magical energy. Slowly at first, then faster, the flow increased.

"Now *that's* something," Bob said.

David took another step, then another. He was only three feet from the grave. Another step, calm and deliberate, with the bone wand held upright before him. And Kevin drew back. Now the bare dirt of the Zwilling's grave was between them.

David made a feint with the wand, and Kevin dodged. The boy moved as if in a trance, as if rooted to the spot.

"Now, Bob."

Bob dropped to the ground, drawing lines of light with his finger in the grass. The banishment incantation was

complicated, in jaw-cracking Assyrian, but Bob went through it quickly and carefully.

Kevin trembled, his eyes fixed on David. Once again Mark felt sorry for him...it was the last time.

David shook his head. "I'm sorry, Kevin."

The boy whimpered, then straightened with a growl. He started to lunge, but before he could complete his movement, David swung the wand with his full strength...at the same time voicing a dreadful Word.

The wand hit Kevin on the left temple; lightning flashed and there was a blast of energy like sudden, unexpected sunrise. Kevin fell, the side of his head burnt and bloody. He twitched, then closed his eyes and lay still.

For a moment there was absolute silence. Then Peter cheered. "That was great, David! Wow — smack, and down he goes."

"Hush, little one," Frau Zunge said. "David?"

David crouched at Kevin's side, put his fingers against the boy's neck. He nodded. "No pulse." Kevin's blood, still flowing, seeped into the bare dirt.

Cathy stood still, her hands partially raised and her eyes focussed in the middle distance. "It can't have been that easy."

"Easy?" Mark was exhausted, and he could see that the others felt the same way. "What was so easy about — "

"My God." Bob pointed, with a level finger.

The dirt of the grave was moving.

David drew back, standing, and motioned the others to stay clear.

Slowly, tiny white things emerged from the dirt...worms? No, *fingers*: small, pale fingers attached to the diminutive hands of a baby. Without a sound, a midget head poked above the earth, its eyes and ears caked with dirt. It was bald, its skin wrinkled; and when it opened its mouth, Mark saw razor-sharp teeth.

David pulled Cathy and Bob close to him, whispered in

their ears.

The creature — a mockery of a human infant — was completely above the ground now. Mark had the impression that it was blind; it waved its hands about, then sniffed and started moving toward Kevin's unmoving body. Mark couldn't hold back a shiver of disgust as the thing reached Kevin's shoulder and sank its teeth into his flesh.

It was no longer silent...unmistakable soft sucking sounds told that the creature was feeding.

It finished, then raised its head. It seemed larger, now — about the size of a small dog, and perhaps it was still growing. Sluggishly, it wiped its eyes, then opened them. The eyes burned with a terrible emerald fire. It looked from one to the other, and finally its gaze settled on Peter. The right arm shot up, and one finger pointed directly at Mark's brother.

"You are mine." The creature's voice was deep, compelling, and emotionless — the voice of the Zwilling. It pulled itself to unsteady feet, now standing as tall as a six-year-old, and took a wobbly step toward Peter.

David stepped into the thing's path. "Not yet."

"You brought me the blood I needed...and now you have brought me the body I need. Come here, Peter."

Peter, frightened, shook his head. "No."

"Bob, Cathy, go ahead," David said. He dropped back; Bob and Cathy stood before the Zwilling, and joined their hands.

Their spell was a simple incantation of binding; it wove a net of magical forces around the grave and sought to pin the unnatural child to its place. Mark quickly fell into the rhythm of their chanting, and he almost saw the lines of magical force. Frau Zunge joined the incantation, and they grew stronger, more visible. The Zwilling thrashed, clawed with its bony fingers, and grew larger still.

David, meanwhile, stood straight in the middle of his path of light. He held the wand high, then lowered it quickly and placed it on the glowing grass. Motes of brilliant light danced around the wand like fireflies, and followed David's hands as

he stood again.

He faced to the west, toward the old church. A mystic radiance played around the stones of Saint Zachary's; David's body was silhouetted against the glow. David raised his right hand high, and in it was the straight, sharp blade of his dagger.

