

01 THE VILLAGE OF SALTUS

Morwenna's face floated in the single beam of light, lovely and framed in hair
dark as my cloak; blood from her neck pattered to the stones. Her lips moved
without speech. Instead I saw framed within them (as though I were the Increate,
peeping through his rent in Eternity to behold the World of Time) the farm,
Stachys her husband tossing in agony upon his bed, little Chad at the pond,
bathing his fevered face.
Outside, Eusebia, Morwenna's accuser, howled like a witch. I tried to reach the
bars to tell her to be quiet, and at once became lost in the darkness of the
cell. When I found light at last, it was the green road stretching from the

growing since the founding of Urth, trees as high as cliffs, wrapped in
pure
green. Between them lay the road, grown up in fresh grass, and on it
were the
bodies of men and women. A burning cariole tainted the clean air with
smoke.
Five riders sat destriers whose hooked tushes were encrusted with
lazulite. The
men wore helmets and capes of indanthrene blue and carried lances
whose heads
ran with blue fire; their faces were more akin than the faces of brothers.
On
these riders, the tide of travelers broke as a wave on a rock, some
turning
left, some right. Dorcas was torn from my arms, and I drew Terminus
Est to cut
down those between us and found I was about to strike Master
Malrubius, who
stood calmly, my dog Triskele at his side, in the midst of the tumult.
Seeing

bursting,

savory, and nearly burned - from the grill. Time to wash, time to serve
the

journeymen, time to chant lessons to myself before Master Palaemon's
examination.

I woke in the apprentices' dormitory, but everything was in the wrong
place: a

blank wall where the round port should have been, a square window
that should

have been a bulkhead. The row of hard, narrow cots was gone, and the
ceiling too

low.

Then I was awake. Country smells - much like the pleasant odors of
flower and

tree that used to float across the ruined curtain wall from the necropolis,
but

mixed now with the hot reek of a stable - drifted through the window.

The bells

began again, ringing in some campanile not far away, calling the few
who

still

wanted water to splash on my face and smooth my hair. Before sleeping

I had

folded my cloak, with the Claw at the center, to use for a pillow. I spread

it

now, and remembering how Agia had once tried to slip her hand into the sabretache on my belt, thrust the Claw into my boot top.

Jonas still slept. In my experience, people asleep look younger than they do

awake, but Jonas seemed older - or perhaps only ancient; he had the face, with

straight nose and straight forehead, that I have often noted in old pictures. I

buried the smoldering fire in its own ashes and left without waking him.

By the time I had finished refreshing myself from the bucket of the innyard

well, the street before the inn was no longer silent, but alive with hooves that

splashed through the puddles left by the previous night's rain, and the clacking

of scimitar horns. Each animal was taller than a man, black or piebald,

their hard,

watchful, low-bred dogs.

Inside the inn once more, I ordered breakfast and got bread warm from the oven,

newly churned butter, pickled duck's eggs, and peppered chocolate beaten to a

froth. (This last a sure sign, though I did not know it then, that I was among

people who drew their customs from the north.) Our hairless gnome of a host, who

had no doubt seen me in conversation with the alcalde the night before, hovered

over my table wiping his nose on his sleeve, inquiring about the quality of each

dish as it was served - though they were all, in truth, very good - promising

better food at supper, and condemning the cook, who was his wife. He called me

sieur, not because he thought as they sometimes had in Nessus that I was an

comfortable together?"

I was about to say that I would prefer separate rooms (I thought Jonas no thief,

but I was afraid the Claw might be too much of a temptation for any man, and I

was unused, moreover, to sleeping double) when it occurred to me that he might

have difficulty paying for a private accommodation.

"You will be there today, sieur? When they break through the wall? A mason could

take down the ashlars, but Barnoch's been heard moving inside and may have

strength left. Perhaps he's found a weapon. Why, he could bite the masons'

fingers, if nothing else!"

"Not in an official capacity. I may watch if I can."

"Everyone's coming." The bald man rubbed his hands, which slithered together as

if they had been oiled. "There's to be a fair, you know. The alcalde announced

fair sprang up out of his head, colored tents and ribbons, roast meat and spun

sugar, all together. Today? Why today we'll open the sealed house and pull

Barnoch out like a badger. That will warm them up, that will draw them for

leagues around. Then we'll watch you do for Morwenna and that country fellow.

Tomorrow you'll begin on Barnoch - hot irons you start with usually, don't you?

And everybody will want to be there. The day after, finish him off and fold the

tents. It doesn't do to let them hang about too long after they've spent their

money, or they begin to beg and fight and so on. All well planned, all well

thought out! There's an alcalde for you!"

I went out again after breakfast and watched the alcalde's enchanted thoughts

take shape. Countryfolk were stumping into the village with fruits and animals

drilling

of the garrison in the Citadel, but which I had not heard since I had left it.

The cattle I had watched earlier that morning had been going down to the river,

there to be herded into barges for the remainder of their trip to the abattoirs

of Nessus. These soldiers were coming the other way, up from the water. Whether

that was because their officers felt the march would toughen them, or because

the boats that had brought them were needed elsewhere, or because they were

destined for some area remote from Gyll, I had no way of knowing. I heard the

shouted order to sing as they came into the thickening crowd, and almost

together with it the thwacks of the vingtners' rods and the howls of the unfortunates who had been hit.

The men were kelau, each armed with a sling with a two-cubit handle and each

but a true slingers' song. Insofar as I heard it that day, it ran thus:

"When I was a lad, my mother said,
'You dry your tears and go to bed;
I know my son will travel far,
Born beneath a shooting star.'

"In after years, my father said,
As he pulled my hair and knocked my head,
'They mustn't whimper at a scar,
Who're born beneath a shooting star.'

"A mage I met, and the mage he said,
'I see for you a future red,
Fire and riot, raid and war,
O born beneath a shooting star.'

"A shepherd I met, and the shephad said,
'We sheep must go where we are led,
To Dawn-Gate where the angels are,
Following the shooting star.' "

"Southerners - notice how many have yellow hair and dotted hides?

They're used

to cold down there, and they'll need to be in the mountains. Still, the singing

almost makes you want to join 'em. How many, would you say?"

The baggage mules were just coming into view, laden with rations and prodded

forward with the points of swords. "Two thousand. Perhaps twenty-five hundred."

"Thank you, sieur. I like to keep track of them. You wouldn't believe how many

I've seen coming up our road here. But precious few going back. Well, that's

what war is, I believe. I always try to tell myself they're still there - I mean, wherever it was they went - but you know and I know there's a lot that

have gone to stay. Still, the singing makes a man want to go with 'em."

I asked if he had news of the war.

"Oh, yes, sieur. I've followed it for years and years now, though the battles

real war at all."

The crowd had closed behind the last mule driver, and it thickened with every

word that passed between us. Bustling men set up stalls and pavilions, narrowing

the street and making the press of people greater still; bristling masks on tall

poles seemed to have sprouted from the ground like trees.

"Where does your wife think the soldiers are going, then?" I asked the innkeeper.

"Looking for Vodalus, that's what she says. As if the Autarch - whose hands run

with gold and whose enemies kiss his heel - would send his whole army to fetch a

bandit!"

I scarcely heard a word beyond Vodalus.

Whatever I possess I would give to become one of you, who complain every day of

memories fading. My own do not. They remain always, and always as vivid as at

drifting river fog the slender figure of Vodalus as he gave his pistol to his mistress and drew his sword. Now (it is a sad thing to have become a man) I was

struck by the extravagance of the gesture. He who had professed in a hundred

clandestine placards to be fighting for the old ways, for the ancient high civilization Urth has now lost, has discarded the effectual weapon of that civilization.

If my memories of the past remain intact, perhaps it is only because the past

exists only in memory. Vodalus, who wished as I did to summon it again, yet

remained a creature of the present. That we are capable only of being what we

are remains our unforgivable sin.

No doubt if I had been one of you whose memories fade, I would have rejected him

on that morning as I elbowed my way through the crowd, and so in some fashion

would have escaped this death in life that grips me even as I write these words.

02 THE MAN IN THE DARK

The bandit's house had differed in no way from the common houses of the village.

It was of broken mine-stone, single storied, with a flattish, solid-looking roof

of slabs of the same material. The door and the only window I could see from the

street had been closed with rough masonry. A hundred or so fair-goers stood

before the house now, talking and pointing; but there was no sound from within,

and no smoke issuing from the chimney.

"Is this commonly done hereabouts?" I asked Jonas.

"It's traditional. You've heard the saying, 'A legend, a lie, and a likelihood

make a tradition'?"

"It seems to me it would be easy enough to get out. He could break through a

the house

and take everything they can find in the way of food and tools and lights, besides whatever else may be of value."

A resonant voice said, "Having good sense, as we flatter ourselves, we do

indeed." It was the alcalde, who had come up behind us without either of us

noticing his presence in the crowd. We wished him a good day, and he returned

the courtesy. He was a solid, square-built man whose open face was marred by

something too clever about the eyes. "I thought I recognized you, Master

Severian, bright clothes or no. Are these new? They look it. If they don't give

satisfaction, speak out to me about it. We try to keep the traders honest that

come to our fairs. It's only good business. If he doesn't make them right for

you, whoever he is, we'll duck him in the river, you may be sure. One or two

look to wear

well. If you're asked where you had them, you might say Saltus Fair.

Such talk

does no harm."

I promised I would, though I was far more concerned about the safety of Terminus

Est, which I had left hidden in our room at the inn, than about my own appearance or the durability of the lay clothes I had bought from a slopman.

"You and your assistant have come to see us draw out the miscreant, I suppose?

We'll be at him as soon as Mesmin and Sebald bring the post. A battering ram is

what we called it when we passed the word of what was intended, but I'm afraid

the truth is that it's nothing more than a tree trunk, and not a big one either

- otherwise the village would have had to fee too many men to handle it.

Yet it

should do the work. I don't suppose you've heard of the case we had here

you see here, for it's largely the same ones doing it, and they did it in the

same way. But it was the other end of summer, just at apple-picking time, and

that I recall very well because of the people drinking new cider in the crowd,

and myself with a fresh apple to eat while I watched.

"Next year when the corn was up, someone wanted to buy the house.

Property

becomes the property of the town, you know. That's how we finance the work, the

ones that do it take what they can find for their share, and the town takes the

house and ground.

"To shorten a lengthy tale, we cut a ram and broke through the door in fine

fashion, thinking to sweep up the old woman's bones and turn the place over to

the new owner." The alcalde paused and laughed, throwing back his head. There

find in rotten wood, back among the big trees. We're miners, mostly,
here in
Saltus, and used to things found underground, but we took to our heels
and came
back with torches. It didn't like the light, or the fire either."
Jonas touched me on the shoulder and pointed to a swirl in the crowd. A
group of
purposeful-looking men were shouldering their way down the street.
None had
helmets or body armor, but several carried narrow-headed pioletes, and
the rest
had brass-bound staves. I was strongly reminded of the volunteer
guards who had
admitted Drotte, Roche, Eata, and me to the necropolis so long ago.
Behind these
armed men were four who carried the tree trunk the alcalde had
mentioned, a
rough log about two spans across and six cubits long.
A collective indrawn breath greeted them; it was followed by louder talk
and

proceed

without ceremony. In that, I had reckoned without the alcalde. At the last possible moment he mounted the doorstep of the sealed house, and waving his hat

for silence, addressed the crowd.

"Welcome visitors and fellow villagers! In the time it takes to draw breath thrice, you will see us smash this barrier and drag out the bandit Barnoch.

Whether he be dead, or, as we have good reason to believe - for he hasn't been

in there that long - alive. You know what he has done. He has collaborated with

the traitor Vodalus's cultellarii, informing them of the arrivals and departures

of those who might become their victims! All of you are thinking now, and

rightly!, that such a vile crime deserves no mercy. Yes, I say! Yes, we all say!

Hundreds and maybe thousands lie in unmarked graves because of this Barnoch.

Hundreds and maybe thousands have met a fate far worse!

Much

smooth, persuasive talk, I ought to have said, and possibly some money. Before

you nod your head at him, I want you to remember this house of Barnoch's the way

it looks now, with those ashlar where the door should be. Think about your own

house with no doors and no windows, but with you inside it.

"Then think about what you're going to see done to Barnoch when we take him out.

Because I'm telling you - you strangers particularly - what you're about to see

here is only the beginning of what you'll be seeing at our fair in Saltus! For

the events of the next few days we have employed one of the finest professionals

from Nessus! You will see at least two persons executed here in the formal

style, with the head struck off at a single blow. One's a woman, so we'll be

using the chair! That's something a lot of people who boast of their

He lifted his voice to a shout. "If you can, Barnoch, cut your throat now!

Because if you don't, you're going to wish you had starved long ago!"

For a moment there was silence. I was in agony at the thought that I should soon

have to practice the Art on a follower of Vodalus's. The alcalde raised his

right arm over his head, then brought it down in an emphatic gesture.

"All

right, lads, at it with a will!"

The four who had brought the ram counted one, two, three to themselves as if by

prearrangement and ran at the walled-up door, losing some of their impetuosity

when the two in front mounted the step. The ram struck the stones with a loud

thump, but with no other result.

"All right, lads," the alcalde repeated. "Let's try it again. Show them the kind

of men Saltus breeds."

The four charged a second time. At this attempt, those in front handled the step

cracking like the breaking of bones. "One more," the alcalde said.

He was right. The next blow sent the stone it struck into the house, leaving a

hole the size of a man's head. After that, the ramsmen no longer bothered with a

running start; they knocked the remaining stones out by swinging the ram with

their arms until the aperture was large enough for a man to step through.

Someone I had not noticed previously had brought torches, and a boy ran to a

neighboring house to kindle them at the kitchen fire. The men with piletes and

staves took them from him. Showing more courage than I would have credited to

those clever eyes, the alcalde drew a short truncheon from under his shirt and

entered first. We spectators crowded after the armed men, and because Jonas and

I had been in the forefront of the onlookers, we reached the opening almost at

wood.

The people behind me were pushing to go in farther; and I, as I discovered

somewhat to my surprise, was pushing back.

There was a commotion at the rear of the house - hurried and confused footsteps

- a shout - then a high, inhuman scream.

"They've got him!" someone behind me called, and I heard the news being passed

to those outside.

A fattish man who might have been a smallholder came running out of the dark, a

torch in one hand and a stave in the other. "Out of the way! Get back, all of

you! They're bringing him out!"

I do not know what I expected to see . . . Perhaps a filthy creature with matted

hair. What came instead was a ghost. Barnoch had been tall; he was tall still,

but stooped and very thin, with skin so pale it seemed to glow as decayed wood

be free," it said. "Vodalus! Vodalus will come!"

How I wished then that I had never been imprisoned myself, for his voice brought

back to me all those airless days when I waited in the oubliette beneath our

Matachin Tower. I too had dreamed of rescue by Vodalus, of a revolution that

would sweep away the animal stench and degeneracy of the present age and restore

the high and gleaming culture that was once Urth's.

And I had been saved not by Vodalus and his shadowy army, but by the advocacy of

Master Palaemon - and no doubt of Drotte and Roche and a few other friends - who

had persuaded the brothers that it would be too dangerous to kill me and too

disgraceful to bring me before a tribunal.

Barnoch would not be saved at all. I, who should have been his comrade, would

brand him, break him on the wheel, and at last sever his head. I tried to tell

unguided

by ourselves, will distinguish from a mass of detail some single object, presenting it with a clarity never achieved by concentration. So it was with me.

Out of all the struggling tide of faces beyond the doorway, I saw one, upturned, illuminated by the sun. It was Agia's.

03 THE SHOWMAN'S TENT

The instant was frozen as though we two, and all those about us, stood in a painting. Agia's uptilted face, my own wide eyes; so we remained amid the cloud of countryfolk with their bright clothes and bundles. Then I moved, and she was gone. I would have run to her if I could; but I could only push my way through

he had

paid no attention to the young woman beside him and had no notion of where she

might have gone. I followed the throng who followed the prisoner until I was

sure she was not among them, then, knowing nothing better to do, began to search

the fair, peering into tents and booths, and making inquiries of the farmwives

who had come to sell their fragrant cardamom-bread, and of the hotmeat vendors.

All this, as I write it, slowly convoluting a thread of the vermilion ink of the

House Absolute, sounds calm and even methodical. Nothing could be further from

the truth. I was gasping and sweating as I did these things, shouting questions

to which I hardly stayed for an answer. Like a face seen in dream, Agia's

floated before my imagination: wide, flat cheeks and softly rounded chin,

the phrase was as meaningless as the song of the cicada.

"Yes. Every country maid who comes here."

"Do you know her name?"

"A woman? Certainly I can get you a woman.

"Where did you lose her?"

"Don't worry, you'll soon find her again. The fair's not big enough for anybody

to stay lost long. Didn't the two of you arrange a place to meet? Have some of

my tea - you look so tired."

I fumbled for a coin.

"You don't have to pay, I sell enough as it is. Well, if you insist. It's only an aes. Here."

The old woman rummaged in her apron pocket and produced a flood of little coins,

then splashed the tea, hissing hot, from her kettle into an earthenware cup and

offered me a straw of some dimly silver metal. I waved it away.

"It's clean. I rinse everything after each customer."

"I'm not used to them."

The old woman snorted and pushed a straggling lock of gray hair back under her kerchief. "At Saltus Fair? Of course not! Everybody wears his best to a fair, and any girl with sense would know that. How about down by the water where they've got the prisoner chained?"

I shook my head. "She seems to have disappeared."

"But you haven't given up. I can tell from the way you look at the people going past instead of me. Well, good for you. You'll find her yet, though they do say all manner of strange things have been happening round and about of late. They caught a green man, do you know that? Got him right over there where you see the tent. Green men know everything, people say, if you can but make them talk. Then there's the cathedral. I suppose you've heard about that?"

"The cathedral?"

"I've heard tell it wasn't what cityfolk call a real one - I know you're from

for him, and why should I? Still, it's a shame what they did, if they did what's
told against them. Set fire to it, you know."
"Are you talking about the Cathedral of the Pelerines?"
The old woman nodded sagely. "There, you said it yourself. You're making the
same mistake they did. It wasn't the Cathedral of the Pelerines, it was the
Cathedral of the Claw. Which is to say, it wasn't theirs to burn."
To myself I muttered, "They rekindled the fire."
"I beg pardon." The old woman cocked an ear. "I didn't hear that."
"I said they burned it. They must have set fire to the straw floor."
"That's what I heard too. They just stood back and watched it burn. It
went up
to the Infinite Meadows of the New Sun, you know."
A man on the opposite side of the alleyway began to pound a drum.
When he paused
I said, "I know that certain persons have claimed to have seen it rise into
the
air."

cathedral would

rise just like it did. He can't see the Hand in nature."

"He didn't see it himself?" I asked. "The cathedral, I mean."

She failed to understand. "Oh, he's seen it when they've been through here, at

least a dozen times."

The chant of the man with the drum, similar to that I had once heard Dr. Talos

use, but more hoarsely delivered and bereft of the doctor's malicious intelligence, cut through our talk. "Knows everything! Knows everybody!

Green as

a gooseberry! See for yourself!"

(The insistent voice of the drum: BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!)

"Do you think the green man would know where Agia is?"

The old woman smiled. "So that's her name, is it? Now I'll know, if anybody

should mention her. He might. You've money, why not try him?"

Why not indeed, I thought.

"Brought from the jun-gles of the North! Never eats! A-kin to the bush-es and

the drummer's face. "For as long as you wish." I handed him his money
and
stepped inside.

It had been plain he had not thought I would want to stay long, and I
expected a

stench or something equally unpleasant. There was nothing beyond a
slight odor

as of hay curing. In the center of the tent, in a dust-spangled shaft of
sunlight admitted by a vent in the canvas roof, was chained a man the
color of

pale jade. He wore a kilt of leaves, now fading; beside him stood a clay
pot
filled to the brim with clear water.

For a moment we were silent. I stood looking at him. He sat looking at
the

ground. "That's not paint," I said. "Nor do I think it dye. And you have no
more

hair than the man I saw dragged from the sealed house."

He looked up at me, then down again. Even the whites of his eyes held
a greenish
tint.

I thought of Master Palaemon, then of Master Malrubius and my poor Thecla, and I shrugged. "I can read and write."

"Yet you know nothing about me. I am not a talking vegetable, as you should be able to see. Even if a plant were to follow the one evolutionary way, out of some many millions, that leads to intelligence, it is impossible that it should duplicate in wood and leaf the form of a human being."

"The same thing might be said of stones, yet there are statues." For all his aspect of despair (and his was a sadder face by far than my friend Jonas's), something tugged at the corners of his lips. "That is well put. You have no scientific training, but you are better taught than you realize."

"On the contrary, all my training has been scientific - although it had nothing to do with these fantastic speculations. What are you?"

"A great seer. A great liar, like every man whose foot is in a trap."

I am well acquainted with the alcalde of this village. A green man is still
a
man; and if he is a slave, his master must show how he came to that
state, and
how he himself came into possession of him."

The green man said, "I'm a fool, I suppose, to put any confidence in you.
And
yet I do. I am a free man, come from your own future to explore your
age.

"That is impossible."

"The green color that puzzles your people so much is only what you call
pond
scum. We have altered it until it can live in our blood, and by its
intervention
have at last made our peace in humankind's long struggle with the sun.
In us,
the tiny plants live and die, and our bodies feed from them and their
dead and
require no other nourishment. All the famines, and all the labor of
growing
food, are ended."

Urth -

if what you say is the truth."

The green man threw back his head and laughed. Much later I was to hear the

sound the alzabo makes as it ranges the snow - swept tablelands of the high

country; its laughter is horrible, but the green man's was more terrible, and I

drew away from him. "You're not a human being," I said. "Not now, if you ever

were."

He laughed again. "And to think I hoped in you. What a poor creature I am. I

thought I had resigned myself to dying here among a people who are no more than

walking dust; but at the tiniest gleam, all my resignation fell from me. I am a

true man, friend. You are not, and in a few months I will be dead."

I remembered his kin. How often I had seen the frozen stalks of summer flowers

sun has

come, and because it has come we have forgotten it. If I am ever able to return

to my own time, I will tell them there of you."

"If you are indeed of the future, why cannot you go forward to your home, and so escape?"

"Because I am chained, as you see." He held out his leg so that I could examine

the shackle about his ankle. His berylline flesh was swollen about it, as I have

seen the bark of a tree swollen that had grown through an iron ring.

The tent flap opened, and the drummer thrust his head through. "Are you still

here? I have others outside." He looked significantly at the green man and

withdrew.