His voice rang out clear and strong. "*I immolate this victim to thee, Gods and Powers....*"

Cathy's scream was louder, and it paralyzed all movement. "No!"

Mark couldn't move — the magical energy held him captive as much as it held the Zwilling. He could only watch helplessly as David's hand descended toward his own chest.

It was Bob who managed to break the spell. He launched himself in a flying tackle, hit David at the waist, and the two of them went down in a tangle of arms and legs.

"You idiot!" David yelled. And everything happened at once.

The Zwilling growled, ripped the magical net to pieces, and jumped. Mark felt it brush by him, and where it touched him his skin burnt as if afire. For an awful instant he thought the thing was going to land on David and start feeding from his blood; then its terrible purpose became clear.

It scrambled onto Peter's shoulders, dug its fingers into the boy's face, and buried its mouth in his throat. Peter screamed, trying to pull the creature off him — then he stiffened, fell silent and dropped his hands to his side. In another instant he was gone, off and running across the road and down into the woods.

There was no time for discussion, debate or disagreement. David and Bob ran off after Peter, and Mark followed as fast as he could run. Cathy fell behind, and he didn't know what happened to Frau Zunge. He didn't care about dry branches whipping against his skin, didn't care about the ache in his chest, didn't care about the tears that blinded him. There was room in his mind for only one thought: his brother was in the

hands of the Zwilling. Kevin was dead, and now the Zwilling wanted Peter as a host.

"Easy...huh?" David panted as they ran through the dark woods. "Next time...let me go...through with it."

"Never," Bob answered.

They slowed to a trot, and Mark caught up with them. He stripped off his shirt and threw it aside. "We're not going to find them this way."

"You're right." David threw off his own clothes. A few seconds later, three wolves stood between the trees. David clutched his wand and dagger between his teeth.

Mark sniffed, and growled. Evil, there was much evil abroad tonight. Not a fit place for a wolf to be. And yet...one of his brothers was in trouble. He had to help, no matter what the danger.

His pack-leader stood atop a fallen log, took the scent of the night, then commanded Mark and Bob to follow him. The odor was strong; they set off together toward whatever awaited.

When Human anger burned in a wolf's breast, the result was a heady mix of emotions. Mark howled a challenge to the empty night, to his unseen opponent. I am coming for you.

The trail led down toward the River. This was the way it had to be, Mark knew without thinking. The River's magic had flowed through this affair from the beginning; now the River would serve as the final arena for the end.

Peter stood on the muddy riverbank, with the Zwilling still clinging to his shoulders. He faced the River, and his hands made jerky movements that looked like magical gestures. There was no moon, but the residual glow in the west lit the boy's figure and turned the River to flowing molten metal.

David turned human, and Bob and Mark followed his lead. They managed to get within ten feet of Peter before the creature on his back turned and looked at them.

David spoke calmly. "Leave him alone."

"I feel the power. The valley shall be mine." When the

Zwilling spoke, there was the echo of distant thunder. A breeze rose, bringing with in the scent of approaching rain.

"Your last warning: leave him alone."

The Zwilling laughed a hoarse laugh. *"Go ahead and kill yourself, David Galvin. You cannot stop me now. My power is too strong. Peter has more ability than you realize."*

Mark could stand it no longer. "Peter!" he cried, "Throw it off. I know you can."

Bob's hand on his arm was hot and tight. "He doesn't hear you. It's up to David now."

David raised his dagger again, held it at arm's length in front of his face. "Goddess guide my hand," he said clearly.

"Ha!"

"In the name of the right," David said, then drew back his hand...

The dagger sailed through the air, a bolt of lightning, and buried itself in the upturned eye of the Zwilling. The impact knocked the creature off Peter's back, and it fell to the ground with a wet thud.

"Take Peter!" David didn't waste a second; he was on top of the Zwilling, the two of them wrestling in the mud. The creature growled and swore — David was silent.