"He means that I must drive you off, or he will close the vent through which my

sunlight falls. I drive away those who pay to see me by foretelling their

Answer one question truthfully for me, and I will go. I am looking for a woman called Agia. Where will I find her?"

For a moment his eyes rolled upward until only a narrow crescent of pale green

showed beneath their lids. A faint tremor seized him; he stood and extended his

arms, his fingers splayed like twigs. Slowly he said, "Above ground."

The tremor ceased, and he sat again, older looking and paler than before.

"You are only a fraud then," I told him as I turned away. "And I was a simpleton to believe in you even by so little."

"No," the green man whispered. "Listen. In coming here, I have passed through

all your future. Some parts of it remain with me, no matter how clouded. I told

you only the truth - and if you are indeed a friend of the alcalde of this place, I will tell you something further that you may tell him, something I have

seemed to

unfold in his great joy, as though he were already basking in the brighter
light
of his own day.

04 THE BOUQUET

As I left the showman's tent, I glanced up at the sun. The western
horizon had

already climbed more than half up the sky; in a watch or less it would be
time

for me to make my appearance. Agia was gone, and any hope of
overtaking her had

been lost in the frantic time I had spent dashing from one end of the fair
to

the other; yet I took comfort from the green man's prophecy, which I
took to

mean that Agia and I should meet again before either of us died, and
from the

by

recollections of Thecla and my elevation to journeyman, both occasioned by the

need to change from my new lay clothes into the fuligin of the guild. So strong

is the power of association that it could be exercised by that habit while it

was still out of sight on the pegs in the room, and by Terminus Est while she

remained concealed beneath the mattress.

It used to entertain me, while I was still attendant upon Thecla, to find that I

could anticipate much of her conversation, and particularly the first of it, from the nature of the gift I carried when I entered her cell. If it were some

favorite food thieved from the kitchen, for example, it would elicit a description of a meal at the House Absolute, and the kind of food I brought even

governed the nature of the repast described: flesh, a sporting dinner with the

the House Absolute, lit by a thousand torches and enlivened by jugglers,
actors,
dancers, and pyrotechnic displays.

She ate standing as often as sitting, walking the three strides that took
her

from one end of her cell to the other, holding the dish in her left hand
while

she gestured with her right. "Like this, Severian, they all spring into the
ringing sky, showering green and magenta sparks, while the maroons
boom like
thunder!"

But her poor hand could hardly show the rockets rising higher than her
towering

head, for the ceiling was not much taller than she.

"But I'm boring you. A moment ago, when you brought me these
peaches, you looked

so happy, and now you won't smile. It's just that it does me good, here,
to

remember those things. How I'll enjoy them when I see them again."

I was not bored, of course. It was only that it saddened me to see her, a
woman

because you look so young."

"Yes, I've done it before. Never to a woman."

"You think she's innocent?"

I was taking off my shirt; when I had my arms freed I mopped my face with it and

shook my head. "I'm sure she's not. I went down and talked to her last night -

they have her chained at the edge of the water, where the midges are bad. I told

you about it."

Jonas reached for the wine himself, his metal hand clinking when it met the cup.

"You told me that she was beautiful, and that she had black hair like-"

"Thecla. But Morwenna's is straight. Thecla's curled."

"Like Thecla, whom you seem to have loved as I love your friend Jolenta. I

confess you had a great deal more time to fall in love than I did. And you told

me she said her husband and child had died of some sickness, probably from bad

water. The husband had been quite a bit older than she."

around my bare shoulders. "Clients who have been exposed by the authorities like
that have usually been stoned. When we see them they're bruised, and often
they've lost a few teeth. Sometimes they have broken bones. The women have been
raped."
"You say she's beautiful. Perhaps people think she's innocent. Perhaps they took
pity on her."
I picked up Terminus Est, drew her, and let the soft sheath fall away.
"The innocent have enemies. They are afraid of her."
We went out together.
When I had entered the inn, I had to push my way through the mob of drinkers.
Now it opened before me. I wore my mask and carried Terminus Est unsheathed
across my shoulder. Outside, the sounds of the fair stilled as we went forward
until nothing remained but a whispering, as though we strode through a

taken forth

Barnoch. The alcalde wore his yellow gown of office and his gold chain.

By ancient custom, we must not use the steps (although I have seen Master

Gurloes assist his vault to the scaffold with his sword, in the court before the

Bell Tower). I was, very possibly, the only person present who knew of the

tradition; but I did not break it, and a great roar, like the voice of some beast, escaped the crowd as I leaped up with my cloak billowing about me.

"Increate," read the caloyer, "it is known to us that those who will perish here

are no more evil in your sight than we. Their hands run with blood. Ours also."

I examined the block. Those used outside the immediate supervision of the guild

are notoriously bad: "Wide as a stool, dense as a fool, and dished, as a rule."

This one fulfilled the first two specifications in the proverbial description only too well, but by the mercy of Holy Katharine it was actually slightly

today . . ."

I posed, legs wide as I leaned upon my sword as if I were in complete control of

the ceremony, though the truth was that I did not know which of them had drawn

the short ribbon.

"You, the hero who will destroy the black worm that devours the sun; you for

whom the sky parts as a curtain; you whose breath shall wither vast Erebus,

Abaia, and Scylla who wallow beneath the wave; you that equally live in the

shell of the smallest seed in the farthest forest, the seed that hath rolled into the dark where no man sees."

The woman Morwenna was coming up the steps, preceded by the alcalde and followed

by a man with an iron spit who used it to prod her. Someone in the crowd shouted

an obscene suggestion.

". . . have mercy on those who had no mercy. Have mercy on us, who shall have

crowd), it

struck me that he was frightened. He would have to witness everything that was

done to both prisoners at close range. I smiled, though my mask concealed it.

". . . of respect for your sex. But you shall be branded on the right cheek and

the left, your legs broken, and your head struck from your body."

(I hoped they had had sense enough to remember that a brazier of coals would be required.)

"Through the power of the high justice laid upon my unworthy arm by the

condescension of the Autarch - whose thoughts are the music of his subjects - I

do now declare . . . I do now declare . . ."

He had forgotten it. I whispered the words: "That your moment has come upon

you."

"I do now declare that your moment has come on you, Morwenna."

"If you have pleas for the Conciliator, speak them in your heart."

Clearly but not loudly, Morwenna said, "I know that most of you think me guilty.

I am innocent. I would never do the horrible things you have accused me of."

The crowd drew closer to hear her.

"Many of you are my witnesses that I loved Stachys. I loved the child Stachys gave me."

A patch of color caught my eye, purple-black in the strong spring sunshine. It

was such a bouquet of threnodic roses as a mute might carry at a funeral. The

woman who held them was Eusebia, whom I had met when she tormented Morwenna at

the riverside. As I watched her, she inhaled their perfume rapturously, then

employed their thorny stems to open a path for herself through the crowd, so

that she stood just at the base of the scaffold. "These are for you, Morwenna.

Die before they fade."

forgive you now."

Eusebia was about to speak again, but I silenced her with a look. The gap-toothed, grinning man beside her waved, and with something of a start I

recognized Hethor.

"Are you ready?" Morwenna asked me. "I am."

Jonas had just set a bucket of glowing charcoal on the scaffold. From it thrust

what was presumably the handle of a suitable inscribed iron; but there was no

chair. I gave the alcalde a glance I intended to be significant.

I might have been looking at a post. At last I said, "Have we a chair, Your

Worship?"

"I sent two men to fetch one. And some rope."

"When?" (The crowd was beginning to stir and murmur.)

"A few moments ago."

The evening before he had assured me that everything would be in readiness, but

there was no point in reminding him of that now. There is no one, as I have

cowardly client, mounting the steps in the full knowledge that his eyes
are to

be plucked out, will in nineteen cases from a score conduct himself
better. Even

a shy cenobite, unused to the sounds of men and diffident to the point of
tears,

can be better relied on.

Someone called, "Get it over with!"

I looked at Morwenna. With her famished face and clear complexion,
her pensive

smile and large, dark eyes, she was a prisoner likely to arouse quite
undesirable feelings of sympathy in the crowd.

"We could seat her on the block," I told the alcalde. I could not resist
adding,

"It's more suited to that anyway."

"There's nothing to tie her with."

I had permitted myself a remark too many already, so I forbore giving
my opinion

of those who require their prisoners bound.

Instead, I laid Terminus Est fiat behind the block, made Morwenna sit
down,

her," he said.

I had been hoping to avoid that, but I helped Morwenna to rise. With her right

hand in mine, as though we were taking part in a country dance, we made a slow,

formal circuit of the platform. Hethor was beside himself with delight, and

though I tried to shut out the sound of his voice, I could hear him boasting of

his acquaintance with me to the people around him. Eusebia held up her bouquet

to Morwenna, calling, "Here, you'll need these soon enough."

When we had gone once around, I looked at the alcalde, and after the pause

necessitated by his wondering at the occasion for the delay, received the signal

to proceed.

Morwenna whispered, "Will it be over soon?"

"It is almost over now." I had seated her on the block again, and was picking up

on

flesh, the sound of the femurs breaking came as clear as the crack,
crack of a

winning boxer's left-hand, right-hand blows. For an instant Morwenna
remained

poised on the block, fainted but not fallen; in that instant I took a
backward

step and severed her neck with the smooth, horizontal stroke that is so
much

more difficult to master than the downward.

To be candid, it was not until I saw the up-jetting fountain of blood and
heard

the thud of the head striking the platform that I knew I had carried it off.

Without realizing it, I had been as nervous as the alcalde.

That is the moment when, again by ancient tradition, the customary
dignity of

the guild is relaxed. I wanted to laugh and caper. The alcalde was
shaking my

shoulder and babbling as I wished to myself; I could not hear what he
said -

"Will you cut my wife's (husband's) hair too?" "Half a measure of sausage when

you're done with that." "Can I have her hat?"

I laughed at them all and was feigning to toss the head to them when someone

plucked at my ankle. It was Eusebia, and I knew before her first word that she

was under that compulsion to speak I had often observed among the clients in our

tower. Her eyes were sparkling with excitement, and her face was twisted by her

attempt to get my attention, so that she looked simultaneously older and younger

than she had appeared before. I could not make out what she was shouting and

bent to listen.

"Innocent! She was innocent!"

This was no time to explain that I had not been Morwenna's judge. I only nodded.

"She took Stachys - from me! Now she's dead. Do you understand? She was innocent

Hethor grasped her arm and pointed to me. "My master! Mine! My own!"

"So it was somebody else. Or sickness after all-"

I shouted: "To the Demiurge alone belongs all justice!" The crowd was still

noisy, though it had quieted a trifle by this time.

"But she stole my Stachys, and now she's gone." Louder than ever: "Oh, wonderful! She's gone!" With that, Eusebia plunged her face into the bouquet as

though to fill her lungs to bursting with the roses' cloying perfume. I dropped

Morwenna's head into the basket that awaited it and wiped my sword blade with

the piece of scarlet flannel Jonas handed me. When I noticed Eusebia again she

was lifeless, sprawled among a circle of onlookers.

At the time I thought little of it, only supposing that her heart had failed in her excess of joy. Later that afternoon the alcalde had her bouquet examined by

an apothecary, who found among the petals a strong but subtle poison he could

separated, perhaps, by the abyss of eons. Though what I have already written -

from the locked gate to the fair at Saltus - embraces most of my adult life, and

what remains to be recorded concerns a few months only, I feel I am less than

half concluded with my narrative. In order that it shall not fill a library as great as old Ultan's, I will (I tell you now plainly) pass over many things.

I

have recounted the execution of Agia's twin brother Agilus because of its

importance to my story, and that of Morwenna because of the unusual circumstances surrounding it. I will not recount others unless they hold some

special interest. If you delight in another's pain and death, you will gain little satisfaction from me. Let it be sufficient to say that I performed the prescribed operations on the cattle thief, which terminated in his execution; in

the future, when I describe my travels, you are to understand that I practiced

the mystery of our guild where it was profitable to do so, though I do not

I found, to be popular with the mob and known to everyone; but it is tiring too,
and after a time one grows weary of answering the same simple-minded questions
again and again, and of politely refusing invitations to drink.
There had been a slight disagreement with the alcalde concerning the compensation I was to receive for my work, my understanding having been that in
addition to the quarter-payment made when I was engaged, I would receive full
payment for each client upon death, while the alcalde had intended, so he said,
that full payment should be made only after all three were attended to. I would
never have agreed to that, and liked it less than ever in the light of the green
man's warning (which out of loyalty to Vodalus I had kept to myself). But after
I had threatened not to appear on the following afternoon I was paid, and
everything peaceably resolved.

in our ewer the night before, after I had examined the Claw in secret.

Jonas, observing me, I think, as I stared at the pale red fluid, poured a cup of

his own and said, "You must remember that you are not responsible for the

sentences. If you had not come here, they would have been punished eventually

anyway, and probably would have suffered worse in less skilled hands."

I asked him what he thought he was talking about.

"I can see it troubles you . . . what happened today."

"I thought it went well," I said.

"You know what the octopus remarked when he got out of the mermaid's kelp bed:

'I'm not impugning your skill - quite the opposite. But you look as if you could

use a little cheering up.' "

"We're always a little despondent afterward. That's what Master Palaemon always

said, and I've found it true in my own case. He called it a purely mechanical

proceeded smoothly after we decided not to wait for the chair. I exercised my skills to applause, and I was the focus of admiration. There's a feeling of lassitude afterward. Master Palaemon used to talk of crowd melancholy and court melancholy, and said that some of us have both, some have neither, and some have one but not the other. Well, I have crowd melancholy; I don't suppose I'll ever have the chance, in Thrax, of discovering whether I also have court melancholy or not."

"And what is that?" Jonas was looking down into his wine cup.

"A torturer, let's say a master at the Citadel, is occasionally brought into contact with exultants of the highest degree. Suppose there's some exceedingly sensitive prisoner who's thought to possess important information. An official of lofty standing is likely to be delegated to attend such a prisoner's examination. Very often he will have had little experience with the more

"No. Aren't you going to eat any of this meat?"

"Neither have I, but I've heard about them, and that's why I was tense.

Times

when the client has broken away and fled into the crowd. Times when several

strokes were needed to part the neck. Times when a torturer lost all confidence

and was unable to proceed. When I vaulted onto that scaffold, I had no way of

knowing that none of those things was going to happen to me. If they had, I

might have been finished for life,"

" 'Still, it's a terrible way to earn a living.' That's what the thorn-bush said to the shrike, you know."

"I really don't-" I broke off because I had seen something move on the farther

side of the room. At first I thought it was a rat, and I have a pronounced dislike of them; I have seen too many clients bitten in the oubliette under

our

tower.

"What is it?"

Dearest Severian:

From one of the kind men who are assisting me, I have learned you are
in the

village of Saltus, not far away. It seems too good to be true, but now I
must

discover whether you can forgive me.

I swear to you that any suffering you have endured for my sake was not
by my

choice. From the first, I wanted to tell you everything, but the others
would

not hear of it. They judged that no one should know but those who had
to know

(which meant no one but themselves), and at last told me outright that if
I did

not obey them in everything they would forgo the plan and leave me to
die. I

knew you would die for me, and so I dared to hope that you would have
chosen, if

you could choose, to suffer for me too. Forgive me.

But now I am away and almost free - my own mistress so long as I obey
the simple

That was

because my patron, the good Father Inire, had charged him to be strictly attentive to me.

At length, when it became clear that the Autarch would not free me, Father Inire

arranged to do so himself. I do not know what threats were made to Master

Gurloes, or what bribes were offered him. But they were sufficient, and a few

days before my death - as you thought, dearest Severian - he explained to me how

the matter was to be arranged. It was not enough, of course, that I be freed. I

must be freed in such a way that no search should be made for me. That meant it

needs appear that I was dead; yet the instructions Master Gurloes had received

had charged him strictly not to let me die.

You will now be able to fathom for yourself how we cut through this tangle of

made a shallow cut on my arm, crouched near the door so some blood
would run
beneath it, then smeared my throat and fell across the bed for you to
see when
you looked into my prison.
Did you look? I lay as still as death. My eyes were closed, but I seemed
to feel
your pain when you saw me there. I nearly wept, and I recall how
frightened I
was that you might see the tears welling up. At last I heard your
footsteps, and
I bandaged my arm and washed my face and neck. After a time Master
Gurloes came
and took me away. Forgive me.
Now I would see you again, and if Father Inire wins a pardon for me as
he has
solemnly pledged himself to do, there is no reason why we need ever
part again.
But come to me at once - I am awaiting his messenger, and if he arrives
I must

Here I must impart to you a grave secret, which you must by no means
reveal to

others. This mine is a treasure house of the Autarch's, and in it he has
stored

great sums of coined money, bullion, and gems against a day in which
he may be

forced from the Phoenix Throne. It is guarded by certain servitors of
Father

Inire's, but you need have no fear of them. They have been instructed to
obey

me, and I have told them of you, and ordered them to permit you to
pass without

challenge. Entering the mine, then, follow the water-course until you
reach the

end, where it issues from a stone. Here I wait, and here I write, in the
hope

that you will forgive your

THECLA

I cannot describe the surge of joy I felt as I read and reread this letter.

ready to help me.

"I need your animal," I said. "May I take her?"

"Gladly. But-

I was already unbolting the door. "you cannot come. If all goes well, I'll see

that she is returned to you."

As I raced down the stair and into the innyard, the letter spoke in my mind in

Thecla's very voice; and by the time I entered the stable I was a lunatic indeed. I looked for Jonas's merychip, but instead saw before me a great

destrier, his back higher than my eyes. I had no notion who might have ridden

him into this peaceful village, and I gave it no thought. Without hesitating an

instant I sprang onto his back, drew Terminus Est, and with a stroke severed the

reins that tethered him.

I have never seen a better mount. He was out of the stable in one bound, and in

two, lunging into the village street. For the space of a breath I feared he

I am no great rider now, and was still less one then. Despite the high saddle, I think I would have tumbled from the back of an inferior animal before we had covered half a league; but my stolen destrier moved, for all his speed, as smoothly as a shadow. A shadow indeed we must have appeared, he with his black hide, I in my fuligin cloak. He had not slackened his pace before we splashed across the brook mentioned in the letter. I checked him there - partly by grasping his halter, more by speech, to which he harkened as a brother might.

There was no path on either side of the water, and we had not traced it far before trees rimmed the banks. I guided him into the brook then (though he was loath to go) where we made our way up foaming races as a man climbs steps, and swam deep pools.

their squared edges I knew they were the work of hands, and that we
were in the
region of the mines, with the wreck of some great city below us. Our
way was
steeper, and for all his mettle he faltered sometimes on sliding stones,
so that
I was forced to dismount and lead him. In this way we passed through a
series of
little, dreaming hollows, each dark in the shadows of its high sides, but
each
flecked in places with green moonlight, each ringing with the sound of
water -
but with that sound only, and otherwise wrapped in silence.
At last we entered a vale smaller and narrower than any of the others;
and at
the end of it, a chain or so off where the moonlight spilled upon a sheer
elevation, I saw a dark opening. The brook had its origin there, flooding
out
like saliva from the lips of petrified titan. I found a patch of ground
beside
the water sufficiently level for my mount to stand and contrived to tie him

I had my hands inside the opening when I heard, or thought I heard,
some sound
from the vale behind me. I paused, and turned my head to look back.
The rush of
the water would have drowned any noise less commanding than a bugle
call or an
explosion, and it had drowned this, yet still I had sensed something - the
note
of stone falling upon stone, perhaps, or the splash of something
plunging into
the water.
The vale seemed peaceful and silent. Then I saw my destrier shift his
stance,
his proud head and forward-cocked ears coming for an instant into the
light. I
decided that what I had heard was nothing more than the striking of his
steel-shod feet against the rock as he stamped in discontent at being so
closely
tethered. I drew my body into the mine entrance, and by doing so, as I
later
learned, saved my life.

as I had

when I had led the destrier up it. Terminus Est was slung over my left shoulder,

and I had no fear that the tip of her sheath might be wet by the stream, for the

ceiling of the tunnel was so low that I walked bent double. So I proceeded for a

long time, fearing always that I had come wrong, and that Thecla waited for me

elsewhere, and would wait in vain.

06 BLUE LIGHT

I grew so accustomed to the sound of the icy water that had you asked me I

should have said I walked in silence; but it was not so, and when, most suddenly, the constricted tunnel opened into a large chamber equally dark, I

indeed,

though you must recall that I had been told that such guards as might be
in the

mine had been warned of my arrival and instructed to do me no harm. I
called

Thecla's name.

And the echoes answered: "Thecla . . . Thecla . . . Thecla . . ."

Then silence again.

I remembered that I was to have followed the water until it welled from a
rock,

and that I had not done so. Possibly it trickled through as many galleries
here

beneath the hill as it had through dells outside it. I began to wade again,
feeling my way at each step for fear I might plunge over my head with
the next.

I had not taken five strides when I heard something, far off yet distinct,
above

the whispering of the now smoothly flowing water. I had not taken five
more when

I saw light.

sometimes of an

impure yellowish green. It was impossible to say how far it was, and it seemed

to possess no shape. For a time it shimmered before my sight; and I, still

following the stream, splashed toward it. Then it was joined by another.

It is difficult for me to concentrate on the events of the next few minutes.

Perhaps everyone holds in his subconscious certain moments of horror, as our

oubliette held, in its lowest inhabited level, those clients whose minds had

long ago been destroyed or transformed into consciousness no longer human. Like

them, these memories shriek and lash the walls with their chains, but are seldom

brought high enough to see the light.

What I experienced under the hill remains with me as they remained with us,

something I endeavor to lock within the furthest recesses of my mind but am from

now, but I have small comfort in that.)

The light I had seen was joined by a second, as I have described, then
the first

two by a third, and the first three by a fourth, and still I went on. Soon
there

were too many of the lights to count; but not knowing what they were, I
was

actually comforted and encouraged by the sight of them, imagining each
perhaps

to be a spark from a torch of some kind not known to me, a torch held
by one of

the guards mentioned in the letter. When I had taken a dozen more
steps, I saw

that these flecks of light were coalescing into a pattern, and that the
pattern

was a dart or arrowhead pointed toward myself. Then I heard, very
faintly, such

a roaring as I used to hear from the tower called the Bear when the
beasts were

given their food. Even then, I think, I might have escaped if I had turned
and

By this time the uncertain, hueless light these stars shed had increased
enough
for me to see as looming shadows the shapes about me. To either side
were masses
whose angular sides suggested that they were works of men - it seemed
I walked
in the buried city (here not collapsed under the weight of the overlaying
soil)
from which the miners of Saltus delved their treasures. Among these
masses stood
squat pillars of an ordered irregularity such as I have sometimes noticed
in
ricks of firewood, from which every stick protrudes yet goes to make the
whole.
These glinted softly, throwing back the corpse light of the moving stars
as
something less sinister, or at least more beautiful, than they had
received.
For a moment I wondered at these pillars; then I looked at the star-
shapes

shapes

like men, small only because the cavern in which I stood was more vast than I

had ever conceived that such a place could be. And the men, who seemed not men,

being thicker of shoulder and more twisted than men, were rushing toward me. The

roar I heard was the sound of their voices.