Bob grabbed Peter, trying to hold him back. But the boy thrashed wildly, snarled and bit like a wild animal. "Help me," Bob appealed.

Mark wrapped his arms around Peter, hugged the boy to him despite his clawing and biting. "Stop it, Peter. You're my brother, and I'm not going to give you up to that thing. I know you're in there, I know you can hear me."

Peter calmed, panting, sandwiched between Bob and Mark. They held him tight and watched David's struggle.

Naked, covered with mud, the Zwilling and David rolled, wrestled, tumbled toward the River. When the Zwilling got a hand free, it pulled the dagger from its own eye and lashed at David's unprotected back. But David was too quick, he twisted the Zwilling's hand back and there was the awful

crack of breaking bones. The dagger fell into the River.

The wind was higher, now, and it grew darker as clouds gathered in the south. The River was wilder, blown by wind and spattered with raindrops. Still David and the Zwilling fought.

"If this goes on much longer," Bob gasped, "there'll be another storm."

"I...know," David said between clenched teeth. Crouching above the Zwilling, he lifted the creature, then slammed it down into the mud. He punched, then again, and then he drew back. He lifted his right hand, held it open in the last glimmer of twilight.

The wand, glowing with its own light, leapt into his hand.

"Now...it's...over." David thrust with the wand, and it penetrated the Zwilling's chest, pinning it to the ground. David fell back, while the Zwilling clawed at the protruding wand — then suddenly body and wand were both aflame, burning with a bright red fire.

"Aarrgh!" With a superhuman convulsion, Peter twisted free and fell upon David. "*Galvin, you die!*"

The Zwilling's body still burned, and in its light David and Peter fell toward the River. They fought quietly on the bank, until a bolt of lightning split the sky and thunder rolled down the valley. The rain had come for real, and the River was lashed into foam.

Bob grabbed Mark's hand, pulled him to where the Zwilling's body burned. He thrust his hand into the flames and pulled out the blazing wand, then held it high. "Help me with this one," he whispered. Then he started an incantation:

"I exorcise thee, O impious spirit, who, when thy power has passed away, dost still pretend to impose a tyrant yoke on man. I exorcise thee by —"

"Enough." David pulled free from Peter's grasp and stood at the very brink of the River. He clapped his hands and the boy stumbled backward.

"Peter, sleep." David said, and Peter dropped to the

ground.

Panting, bleeding, David stood straight and nodded to Bob.
"That did it."

"It's over?"

Mark knelt at Peter's side. His brother was hurt, scars all over his body — but he was breathing steadily, his eyes were closed, and his lips bore a half-smile.

"I think...it's over."

"Not yet."

Something rose from the water behind David. In a horrified instant of recognition, Mark realized that it was Kevin Judd — head still bleeding, eyes burning with the Zwilling's awful fire. In his upraised right hand was David's dagger.

Before anyone could move, Kevin thrust and the dagger was buried in David's back. Looking more surprised than anything else, David spun, grabbed Kevin...and the two of them tumbled into the River.

"I thought he was dead!" Bob raced to the River's edge, as lightning flashed and a tremendous crack of thunder echoed. Mark joined him...but he couldn't see anything in the frothing River.

"Wait...look."

Slowly, a shadow rose from the River, came toward them. Mark's heart started to beat again, then the figure came close enough to see.

It was Kevin.

"Give me the child," Kevin said in the Zwilling's deep voice.

Bob clenched his fists. "You can't animate a dead body forever."

"Long enough for the likes of you."

There was movement behind Mark, and in spite of himself he turned.

A white horse came out of the woods, all aglow with its own radiance. Cathy was astride the beast, holding onto its mane; behind her was Frau Zunge, her useless legs dangling.

The glow enveloped all of them.

"My children," Cathy said to Kevin, "have all but beaten you. Now face the Mother of all."

Mark felt himself drawn to his knees, and Bob joined him. "Goddess," he whispered.

Cathy dismounted, helped Frau Zunge down. The older woman stood unsteadily, help up more by magical force than by her own withered limbs.

"The Goddess," Cathy said, "Wears three faces. The crone," she gestured to Zunge, "The Mother...and the Lover." She held out a hand, and there was a shimmer in the air.

The shimmer firmed, became a mist, then the mist took form.

"Oh my God, Linda." Bob stared at her as tears rolled unheeded down his cheeks.

Linda's ghost moved forward, across the water, until she stood before Kevin. "The Goddess' power is the power to enchant — and to destroy." She touched Kevin's face, ran her insubstantial fingers over the boy's shattered bone and blood-matted hair. His eyes followed the motion of her hand.

She stepped behind him, folding him in an embrace while her hands drew circles on his chest. Then, slowly, her arms tightened around his neck.

Kevin pulled loose and slapped her. His hand went right through her image, but still she fell to the water. He spat upon her.

"Is that all you can do?" He challenged Cathy.

She lowered her head, nodded to Frau Zunge.

"The Goddess brings death," Frau Zunge said. She moved falteringly toward Kevin.

Bob grabbed Mark's arm. "Look," he hissed. Off in the water, a dozen feet beyond where Kevin stood, David was sitting up. In the gloom Mark couldn't tell how badly he was hurt — but he was still alive.

Frau Zunge reached Kevin, and stood before him with her hands on her hips. "Death is my power...age and infirmity,

sickness and death. Cold is my breath, ice is my stare, and death is my touch." She raised a hand, reached for Kevin with one gnarled finger.

He slapped her arm away and laughed. *"Do you think I know nothing of death, Crone? He is my servant as well as yours. Yet I live in the realm beyond death."* Kevin smiled a twisted, evil grin. *"Pain is my touch, woman. Feel it."* He slapped her again, and with a cry Frau Zunge fell.

Kevin turned his eyes skyward. *"You pick your incarnations badly, Goddess. I have dealt with this body all its life — your hosts cannot begin to compete."* Leaving Frau Zunge where she lay, Kevin walked to the bank. When he stepped out of the River, Cathy was in his path.

"Stand aside." he told her. *"The child is mine."*

"You evade me and you mock me," she said evenly. "But your power cannot begin to match that of the Mother whose child is threatened."

"Stand aside, bitch."

She raised her hands. The rain stopped, the thunder subsided. "The charade is over. Your foul body is destroyed, your host is dead...and the one you want is under my protection. Return to your realm."

"I will take all of you with me, if I go."

Cathy snapped her fingers. "Kevin," she called. Kevin's head jerked, and for a second the eldritch light went out of his eyes.

She held her arms open. "I offer you the mercy and the peace of the Goddess. The choice is yours, Kevin. Come to me, and close the door on the Zwilling."

"No." The voice was deep and cold.

Cathy shook her head. She reached out and stroked Kevin's head, tucking back the hair that fell in his eyes. "I'm talking to you, Kevin Judd. You are not yet lost. Come to me, my son."

"Mother?"

"I'm here. You need but say yes."

"No!"

Kevin shook, then threw back his head and screamed. Cathy wrapped her arms around him, tenderly pulled him close. Mark couldn't see how she dared to be so kind to him.

He looked up into her face, and his eyes were once again clear and human. "I am yours, Mother. Take me."

Then his body went limp, and she lowered it to the ground.

"*Nooo!*" The Zwilling's cry was louder than thunder. Its still-burning corpse, the only body it had left in this world, stirred and rose. "*Never.*"

Cathy opened her arms...and Frau Zunge was on her right, Linda's ghost on her left. "I am the Lover," Linda said, "I captivate you."

"I am the Mother," Cathy said, "I pity you."

"I am the Crone," Frau Zunge croaked, "And my power...is the power of death."

Together the three women raised their arms and pointed at the Zwilling. They spoke a single Word, a Word of Power that could pass no mortal throat.

The flames flared, then subsided. Where they had burned, nothing was left.

Chapter Thirty-eight

(Bob)

The scent of magic hung over the valley. Bob smelled it even though he wasn't in wolf form; he took great gasps of it and felt it refresh his spirit.