I turned, and when I found I could not run through the water mounted the bank

where the dark structures stood. By that time they were almost upon me, and some

were moving wide to my right and left and cut me off from the outer world.

They were terrible in a fashion I am not certain I can explain - like apes in

that they had hairy, crooked bodies, long-armed, short-legged, and thick-necked.

Their teeth were like the fangs of smilodons, curved and saw-edged, extending a

desires of

thousands, so these men were wrapped in the guise of lurid apes, and knew it. As

they ringed me, I could see that knowledge, and it was the worse because those

eyes were the only part of them that did not glow.

I gulped air to shout Thecla once more. Then I knew, and closed my lips, and

drew Terminus Est.

One, larger or at least bolder than the rest, advanced on me. He carried a

short-hafted mace whose shaft had once been a thigh bone. Just out of sword-reach he threatened me with it, roaring and slapping the metal head of his

weapon in a long hand.

Something disturbed the water behind me, and I turned in time to see one of the

glowing man-apes fording the stream. He leaped backward as I slashed at him, but

the square blade-tip caught him below the armpit. So fine was that blade, so

my

attackers in view, I backed into it and began slowly to move toward the point

where it ran to the outside world. I felt that if I could once reach the constricted tunnel I would be safe; but I knew too that they would never permit

me to do so.

They gathered more thickly around me until there must have been several hundred.

The light they gave was so great then that I could see that the squared masses I

had glimpsed earlier were indeed buildings, apparently of the most ancient

construction, built of seamless gray stone and soiled everywhere by the dung of

bats.

The irregular pillars were stacks of ingots in which each layer was laid across

the last. From their color I judged them to be silver. There were a hundred in

each stack, and surely many hundreds of stacks in the buried city.

and the screams.

One's sense of time goes mad at such moments. I recall the rush of the attack

and my own frantic blows, but in retrospect everything seems to have happened in

a breath. Two and five and ten were down, until the water around me was

blood-black in the corpse light, choked with dying and dead; but still they came. A blow on my shoulder was like the smash of a giant's fist.

Terminus Est

slipped out of my hand, and the weight of the bodies bore me down until I was

grappling blind under water. My enemy's fangs slashed my arm as two spikes

might, but he feared drowning too much, I think, to fight as he would have

otherwise. I thrust fingers into his wide nostrils and snapped his neck, though

it seemed tougher than a man's.

If I could have held my breath then until I worked my way to the tunnel, I might

as

pure profit, an undeserved gift. I had no weapon, and my right arm was
numbed

and torn. The man-apes were bold now. That boldness gave me a
moment more of

life, for so many crowded forward to kill me that they obstructed one
another. I

kicked one in the face. A second grasped my boot; there was a flash of
light,

and I (moved by what instinct or inspiration I do not know) snatched at it.
I

held the Claw.

As though it gathered to itself all the corpse light and dyed it with the
color

of life, it streamed forth a clear azure that filled the cavern. For one
heartbeat the man-apes halted as though at the stroke of a gong, and I
lifted

the gem overhead; what frenzy of terror I hoped for (if I really hoped at
all) I

cannot say now.

with no sound but the whispering of the stream; but now I could see everything,
from the stacks of tarnished silver ingots near to which I stood, to the very
end where the man-apes had descended a ruined wall, appearing to my sight then
like flecks of pale fire.
I began to back away. The man-apes looked up at that, and their faces were the
faces of human beings. When I saw them thus, I knew of the eons of struggles in
the dark from which their fangs and saucer eyes and flap ears had come to be.
We, so the mages say, were apes once, happy apes in forests swallowed by deserts
so long ago they have no names. Old men return to childish ways when at last the
years becloud their minds. May it not be that mankind will return (as an old man
does) to the decayed image of what once was, if at last the old sun dies and we

my escape from the most frantic battle, I would have despised myself if I
had
left her behind. To walk out unmolested without her was more than I
could bear.
I began to advance again, watching by the light of the Claw for her
gleaming
blade.
At this the faces of those strange, twisted men seemed to brighten, and
I saw by
their looks that they hoped I meant to remain with them, so that the
Claw and
its blue radiance would be theirs always. How terrible it seems now
when I set
the words on paper; yet it would not, I think, have been terrible in fact.
Bestial though they appeared, I could see adoration on every brute face,
so that
I thought (as I think now) that if they are worse in many ways than we
are,
these people of the hidden cities beneath Urth are better in others,
blessed
with an ugly innocence.

one of

you take her?"

I would not have spoken to them if I had not been half frantic with the fear of

losing her; but it seemed they understood. They began to mutter among themselves

and to me, and to make signs to me - without rising - to show they would fight

no more, extending their bludgeons and spears of pointed bone for me to take.

Then above the murmuring of the water and the muttering of the man-apes, I heard

a new sound, and at once they fell silent. If an ogre were to eat of the very

legs of the world, the grinding of his teeth would make just such a noise. The

bed of the stream (where I still stood) trembled under me, and the water, which

had been so clear, received a fine burden of silt, so that it looked as though a

gallery, silent now and swift as so many flitting bats. The light went with them, for it seemed, as I had somehow feared, that the Claw had flamed for them
and not for me.

A third step came from underground, and with it the last gleam winked out; but

at that instant, in that final gleam, I saw Terminus Est lying in the deepest

water. In the dark I bent, and putting the Claw back into the top of my boot,

took up my sword; and in so doing I discovered that the numbness had left my

arm, which now seemed as strong as it had before the fight.

A fourth step sounded and I turned and fled, groping before me with the blade.

What creature it was we had called from the roots of the continent I think I now

know. But I did not know then, and I did not know whether it was the roaring of

the man-apes, or the light of the Claw, or some other cause that had waked it. I

When I recall my second passage through the tunnel that led to the outer world,

I feel it occupied a watch or more. My nerves have never, I suppose, been fully

sound, tormented as they have always been by a relentless memory. Then they were

keyed to the highest pitch, so that to take three strides seemed to exhaust a

lifetime. I was frightened, of course. I have never been called a coward since I

was a small boy, and on certain occasions various persons have commented on my

courage. I have performed my duties as a member of the guild without flinching,

fought both privately and in war, climbed crags, and several times nearly drowned. But I believe there is no other difference between those who are called

courageous and those who are branded craven than that the second are fearful

by their bravery, if they have had no forewarning of their danger.

Master Gurloes, whom I had supposed to be of the most dauntless courage when I

was a boy, was unquestionably a coward. During the period when Drotte was

captain of apprentices, Roche and I used to alternate, turn and turn about, in

servicing Master Gurloes and Master Palaemon; and one night, when Master Gurloes

had retired to his cabin but instructed me to stay to fill his cup for him, he

began to confide in me.

"Lad, do you know the client Ia? An armiger's daughter and quite good-looking."

As an apprentice I had few dealings with clients; I shook my head.

"She is to be abused."

I had no idea what he meant, so I said, "Yes, Master."

"That's the greatest disgrace that can befall a woman. Or a man either.

To be

abused. By the torturer." He touched his chest and threw back his head to look

At last I understood what he meant, and I told him that I had not realized it would be permissible, since I was still an apprentice; but that if he gave the order, I would certainly obey.

"I imagine you would. She's not bad, you know. But tall, and I don't like them tall. There's an exultant's bastard in that family a generation or so back, you may be sure. Blood will confess itself, as they say, though only we know all that means. Want to do it?"

He held out his cup and I poured. "If you wish me to, Master." The truth was that I was excited at the thought. I had never possessed a woman.

"You can't. I must. What if I were to be questioned? Then too, I must certify it - sign the papers. A master of the guild for twenty years, and I've never falsified papers. I suppose you think I can't do it."

The thought had never crossed my mind, just as the opposite thought (that he

they are very

drunk, and he strode over to a cabinet quite confidently, though I thought for a

moment that he was going to drop the blue porcelain jar he took down.

"This is a rare and potent drug." He took the lid off and showed me a dark brown

powder. "It never fails. You'll have to use it someday, so you ought to know

about it. Just take as much as you could get under your fingernail on the end of

a knife, you follow me? If you take too much, you won't be able to appear in

public for a couple of days."

I said, "I'll remember, Master."

"Of course it's a poison. They all are, and this is the best - a little more than that would kill you. And you mustn't take it again until the moon changes,

understand?"

"Perhaps you'd better have Brother Corbinian weigh the dose, Master."
Corbinian

took an

iron phallus. It was about a span and a half long and had a leather thong through the end opposite the tip.

It must seem idiotic to you who read this, but for an instant I could not imagine what the thing was for, despite the somewhat exaggerated realism of its

design. I had a wild notion that the wine had rendered him childish, as a little

boy is who supposes there is no essential difference between his wooden mount

and a real animal. I wanted to laugh.

" 'Abuse,' that's their word. That, you see, is where they've left us an out."

He had slapped the iron phallus against his palm - the same gesture, now that I

think of it, that the man-ape who had threatened me had made with his mace. Then

I had understood and had been gripped by revulsion.

But even that revulsion was not the emotion I would feel now in the same

statue, and perhaps had been. Yet I saw him on another occasion, when the thing

had to be done immediately for fear the order could not otherwise be carried out

before the client died, act at once, and without powder or phallus, and without difficulty.

Master Gurloes was a coward then. Still, perhaps his cowardice was better than

the courage I would have possessed in his position, for courage is not always a

virtue. I had been courageous (as such things are counted) when I had fought the

man-apes, but my courage was no more than a mixture of foolhardiness, surprise,

and desperation; now, in the tunnel, when there was no longer any cause for

fear, I was afraid and nearly dashed my brains out against the low ceiling; but

I did not pause or even slacken speed before I saw the opening before me, made

ascent. I had just gained the third when two quarrels struck the rock
near my
head. One must have wedged its point in some flaw in the ancient work,
for it
remained in place, blazing with white fire. I recall how astonished I was,
and
also how I hoped, in the few moments before the next struck nearer still
and
nearly blinded me, that the arbalests were not of the kind that bring a
new
projectile to the string when cocked, and thus are so swift to shoot
again.
When the third exploded against the stone, I knew they were, and
dropped before
the marksmen who had missed could fire yet again.
There was, as I ought to have known there would be, a deep pool where
the stream
fell from the mouth of the mine. I got another ducking, but since I was
already
wet it did no harm, and in fact quenched the flecks of fire that had clung
to my

They and

the woman who stood between them were staring at the place where
the cascade

fell.

As I drew Terminus Est for the final time that night, I called, "Over here,
Agia."

I had guessed earlier that it was she, but as she turned (more swiftly
than

either of the men with her) I glimpsed her face in the moonlight. It was a
terrible face to me (though for all her self-depreciation so lovely)
because the

sight of it meant that Thecla was surely dead.

The man nearest me was fool enough to try to bring his arbalest to his
shoulder

before he pulled the trigger. I ducked and cut his legs from under him,
while

the other's quarrel whizzed over my head like a meteor.

By the time I had straightened up again, the second man had dropped
his arbalest

and was drawing his hanger. Agia was quicker, making a cut at my neck
with an

Before I realized that it was not at me that he was looking, something feverishly gleaming bounded past me. I heard the ugly sound of a breaking skull.

Agia turned as gracefully as any cat and would have spitted the man-ape, but I

struck the poisoned blade from her hand and sent it skittering into the pool.

She tried to flee then; I caught her by the hair and jerked her off her feet.

The man-ape was mumbling over the body of the arbalestier he had killed -

whether he sought to loot it or was merely curious about its appearance I have

never known. I set my foot on Agia's neck, and the man-ape straightened and

turned to face me, then dropped in the crouching posture I had seen in the mine

and held up his arms. One hand was gone; I recognized the clean cut of Terminus

Est. The man-ape mumbled something I could not understand.

I tried to reply. "Yes, I did that. I am sorry. We are at peace now."

saw the Claw of the Conciliator." Then it came to me that he must have followed me outside for another glimpse of the gem, braving the fear engendered by whatever we had waked below the hill. I thrust my hand into the top of my boot and pulled out the Claw, and the instant I had done so realized what a fool I had been to put the boot and its precious cargo so close to Agia's reach, for her eyes went wide with cupidity at the moment that the man-ape abased himself further and stretched forth his piteous stump.

For a moment we were posed, all three, and a strange group we must have looked in that eerie light. An astonished voice - Jonas's - called "Severian!" from the heights above. Like the trumpet note in a shadow play that dissolves all feigning, that shout ended our tableau. I lowered the Claw and concealed it in

looking at the corpses of the men who had been with Agia.

I said, "This wasn't the real fight."

Agia was sitting up, rubbing her neck and shoulders. "There were four, and we

would have had you, but the bodies of those things, those firefly tiger-men,

started pitching out of the hole, and two were afraid and slipped away."

Jonas scratched his head with his steel hand, a sound like the currying of a

charger. "I saw what I thought I saw, then. I had begun to wonder."

I asked what he thought he had seen.

"A glowing being in a fur robe making an obeisance to you. You were holding up a

cup of burning brandy, I think. Or was it incense? What's this?" He bent and

picked up something from the edge of the bank, where the man-ape had crouched.

"A bludgeon."

"Yes, I see that." There was a loop of sinew at the end of the bone handle, and

and her

twin, and described the death of Agilus.

"So now she's come to join him." Jonas looked from her to the crimson length of

Terminus Est and gave a little shrug. "I left my merychip up there, and perhaps

I ought to go and look after her. That way I can say afterward that I saw nothing. Was this woman the one who sent the letter?"

"I should have known. I had told her about Thecla. You don't know about Thecla,

but she did, and that was what the letter was about. I told her while we were

going through the Botanic Gardens in Nessus. There were mistakes in the letter

and things Thecla would never have said, but I didn't stop to think of them when

I read it."

I stepped away and replaced the Claw in my boot, thrusting it deep. "Maybe you

had better attend to your animal, as you say. My own seems to have broken loose,

hired to shoot you when you came wading up the brook. They were
stupid and
stubborn as men always are, and said they wouldn't waste their quarrels
- that
the creatures inside would kill you. I rolled down a stone, the biggest I
could
move, but by then it was too late."
"They had told you about the mine?"
Agia shrugged, and the moonlight turned her bare shoulders to
something more
precious and more beautiful than flesh. "You're going to kill me now, so
what
does it matter? All the local people tell stories about this place. They say
those things come out at night during storms and take animals from the
cowsheds,
and sometimes break into the houses for children. There's also a legend
that
they guard treasure inside, so I put that in the letter too. I thought if you
wouldn't come for your Thecla, you might for that. Can I stand with my
back to
you, Severian? If it's all the same, I don't want to see it coming."

end of the

guard, the head that marked the female edge.

And a little later, again, "Strike!"

But by that time I had climbed out of the vale.

08 THE CULTELLARII

We returned to the inn in silence, and so slowly that the eastern sky was gray

before we reached the town. Jonas was unsaddling the merychip when I said, "I

didn't kill her."

He nodded without looking at me. "I know."

"Did you watch? You said you wouldn't."

"I heard her voice when you were practically standing beside me. Will she try

again?"

I waited, thinking, while he carried the little saddle into the tack room. When

"I don't think it would have been right - I'm only saying that I would have done

it. I would have imagined myself stabbed in my sleep, dying on a dirty bed

somewhere, and I would have swung that thing. It wouldn't have been right."

Jonas lifted the mace the man-ape had left behind, and chopped with it in a

parody, brutal and graceless, of a sword cut. The head caught the light and both

of us gasped.

It was of pounded gold.

Neither of us felt any desire to join the festivities the fair still proffered to those who had caroused all night. We retired to the room we shared, and

prepared for sleep. When Jonas offered to share his gold with me, I refused.

Earlier, I had had money in plenty and the advance on my fee, and he had been

it; but I did not, and contrived instead to slip my foot from my wet boot in such a way that the Claw fell into the toe.

I woke about noon, and after satisfying myself that the Claw was still there,

roused Jonas as he had asked me. "There should be jewelers at the fair who'll

give me some sort of price for this," he said. "At least, I can bargain with them. Want to come with me?"

"We should have something to eat, and by the time we're through, I'll be due at

the scaffold."

"Back to work then."

"Yes." I had picked up my cloak. It was sadly torn, and my boots were dull and

still slightly damp.

"One of the maids here can sew that for you. It won't be as good as new, but it

will be a lot better than it is now." Jonas swung open the door. "Come along, if

you're hungry. What are you looking so thoughtful about?"

He smiled. "A cacogen?"

"An outlander."

Jonas shook his head, then nodded. "Yes, I suppose I am. But you - you have this

talisman that lets you command nightmares, and you have discovered a hoard of

silver. Yet you talk about it to me as someone else might talk about the weather."

I took a bit of bread. "It is strange, I agree. But the strangeness resides in

the Claw, the thing itself, and not in me. As for talking about it to you, why

shouldn't I? If I were to steal your gold, I could sell it and spend the money,

but I don't think things would go well for someone who stole the Claw. I don't

know why I think that, but I do, and of course Agia stole it. As for the silver-

"And she put it in your pocket?"

"In the sabretache that hangs from my belt. She thought her brother would kill

"The Pelerines. They stopped us as we were trying to get out. Jonas, do you think it's true that some people can read the thoughts of others?"

"Of course."

"Not everyone is so sure. Master Gurloes used to speak favorably of the idea, but Master Palaemon wouldn't hear of it. Still, I think the chief priestess of the Pelerines could, at least to some degree. She knew Agia had taken something, and that I had not. She made Agia strip so they could search her, but they didn't search me. Later they destroyed their cathedral, and I think that must have been because of the loss of the Claw - it was the Cathedral of the Claw, after all."

Jonas nodded thoughtfully.

"But none of this is what I wanted to ask you about. I'd like your opinion of

"Because you've been a sailor, and because of the story about the beans - the story you told at the gate. You must have seen my brown book when I was reading it upstairs. It tells all the secrets of the world, or at least what various mages have said they were. I haven't read it all or even half of it, though Thecla and I used to read an entry every few days and spend the time between readings arguing about it. But I've noticed that all the explanations in that book are simple, and seemingly childish."

"Like my story."

I nodded. "Your story might have come out of the book. When I first carried it to Thecla, I supposed it was intended for children, or for adults who enjoyed childish things. But when we had talked about some of the thoughts in it, I understood that they had to be expressed in that way or they couldn't be expressed at all. If the writer had wanted to describe a new way to make wine or

husbands: 'Before you ask more questions, think about whether you really want to know the answers.' "

"One last question," I said, "and then I promise I won't ask you anything more.

When we were going through the Wall, you said the things we saw in there were

soldiers, and you implied they had been stationed there to resist Abaia and the

others. Are the man-apes soldiers of the same kind? And if they are, what good

can human-sized fighters do when our opponents are as large as mountains? And

why didn't the old autarchs use human soldiers?"

Jonas had wrapped the mace in a rag and stood now shifting it from one hand to

the other. "That's three questions, and the only one I can answer for certain is

the second. I'll guess at the other two, but I'm going to hold you to your promise; this is the last time we're going to speak of these things.

still. Thus the servitors could be made to endure things that human soldiers would not. That may have been why they were used in the Wall. Or there may be some other explanation entirely."

Jonas paused and walked to the window, looking not into the street but up at the clouds. "I don't know whether your man-apes are the same kind of hybrid. The one

I saw looked quite human to me except for his pelt, so I would be inclined to

agree with you that they are human beings who have undergone some change in

their essential nature as a result of their life in the mines and their contact

with the relics of the city buried there. Urth is very old now. It's very old, and no doubt there have been many treasures hidden in bygone times.

Gold and

silver do not alter, but their guardians can suffer metamorphoses stranger than

those that turn grapes to wine and sand to pearls."

stared out and

up once more.

"All right," I conceded, "you don't have to answer that. But what about the

other question you pledged yourself to answer? How can human soldiers resist the monsters from the seas?"

"You were correct when you said Erebus and Abaia are as great as mountains, and

I admit that I was surprised you knew it. Most people lack the imagination to

conceive of anything so large, and think them no bigger than houses or ships.

Their actual size is so great that while they remain on this world they can

never leave the water - their own weight would crush them. You mustn't think of

them battering at the Wall with their fists, or tossing boulders about. But by

their thoughts they enlist servants, and they fling them against all rules that

Now I am come to a part of my story where I cannot help but write of something I

have largely avoided mentioning before. You that read it cannot but have noticed

that I have not scrupled to recount in great detail things that transpired years

ago, and to give the very words of those who spoke to me, and the very words

with which I replied; and you must have thought this only a conventional device

I had adopted to make my story flow more smoothly. The truth is that I am one of

those who are cursed with what is called perfect recollection. We cannot, as I

have sometimes heard foolishly alleged, remember everything. I cannot recall the

ordering of the books on the shelves in the library of Master Ultan, for example. But I can remember more than many would credit: the position of each

object on a table I walked past when I was a child, and even that I have

bearing his

sword.

Some say this power is linked to weak judgement - of that I am no judge. But it

has another danger, one I have encountered many times. When I cast my mind into

the past, as I am doing now and as I did then when I sought to recall my dream,

I remember it so well that I seem to move again in the bygone day, a day

old-new, and unchanged each time I draw it to the surface of my mind, its

eidolons as real as I. I can even now close my eyes and walk into Thecla's cell

as I did one winter evening; and soon my fingers will feel the heat of her garment while the perfume of her person fills my nostrils like the perfume of

lilies warmed before a fire. I lift her gown from her and embrace that ivory

body, feeling her nipples pressed to my face . . .

from whom it had come, and hoping it had revealed more than its
shaper
apprehended.
Again I bestride the mitred, leather-winged steed. Pelicans fly below us
with
stiffly formal strokes, and gulls wheel and keen.
Again I fall, tumbling through the abyss of air, whistling toward the sea,
yet
suspended, for a time, between wave and cloud. I arch my body, bring
down my
head, let my legs trail behind me like a banner, and so cleave the water
and see
floating in clear azure the head with hair of snakes and the many-
headed beast,
and then the swirling sand-garden far below. The giantesses lift arms
like the
trunks of sycamores, each finger tipped with an amaranthine talon. Then
very
suddenly, I who had been blind before understood why it was that Abaia
had sent

dream.