We made it, he thought. Somehow, by the grace of the Goddess and the power of the Arts, we made it.

The aura of the Goddess still lingered about Cathy, filling the glade with a cool radiance not unlike moonlight. She stood at the edge of the River, above Kevin's fallen body, and reached out to David.

"Come, David. Don't be afraid."

He struggled to the bank, and she helped him up. He was bleeding from a hundred wounds, and his left arm hung limp at his side. He lowered his eyes.

"I suppose I didn't do very well, did I?"

"You did perfectly. With your mastery of the Arts and your power, you paved the way for the Goddess. Without you, no power would have been able to defeat the Zwilling."

"But..." He shivered. "If I had given my life..."

"If you had done that thing, the Zwilling would have taken your power and it would rule this world." She lifted his chin in a tender hand. "David Galvin, I name you Master of the

Arts, and I adjure you to follow your own path and your own conscience."

"But Susan — "

"She sleeps in the peace of the Goddess. You have freed her, son. Be happy."

"I-I don't know what to say. Thank you." He shook his head. "The Zwilling is really gone? It won't bother us again?"

"Banished, destroyed, thrown beyond the barriers of this world. It will not return soon." She frowned. "But as long as magic exists in this valley, as long as the River carries its eternal power, the struggle will continue. The Zwilling's power is broken; but the principle it represents will surely return. Not this season, not the next, perhaps not in your lifetime. Yet it is the duty of all practitioners of the Arts, to remain ever-vigilant."

Mark looked up, his hand still on his brother's shoulder. "What about Peter?"

Cathy nodded and came to where the boy lay. She crouched over him, touched her hand to his forehead. "He sleeps, but he will wake. Take him home, keep him with the things and the people he loves. His body will heal quickly; his soul will need more time. But the Goddess is with him...he *will* heal."

"This is all so...I don't know, unreal. Here we are talking with the Goddess, talking through Cathy — where is she?"

Cathy smiled. "I'm right here, Mark. I'm not going to leave you." She tousled his hair. "I just...there's no way to tell you. I'm touched by Her, and Her presence is with me and all around me...." She trailed off, a happy smile on her face.

David put his hand on Mark's shoulder. "What about the others the Zwilling hurt? Mark's parents, Doctor Quaile?"

Cathy bent to the River; when she stood, she held a phial full of sparkling water. "The magic is in the land and the River. Take this to them, and bid them drink. It will do more for them than all your medicine." She gave the phial to David, who held it reverently.

Moving as if in a dream, Cathy approached the horse. She stroked its neck and whispered, "You have served me well, fair beast. Go now to your home, and live in peace. Mayhap the Goddess will call you again." She slapped the horse gently on the flank, and it trotted off into the woods.

Frau Zunge still stood, statue-like. Cathy nodded at her. "You have borne your burden well, sister. What will you have of me?"

"The memory, sister. That is all."

"It is yours." Cathy helped the old woman to a rock, where she sat down.

It was dark now, but for Cathy's glow and the brilliant stars. No trace of clouds remained. Only the palest glimmer remained where Linda's ghost had stood. Cathy approached that glimmer, and whispered something that Bob couldn't hear. Then she turned back to the boys.

"Remember well this night. Use your abilities carefully, and use them always for the right." She raised her hands toward the stars, closed her eyes, and gave a great sigh.

"Wait." Bob stood, approached Cathy, then fell to his knees before her. She looked down at him, and in her eyes was a vast, supernatural compassion. "I don't have any right to ask...but what about Linda?"

"She, too, has found peace with the Mother of All."

At least, he thought, she wasn't in that terrible place with the Zwilling. That was something.

He swallowed. "There's nothing for me here without her." He glanced in Frau Zunge's direction. "Goddess...may I join her?"

"Bob, no," David said. "He doesn't know what he's asking."

Bob continued looking into Cathy's eyes. The light of the stars was mirrored there, just as in the calm River. "I know. Take me, please."

Cathy shook her head. "That request I cannot grant you, Bob Toland." She stepped back, and raised her hands to the

sky once again.

"No, wait." Damn it, there *had* to be a way. He couldn't live without Linda.

The light increased, like a million stars, until he was blinded. "Don't leave! Don't!" he cried through his tears. But it was too late. He found himself on his back, looking up at the sky where one bright star outshone all the others. A voice in the back of his head whispered, "Trust to the mercy of the Goddess." Then She was gone.

"Bob?" It was Cathy's voice. She helped him up; the mystic light was gone and now she was just plain old Cathy Vovcenko. He closed his eyes and nodded.

"Thanks, Cathy."

Her hands were cool on his face, wiping away his tears. Then her arms slipped around him, pulled him close, and he opened his eyes in surprise.

He was looking into Linda's face.

She kissed him...she was alive, material, no longer just a ghost. When she drew back she saw the question in his face, and she smiled.

"I told you," she said, "To trust Her mercy."

"You're back."

"For good," she agreed.

David chuckled, then lifted Frau Zunge in his strong arms. "Cathy, if you and Mark will bring Peter, I think we can leave Bob and Linda alone for a while."

Cathy nodded.

As Mark turned, Bob caught his eye, and for an instant Bob felt torn — then Mark smiled, and gave a slight nod.

Bob nodded back, knowing that Mark understood. The bond that was between them would be there forever — but now, it was time for Linda. Mark took Peter's hand, and the two of them disappeared up the hill.

Bob stroked Linda's hair, still unwilling to believe that it really was her. The River gurgled softly behind them, and they kissed again.

“You think too much,” she said with a languid stretch. Then, abruptly, she made the change into wolf form. For a second she stood on all fours, taunting him, then she raced away into the night.

She was right. There was no more need for thought.

He spoke the words, and made the change himself. Wolf, strong and powerful, he heard his mate’s passionate howl, and he set off in pursuit of her.

When he found her, he was happier than ever in his life.

Epilogue (Cathy)

Cathy stood alone in moonlight. Behind her, the River flowed on its eternal path to Bay and Ocean; the magic of the Patapsco Valley danced when she moved her hands.

She cast her mind out into the night, and felt all the people. Bob and Linda, happy in love. Mark and Peter, sleeping at last, finally at peace. David...poor tortured David. She hoped that he would find his own place in the world. If he would only listen to himself, believe in himself — there was no limit to what he could do.

There were millions of others. Doctor Quaile, Mr. and Mrs. Evans, Frau Zunge. Doctor Whitlow, who now slept in the peace of the Goddess. Cathy's own family: her sister Debbie, concerned about boyfriends and school plays and all the other troubles of a high school senior. Her mother...who had given her nothing but love and support, and who had been there in the power of the Goddess. All her friends, and their friends, and all the billions who filled this world.

The moonlight made her shiver.

And you, Cathy, she thought. What are *you* going to do, now that you've been touched by the Goddess?

She didn't need to frame her answer in words. The

Goddess was still with her, would be forever. I've consecrated myself to Her service, Cathy thought. Whatever She wills, I will do.