Hands grasped me like a doll, and as I dandled thus between the meretrices of

Abaia, I was lifted from my broad-armed chair in the inn of Saltus; yet still,

for perhaps a hundred heartbeats more, I could not rid my mind of the sea and

its green-haired women.

"He sleeps."

"His eyes are open."

A third voice: "Shall we bring the sword?"

"Bring it - there may be work for it."

The titanesses faded. Men in deerskin and rough wool held me on either side, and

one with a scarred face held the point of his dirk at my throat. The man on my

right had picked up Terminus Est with his free hand; he was the black-bearded

volunteer who had helped break open the sealed house.

"Someone's coming."

They forced us to stand with our faces to the wall while they bound our hands.

Our cloaks were draped over our shoulders afterward to hide the thongs, so that

we appeared to walk with our hands clasped behind us, and we were led out into

the innyard, where a huge baluchither shifted from foot to foot under a plain

howdah of iron and horn. The man who held my left arm reached up and struck the

beast at the hollow of the knee with the shaft of a goad to make him kneel, and

we were driven onto his back.

When Jonas and I had come to Saltus, our path had threaded hills of debris from

the mines, hills composed largely of broken stone and brick. When I had ridden

on the false errand of Agia's letter, I had galloped past more of these, though

Everything foul lay in tumbled heaps ten tunes and more the height of
the
baluchither's lofty back - obscene statues, canted and crumbling, and
human
bones to which strips of dry flesh and banks of hair still clung.
And with them ten thousand men and women; those who, in seeking a
private
resurrection, had rendered their corpses forever imperishable lay here
like
drunkards after their debauch, their crystal sarcophagi broken, their
limbs
relaxed in grotesque disarray, their clothing rotted or rotting, and their
eyes
blindly fixed upon the sky.
At first Jonas and I had attempted to question our captors, but they had
silenced us with blows. Now that the baluchither wound his way among
this
desolation, they seemed easier of mind, and I asked again where they
were taking
us. The man with the scarred face replied, "To the wild, the home of free
men

doubt, for

offering so blithely to rack one of his servants."

"I know him indeed," I said, and was about to tell the scarred man of my connection with Vodalus, whose life I had preserved in the last year before I

became captain of apprentices. But then I came to doubt if Vodalus would

remember it, and only said that if I had known Barnoch to be a servant of

Vodalus, I would on no account have agreed to perform his excruciation. I lied,

of course; for I had known, and had justified accepting my fee by the thought

that I would be able to spare Barnoch some suffering. The lie did me no good;

all three chortled, even the trainer who bestrode the baluchither's neck.

When their merriment had subsided, I said, "Last night I rode out of Saltus to

the northeast. Are we going that way now?"

"So that's where you were. Our master came seeking you, and came back

long." And then, to pass the time, he described to me the means by which his master dealt with captives, most of which were primitive in the extreme, and more productive of theatrical effects than of true agony.

As if some invisible hand had spread a curtain over us, the shadows of the trees fell upon the howdah. The glitter of billions of shards of glass was left behind

with the staring of the dead eyes, and we entered into the coolness and green

shade of the high forest. Among those mighty trunks even the baluchither, though

he stood three times the height of a man, seemed no more than a little, scurrying beast; and we who rode his back might have been pygmies from some

children's tale, bound for the anthill stronghold of a pixie monarch.

And it came to me that these trees had been hardly smaller when I was yet

unborn, and had stood as they stood now when I was a child playing among the

two thoughts I forged a mood by which I stood ready to grasp each smallest

chance to live, yet in which I cared not too much whether I saved myself or not.

By that mood, as I think, I did live; it has been so good a friend to me that I

have endeavored to wear it ever since, succeeding not always, but often.

"Severian, are you all right?"

It was Jonas who spoke. I looked at him, I think, in some wonder. "Yes.

Did I

seem ill?"

"For a moment."

"I was only reflecting on the familiarity of this place, seeking to understand

it. I think it recalls to me many summer days in our Citadel. These trees are

nearly as large as the towers there, and many of the towers are wrapped in ivy,

Agia and I were ferried to the island where the Botanic Gardens stands,
and then

later when we crossed the Lake of Birds. The motion is much like the
motion of

this beast, and it is as silent, save for a splashing, sometimes, when the
oar

goes into the water. I feel now that I'm traveling through the Citadel in a
flood, solemnly rowed."

At that Jonas looked so grave that I burst out laughing at the sight of his
face, and stood up, meaning (I think) to look over the side of the howdah
and

show by some remark about the forest floor that I was merely indulging
my fancy.

I had no sooner stood, however, than the scarred man rose too, and
holding his

dirk's point within a thumb of my throat told me to sit again. To spite him
I

shook my head.

He flourished his weapon. "Get down or I'll rip your belly open!"

"And lose the glory of bringing me back? I don't think so. Wait until the
others

other, and by opening the arms to the right and left draw the blade clear

-

sought to free it by pulling up, as if he were jerking a weed from a field.

In

this clumsy business he was taken off guard by one of the baluchither's rolling

steps, and lurched against the man with the scarred face. The edges of the

blade, keen enough to part a hair, cut them both; the man with the scarred face

threw himself backward, and Jonas, by hooking one of his feet behind the scarred

man's and pressing his leg with the sole of the other, managed to tumble him

over the railing of the howdah.

Meantime, the black-bearded man had dropped Terminus Est and was staring at his

wound, which was very long, though no doubt shallow. I knew that weapon as I

know my own hand, and it took only a moment to turn and crouch and grasp the

The contraction of his muscles snapped him erect, as often happens
when the
subject is not made to kneel; I think the spray of blood was the first sign
the
trainer had (so swiftly had it all taken place) that something was amiss.
He
looked back at us, and I was able to take him very neatly, swinging the
blade
one-handed in the horizontal stroke, as I leaned out of the howdah.
His head had no more than struck the ground when the baluchither
stepped between
two great trees growing so close together that he seemed to squeeze
himself like
a mouse through a crevice in a wall. Beyond lay a glade more open than
anything
I had seen in that forest - where grass grew as well as fern, and spots of
sunlight, unshaded with green and rich as orpiment, played over the turf.
Here
Vodalus had caused to be erected his throne, beneath a canopy woven
of flowering

the

baluchither's back and holding up my sword, red now to the hilt. A
hundred faces

turned toward us, with the face of the exultant on the throne among
them, and

the heart-shaped face of his consort; and in their eyes I saw what they
must

have seen at that moment: the great animal bestridden by a headless
man, its

forequarters dyed with his blood; myself standing erect upon its back,
with my

sword and fuligin cloak.

Had I slipped down and sought to flee, or tried to goad the baluchither to
greater speed, I would have died. Instead, by the virtue of the spirit that
had

entered me when I saw the long-dead bodies among the refuse of the
mines and the

eternal trees, I remained as I was; and the baluchither, with no one to
guide

him, trod forward steadily (Vodalus's followers dodging aside to make a
path for

one of

them, and perhaps the foremost. "I sent my men to fetch the headsman," he said.

"I perceive they succeeded."

I saluted with my sword, holding the hilt before my eyes as we were taught to do

when an exultant came to observe an execution in the Grand Court.

"Sieur, they

have brought you the anti-headsman - there was a time when your own would have

rolled on fresh-turned soil if it had not been for me."

He looked at me more closely then, at my face instead of at my sword and cloak,

and after a moment he said, "Yes, you were the youth. Has it been that long?"

"Just long enough, sieur."

"We will talk of this in private, but I have public business to do now. Stand

here." He pointed to the ground at the left of the dais.

I climbed from the baluchither with Jonas following me, and two grooms led the

scarcely any difference between the two except that the one was gray or white,

and the other brown and pale green. Then I believed I understood why all the

soldiers of the Autarch and all the thronging retainers of the exultants could

not subdue Vodalus - he occupied the mightiest fortress of Urth, greater far

than our Citadel, to which I had likened it.

At length he dismissed the crowd, each man and woman to his or her own place,

and came down from the dais to talk to me, bending over me as I might have bent

above a child.

"You served me once," he said. "For that I will spare your life whatever else

befalls, though it may be necessary that you remain my guest for a time. Knowing

that your life is no longer in danger, will you serve me again?"

The oath to the Autarch I had taken on the occasion of my elevation had not the

not to be found. That is not true -those who say so have always looked
in the
mistaken place. One who truly benefits another is for a moment at a
level with
the Pancreator, and in gratitude for that elevation will serve the other all
his
days; and so I told Vodalus.

"Good!" he said, and clapped me on the shoulder. "Come. Not far from
here we
have a meal prepared. If you and your friend will sit with me and eat, I
will
tell you what must be done."

"Sieur, I have disgraced my guild once. I only ask that I may not be
made to
disgrace it again."

"Nothing you do will be known," Vodalus said. And that satisfied me.

When I had saved him, mentally at least I had still been a boy, and to a boy all grown men appear lofty unless they are of very low stature indeed. I saw now that Vodalus was as tall as Thecla or taller, and that Thecla's half-sister Thea was as tall as she. Then I knew them to be truly of the exalted blood, and not armigers merely, such as Sieur Racho had been. It was with Thea that I had first fallen in love, worshipping her because she belonged to the man I had saved. Thecla I had loved, in the beginning, because she recalled Thea. Now (as autumn dies, and winter and spring, and summer comes again, the end of the year as it is its beginning) I loved Thea once more - because she recalled Thecla. Vodalus said, "You are an admirer of women," and I lowered my eyes. "I have been little in polite company, sieur. Please forgive me."

trifle surprised. I would have thought that a man in your profession would look

on us poor human beings much as a butcher does on cattle."

"Of that I cannot inform you, sieur. I have not been bred a butcher."

Vodalus laughed. "A touch! I am almost sorry now that you have consented to

serve me. If you had only elected to remain my prisoner, we would have had many

delightful conversations while I used you - as I had intended to - to cheap for

the unfortunate Barnoch's life. As it is, you will be away by morning. Yet I

think I have an errand for you that will consort well with your own inclinations."

"If it is your errand, sieur, it must."

"You are wasted on the scaffold." He smiled. "We will find better work for you

before long. But if you are to serve me well, you must understand something of

the position of the pieces on the board, and the goal of the game we play. Call

"That would be well enough, but it is only a step and not our final goal.

You

have come from the Citadel - I know, you see, something of your journeyings and

history -that great fortress of bygone days, so you must possess some feeling

for the past. Has it never struck you that mankind was richer by far, and happier too, a chiliarad gone than it is now?"

"Everyone knows," I said, "that we have fallen far from the brave days of the past."

"As it was then, so shall it be again. Men of Urth, sailing between the stars,

leaping from galaxy to galaxy, the masters of the daughters of the sun."

The Chatelaine Thea, who must have been listening to Vodalus though she had

showed no sign of it, looked across him to me and said in a sweet, cooing voice,

"Do you know how our world was renamed, torturer? The dawnmen went to red

me, though I do not see how any language could endure such confusion.

Vodulus listened to her as though he were impatient to speak himself, yet was

too well mannered to interrupt her.

"Then others - who would have drawn a people to the innermost habitable world

for their own reasons - took up the game as well, and called that world Skuld,

the World of the Future. Thus our own became Urth, the World of the Past."

"You are wrong in that, I fear," Vodulus told her. "I have it on good authority

that this world of ours has been called by that name from the utmost reaches of

antiquity. Still, your error is so charming that I would rather have it that you

are correct and I mistaken."

Thea smiled at that, and Vodulus turned again toward me. "Though it does not

the mastery of the universe."

He paused, and because he seemed to expect some comment from me, I said, "Sieur,

we are much diminished in wisdom from that age."

"Ah, now you strike to the heart. Yet with all your perspicacity, you mistake

it. No, we are not diminished in wisdom. We are diminished in power. Study has

advanced without letup, but even as men have learned all that is needful for

mastery, the strength of the world has been exhausted. We exist now, and

precariously, upon the ruin of those who preceded us. While some skim the air in

their fliers, ten thousand leagues in a day, we others creep upon the skin of

Urth, unable to go from one horizon to the next before the westernmost has

lifted itself to veil the sun. You spoke a moment ago of checkmating that mewling fool the Autarch. I want you to conceive now of two autarchs - two great

Now, of those two powers, which would you serve?"

The wind was stirring in the trees, and it seemed to me that everyone at the

table had fallen silent, listening to Vodalus and waiting for my reply. I said,

"The black, surely."

"Good! But as a man of sense you must understand that the way to reconquest

cannot be easy. Those who wish no change may sit hugging their scruples forever.

We must do everything. We must dare everything!"

The others had begun to talk and eat again. I lowered my voice until only

Vodalus could hear me. "Sieur, there is something I have not told you. I dare

not conceal it longer for fear you should think me faithless,"

He was a better intriguer than I, and turned away before he answered, pretending

to eat. "What is it? Out with it."

"Sieur," I said, "I have a relic, the thing they say is the Claw of the Conciliator."

"To whom should I give it, then?"

Vodalus chewed and swallowed. "I had heard from friends I have in Nessus that it

was gone. So you have it. You must keep it until you can dispose of it. Do not

try to sell it - it would be identified at once. Hide it somewhere. If you must,

throw it into a pit."

"But surely, sieur, it is very valuable."

"It is beyond value, which means it is worthless. You and I are men of sense."

Despite his words, there was a tinge of fear in his voice. "But the rabble believe it to be sacred, a performer of all manner of wonders. If I were to possess it, they would think me a desecrator and an enemy of the Theologoumenon.

Our masters would think me turned traitor. You must tell me-"

Just at that moment, a man I had not seen previously came running up to the

table with a look that indicated he bore urgent news. Vodalus rose and walked a

few paces away with him, looking very much, I thought, like a handsome

Thea, Jonas and me, and one other man.

"You are to join us," Thea said at last in her cooing voice. "Yet you do not

know our ways. Have you need of money?"

I hesitated, but Jonas said, "That's something that's always welcome, Chatelaine, like the misfortunes of an older brother."

"Shares will be set aside for you, from this day, of all we take. When you return to us, they will be given to you. Meanwhile I have a purse for each of

you to speed you on your way."

"We are going, then?" I asked.

"Were you not told so? Vodalus will instruct you at the supper."

I had supposed the meal we were eating would be the final one of the day, and

the thought must have been reflected in my face.

"There will be a supper tonight, when the moon is bright," Thea said.

"Someone

will be sent to fetch you." Then she quoted a scrap of verse:

"Dine at dawn to open your eyes,

Dine at noon that you be strong.

I told Thea, "I would speak with you, Chatelaine, when we have more leisure. I

know something that concerns your schoolmate."

She saw that I was serious in what I said, and I saw that she had seen.

Then we

followed Chuniaid through the trees for a distance, I suppose, of a league or

more, and at length reached a grassy bank beside a stream. "Wait here," he said.

"Sleep if you can. No one will come until after dark."

I asked, "What if we were to leave?"

"There are those all through this wood who know our liege's will concerning

you," he said, and turning on his heel, walked away.

Then I told Jonas what I had seen beside the opened grave, just as I have

written it here.

"I see," he remarked when I was finished, "why you will join this Vodalus. But

you must realize that I am your friend, not his. What I desire is to find the

woman called Agia while returning something we both know of to the women called

Pelrines."

He was smiling by the time he finished this list, and I was laughing.

"And though you remind me of the old man's kestrel, that sat on a perch for

twenty years and then flew off in all directions, I hope you achieve these things. But I trust you realize that it is possible - just barely possible, perhaps, but possible - that one or two of them may get in the way of four or

five of the others."

"What you're saying is very true," I admitted. "I'm striving to do all those things, and although you won't credit it, I am giving all my strength and as

much of my attention as can be of any benefit to all of them. Yet I have to

admit things aren't going as well as they might. My divided ambitions have

landed me in no better place than the shade of this tree, where I am a homeless

wanderer. While you, with your single-minded pursuit of one allpowerful

background, and I sought, without venturing direct questions, to draw him out. I

learned (or rather, I thought I did) that his father had been a craftsman; that

he had been raised by both parents in what he called the usual way, though it

is, in fact, rather rare; and that his home had been a seacoast town in the

south, but that when he had last visited it he had found it so much changed that

he had no desire to remain.

From his appearance, when I had first encountered him beside the Wall, I had

supposed him to be about ten years my elder. From what he said now (and to a

lesser extent from some earlier talks we had had) I decided he must be somewhat

older; he seemed to have read a good deal of the chronicles of the past, and I

was still too naive and unlettered myself, despite the attention Master Palaemon

fell silent to

watch her. She was coming toward us without having seen us, so that she moved in

the blind way people do who are merely following directions. At times a shaft of

sunlight fell upon her face, which, if it chanced to be in profile, suggested

Thecla's so strongly that the sight of it seemed to tear at my chest. She had

Thecla's walk as well, the proud phororhacos stalk that should never have been

caged.

"It must be a truly ancient family," I whispered to Jonas. "Look at her! Like a

dryad. It might be a willow walking."

"Those ancient families are the newest of all," he answered. "In ancient times

there was nothing like them."

I do not believe she was near enough to make out our words, but she seemed to

made her seem

less formidable, and seated she was hardly taller than we.

"I was her last friend," I said. "She told me they would try to make you persuade Vodalus to give himself up to save her. Did you know she was imprisoned?"

"Were you her servant?" Thea seemed to weigh me with her eyes. "Yes, I heard

they took her to that horrible place in the slums of Nessus, where I understand

she died very quickly."

I thought of the time I had spent waiting outside Thecla's door before the scarlet thread of blood came trickling from under it, but I nodded.

"How was she arrested - do you know?"

Thecla had told me the details, and I recounted them just as I had got them from

her, omitting nothing.

"I see," Thea said, and was silent for a moment, staring at the moving water. "I

have missed the court, of course. Hearing about those people and that business

of muffling her with a tapestry - that's so very characteristic - calls up the

region, and hunt."

Thea's face twisted in a bitter smile. "I have had enough of hunting now for ten

lifetimes. But when Vodalus is Autarch, I will be his consort. Then I shall walk

beside the Well of Orchids again, this time with the daughters of fifty exultants in my train to amuse me with their singing. Enough of that; it is some

months off at least. For the present I have - what I have."

She looked somberly at Jonas and me, and rose very gracefully, indicating by a

gesture that we were to remain where we were. "I was happy to hear something now

of my half-sister. That house you spoke of is mine now, you know, though I can't

claim it. To recompense you, I warn you of the supper we will soon share. You

didn't seem receptive of the hints Vodalus flung you. Did you understand them?"

When Jonas said nothing, I shook my head.

has

died, and cries to be let in."

Thea nodded. "That animal was brought from the stars long ago, as were many

other things for the benefit of Urth. It is a beast having no more intelligence

than a dog, and perhaps less. But it is a devourer of carrion and a clawer at

graves, and when it has fed upon human flesh it knows, at least for a time, the

speech and ways of human beings. The analeptic alzado is prepared from a gland

at the base of the animal's skull. Do you understand me?"

When she had gone, Jonas would not look at me, nor I at his face; we both knew

what feast it was we were to attend that night.

remained where I was, retching and shivering, and rinsing my face and mouth,

while the cold, clear water washed away the wine and halfdigested meat I had brought up.

When at last I was able to stand, I returned to Jonas and told him, "We must go."

He looked at me as though he pitied me, and I suppose he did. "Vodalus's fighting men are all around us."

"You were not sick, I see, the way I was. But you heard who their allies are.

Perhaps Chuniald was lying."

"I've heard our guards walking among the trees - they're not as silent as all

that. You have your sword, Severian, and I have a knife, but Vodalus's men will

have bows. I noticed that most of those who sat with us at table did. We can try

to hide behind the trunks like alouattes . . ."

I had known, of course, but it had been a remote and seemingly irrelevant

knowledge then. Now I found I had nothing to say, and indeed almost no thoughts

at all outside the hope that night would come quickly.

The men Vodalus sent for us came more quickly still: four burly fellows who

might have been peasants and carried berdiches, and a fifth, with something of

the armiger about him, who wore an officer's spadron. Perhaps these men were in

the crowd before the dais who had watched us arrive; at any rate, they seemed

determined to take no risks with us and surrounded us with their weapons at the

ready even while they hailed us as friends and comrades in arms. Jonas put as

brave a face on it as a man could, and chatted with them while they escorted us

be forced

to join in the meal to which we were led, but I knew without asking that to

refuse - or even to seem to wish to refuse - would destroy whatever confidence

Vodulus had in me, endangering my freedom and perhaps my life.

Our five guards, who had talked only reluctantly at first in response to Jonas's

jests and queries, grew more cheerful as I became more desperate, gossiping as

if they were on the way to a drinking bout or a brothel. Yet though I recognized

the note of anticipation in their voices, the gibes they made were as unintelligible to me as the banter of libertines is to a little child: "Going far this time? Going to drown yourself again?" (This from the man at the back of

our party, a mere disembodied voice in the dark.)

"By Erebus, I'm going to sink so far you won't see me until winter."

A voice I recognized as belonging to the armiger asked, "Have any of you seen

"I don't . . ."

The voice broke off, or perhaps I only stopped attending to what it said. I had

seen a glimmer through the trees.

After a few strides more, I could make out torches, and hear the sound of many

voices. Someone ahead called for us to halt, and the armiger went forward and

gave a password softly.

Soon I found myself sitting on forest duff, with Jonas on my right and a low

chair of carved wood at my left. The armiger had taken a position on Jonas's

right, and the rest of the people present (almost as though they had been

waiting for our arrival) had formed a circle whose center was a smokey orange

lantern suspended from the boughs of a tree.

No more than a third of those who had been at the audience in the glade were

We had been waiting for some time when Vodalus stepped dramatically out of the darkness and strode across the circle. All present stood, then resumed their seats as he dropped into the carved chair beside me.

Almost at once, a man in the livery of an upper servant in some great house came forward to stand in the center of the circle beneath the orange light. He carried a salver with a large and a small bottle on it, and a crystal goblet.

A murmuring began - not a thing for words, I thought, but the sound of a hundred little noises of satisfaction, of quick breathings and tongues on lips. The man with the salver stood motionless until this had run its course, then advanced toward Vodalus with measured steps.

Behind me the cooing voice of Thea said, "The alzado, of which I told you, is in the smaller bottle. The other holds a compound of herbs that soothe the stomach."

begun to mix the contents of the bottles in the goblet, and he seemed to think the moment inappropriate.

The salver was moved in circles to impart a gentle swirling motion to the liquid. "Very good," Vodalus said. He took the goblet from the salver with both hands and raised it to his lips, then passed it to me. "As the Chatelaine told you, you must take one full swallow. If you take less, the amount will be insufficient, and there will be no sharing. If you take more, it will be of no benefit to you, and the drug, which is very precious, will be wasted."