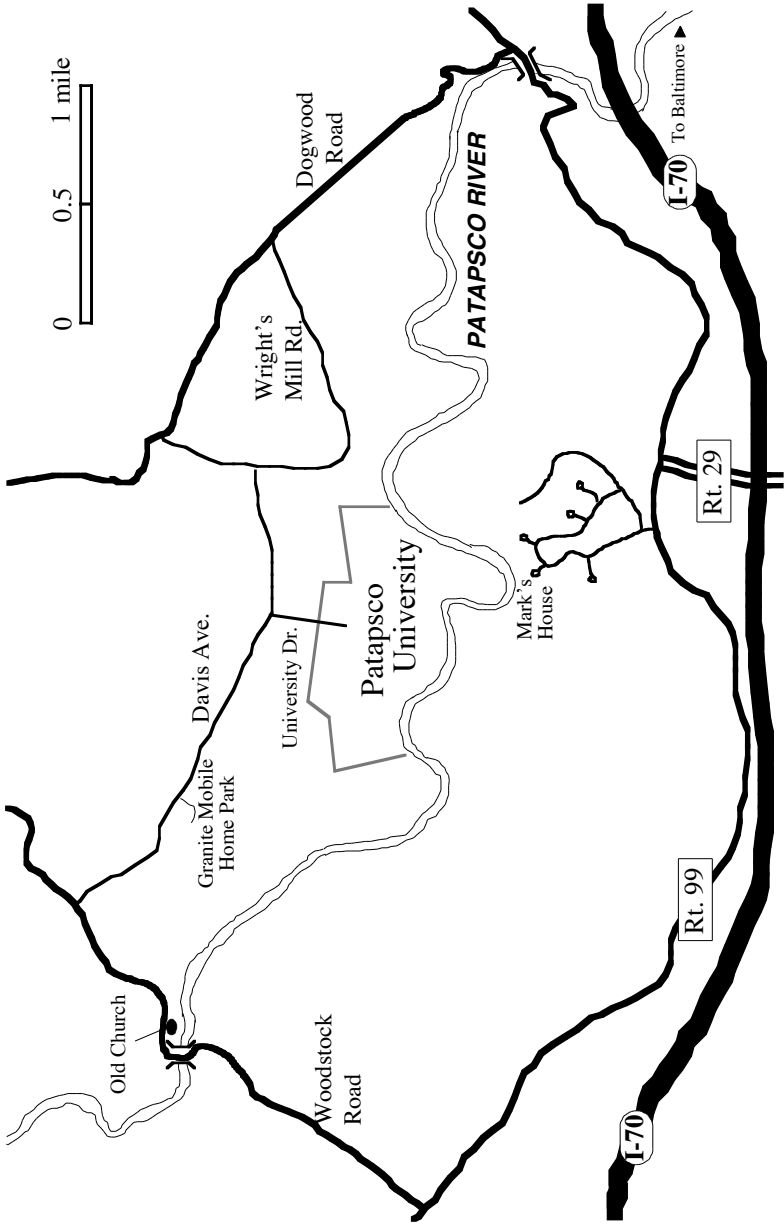
She closed her eyes and lowered her arms. The battle was won...but there would be others. Much as she had done, much as David and the others had accomplished, there was still a lot to learn. The Zwilling was gone, but the power behind it was strong as ever.

She shrugged, then turned back toward the campus. The future would take care of itself and no power, not even Hers, could stop it. For tonight, she was happily tired, and her bed waited.

She paused, then took her school ring from her finger. She had no more need for its protection; she was in the hands of a greater Power. She gave the ring a little kiss, then tossed it as high as she could. It landed in the Patapsco with a satisfying plop.

Smiling, Cathy headed home.

Carried by the current, her ring continued downstream, just one more bit of magic flowing along that ancient course.



Author's Note

Besides the creation of Patapsco University, I took very few liberties with the geography of western Baltimore County. Woodstock Road, the old church, the trailer park, and the community of Mount Hebron really *did* exist in approximately the locations given in this book. Except for shortening Davis Avenue a bit, I left the communities of Granite and Woodstock as much alone as was possible.

Many locations herein do exist, but I found it judicious to change their names, or to create fictional histories a little more dramatic than the real events. Those who believe that "truth is stranger than fiction" have obviously been reading the wrong fiction.

I am indebted to the citizens of Granite, Woodstock and Mount Hebron for allowing me to explore their lovely hillsides.

Of the books I used to research the occult, surely the most valuable were Barbara Haislip's *Stars, Spells, Secrets, and Sorcery*, Arthur Edward White's *Book of Ceremonial Magic* and Nevill Drury's excellent *Dictionary of Mysticism and the Occult*. Of course, I also made good use of *Tobin's Spirit Guide* and all the rest of the standard references.

Patapsco University is completely a product of my imagination, as is its peculiar Department of Comparative Religion. The Patapsco River, on the other hand, is just as completely real.

—Don Sakers

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