I drank from the goblet as he had directed. The mixture was as bitter as wormwood and seemed cold and fetid, recalling a winter day long before when I had been ordered to clean the exterior drain that carried wastes away from the journeymen's quarters. For a moment I felt that my gorge would rise as it had beside the brook, though in truth nothing remained in my stomach to come up. I

ten

drinkers; when it was emptied, the man in livery wiped the rim, filled the goblet again from the bottles on the salver, and started it once more.

Gradually, he seemed to lose the solid form natural to a rounded object and

become a silhouette only, a mere colored figure sawn from wood. I was reminded

of the marionettes I had seen in my dream on the night I had shared Baldanders's

bed.

The circle, too, in which we sat, though I knew it to contain thirty or forty persons, seemed to have been cut from paper and bent like a toy crown. Vodalus

on my left and Jonas at my right were normal; but the armiger appeared already

half pictured, as did Thea.

As the man in livery reached her, Vodalus rose, and moving so effortlessly that

he might have been propelled by the night breeze, floated toward the orange

obey,

without hesitation or scruple, to death if need be, Vodalus as your
chosen

leader?"

I tried to nod with the trees, and when that seemed insufficient I said, "I
consent," and Jonas, "Yes."

"And that you will obey as you would Vodalus, any person whatsoever
whom Vodalus

sets over you?"

"Yes."

"Yes."

"And that you will put this oath above all other oaths, whether sworn
before

this time or after it?"

"We will," said Jonas.

"Yes," I said.

The breeze was gone. It was as if some unquiet spirit had haunted the
gathering,

then suddenly vanished. Vodalus was once more in his chair beside me.
He leaned

trade, the

fair ivory and rare woods of altars and reliquaries by the boiled offal of ignoble animals, men and women by the organs of elimination. So we are joined -

you and I. So will we both be joined, a few moments hence, to a fellow mortal

who will live again - strongly, for a time - in us, by the effluvia pressed from

the sweetbreads of one of the filthiest beasts. So blossoms spring from muck."

I nodded.

"This was taught us by our allies, those who wait until man is purified again,

ready to join with them in the conquest of the universe. It was brought by the

others for foul purposes they hoped to keep secret. I mention this to you because you, when you go to the House Absolute, may meet them, whom the common

people call cacogens and the cultured Extrasolarians or Hierodules. You must be

have learned that the troupe of players to which you once belonged will
be
admitted there for a thiasus a few days hence. You will rejoin them and
take the
opportunity to give what I shall give you," he fumbled in his tunic, "to the
one
who shall say to you, 'The pelagic argosy sights land.' And should he
give you
any message in return, you may entrust it to whoever says to you, 'I am
from the
quercine penetralia.'"
"Liege," I said, "my head is swimming." (Then, lying,) "I cannot
remember those
words - truly, I have forgotten them already. Did I hear you say that
Dorcas and
the other will be in the House Absolute?"
Vodulus now pressed into my hand a small object that was not a knife,
yet was
shaped something like one. I stared at it; it was a steel, such as flint is
struck against to kindle fire. "You will remember," he said. "And you will
never

you

encountered a certain badger of mine-

"Hildegrin! Sieur, I understand nothing."

"He uses that name among others, yes. He thought it sufficiently unusual to see

a torturer so far from the Citadel - and talking of me - as to make it worthwhile to have you watched, though he had no notion you had saved me that

night. Unfortunately, the watchers lost you at the Wall; since then they have

observed the movements of your traveling companions in the hope you would rejoin

them. I supposed that an exile might choose to side with us and so save my poor

Barnoch long enough for us to free him. Last night I myself rode into Saltus to

speaking with you, but I had my mount stolen for my pains and accomplished not a

straw. Today, then, it was necessary that we take you by whatever means to

did not

have to stand as well, for I was sure my legs would not hold me.

Something dim

and white and twice the height of a man was sailing among the trees to the

twittering of the upanga. Every neck craned to look at it, and Vodalus drifted

to meet it. Thea leaned across his empty chair to speak to me. "Lovely, is she

not? They have accomplished wonders."

It was a woman seated on a silver litter borne on the shoulders of six men. For

a moment I thought it was Thecla - it looked so like her in the orange light.

Then I realized that it was rather her image, made, perhaps, of wax.

"It is said to be perilous," Thea cooed, "when one has known the shared in life;

memories held together may amaze the mind. Yet I who loved her will risk that

confusion, and knowing from your look when you spoke of her that you would

of a

human being in roasted flesh.

I think I would have gone mad at that moment if it had not been for the alzabo.

It stood between my perception and reality like a giant of mist, through which

everything could be seen but nothing apprehended. I had another ally as well: it

was the knowledge growing in me, the certainty that if I were to consent now and

swallow some part of Thecla's substance, the traces of her mind that must

otherwise soon fade in decay would enter me and endure, however attenuated, as

long as I.

Consent came. What I was about to do no longer seemed filthy or frightening.

Instead I opened every part of myself to Thecla, and decked the essence of my

being with welcome. Desire came too, born of the drug, a hunger no other food

their

backs blocked my view. When they parted, she was gone; nothing remained but

smoking meats laid upon what might have been a white tablecloth . . .

I ate and waited, begging forgiveness. She deserved the most magnificent

sepulcher, priceless marble of exquisite harmony. In its place she was to be

entombed in my torturer's workroom, with the floor scrubbed and the devices half

disguised under garlands of flowers. The night air was cool, but I was sweating.

I waited for her to come, feeling the drops roll down my bare chest and staring

at the ground because I was afraid I would see her in the faces of the others

before I felt her presence in myself.

Just when I despaired - she was there, filling me as a melody fills a cottage. I

was with her, running beside the Acis when we were a child. I knew the ancient

and

death.

I learned that I had been more to her than I had ever guessed, and at last fell

into a sleep in which my dreams were all of her. Not memories merely - memories

I had possessed in plenty before. I held her poor, cold hands in mine, and I no

longer wore the rags of an apprentice, nor the fuligin of a journeyman. We were

one, naked and happy and clean, and we knew that she was no more and that I

still lived, and we struggled against neither of those things, but with woven

hair read from a single book and talked and sang of other matters.

12 THE NOTULES

that as

well. At the next, I was aware of cold and unwelcome light, and the piping of

birds.

I sat up. My cloak was soaked with dew, and dew lay like sweat upon my face.

Beside me, Jonas had just begun to stir. Ten paces off two great destriers - one

the color of white wine, one of unspotted black - champed their bits and stamped

with impatience. Of feast and feasters there was no more sign than of Thecla,

whom I have never seen again and now no longer hope to see in this existence.

Terminus Est lay beside me in the grass, secure in her tough, well oiled sheath.

I picked her up and made my way downhill until I found a stream, where I did

what I might to refresh myself. When I returned, Jonas was awake. I directed him

to the water, and while he was gone I made my farewell to dead Thecla.

shimmering gown

of frost-white that scarcely covers her breasts but falls in ever changing
cascades below her waist. I see her poised for a moment there; both
hands reach

up to touch our face.

Then she is whirled away in a room whose walls and ceiling and floor
are all of

mirrors. No doubt it is her own memory of her image in those mirrors
that I see,

but after a step or two she vanishes into the dark and I see her no more.

By the time Jonas returned I had mastered my grief and was able to
make a show

of examining our mounts. "The black for you," he said, "and the cream
for me,

obviously. Both of them look like they outvalue either of us, though, as
the

sailor told the surgeon who took off his legs. Where are we going?"

"To the House Absolute." I saw the incredulity in his face. "Did you
overhear me

talking with Vodalus last night?"

around him than

he began to dance with eagerness.

It was the worst possible time, perhaps; but it was also the only time. I asked,

"How much do you remember?"

"About the woman last night? Nothing." Jonas dodged the black, loosed the

cream's reins, and vaulted up. "I didn't eat. Vodalus was watching you, but

after they had swallowed the drug, no one was watching me, and anyway I have

learned the art of appearing to eat without actually doing it."

I looked at him in astonishment.

"I've practiced several times with you - at breakfast yesterday, for example. I

don't have much appetite, and I find it socially useful." As he urged the cream

down a forest path, he called over his shoulder, "As it happens, I know the

route fairly well, at least for most of the way. But would you mind telling me

over

the events of several days. As we rode, I told Jonas all that Vodalus had told

me, and much more. We halted at villages and towns as we found them, and where

we halted I practiced such of my craft as was in demand - not because the money

I earned was strictly necessary to us (for we had the purses the Chatelaine Thea

had given us, much of my fee from Saltus, and the money Jonas had obtained for

the man-ape's gold) but in order to allay suspicion.

Our fourth morning found us still pressing northward. Gyll sunned itself to our

right like a sluggish dragon guarding the forbidden road that returned to grass

upon its bank. The day before, we had seen uhlans on patrol, men mounted much as

we were and bearing lances like those that had killed the travelers at the Piteous Gate.

days from it, some pilgrims told me the House Absolute was nearby.

They warned

me of the praetorians, and seemed to know what they were talking about."

Following his example, I had allowed my mount to break into a trot. "You were

walking."

"Riding my merychip - I suppose I'll never see the poor creature again.

She was

slower at her best than these animals at their worst, I'll grant you. But I'm not

certain they're twice as fast."

I was about to say I did not believe Vodalus would have dispatched us when he

did if he had not thought it possible for us to reach the House Absolute in

time, when something that at first seemed a great bat came skimming within a

handsbreadth of my head.

If I did not know what it was, Jonas did. He shouted words I could not

was rattling among the branches behind us.

When we cleared the margin of the wood and entered the dry gully beyond, it was

not to be seen; but as we reached the bottom and began to climb the farther

side, it emerged from the trees, more ragged than ever.

For the space of a prayer it seemed to have lost sight of us, soaring at an

angle to our own path, then swooping toward us again in a long, flat glide. I

had Terminus Est clear of her sheath, and I neck-reined the black between the

flying thing and Jonas.

Swift though our destriers were, it came far more swiftly. If I had possessed a

pointed blade, I think I could have spitted it as it dove; had I done so I would

surely have perished. As it was, I caught it with a two-handed stroke. It was

like cutting air, and I thought the thing too light and tough for even that bitter edge. An instant later it parted like a rag; I felt a brief sensation of

we plunged into their tangled growth like madmen, flattened against the necks of our mounts.

Soon the foliage grew so thick they could move no faster than a walk. Almost at

once we reached a sheer rock face and were forced to halt. When we were no

longer smashing through the tangled limbs, I could hear something else behind us

- a dry rustling, as though a wounded bird were fluttering among the treetops.

The medicinal fragrance of the cedars oppressed my lungs.

"We must get out," Jonas panted, "or at least keep moving." The splintered end

of a branch had gouged his cheek; a trickle of blood coursed down it as he

spoke. After looking in both directions he chose the right, toward the river,

and lashed his mount to force it into what appeared to be an impenetrable thicket.

fluttering scraps of night came after us, but though their smaller size made

them appear swifter, they were slower than the single large entity had been.

"We have to find a fire," Jonas shouted above the drumming of the destriers'

hooves. "Or a big animal we can kill. If you slashed the belly of one of these

beasts, that would probably do it. But if it didn't, we couldn't get away."

I nodded to show that I also opposed killing one of the destriers, though it

crossed my mind that my own might soon drop from exhaustion. Jonas was having to

allow his to slow now to keep from distancing me. I asked, "Is it blood they

want?"

"No. Heat."

Jonas swung his destrier to the right and slapped its flank with his steel hand.

It must have been a good blow, for the animal leaped ahead as though stung. We

the grass

showed that they faced it.

Ahead, the lay of the ground changed as subtly and yet as abruptly as
cloth

alters at a seam. A sinuous ribbon of green lay as flat as if it had been
rolled, and I swung the black down it, shouting in his ears and
belaboring him

with the flat of my blade. He was drenched with sweat now and streaked
with

blood from the broken twigs of the cedars. Behind us I could hear
Jonas's

shouted warnings, but I gave them no heed.

We rounded a curve, and through a break in the trees I saw the gleam
of the

river. Another curve, with the black beginning to flag again - then, far off,
the sight I had been waiting for. Perhaps I should not tell it, but I lifted
my

sword to Heaven then, to the diminished sun with the worm in his heart;
and I

called, "His life for mine, New Sun, by your anger and my hope!"

verdure

of the road. In no more than a breath, we had reversed our track and were

pounding back toward the things that pursued us. Whether Jonas understood my

plan then I do not know, but he fell in with it as though he did, never slackening his own pace.

One of the fluttering creatures swooped, looking for all Urth like a hole torn

in the universe, for it was true fuligin, as lightless as my own habit. It was

trying for Jonas, I believe, but it came within sword reach, and I parted it as

I had before, and again felt a gust of warmth. Knowing from where that heat

came, it seemed more evil to me than any vile odor could; the mere sensation on

my skin made me ill. I reined sharply away from the river, fearing a bolt from

the uhlan's lance at any moment. We had no more than left the road when it came,

They were not there either, but his eyes showed me where they had gone: they

flitted about the uhlan, and he, as I watched, sought to defend himself with his

lance. Bolt after bolt split the air, so that there was a continual crashing like thunder. With each bolt the brightness of the sun was washed away, but the

very energies with which he sought to destroy them seemed to give them strength.

To my eyes they no longer flew, but flickered as beams of darkness might,

appearing first in one place then in another, and always nearer the uhlan, until

in less time than I have taken to write of it all three were at his face. He tumbled from his saddle, and the lance fell from his hand and went out.

13 THE CLAW OF THE CONCILIATOR

think we might handle them. We need something to put them in - something

water-tight, of metal or glass."

I had nothing of that kind and told him so.

"Neither have I." He knelt beside the uhlan and turned out his pockets.

Aromatic

smoke from the blazing tree wreathed everything like incense, and I had the

sensation of being once more in the Cathedral of the Pelerines. The litter of

twigs and last summer's leaves on which the uhlan lay might have been the

straw-strewn floor; the trunks of the scattered trees, the supporting poles.

"Here," Jonas said, and picked up a brass vasculum. Unscrewing the lid he

emptied it of herbs, then rolled the dead uhlan on his back.

"Where are they?" I asked. "Has the body absorbed them?"

Jonas shook his head, and after a moment began, very carefully and delicately,

cut these creatures, and choose to stand their ground doing it until they were surrounded by too many to fend off."

One of the uhlan's eyes was half open. I had seen corpses often before, but I

could not escape the eerie feeling that he was in some sense watching me, the

man who had killed him to save himself. To turn my mind to other things, I said,

"After I cut the first one, it seemed to fly more slowly."

Jonas had placed the horror he had drawn out in the vasculum and was extracting

a second from the right nostril; he murmured, "The speed of any flying thing

depends on its wing area. If that weren't the case, the adepts who use these

creatures would tear them into scraps before they sent them forth, I suppose."

"You sound as though you've encountered them before."

"We docked once at a port where they're used in ritual murders. I suppose it was

"There's one more," I said.

He nodded and used his steel hand to force open the dead man's mouth; instead of

holding teeth and livid tongue and gums it appeared to be a bottomless gulf, and

for a moment my stomach churned. Jonas drew out the third creature, streaked

with the dead man's saliva.

"Wouldn't he have had a nostril open, or his mouth, if I hadn't cut the thing a

second time?"

"Until they worked their way into his lungs. We're lucky, actually, to have been

able to get to him so quickly. Otherwise you would have had to slice the body

open to get them out."

A wisp of smoke called to mind the burning cedar. "If it was heat they wanted .

.."

"They prefer life's heat, though they can sometimes be distracted by a fire of

we had was a breath of warmth; but I have no idea what the natives call them."

"Where is this island?"

He looked at me curiously.

"Is it far from the coast? I've always wanted to see Uroboros, though I suppose

it is dangerous."

"Very far," Jonas said in a flat voice. "Very far indeed. Wait a moment."

I waited, watching, as he strode to the riverbank. He threw the vasculum hard -

it had almost reached midstream when it dropped into the water. When he returned

I asked, "Couldn't we have used those things ourselves? It doesn't seem likely

that whoever sent them is going to give up now, and we might have need of them."

"They would not obey us, and the world is better without them anyway, as the

butcher's wife told him when she cut away his manhood. Now we'd best be going.

There's somebody coming down the road."

reached into my

boot, far down where I had pushed it for safety, and drew out the Claw.

It was the first time I had seen it by full daylight. It caught the sun and flashed like a New Sun itself, not blue only but with every color from violet to

cyan. I laid it on the uhian's forehead, and for an instant tried to will him alive.

"Come on," Jonas called. "What are you doing?"

I did not know how to answer him.

"He's not quite dead," Jonas called. "Get off the road before he finds his lance!" He lashed his mount.

Faintly, a voice I seemed to recognize called, "Master!" I turned my head to

look down the grass-grown highway.

"Master!" One of the travelers waved an arm, and both began to run.

"It's Hethor," I said; but Jonas had gone. I looked back at the uhlan.

Both his

eyes were open now, and his chest rose and fell. When I took the Claw from his

forehead and thrust it back into my boot top, he sat up. I shouted to Hethor and

even his

own, which stood patiently awaiting its rider. "What is this place?"

"Only a stretch of the old road beside Gyll."

He shook his head and pressed it with his hands.

Hethor came panting up, like an ill-bred dog that has run when called
and now

expects a petting for it. His companion, whom he had outreached by a
hundred

strides or so, wore the gaudy clothes and greasy look of a small trader.

"M-m-master," Hethor said, "you can have no idea how much t-t-trouble,
how much

deadly loss and difficulty we have had in overtaking you across the
mountains,

across the wide-blown seas and c-c-creaking plains of this fair world.
What am

I, your s-slave, but an abandoned sh-shell, the sport of a thousand tides,
cast

up here in this lonely place because I cannot r-r-rest without you? H-
how could

you, the redclawed master, know of the endless labor you've cost us?"

The uhlan said slowly, "I am Cornet Mineas. Who are you?"

Hethor bobbed his head as though he would have bowed. "M-m-master is the noble

Severian, servant of the Autarch - whose urine is the wine of his subjects - in

the Guild of the Seekers for Truth and Penitence. H-h-hethor is his humble

servant. Beuzec is also his humble servant. I suppose the man who rode away is

his servant too."

I gestured for him to be quiet. "We are all only poor travelers, Cornet. We saw

you lying here stunned and sought to help you. A moment ago, we thought you

dead; it must have been a near thing."

"What is this place?" the uhlan asked again.

Hethor answered eagerly. "The road north of Quiesco. M-mm-master, we were on a

boat, sailing the wide waters of Gyoll in the blind night. We di-d-disembarked

I said, "It's not far from here, I think."

"I am to be especially vigilant."

"I feel sure one of your comrades will be along soon." I caught my mount and

clambered onto his lofty back.

"M-m-master, you're not going to l-l-leave us again? Beuzec has seen you perform

but twice."

I was about to answer Hethor when I caught sight of a flash of white among the

trees across the highway. Something huge was moving there. At once, the thought

that the sender of the notules might have other weapons at hand filled my mind,

and I dug my heels into the black's flanks.

He sprang away. For half a league or more we raced along the narrow strip of

ground that separated the road from the river. When at last I saw Jonas,

I

galloped across to warn him, and told him what I had seen.

A graveled path hardly more than a cubit wide wound among the trees.

It was

bordered with more wild flowers than I have ever seen growing naturally in

company, and it was of pebbles so uniform in size, and of such shining whiteness, that they must surely have been carried from some secret and far off beach.

After riding a bit closer to examine it, I asked Jonas what such a path here

could possibly mean.

"Only one thing, surely - that we are already on the grounds of the House

Absolute."

Quite suddenly, I recalled the spot. "Yes," I said. "Once Josepha and I, with

some others, made up a fishing party and came here. We crossed by the twisted

oak . . ."

Jonas looked at me as though I were mad, and for a moment I felt that I was. I

journeyman of the torturers, who was unfortunate enough to love her.

See

yourself!" He held up the steel hand so that I could see a stranger's face,

narrow, ugly, and bewildered, reflected in its work-polished balm.

I remembered our tower then, the curved walls of smooth, dark metal. "I am

Severian," I said.

"That is correct. The Chatelaine Thecla is dead."

"Jonas . . ."

"Yes?"

"The uhlan is alive now - you saw him. The Claw gave him life again. I laid it

on his forehead, but perhaps it was just that he saw it with his dead eyes. He

sat up. He breathed and spoke to me, Jonas."

"He was not dead."

"You saw him," I said again.

"I am much older than you are. Older than you think. If there is one thing

I

the notules

away from him he was able to breathe, and after a time he regained consciousness. As for your Thecla, no power in the universe could have restored

her to life. They must have dug her up while you were still imprisoned in the

Citadel and stored her in an ice cave. Before we saw her, they had gutted her

like a partridge and roasted her flesh." He gripped my arm. "Severian, don't be

a fool!"

At that moment I wanted only to perish. If the notule had reappeared, I would

have embraced it. What did appear, far down the path, was a white shape like

that I had seen nearer the river. I tore myself away from Jonas and galloped

toward it.

lives a race

like and yet unlike the human. They are no taller than we. Their bodies are like

ours save that they are perfect, and that the standard to which they adhere is

wholly alien to us. Like us they have eyes, a nose, a mouth; but they use these

features (which are, as I have said, perfect) to express emotions we have never

felt, so that for us to see their faces is to look upon some ancient and terrible alphabet of feeling, at once supremely important and utterly unintelligible.

Such a race exists, yet I did not encounter it there at the edge of the gardens

of the House Absolute. What I had seen moving among the trees, and what I now -

until I at last saw it clearly - flung myself toward, was rather the giant image

of such a being kindled to life. Its flesh was of white stone, and its eyes had

have

failed utterly to convey the essence of the thing. Its spirit was that of
sculpture. If some fallen angel had overheard my conversation with the
green

man, he might have contrived such an enigma to mock me. In its every
movement it

carried the serenity and permanency of art and stone; I felt that each
gesture,

each position of the head and limbs and torso, might be the last. Or that
each

might be repeated interminably, as the poses of the gnomens of
Valeria's

many-faceted dial were repeated down the curving corridors of the
instants.

My initial terror, after the white statue's strangeness had washed away
my will

toward death, was the instinctive one that it would do me hurt.

My second was that it would not attempt to. To be as frightened of
something as

I was of that silent, inhuman figure, and then to discover that it meant no

statues. The real statue came toward us, its three or four times life-size face stamped with inconceivable emotion and its limbs wrapped in terrible and perfect beauty.

I heard Jonas shout, and the sound of a blow. I had just time to see him on the ground grappling with men in tall, crested helmets that vanished and reappeared even as I looked at them, when something whizzed past my ear; another struck my wrist, and I found myself struggling in a web of cords that constricted like little boas. Someone seized my leg and pulled, and I fell.

When I had recovered enough to be aware of what was taking place, I had a wire noose about my neck, and one of my captors was rummaging through my sabretache.

I could see his hands clearly, darting like brown sparrows. His face was visible

material was invisible and only the greens and browns of the wood could be seen,
twisted by the shapes of cuirass, gorget, and greaves.

Despite my protest that I was a member of the guild, the praetorian took all the

money I had (though he left me Thecla's brown book, my fragment of whetstone,

oil and flannel, and the other miscellaneous objects in my sabretache). Then he

skillfully drew off the cords that entangled me and thrust them (as nearly as I

could tell) into the armhole of his breastplate, though not before I had seen

them. They reminded me of the whip we used to call a "cat," and were a bundle of

thongs joined at one end and weighted at the other; I have learned since that

this weapon is called the achico.

My captor now lifted the wire noose until I stood. I was conscious, as I have

escaped, been killed, been rendered unconscious, or plunged into agony; but I

could not actually be forced to do as I did.

At least I knew it was a game, and I smiled as he sheathed Terminus Est and led

me to where Jonas stood.

Jonas said, "We've done no harm. Return my friend's sword and give us back our

animals, and we will go."

There was no reply. In silence two praetorians (four fluttering sparrows, as it

seemed) caught our destriers and led them away. How like us those animals were,

walking patiently they knew not where, their massive heads following thin strips

of leather. Nine-tenths of life, so it seems to me, consists of these surrenders.

We were made to go with our captors out of the wood and onto a rolling meadow

perfect

polish of the metal imparted to it a seeming softness, an almost liquid yielding, that was profoundly disturbing to the eye and that permitted it to

fade into sky and grass at a distance of a few paces. When we had walked half a

league across the sward, we entered a grove of flowering plums, and at once the

crested helms and flaring pauldrons danced with pink and white.

There we struck a path that curved and curved again. Just as we were on the

point of emerging from the grove we halted, and Jonas and I were pushed

violently back. I heard the feet of the stony figures that followed us grate on

the gravel as they too stopped short; one of the soldiers warned them off with

what seemed to me a wordless cry. I peered through the blossoms as well as I

could to see what lay ahead.

various sorts. One led a shaggy arctother; another perched upon the neck of a ground sloth greener than the lawns. No sooner had this group passed than other groups followed them. While they were still too far for me to distinguish their faces, I noticed one in which the bowed head of a single individual was lifted above the rest by at least three cubits. A moment later I had recognized another as Dr. Talos, strutting along with his chest thrown out and his head well back. My own dear Dorcas followed close behind him, looking more than ever like a forlorn child wandered from some higher sphere. Fluttering with veils and sparkling with bijoux under her parasol, Jolenta rode a diminutive jennet sidesaddle; and behind them all, patiently wheeling such properties as he could not shoulder, lumbered he whom I had identified first, the giant, Baldanders.

was

really only the flowering trees among which we stood that caught her attention.

I heard the inhalation of Jonas's breath; but the first syllable of her name was

cut short by the thud of the blow that followed, and he pitched at my feet. When

I recall that scene now, the rattle of his metal hand on the gravel of the path

is as vivid as the perfume of the plum blossoms.

After all the troupes of performers had gone, two praetorians picked up poor

Jonas and carried him. They did it as easily as they might have carried a child;

but I at the time attributed that only to their strength. We crossed the road

down which the performers had come and penetrated a hedge of roses higher than a

man, covered with immense white blossoms and filled with nesting birds.

sees has

been directed toward the point at which he stands; but after he has walked a

hundred paces, or a league, he finds himself at the center still; and every

vision seems to convey some incommunicable truth, like one of the unutterable

insights granted eremites.

So beautiful were these gardens that we had been in them for some time before I

realized that no towers were lifted above them. Only the birds and the clouds,

and beyond them the old sun and the pale stars, rose higher than their treetops;

we might have been wandering through some divine wilderness. Then we reached the

crest of a wave of land more lovely than any cobalt wave of Uroboros's, and with

breathhtaking suddenness a pit opened at our feet. I have called it a pit, but it

the

memories of the House Absolute, mine by absorption now from the life of Thecla,

coalesced, I understood something that had been implicit in the doctor's play

and in many of the stories Thecla had told me as well, though she had never

mentioned it directly: The whole of this great palace lay underground - or

rather, its roofs and walls were heaped with soil planted and landscaped, so

that we had been walking all this time over the seat of the Autarch's power,

which I had thought still some distance away.

We did not go down into that grotto, which no doubt opened onto chambers quite

unsuited to the detention of prisoners, or into any of the next score or so we

passed. At last, however, we came upon one far more grim, though no less

some of

these were luminous; some strewed the air with strange, musty odors;

some

suggested fantastic phallic fetishes.

In the center of this dark garden, supported by scaffolding and green with

verdigris, hung a set of gongs. It appeared to me that they were intended to be

rung by the wind; yet it seemed impossible that any wind should ever reach them.

So I thought, at least, until one of the praetorians opened a heavy door of

bronze and worm-scarred wood in one of the dark stone walls. Then a draft of

cold, dry air blew through that doorway and set the gongs to swaying and

clashing, so well tuned that their chiming seemed the purposeful composition of

some musician, whose thoughts were now in exile here.

In looking up at the gongs (which the praetorians did not prevent me from doing)

unconsciously transferred the practices of our own oubliette to this unknown place. Nothing more different from the actual arrangement could have been imagined. The entrance opened on no corridor of narrow doors, but to a spacious and carpeted one with a second entrance opposite. Hastarii with flaming spears stood as sentries before this second set of doors. At a word from one of the praetorians, they swung them open; beyond lay a vast, shadowy, bare room with a very low ceiling. Several dozen persons, men and women and a few children, were scattered in diverse parts of it - most singly, but some in couples or groups. Families occupied alcoves, and in some places screens of rags had been erected to provide privacy. Into this we were thrust. Or rather, I was thrust and the unfortunate Jonas was

I was ringed by faces. Two women took Jonas from me, and promising to care for him carried him away. The rest began to ply me with questions. What was my name? What clothes were those I wore? Where had I come from? Did I know such a one, or such a one, or such a one? Had I ever been to this town or that? Was I of the House Absolute? Of Nessus? From the east bank of Gyoll or the west? What quarter? Did the Autarch still live? What of Father Inire? Who was archon in the city? How went the war? Had I news of so-and-so, a commander? Of so-and-so, a trooper? Of so-and-so, a chiliarch? Could I sing, recite, play an instrument? As may be imagined, in such a welter of inquiries I was able to answer almost none. When the first flurry was spent, an old, gray-bearded man and a woman who

of hearing, until at last the low room was as still as it had been when the doors opened.

"I am Lomer," the old man said. He cleared his throat noisily. "This is Nicarete."

I told him my name, and Jonas's.

The old woman must have heard the concern in my voice. "He will be safe, rest

assured. Those girls will treat him as well as they can, in the hope that he'll

soon be able to talk to them." She laughed, and something in the way she threw

back her well shaped head told me she had once been beautiful.

I began to question them in my turn, but the old man interrupted me.

"Come with

us," he said, "to our corner. We will be able to sit at ease there, and I can

offer you a cup of water."

As soon as he pronounced the word, I realized that I was terribly thirsty.

He

led us behind the rag screen nearest the doors and poured water for me from an

grounds.

Lomer nodded. His skin was of that pale color peculiar to those who never see

the sun; with his straggling beard and uneven teeth, he would have been

repulsive in any other setting; but he belonged here as much as the half-obliterated tiles of the floor did. "I am here by the malice of the Chatelaine Leocadia. I was seneschal to her rival the Chatelaine Nympha, and

when she brought me here to the House Absolute with her in order that we might

review the accounts of the estate while she attended the rites of the philomath

Phocas, the Chatelaine Leocadia entrapped me by the aid of Sancha, who-

The old woman, Nicarete, interrupted him. "Look!" she exclaimed. "He knows her."

And so I did. A chamber of pink and ivory had risen in my mind, a room of which

two walls were clear glass exquisitely framed. Fires burned there on marble

"You do know her then." Lomer's head nodded slowly, as though it were answering
the question put by its own mouth. "You are the first in many years."
"Let us say that I remember her."
"Yes." The old man nodded. "They say she is dead now. But in my day she was a
fine, healthy young woman. The Chatelaine Leocadia persuaded her to it, then
caused us to be discovered, as Sancha knew she would. She was but fourteen, and
no crime was charged to her. We had done nothing in any case; she had only begun
to undress me."
I said, "You must have been quite a young man yourself."
He did not answer, so Nicarete replied for him. "He was twenty-eight."
"And you," I asked. "Why are you here?"
"I am a volunteer."
I looked at her in some surprise.
"Someone must make amends for the evil of Urth, or the New Sun will never come.

about her shoulders as young women do. "I will leave, but only on my own terms,

which are that all those who have been here so long that they have forgotten

their crimes be set free as well."

I remembered the kitchen knife I had stolen for Thecla, and the ribbon of crimson that had crept from under the door of her cell in our oubliette, and I

said, "Is it true that prisoners really forget their crimes here?"

Lomer looked up at that. "Unfair! Question for question - that's the rule, the

old rule. We still keep the old rules here. We're the last of the old crop, Nicarete and me, but while we last, the old rules still stand. Question for question. Have you friends who may strive for your release?"

Dorcas would, surely, if she knew where I was. Dr. Talos was as unpredictable as

the figures seen in clouds, and for that very reason might seek to have me

freed, though he had no real motive for doing so. Most importantly, perhaps, I

mind. Now I was glad of that.

"Have you friends? Relations? If you have, you may be able to do something for

the rest of us."

"Friends, possibly," I said. "They may try to help me if they ever learn what

has happened to me. Is it likely they may succeed?"

In that way we talked for a long time; if I were to write it all here, there would be no end to this history. In that room, there is nothing to do but talk

and play a few simple games, and the prisoners do those things until all the

savor has gone out of them, and they are left like gristle a starving man has

chewed all day. In many respects, these prisoners are better off than the clients beneath our own tower; by day they have no fear of pain, and none is

alone. But because most of them have been there so long, and few of our clients

had been long confirmed, ours were, for the most part, filled with hope, while

succeeded to a
better position.

As they left, I heard Nicarete say, "Will they come tonight?" Lomer made
some

reply, but I could not say what that reply was, and I was too fatigued to
ask.

My feet told me there was a thin pallet on the floor; I sat down and had
begun

to stretch myself full length when my hand touched a living body.

Jonas's voice said, "You needn't jerk back. It's only me."

"Why didn't you say something? I saw you walking about, but I couldn't
break

away from the two old people. Why didn't you come over?"

"I didn't say anything because I was thinking. And I didn't come over
because I

couldn't break away from the women who had me, at first. Afterward,
those people

couldn't break away from me. Severian, I must escape from here."

"Everyone wants to, I suppose," I told him. "Certainly I do."

"But I must." His thin, hard hand - his left hand of flesh - gripped mine.

"If I

until I could feel the pallet in position, then drew out the Claw. Its light was

so faint I might have shaded it with my hand.

"Is it dying?" Jonas asked.

"No, it's often like this. But when it is active - when it transmuted the water

in our carafe and when it awed the man-apes - it shines brightly. If it can procure our escape at all, I don't believe it will do so now."

"We must take it to the door. It might spring the lock." His voice was shaking.

"Later, when the others are all asleep. I'll free them if we can get free ourselves; but if the door doesn't open - and I don't think it will - I don't want them to know I have the Claw. Now tell me why you must escape at once."

"While you were talking to the old people I was being questioned by a whole

family," Jonas began. "There were several old women, a man of about fifty,

another about thirty, three other women, and a flock of children. They had

carried me to their own little niche in the wall, you see, and the other

people dressed the way I did. And the food outside - there were a great many

questions about food, some of them quite ludicrous. Had I ever seen butchering?

And did the animals plead for their lives? And was it true that the ones who

make sugar carried poisoned swords and would fight to defend it?

"They had never seen bees, and seemed to think they were about the size of

rabbits.

"After a time I began to ask questions of my own and found that none of them,

not even the oldest woman, had ever been free. Men and women are put into this

room alike, it seems, and in the course of nature they produce children. And

though some are taken away, most remain here throughout their lives.

They have

no possessions and no hope of release. Actually, they don't know what freedom

completely by this place where they have spent all their lives. Yet beneath that

are . . ." Jonas paused, and I could feel the silence pressing in all about us.

"Family memories, I suppose you could call them. Traditions from the outside

world that have been handed down to them, generation to generation, from the

original prisoners from whom they are descended. They don't know what some of

the words mean any longer, but they cling to the traditions, to the stories,

because those are all they have; the stories and their names."

He fell silent. I had thrust the tiny spark of the Claw back into my boot, and

we were in perfect darkness. His labored breathing was like the pumping of the

bellows at a forge.

"I asked them the name of the first prisoner, the most remote from whom they

some sort that had been attached to it because there were too many
Bolcans or
Altos or whatever."

"You told me once that you thought I had an unusual name. Kim Lee
Soong would

have been a very common kind of name when I was . . . a boy. A
common name in

places now sunk beneath the sea. Have you ever heard of my ship,
Severian? She

was the Fortunate Cloud."

"A gambling ship? No, but-"

My eye was caught by a gleam of greenish light so faint that even in that
darkness it was scarcely visible. At once there came a murmur of voices
echoing

and reechoing throughout the wide low, crooked room. I heard Jonas
scrambling to

his feet. I did the same, but I was no sooner up than I was blinded by a
flash

of blue fire. The pain was as severe as I have ever felt; it seemed as
though my

There was another flash, and I recognized the lightning - like sparks I had seen
the day Master Gurloes Roche, and I administered the revolutionary to Thecla. No
doubt Jonas screamed as I had, but by that time there was such bedlam I could
not distinguish his voice.
The greenish light grew stronger, and while I watched, still more than half
paralyzed with pain and wracked by as much fear as I can recall ever having
experienced, it gathered itself into a monstrous face that glared at me with
saucer eyes, then quickly faded to mere dark.
All this was more terrifying than my pen could ever convey, though I were to
slave over this part of my account forever. It was the fear of blindness as well
as of pain, but we were all, for all that mattered, already blind. There was no

16 JONAS

I hungered then for light as a starving man for meat, and at last I risked
the

Claw. Perhaps I should say that it risked me; it seemed I had no control
of the

hand that slid into my boot top and grasped it.

At once the pain faded, and there came a rush of azure light. The
hubbub

redoubled as the other wretched inhabitants of the place, seeing that
radiance,

feared some new terror was to be thrust among them. I pushed the gem
down into

my boot once more, and when its light was no longer visible began to
grope for

Jonas.

He was not unconscious, as I had supposed, but lay writhing, some
twenty steps

the air

goes bad."

"It's all right," I told him. "Everything is all right, Jonas." I despised myself for it, but I was talking to him as if he were the youngest of apprentices, just as, years before, Master Malrubius had spoken to me.

Something hard and cold touched my wrist, moving as if it were alive. I grasped

it, and it was Jonas's steel hand; after a moment I realized he had been trying

to clasp my own hand with it. "I feel weight!" His voice was growing louder. "It

must be only the lights." He turned, and I heard his hand ring and scrape as it

struck the wall. He began talking to himself in a nasal, monosyllabic language I

did not understand.

Greatly daring, I drew out the Claw again and touched him with it once more. It

was as dull as it had been when we had first examined it that evening, and Jonas

I saw

where the blue fire had branded him. Recalling the man-ape's severed hand, I

made certain no one was observing us and began to trace the burn with the Claw.

It sparkled in the light much more brightly than it had the evening before; and

though the black scar did not vanish, it seemed narrower, and the flesh to

either side less inflamed. To reach the lower end of the wound, I lifted the

cloth a trifle. When I thrust in my hand, I heard a faint note; the gem had struck metal. Drawing back the cloth more, I saw that my friend's skin ended as

abruptly as grass does where a large stone lies, giving way to shining silver.

My first thought was that it was armor; but soon I saw that it was not. Rather,

it was metal standing in the place of flesh, just as metal stood in the place of

awake and

active. Now it seemed stranger still, a ragged blot of a room, frayed with odd

corners and crushed under its lowering ceiling. Hoping that exercise would set

my mind in motion (as it often does), I decided to pace off the room's length

and width, treading softly so as not to wake the sleepers.

I had not gone forty paces when I saw an object that seemed completely out of

place in that collection of ragged people and filthy canvas pallets. It was a

woman's scarf woven of some rich, smooth material the color of a peach. There is

no describing the scent of it, which was not that of any fruit or flower that grows on Urth, but was very lovely.

I was folding this beautiful thing to put in my sabretache when I heard a child's voice say, "It's bad luck. Terrible luck. Don't you know?"

Looking around, then down, I saw a little girl with a pale face and sparkling

show you. Now, do you see how it seems to disappear when I trail the
edge of my
cloak across it?"

Her little head, which small though it was seemed much too big for the
shoulders

below it, nodded solemnly. "Burying people wear black. Do you bury
people? When

the navigator was buried there were black wagons and people in black
clothes

walking. Have you ever seen a burying like that?"

I crouched to look more easily into the solemn face. "No one wears
fuligin

clothes at funerals, Mistress, for fear they might be mistaken for
members of my

guild, which would be a slander of the dead - in most cases. Now here is
the

scarf. See how pretty it is? Is it what you call a finding?"

She nodded. "The whips leave them, and what you ought to do is push
them out

through the space under the doors. Because they'll come and take their
things

to eat me."

"You don't sound frightened now."

"Mama says the things you see in the dark don't mean anything - they're different almost every time. It's the whips that hurt, and she held me behind

her, between her and the wall. Your friend is waking up. Why are you looking so funny?"

(I recalled laughing with other people; three were young men, two were women of

about my own age Guibert handed me a scourge with a heavy handle and a lash of

braided copper. Lollian was preparing the firebird, which he would twirl on a long cord.)

"Severian!" It was Jonas, and I hurried over. "I'm glad you're here," he said

when I was squatting beside him. "I . . . thought you'd gone away."

"I could hardly do that, remember?"

"Yes," he said. "I remember now. Do you know what this place is called,

prison, I suppose because it was the only one she had seen before she was taken

to our tower, but I find I do. Individual cells, or at least several separate rooms, seem more practical to me. Perhaps I'm only prejudiced."

Jonas pulled himself up until he was sitting with his back to the wall. His face

had gone pale under the brown, and it shone with perspiration as he said, "Can't

you imagine how this place came to be? Look around you."

I did so, seeing no more than I had seen before: the sprawling room with its dim

lamps.

"This used to be a suite - several suites, probably. The walls have been torn

away, and a uniform floor laid over all the old ones. I'm sure that's what we

used to call a drop ceiling. If you were to lift one of those panels, you'd see

the original structure above it."

I stood and tried; but though the tips of my fingers brushed the rectangular

struggled

with the square of ceiling above her. Then it went up, showering dust.

Beyond it

I saw a network of slender metal bars, and through them a vaulted ceiling with

many moldings and a flaking painting of clouds and birds. The girl's arms

weakened, the panel sunk again, with more dust, and my view was cut off.

When she was safely down, I turned back to Jonas. "You're right. There was an

old ceiling above this one, for a room much smaller than this. How did you

know?"

"Because I talked to those people. Yesterday." He raised his hands, the hand of

steel as well as the hand of flesh, and appeared to rub his face with both.

"Send that child away, will you?"

I told the little girl to go to her mother, though I suspect she only crossed

against the wall just as I have since seen a corpse sit with its back to a tree.

"I used to read, aboard ship. Once I read a history. I don't suppose you know

anything about it. So many chiliads have elapsed here."

I said, "I suppose not."

"So different from this, but so much like it too. Queer little customs and usages . . . some that weren't so little. Strange institutions. I asked the ship

and she gave me another book."

He was still perspiring, and I thought his mind was wandering. I used the square

of flannel I carried to wipe my sword blade to dry his forehead.

"Hereditary rulers and hereditary subordinates, and all sorts of strange officials. Lancers with long, white mustaches." For an instant the ghost of his

old humorous smile appeared. "The White Knight is sliding down the poker. He

balances very badly, as the King's notebook told him."

There was a disturbance at the farther end of the room. Prisoners who had been

Marchfield. Counts were appointed by the kings. That was what they called the dark ages. A baron was only a freeman of Lombardy." The little girl I had lifted to the ceiling appeared as if from nowhere and called to us, "There's food. Aren't you coming?" and I stood up and said, "I'll get us something. It might make you feel better." "It became ingrained. It all endured too long." As I walked toward the crowd, I heard him say, "The people didn't know." Prisoners were walking back with small loaves cradled in one arm. By the time I reached the doorway the crowd had thinned, and I was able to see that the doors were open. Beyond it, in the corridor, an attendant in a miter of starched white gauze watched over a silver cart. The prisoners were actually leaving the antechamber to circle around this man. I followed them, feeling for a moment that I had been set free.

never

bring enough."

I nodded, and by reaching over the heads of several persons I was able to pick

up a pair of sticky loaves. "How often do they feed us?"

"Twice a day. You came yesterday just after the second meal. Everyone tries not

to take too much, but there is never quite enough."

"These are pastries," I said. The tips of my fingers were coated with sugar

icing flavored with lemon, mace, and turmeric.

The old woman nodded, "They always are, though they vary from day to day. That

silver biggin holds coffee, and there are cups on the lower tier of the cart.

Most of the people confined here don't like it and don't drink it. I imagine a

few don't even know about it."

All the pastries were gone now, and the last of the prisoners, save for Nicarete

the

soldiers.

They had advanced their spears to the position of guard, and the fires at the

spearheads burned more brightly. With her I stepped back into the antechamber,

and the doors swung closed behind us.

I reminded Nicarete that she had told me the day before that she was here by her

will, and asked if she knew why the prisoners were fed on pastries and southern

coffee.

"You know yourself," she said. "I hear it in your voice."

"No. It's only that I think Jonas knows."

"Perhaps he does. It is because this prison is not supposed to be a prison at

all. Long ago - I believe before the reign of Ymar - it was the custom for the

Autarch himself to judge anyone accused of a crime committed within the

but the offenders in less serious ones were sent here to wait-

The doors, which had closed such a short time ago, were opening again. A little,

ragged, gap-toothed man was pushed inside. He fell sprawling, then picked

himself up and threw himself at my feet. It was Hethor.

Just as they had when Jonas and I had come, the prisoners swarmed around him,

lifting him up and shouting questions. Nicarete, soon joined by Lomer, forced

them away and asked Hethor to identify himself. He clutched his cap (reminding

me of the morning when he had found me camping on the grass by Ctesiphon's

Cross) and said, "I am the slave of my master, far-traveled, m-m-map-worn Hethor

am I, dust-choked and doubly deserted," looking at me all the while with bright,

deranged eyes, like one of the Chatelaine Lelia's hairless rats, rats that ran

in circles and bit their own tails when one clapped one's hands.

"Something wrong?" Jonas asked. He appeared to be a trifle stronger.

"I'm troubled by thoughts."

"A bad thing for a torturer, but I'm glad of the company."

I put the sweet loaves in his lap and set the cup by his hand. "City coffee - no

pepper in it. Is that the way you like it?"

He nodded, picked up the cup, and sipped. "Aren't you having any?"

"I drank mine there. Eat the bread; it's very good."

He took a bit of one of the loaves. "I have to talk to somebody, so it has to be

you even though you'll think I'm a monster when I'm done. You're a monster too,

do you know that, friend Severian? A monster because you take for your profession what most people only do as a hobby."

"You're patched with metal," I said. "Not just your hand. I've known that for

some time, friend monster Jonas. Now eat your bread and drink your coffee. I

think it will be another eight watches or so before they feed us again."

"We crashed. It had been so long, on Urth, that there was no port when we

of filth to cast it away.

"You're feverish. The whip hurt you, but you'll recover and we'll get out and

find Jolenta."

Jonas nodded. "Do you remember how, when we neared the end of the Piteous Gate,

in all that confusion, she turned her head so that the sun shone on one cheek?"

I told him I did.

"I have never loved before, never in all the time since our crew scattered."

"If you can't eat anything more, you ought to rest now."

"Severian." He gripped my shoulder as he had before, but this time with his

steel hand; it felt as strong as a vise. "You must talk to me. I cannot bear the

confusion of my own thoughts."

For some time I spoke of whatever came into my head, without receiving any

reply. Then I remembered Thecla, who had often been oppressed in much the same

Part I

The Redoubt of the Magicians

Once, upon the margin of the unpastured sea, there stood a city of pale towers.

In it dwelt the wise. Now that city had both law and curse. The law was this:

That for all who dwelt there, life held but two paths: they might rise among the

wise and walk clad with hoods of myriad colors, or they must leave the city and

go into the friendless world.

Now one there was who had studied long all the magic known in the city, which

was most of the magic known in the world. And he grew near the time at which he

must choose his path. In high summer, when flowers with yellow and careless

the city? For I wish to study spells that are not sacred all my days, and
not go

into the friendless world to dig and carry for bread."

Then the old man laughed and said, "Do you recall how, when you were
hardly more

than a boy, I taught you the art by which we flesh sons from dream
stuff? How

skillful you were in those days, surpassing all the others! Go now, and
flesh

such a son, and I will show it to the hooded ones, and you will be as
we."

But the student said: "Another season. Let pass another season, and I
will do

everything you advise."

Autumn came, and the sycamores of the city of pale towers, that were
sheltered

from the sea winds by its high wall, dropped leaves like the gold
manufactured

by their owners. And the wild salt geese streamed among the pale
towers, and

if you do not act now they will turn you out by winter."

But the student answered: "I must study further, that I may achieve what I seek.

Can you not for one season protect me?" And the old man who had taught him

thought of the beauty of the trees that had for so many years delighted his eyes

like the white limbs of women.

At length the golden autumn wore away, and Winter came stalking into the land

from his frozen capital, where the sun rolls along the edge of the world like a

trumpery gilded ball and the fires that flow between the stars and Urth kindle

the sky. His touch turned the waves to steel, and the city of the magicians

welcomed him, hanging banners of ice from its balconies and heaping its roofs

with glaces of snow. The old man summoned his student again, and the student

answered as before.

spring, the most beautiful maidens of the city, the daughters of the magicians,

were clothed in green; and while the soft winds of spring teased their golden

hair, they walked unshod through the portal of the city, and down the narrow

path that led to the quay, and boarded the blacksailed ship that waited them.

And because of their golden hair, and their gowns of green faille, and because

it seemed to the magicians that they were reaped like grain, they were called

Corn Maidens.

When the man who had long been the student of the old man but was yet unhooded

heard the dirges and laments, and looking from his window saw the maidens filing

by, he set aside all his books and began to draw such figures as no man had ever

seen, and to write in many languages, as his master had taught him aforetime.

pen had

been a drudge already many hours; and when the moon tangled her crooked back

among the pale towers, his lamp shone bright. At first it seemed to him that all

the skill his master had taught him of old had deserted him, for from the first

light to the moonlight he was alone in his chambers save for the moth that

fluttered sometimes to show the insignia of Death at his undaunted candle flame.

Then there crept into his dreams, when sometimes he nodded over the table,

another; and he, knowing who that other was, welcomed him, though the dreams

were fleeting and soon forgotten.

He labored on, and that which he strove to create gathered about him as smoke

collects about the new fuel thrown upon a fire almost dead. At times (and

In time these manifestations, originally rare, and, indeed, at first limited almost entirely to those nights when thunder rumbled among the pale towers,

became common, and there were unmistakable signs of the other's presence: a book

he had not unshelved in decades lying beside a chair; windows and doors that

unlocked, as it seemed, of themselves; an ancient alfange, for years past an

ornament hardly more deadly than a trompe l'oeil picture, found cleansed of its

patina, gleaming and newly sharp.

One golden afternoon, when the wind played the innocent games of childhood with

the fresh-fledged sycamores, there came a knock at the door of his study. Not

daring to turn or express even the smallest part of what he felt by his voice,

or even to desist from his work, he called: "Enter."

As doors open at midnight though no living thing stirs, the door began, a

as he judged again, wider still, so much so that a diffident helot might
have
entered with a tray, it seemed a very sea storm seized it and flung it
back
against the wall. Then he heard strides behind him -quick and resolute -
and a
voice respectful and youthful, yet deep with a cleanly manhood,
addressed him,
saying: "Father, I little like to vex you when you are deep in your art. But
my
heart is sorely troubled and has been so these several days, and I beg
you by
the love you have for me to suffer my intrusion and counsel me in my
difficulties."
Then the student dared turn himself where he sat, and he saw standing
before him
a youth haughty of port, wide of shoulder, and mighty of thew.
Command was in
his firm mouth, knowing wit in his bright eyes, and courage in all his
face.

your face. What is it that troubles you?"

"Father," the young man said, "every night for many nights my sleep has been

rent with the screams of women, and often I have seen, like a green serpent

called by the notes of a pipe, a column of green slip down the cliff below our

city to the quay. And sometimes it is vouchsafed me in my dream to go near, and

then I see that all who walk in that column are fair women, and that they weep

and scream and stagger as they walk, so that I might think them a field of young

grain beaten by a moaning wind. What is the meaning of this dream?"

"My son," said the student, "the time has come when I must tell you what I have

concealed from you until now, fearing that in the rashness of your youth you

might dare too much before the time was ripe. Know that this city is oppressed

a navis caput, which is to say that to men he appears a ship having upon its deck

- which is in truth his shoulders - a single castle, which is his head, and in

the castle a single eye. But his body swims in the deep waters with the skate

and the shark, with arms longer than the most lofty masts and legs like pilings

that reach even to the floor of the sea. His harbor is an isle to the west, where a channel with many a twist and bend, dividing and redividing, reaches far

inland. It is on this isle, so my lore teaches me, that the Corn Maidens are

made to dwell; and there he rides at anchor in the midst of them, turning his

eye ever to left and right to watch them in their despair."

Part III

The Encounter with the Princess

to him armored her, and mounted on her sides the mightiest artillery,
and a
hundred times practiced the making of sail, and the reefing of sail, and
the
firing of the guns, until she answered as a blooded mare does to the
rein. For
the pity they felt for the Corn Maidens, they christened her Land of
Virgins.
At last, when the golden leaves fell from the sycamores (even as the
gold
manufactured by magicians falls at last from the hands of men), and the
gray
salt geese streamed among the pale towers of the city with the
lammergeir and
the ossifrage screaming after them, the youths set sail. Much befell
them on the
whale road to the isle of the ogre that has no place here; but at the end
of
those adventures the lookouts saw before them a country of tawny hills
dotted
with green; and even as they shaded their eyes to see it, the green grew

came and

nearer, until fearing to run aground they put about and beat along the coast.

The Corn Maidens followed them, and following attracted more of their sisterhood

until they covered all the land like grain indeed. But the young man did not

forget what he had been told: that the ogre lived among the Corn Maidens.

After a half day's sailing, they rounded a point and saw that the coast fell

away as a deep channel that did not end, but wound its way among the low hills

of the country until it was lost to sight. At the entrance to this channel stood

a calotte of white marble surrounded by gardens, and here the young man ordered

his companions to cast anchor, and went ashore.

He had no more than set foot on the soil of the isle than there came to meet him

in them is not of Urth."

"You speak truly," the princess said. "For I am Noctua, the daughter of the

Night, and the daughter too of him whom you have come to slay."

"Then we cannot be friends, Noctua," said the young man. "But let us not be

enemies." For though he did not know why, being of the stuff of dreams he was

drawn to her; and she, whose eyes held starlight, to him.

At this the princess spread her hands and declared: "Know that my father took my

mother by force, and here holds me against my wishes where I would soon go mad

were it not that she comes to me at each day's end. If you do not see sorrow in

my eyes, it is only because it lies upon my heart. That I may be free, I shall

willingly counsel you how you may engage my father and triumph."

All the young men of the city of the magicians grew quiet and gathered to listen

to her.

these

waters with the tread of giants."

At that the princess trembled and said: "Oh, speak not of giants, for you know

not what you say. Many ships have come as you have, until the oozy bottoms of

all these measureless channels are white with skulls. For it is the custom of my

father to allow them to wander among the islets and straits until their fuel is

spent - however much it may be - and then, coming upon them by night when he can

see them by the glow of their dying fires and they not see him, slay them."

Then the heart of the young man fleshed from dreams was troubled, and he said:

"We will seek him as we are sworn, but is there no way in which we may escape

the fate of those others?"

At this the princess took pity on him, for all who have the stuff of dreams

otherwise you may

come upon him by twilight, and it will go evilly with you."

"For this counsel I would have given my life," said the young man, and all his

companions who had come ashore with him raised a cheer. "For now we will surely

overcome the ogre."

At this the solemn face of the princess became more sober yet, and she said:

"No, not surely, for he is a dread antagonist in any sea fight. But I know a

stratagem that may aid you. You have said that you came well supplied. Have you

tar to pay your ship, should she leak?"

"Many barrels," said the young man.

"Then when you fight, see that the wind blows from yourself to him. And when the

fight is hottest - which will not be long after you have joined - have your men

cast tar into your furnaces. I cannot promise that it will give you the victory,

Then the young men made ready to depart, kindling the fires in the great furnaces amidships until the white specter was born that drives good ships ahead

no matter what wind may blow. And the princess watched them from the strand and

gave them her blessing.

But just as the great wheels began to turn, so slowly at first that they appeared scarcely to move, she called the young man fleshed from dreams to the

railing, saying: "It may be that you shall find my father. Should you find him,

it may be that you shall defeat him, laying low even such prowess as his. Yet

even so, you may be sorely vexed to find your way to the sea once more, for the

channels of this isle are most wondrously wrought. Yet there is a way. From my

father's right hand you must flay the tip of the first finger. There you will see a thousand tangled lines. Be not discouraged, but study it closely; for it

Inland they turned their bow, and even as the princess had foretold, the channel

they followed soon divided, and divided again, until there were a thousand

forking channels and ten thousand islets. When the shadow of the mainmast was no

larger than a hat, the young man fleshed from dreams gave orders that the

anchors be cast, and the fires banked, and there, for a long afternoon, they

waited, oiling the guns, and readying the powder, and preparing all that might

be needful in the hardest fought battle.

At length Night came, and they saw her striding from islet to islet with her

bats about her shoulders and her dire wolves dogging her steps. No more than an

easy carronade shot from their anchorage she seemed, yet they all observed that

might be imagined to have felt.

With the first light, the trumpet sounded from the quarterdeck and the banked

fires were fed new fuel; but as the dawn breeze stood fair for the channel they

held, the young man ordered all plain sail set before the great wheels were

ready to take their first step. And when the white specter wakened, the ship

pressed forward at double speed.

For many leagues that Channel ran, not straight, but near enough that there was

no need to furl the sails or even put about. A hundred others crossed it, and at

each they studied the water; but each was translucent as crystal. To tell the

strange sights they beheld on the islets they passed would require a dozen tales

as long as this - women stem-grown like flowers overhung the ship, and in

nearer approach of battles, earthquakes, and the murders of kings.

At last the youth who stood first mate to the young man fleshed from dreams

approached him where he waited near the steersman, saying: "Far we have traveled

on this channel already, and the sun, that had not shown his face when we bent

our sails, approaches his zenith. Following it, we have crossed a thousand

others, and none has shone a trace of the ogre. May it not be that it is an

unlucky course we take? Would not it be wiser to turn aside soon and try

another?"

Then the young man answered: "Even now we pass a channel to starboard. Look

down, and tell me if its waters are more soiled than our own."

The youth did as he was bid, and said: "Nay, clearer."

"Soon now, another opens to port. To what depth can you see?"

The youth waited until the ship stood opposite the channel of which the young

and ravens. At once understanding came to him, and he shouted to all
the others
to stand by the guns, for he could not tell them to make ready, who had
made
ready so long before.
Ahead lay an islet higher than most, crowned with tall and somber trees;
and
here the channel bent gently, so that the wind, that had been dead
astern, was
at the quarter. The steersman shifted his grip on the wheel, and the
watch payed
out certain sheets and tightened others, and the ship's prow came
around the
quick curve of the cliff, and there before them lay a long hull of narrow
beam,
with a single castle of iron amidships and a single gun larger than any
they
carried thrusting from its one embrasure.
Then the young man fleshed from dreams opened his lips to shout to
the

And the ball of that shot struck the breech of the first gun of their starboard battery, and striking it broke it to pieces and shattered itself as well, so that the fragments of the breaking of both scattered through the ship like dark leaves before a great wind, and many died thereby.

Then the steersman, waiting no order, swung the ship about until her port battery bore, and the guns fired each by the will of the man that pointed it, as wolves howl at the moon. And their shots flew about the single castle of the enemy to either side, and some struck it so that it tolled knells for those who had perished a moment before, and some struck the water before the hull that bore it, and some struck the deck (which was of iron also) and at that contact fled shrieking into the sky.

Then the single gun of their enemy spoke again.

counseled) for many moments no gun would bear but the bow chasers,
and then when
a battery might be brought to bear, it would be the starboard, of which
one gun
was destroyed and so many men dead.
But it came to him in that moment that they fought as a hundred others
had
fought, and that these hundred others were all dead, their ships sunk
and their
bones scattered among the myriad channels that whorled and tangled
the face of
the isle of the ogre. Then he gave his order to the steersman; but none
answered, for he was dead, and the wheel he had held, held him. So
seeing, the
young man fleshed from dreams took the spokes in his own hands and
presented to
their enemy the ship's narrow bow. Then it was seen how the three
sisters favor
the bold, for the next shot from their enemy, that might have raked her
from

to see,

the single castle, which all had until then believed fixed, swung about the

other way, so that its great gun, that was greater than any of their own, still

bore.

A moment later and its ball had struck them amidships, dashing a gun of the

starboard battery from its truck as a drunken man might fling an infant from its

cradle and sending it skittering across the deck and smashing everything in its

path. Then the guns of the battery - those that remained - spoke all in a chorus

of fire and iron. And because the distance was now less than half what it had

been (or perhaps only because their enemy, having shown fear, had weakened the

fabric of his being), their shot no longer struck his castle with an empty clanging, but with a cracking as though the bell that will toll the end of the

feared that

all there were dead, then that the order was not understood in the din of battle. But a shadow fell upon the sun-brightened water that stretched between

their enemy and himself, and he looked upward.

In ancient times, so it is said, a tattered child, the daughter of a fisherman,

found on the sand a stoppered flask, and by breaking the seal and drawing forth

the cork became queen from ice to ice. Just so, it seemed, an elemental being,

strong with the strength of the forging of creation, debouched from the tall

smokestacks of their ship, tumbling over himself in dark joy and growing with a

rush, as the wind comes.

And the wind came indeed, and it seized him with its uncounted hands and bore

him as a solid mass down upon their enemy. Even when nothing more could be seen

they could not say.

It may be they have struck nothing yet, and still circle round the world
seeking

their target.

They fired until the barrels shone like ingots newly come from the
crucible.

Then the smoke that had poured forth so long diminished, and those
below shouted

by the gosport that all the tar was consumed, and the young man
fleshed from

dreams ordered that firing cease, and the men who had worked the
guns fell upon

the deck like so many corpses, too exhausted even to beg water.

The black cloud melted. Not as fog melts in the sun, but as an army
strong to

evil dissolves before repeated charges, giving here, stubbornly standing
there,

still mustering a wisp of skirmishers when it seems all has given way.

In vain then they searched the new-polished waves for their enemy.
Nothing could

they see: not his hull, nor his castle, nor his gun, nor any plank or spar.

the young man fleshed from dreams ordered the great wheels reversed,
and at last

halted, so that they rested as quietly as their opponent had. Then he
strode to

the rail and looked down; but with such an expression that no one, not
even the

most brave, dared to look at him.

When he lifted his eyes at last, his face was set and grim, and with no
word to

any man he took himself to his cabin and barred the door. Then the
youth that

was second to him ordered the ship put about, that they might return to
the

white calotte of the princess; and he ordered also that wounds be
bandaged, and

pumps set in motion, and such repairs as could be made begun. But the
dead he

kept with them, that they might be buried on the high sea.

Part V

channels twisted (as some alleged) like worms in a litch, when no eye
was upon

them. Whatever the truth might be, all day they steamed - for the wind
had died

away - and by the last light saw only that they cruised among islets
unknown.

All night they lay to. When morning came, the youth called to him such
others as

he felt might offer the most valuable counsel; but none of them could
suggest

anything save calling upon the young men fleshed from dreams (which
they were

loath to do) or pressing onward until they reached open waters or the
calotte of

the princess.

That they did all day, striving to hold a straight course, but winding
against

their will among the many turnings of the channels. And when night
came again,

their position was no better than before.

and those who had advised him came to him, and they explained all that they had done and asked how they might find the sea again, that they might bury the dead and return to their homes in the city of the magicians.

At this he looked up into the very vault of the firmament. And some thought he prayed, and some that he sought to restrain the anger he felt against them, and some only that he hoped to gain inspiration there. But so long did he stare that

they waxed afraid, even as they had when he had peered into the water, and one or two began to creep away. Then he said to them: "Behold! Do you not see the

sea birds? From every corner of the sky they stream. Follow them." Until morning was nearly done, they followed the birds insofar as the winding channels permitted. And at last they saw them wheeling and diving at the water

they had been, the crew saw a great piece of carrion floating, which seemed to

them to have been a beast of the land, for it had, as they thought, a head and

legs four. But it was greater than many elephants.

When they were near, the young man ordered the boat put into the water, and when

he climbed aboard they saw that he had thrust into his belt a great alfange

whose blade caught the sun. For a time he labored over the carrion, and when he

returned he carried a chart, the largest any of them had seen, drawn upon

untanned hide.

By dark they reached the calotte of the princess. All waited on board while her

mother visited her; but when that terrible woman was gone, all who could walk

went ashore, and the Corn Maidens crowded about them, a hundred to each youth,

isle and

swore that though she might visit every country over which her mother strode,

she never would return there; and the Corn Maidens swore likewise.

Too many of

them there were, perhaps, for the ship to hold; yet it held them, so that all

the decks were green with their gowns and gold with their hair. Many adventures

they had in making their way back to the city of the magicians. This tale might

tell how they cast their dead into the sea with prayers, yet afterward saw them

in the rigging by night; or how certain of the Corn Maidens wed those princes

who, having spent years so long enchanted that they are loath to leave that life

(and have in that time learned much of gramary), build palaces on lily pads and

are seldom seen by men.

tar that had blinded their enemy, he believed them blackened in mourning for the young man, and he threw himself down, and so perished. For no man lives long when his dreams are dead.

18 MIRRORS

As I read this idle tale I looked at Jonas from time to time, but I never saw the least flicker of expression on his face, though he did not sleep. When it was complete, I said, "I'm not certain I understand why the student at once assumed his son was dead when he saw the black sails. The ship the ogre sent had black sails, but it came only once a year, and had already come." "I know," Jonas said. His voice held a flatness I had not heard before. "Do you mean you know the answers to those questions?"

At last a small voice ventured to say, "That must be a really old story." It was the little girl who had lifted the ceiling tile for me. I was so concerned for Jonas that for a moment I was angry at her for interrupting us; but Jonas muttered, "Yes, it is a very old story, and the hero had told the king, his father, that if he failed he would return to Athens with black sails." I am not sure what that remark meant, and it may have been delirium; but since it was almost the last thing I heard Jonas say, I feel I should record it here, as I have transcribed the wonder-tale that prompted it. For a time both the girl and I endeavored to persuade him to speak again. He would not, and at last we desisted. I spent the remainder of the day sitting beside him, and after a watch or so Hethor (whose small store of wit - as I supposed - had soon been exhausted by the prisoners) came to join us. I had a

are disquieted by incessant dreams, and a fortunate few are visited often by dreams of delightful character. Some will say they were at one time troubled in sleeping but have "recovered" from it, as though awareness were a disease, as perhaps it is.

My own case is that I usually sleep without memorable dreams (though I sometimes have them, as the reader who has gone this far with me will know) and seldom wake before morning. But on this night my sleep was so different from its usual nature that I have sometimes wondered if it should be called sleep at all. Perhaps it was some other state posing as sleep, as alzabos, when they have eaten of men, pose as men.

If it was the result of natural causes, I attribute it to a combination of unfortunate circumstances. I, who had all my life been accustomed to hard work

oppressed by worry for Jonas, and by the feeling (which had been growing on me

all day) that this place was the end of my journey; that I would never reach

Thrax; that I would never rejoin poor Dorcas; that I would never restore the

Claw, or even rid myself of it; that in fact the Increate, whom the owner of the

Claw had served, had decreed that I who had seen so many prisoners die should

end my own life as one.

I slept, if it may be called sleep, only for a moment. I had the sensation of

falling; a spasm, the instinctive stiffening of a victim cast from a high window, wrenched all my limbs. When I sat up, I could see nothing but darkness.

I heard Jonas's breathing, and my fingers told me he was still sitting as I had

left him, his back propped by the wall. I lay down and slept again.

Or rather, I tried to sleep, and passed into that vague state that is neither

I sat up.

For a moment I imagined I had seen a flash of green fire, but there was nothing.

I had covered myself with my cloak; I threw it off, and in the instant it took

to do so remembered that I was in the antechamber of the House Absolute, and

that I had left the inn of Saltus far behind, though Jonas lay beside me still,

on his back, his good hand behind his head. The pale blur I saw was the white of

his right eye, though the sighing of his breath was that of one who slept. I was

still too much asleep myself to wish to talk, and I had a presentiment that he

would not answer me in any case.

Lying down again, I surrendered myself to my irritation at being unable to

sleep. I thought of the herd driven through Saltus and counted them from memory:

Master Palaemon, who had taught us so much, had never taught us
how to sleep -
no apprentice had ever needed to learn that after a day of errands and
scrubbing
and kitchen work. We had rioted each night for half a watch in our
quarters,
then slept like the citizens of the necropolis until he came to wake us to
polishing floors and emptying slops.
There is a rack of knives over the table where Brother Aybert slices
meat. One,
two, three, four, five, six, seven knives, all with plainer blades than
Master
Gurloes's. One with a rivet missing from its handle. One with a handle a
little
burned because Brother Aybert had once laid it on the stove . . .
I was wide awake again, or thought I was, and I did not know why.
Beside me
Drotte slumbered undisturbed. I closed my eyes once more and tried to
sleep as
he did.

fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen cells in each wing. One, two, three
bars
on the little window of my cell's door.

I woke with a start and a sensation of cold, but the sound that had
disturbed me
was only the slamming of one of the hatches far down the corridor.
Beside me, my
boy lover, Severian, lay in the easy sleep of youth. I sat up thinking I
would
light my candle and look for a moment at the fresh coloring of that
chiseled
face. Each time he returned to me, he carried a speck of freedom
glowing on that
face. Each time I took it and blew upon it, and held it to my breast, and
each
time it pined and died; yet sometime it would not, and then instead of
sinking
deeper under this load of earth and metal, I would rise through metal
and earth
to the wind and the sky.

in

the corridor, the light that filtered through the three bars of my cell's hatch.

Faint echoes proclaimed that I was in an area larger than a hundred such cells;

my cheeks and forehead, which had worn themselves away in signaling the nearness

of my walls, confirmed it.

I stood and smoothed my gown, and began to walk almost as a somnambulist might.

. . . One, two, three, four, five, six, seven strides, then the odor of

close-kept bodies and confined air told me where I was. It was the antechamber!

I felt a wrench of dislocation. Had the Autarch ordered me carried here while

I slept? Would the others spare their lashes when they saw me? The door! The

door!

My confusion was so great I nearly fell, borne down by the jumble of my mind.

dwindling vanished within me until I was myself again, and nearly alone.

Yet I had caught it. The location of the door, the secret door through which the

young exultants came by night with their energized lashes of braided wire, was

still in my memory. With everything else I have seen or thought. I could escape

tomorrow. Or now.

"Please," a voice beside me said, "where did the lady go?"

It was the child again, the little girl with the dark hair and the staring eyes.

I asked her if she had seen a woman.

She took my hand in her own tiny one. "Yes, a tall lady, and I'm scared.

There's

a horrible thing in the dark. Did it find her?"

"You're not afraid of horrible things, remember? You laughed at the green face."

"This is different, a black thing that snuffles in the dark." There was real terror in her voice, and the hand that held mine shook.

"What did the lady look like?"

"It's coming along the wall," she said. Then she released my hand and vanished,

but I am sure she did not do as I told her. Instead, she must have followed

Jonas and me, for I have glimpsed her twice since I returned here to the House

Absolute, where no doubt she exists on stolen food. (It is possible she used to

return to the antechamber to eat, but I have ordered that all the people confined there are to be freed, even if it is necessary - as I think it will be - to drive most of them forth at pike point. I have also ordered that Nicarete

be brought to me, and when I was writing of our capture, a moment ago, my

chamberlain entered to say she waited my pleasure.)

Jonas lay as I had left him, and again I saw the whites of his eyes in the dark.

"You said it was necessary to go if you were to remain sane," I told him. "Come.

The sender of the notules, whoever that may be, has laid his hands upon another

thin

slime. My foot found the same filthy dampness on the floor nearby and on the

wall itself. Whatever it was the child had warned me of had come and gone while

I spoke with her, and it had not been for Jonas that it had searched.

The door by which the tormentors entered was not far from our sleeping place, in

the center of the rearmost wall of the antechamber. It was unlocked by a word of

power, as such ancient things almost always are. I whispered, and we passed

through the hidden portal and left it standing open, poor Jonas striding beside

me like a thing wholly metal.

A narrow stairway, festooned with the webs of pale spiders and carpeted with

dust, led by circuitous turnings downward. That much I recalled, but beyond the

stair I could remember nothing.

Absolute, I

wished to be as far from the antechamber as possible.

We had descended perhaps a hundred steps when we reached a door painted with a

crimson teratoid sign that appeared to me to be a glyph from some tongue beyond

the shores of Urth. At that moment I heard a tread upon the stair. There was

neither knob nor latch, but I threw myself against the door, and after an initial resistance it flew open. Jonas followed me; it shut behind us so quickly

that it seemed it should have made a great noise, though there was none.

The chamber beyond the door was dim, but the light grew brighter when he had

entered. After I had made certain there was no one present but ourselves, I made

use of this light to examine him. His face was still fixed, as it had been when

he sat with the wall of the antechamber at his back, yet it was not the lifeless

Thrax is in her scabbard pocket, and I couldn't bear to part with her anyway.

But if you want to try to escape this place, I'll understand. You're not bound to me."

He did not appear to have heard. "I know where we are," he said, and raised one arm stiffly to point toward something I had taken to be a folding screen.

I was delighted to hear his voice, and largely in the hope that he would speak again, I asked, "Where are we, then?"

"On Urth," he answered, and strode across the room to the folded panels. Their backs were set with clustered diamonds, as I now saw, and enameled with such

twisted signs as had been on the door. Yet these signs were no stranger than the actions of my friend Jonas when he threw the panels open. The rigidity I had

remarked in him only a moment before was gone - yet he had not returned to his

hand was

the hand of flesh. When I understood that, I understood what he had said much

earlier: that in the wreck of his ship his face had been destroyed.

I said, "The eyes . . . They could not replace your eyes. Is that right? And so

they gave you that face. Was he killed too?"

He looked about at me in a way that told me he had forgotten I was present. "He

was on the ground," he said. "We killed him by accident, coming in. I needed his

eyes and larynx, and I took some other parts."

"That was why you were able to tolerate me, a torturer. You are a machine."

"You are no worse than the rest of your kind. Remember that for years before I

met you, I had become one of you. Now I am worse than you. You would not have

left me, but I am leaving you. Now I have the chance, and it is the chance I

once

loved her, and nothing more."

Jonas shook his head. "Don't you understand? I will come back for her when I

have been repaired. When I am sane and whole."

Then he stepped into the circle of panels, and a brilliant light kindled in the

air above his head.

How foolish to call them mirrors. They are to mirrors as the enveloping firmament is to a child's balloon. They reflect light indeed; but that, I think,

is no part of their true function. They reflect reality, the metaphysical substance that underlies the material world.

Jonas closed the circle and moved to its center. For perhaps the time of the

briefest prayer, something of wires and flashing, metallic dust danced above the

tops of the panels before all was gone and I was alone.

19 CLOSETS

memory gained upon me, and I saw the sharp silhouette of Dorcas, the giant, and
the others as I had seen them when Jonas and I were being led through the plum
grove There had been men with animals as well and performers of other kinds, all
of them no doubt going to that part of the grounds where (as Thecla had often
told me) the outdoor entertainments were held.
I began to search the room with some vague hope of finding my sword. It was not
there, and it struck me that there was probably some repository near the antechamber where the goods of the prisoners were kept - most likely on the same
level. The stair I had come down would only lead me into the antechamber itself
again; the exit from the room of the mirrors took me only to another room, one
in which curious objects were stored. Eventually I found a door that opened onto

In the event, I was never challenged. A man in rich and elaborate clothing drew
aside, and several lovely women stared at me curiously; I felt Thecla's memories
stirring at the sight of their faces. At last I found another stair - not narrow
and secretive like the one that had taken Jonas and me to the chamber of
mirrors, but a broad, open flight of wide steps.
I ascended some distance, reconnoitered the corridor there until I was certain I
was still lower than the antechamber, then began to climb again when I saw a
young woman hurrying down the stair toward me.
Our eyes met.
In that moment, I feel sure, she was as conscious as I that we had exchanged
glances thus before. In memory I heard her say again, "My dearest sister," in
that cooing voice, and the heart-shaped face sprang into place. It was not Thea,

had no

sooner left the stair than I realized I was standing almost precisely where the

hastarii had stood while Nicarete and I talked beside the silver cart. This was

the point of greatest danger, and I was careful to walk slowly. The wall on my

right held a dozen or more doors, each framed in carved woodwork, and each (as I

saw when I stopped to examine them) spiked to its frame and sealed with the

varnish of years. On my left, the only door was the great one of worm-gnawed oak

through which the soldiers had dragged Jonas and me. Opposite it was the

entrance to the antechamber, and beyond that stretched another row of spiked

doors like the first, at the end of which was another stair. It appeared that

the antechamber had grown to occupy all of this level of this wing of the House

being put

through the doorway of the antechamber, this third man would have taken the

first few steps at least toward wherever it was that such captured weapons were

kept. But I could remember nothing; the soldier had dropped behind when we

descended the steps of the grotto, and I had not seen him again. It was possible, even, that he had not come in with us.

In desperation, I returned to the worm-gnawed door and opened it. The musty odor

of the well entered the corridor at once, and I heard the song of the green

gongs begin. Outside, the world was plunged in night. Save for the corpse

candles of the fungi, the rugged walls were invisible, and only a circle of stars overhead showed where the well dropped into the earth.

I closed the door; no sooner had it grated shut than I heard the sound of footsteps on the stair up which I myself had come. There was no place to hide,

and if I had darted for the second stair I would have had little chance of

began to

bow, saying, "Can I help you, your honor? I am Odilo, the steward here.

You, I

can see, are on a mission of some confidence to . . . Father Inire?"

"Yes," I said. "But first I must require my sword of you."

I had hoped that he had seen Terminus Est and would produce her for me, but he

looked blank.

"I was escorted here earlier. At that time I was told that I would have to surrender my sword, but that it would be restored to me before Father

Inire

required me to use it."

The little man was shaking his head. "I assure you, in my position I would have

been informed if any of the other servants-

"I was told this by a praetorian," I said.

"Ah, I ought to have known. They've been everywhere, answering to no one. We

have an escaped prisoner, your honor, as I suppose you've heard."

"No."

corners - some very strange corners.

"Possibly my sword is in one of them. Will you look?"

He took a half step back, as though I had raised my hand to him. "Oh, I will,

Your Honor, I will. I was only trying to make a bit of conversation. It's probably down here. If you'll just follow me . . ."

We walked toward the other stair, and I saw that in my hasty search I had

overlooked one door, a narrow one beneath the staircase. It was painted white,

so that it was almost of the same shade as the stone.

The steward produced a heavy ring of keys and opened this door. The triangular

room inside was much larger than I would have guessed, reaching far back beneath

the steps and boasting a sort of loft, accessible by a shaky ladder, toward the

rear. Its lamp was of the same type as those I had noticed in the antechamber,

but dimmer.

"Do you see it?" the steward asked. "Wait, there's a candle about here

and come

in here to rummage about. I put a stop to that - got a good lock - but I'm afraid the best things disappeared long ago.

"What is this place?"

"A closet for petitioners, originally. Coats, hats, and boots - you know.

Those

places always fill up with the things the lucky ones forget to take with them

when they go, and then this wing has always been Father Inire's, and I suppose

there's always been some that came to see him that never came back out, as well

as the ones that come out what never came in." He paused and glanced around. "I

had to give the soldiers keys to keep them from kicking down the doors when they

were searching for this Beuzec, so I suppose they might have put your sword in

here. If they didn't, they probably took it up to their guardroom. This wouldn't

be it, I don't imagine?" From a corner he drew out an ancient spadone.

steward's candle. Though it seemed exceedingly improbable that the soldier had

put Terminus Est there, I wanted a few moments to think over the courses of

action open to me.

As I climbed I heard a slight noise from above that I supposed was the scurrying

of some rodent; but when I thrust my head and the candle above the level of the

loft's floor, I saw the small man who had been with Hethor on the road kneeling

in an attitude of intense supplication. That was Beuzec, of course; I had failed

to recall the name until I saw him.

"Anything up there, your honor?"

"Rags. Rats."

"Just as I thought," the steward said as I stepped from the last rung. "I should

have a look myself sometime, but one isn't anxious to climb a thing like that at

suppose you know. If you don't want to be stopped by the patrols, you had better go indoors, so the best plan would be to go up this stairway we're standing under for three flights, then left. Follow the gallery around for about a thousand paces until you come to the hypethral. With it dark out you might miss it, so keep an eye open for the plants. Turn right in there and go another two hundred paces. There's always a sentry at the door."

I thanked him and managed to get ahead of him on the stair by leaving while he was still fumbling with the lock, then stepped into a corridor off the first landing I reached and allowed him to go past me. When he was well out of the way, I went down again to the corridor of the antechamber.

It seemed to me that if my sword had indeed been carried off to some guardroom, it was very unlikely that I could recover it save by stealth or violence, and I

the door

Jonas and I had left open for them, and would be spreading through this wing of

the House Absolute. It could not be long before one was recaptured and a search

began for the others.

When I reached the door of the closet beneath the stair, I pressed my ear to the

panel hoping to hear Beuzec moving about. There was no sound. I called him

softly by name without eliciting a response, then tried to push the door open

with my shoulder. It would not budge, and I was afraid to make noise by running

against it. At last I managed to wedge the steel Vodalus had given me between

the door and the jamb, and so split out the lock.

Beuzec was gone. After a short search I discovered a hole in the back of the

closet that opened into the hollow center of some wall. From there he must have

not seen him since.

That night I did not seek to follow him, but pulled the closet door into place

and concealed the damage to the lock as well as I could. It was only then that I

noticed the symmetry of the corridor: the entrance to the antechamber in the

center, the sealed doors to either side of it, the staircases at either end. If

this hypogeum had been set aside for Father Inire (as the steward had said and

its name indicated) its selection might have been due, at least in part, to this

mirror-image quality. If that were so, then there should certainly be a second

closet beneath the other stair.

20 PICTURES

fragments of wood clinging to the hinges showed there had ever been a door there. The lamp within had gone out, leaving the interior to darkness and spiders.

I had actually turned away from it and taken a step or two before I stopped, under the influence of that consciousness of error that often comes to us before we understand in the least in what the error consists. Jonas and I had been thrust into the ante-chamber late in the afternoon. That night the young exultants had come with their whips. The next morning Hethor had been taken, and at that time, it seemed, Beurec had bolted from the praetorians, who had been given keys by the steward so they might search the hypogeum for him. When the same steward, Odilo, had met me a few moments before, and I had told him that

I went back to the closet with the broken door again. By the scant light that filtered in from the corridor, it was apparent that it had once been lined with shelves like its twin; its interior was bare now, the shelving having been stripped away to serve some new use, leaving the shelf brackets to thrust fruitlessly from the walls. I could see no other object of any kind, but I could also see that no guardsman who had to stand inspection would willingly have set foot among its dust and cobwebs. Without bothering to thrust my own head inside, I reached around the jamb of the broken door, and - with an indescribable mingling of triumph and familiarity - felt my hand close upon the beloved hilt. I was a whole man again. Or rather, more than a man: a journeyman of the guild. There in the corridor I verified that my letter remained in the pocket of the

in a

garden - no doubt one of many gardens. If I went outside now, by night,
it would

perhaps be as difficult for the praetorians to see me in my fuligin as for
me to

see them. But I was unlikely to find any aid; and when the eastern
horizon

dropped below the sun, I would no doubt be apprehended as promptly
as Jonas and

I had been when we rode onto the grounds. If I stayed within the House
Absolute

itself, my experience with the steward indicated I might well pass
unchallenged,

and I might even come across someone who would give me information;
indeed, I

hit upon the plan of telling anyone I met that I had been summoned to
tile

celebration myself (I supposed it was not unlikely that an excruciation
would be

a part of the festivities) and that I had left the sleeping quarters assigned
to

frames hung on the walls, and urns and busts and objects for which I knew no names stood on pedestals between them. The doors opening off the corridor were a hundred or more paces apart, indicating huge rooms beyond; but all were locked, and when I tried their handles I found that they were of a form and metal unknown to me, not shaped to be grasped by human fingers.

When I had walked down this corridor for what seemed at least half a league, I saw someone ahead of me sitting (as I first thought) upon a high stool. As I drew nearer, I found that what I had taken to be a stool was a stepladder, and that the old man perched on it was cleaning one of the pictures. "Excuse me," I said.

He turned and peered down at me in puzzlement. "Know your voice, don't I?"

Then I knew his, and his face as well. It was Rudesind the curator, the old man

long."

"So do I," I told him. "Brown desert reflected in the gold visor of a man in armor."

He nodded, and his anger seemed to melt away. Gripping the sides of the ladder,

he began to descend, his sponge still in his hand. "Exactly. Exactly the one.

Want me to show it to you? It come out very nice."

"We're not in the same place, Master Rudesind. That was in the Citadel.

This is

the House Absolute."

The old man ignored that. "Come out nice . . . It's down here a ways, somewhere.

Those old artists - you couldn't beat 'em for drawing, though their colors has

gone off now. And let me tell you, I know art. I've seen armigers, and exultants

too, that come and look at them and say this and that, but they don't know a

thing. Who's looked at every little bit of these pictures up close?" He thumped

I'm

still here, and I work longer than any, except maybe Ultan. He can't see
the

watchglass." The old man gave a long, cracked laugh.

"I wonder if you could help me. There are performers here who have
been summoned

for the thiasus. Do you know where they're quartered?"

"I've heard tell of it," he said doubtfully. "The Green Room is what they
call

it."

"Can you take me there?"

He shook his head. "There's no picturers there, so I've never been,
though

there's a picture of it. Come and walk a ways with me. I'll find the picture
and

point it out to you."

He pulled the edge of my cloak, and I followed him.

"I'd rather you took me to someone who could guide me there."

"I can do that too. Old Ultan has a map somewhere in his library. That
boy of

his will get it for you."

"Wait a bit, I've got it wrong. I had talent as a boy, that's what I'm supposed

to say. My parents, you know, always encouraged me, and I'd draw for hours. I

recollect one time I spent all one sunny day sketching in chalk on the back of
our house."

A narrower corridor had opened to our left, and he pulled me down it. Though it

was less well lit (nearly dark, in fact) and so cramped that one could not stand

at anything like the proper distance from them, it was lined with pictures much

larger than those in the main corridor, pictures that stretched from floor to

ceiling, and that were far wider than my outstretched arms. From what I could

see of them, they appeared very bad -mere daubs. I asked Rudesind who it was who

had told him he must tell me about his childhood.

proud of

me, showed him some of the things I'd done. It was Fechin, Fechin himself, and

the portrait he made of me hangs here to this day, looking out at you with my

brown eyes. I'm at a table with some brushes and a tangerine on it. I'd been

promised them when I was through sitting."

I said, "I don't think I have time to look at it right now."

"So I became an artist myself. Pretty soon, I took to cleaning and restoring the

works of the great ones. Twice I've cleaned my own picture. It's strange, I tell

you, for me to wash my own little face like that. I keep wishing somebody would

wash mine now, make the dirt of the years come off with his sponge. But that's

not what I'm taking you to see - it's the Green Room you're after, ain't it?"

"Yes," I said eagerly.

a llanero

played a guitar there, as it appeared for no ear but his own. Behind him,
angry

clouds raced across a sullen sky.

"After this you can go to the library and see Ultan's map," the old man
said.

The painting was of that irritating kind which dissolves into mere blobs of
color unless it can be seen as a whole. I took a step backward to get a
better

perspective of it, then another.

With the third step, I realized I should have made contact with the wall
behind

me, and that I had not. I was standing instead inside the picture that had
occupied the opposite wall: a dark room of ancient leather chairs and
ebony

tables. I turned to look at it, and when I turned back, the corridor where I
had

stood with Rudesind had vanished, and a wall covered with old and
faded paper

stood in its place.

forty; about his neck, a phallus - shaped vial I remembered hung on a slender chain.

"Ah," he said. "I wondered who had come. Welcome, Death." With as much composure

as I could muster, I said, "I am the Journeyman Severian - of the guild of torturers, as you see. My entrance was entirely involuntary, and to be truthful,

I would be very grateful to you if you could explain just how it happened. When

I was in the corridor outside, this room appeared to be no more than a painting.

But when I took a step or two back to view the one on the other wall, I found

myself in here. By what art was that done?"

"No art," the man in the yellow robe said. "Concealed doors are scarcely an

original invention, and the constructor of this room did no more than devise a

means of concealing an open door. The room is shallow, as you see; indeed, it is

believing of

normal shape, became itself, with a slanted and trapezoidal ceiling and
a

trapezoidal floor. The very chairs that faced the wall through which I had
come

were things of little depth, so that one could hardly have sat on them;
the

tables were no wider than boards.

"The eye is deceived in a picture by such converging lines," the man in
the

yellow robe continued. "So that when it encounters them in reality, with
little

actual depth and the additional artificiality of monochromatic lighting, it
believes it sees another picture - particularly when it has been
conditioned by

a long succession of true ones. Your entrance with that great weapon
caused a

real wall to rise behind you to detain you until you had been examined. I
need

hardly add that the other side of the wall is painted with the picture you
believed you saw.

circle."

"Did you do all this?"

"Oh, no. All these things . . ." He paused. "And a hundred more like them, make

up what we call the Second House. They are the work of Father Inire, who was

called by the first Autarch to create a secret palace within the walls of the

House Absolute. You or I, my son, would no doubt have built a mere suite of

concealed rooms. He contrived that the hidden house should be everywhere

coextensive with the public one."

"But you aren't he," I said. "Because now I know who you are! Do you recognize

me?" I drew off my mask so he could see my face.

He smiled and said, "You came but once. The khaibit did not please you, then."

"She pleased me less than the woman she counterfeited - or rather, I loved the

the strange, shallow room caught his profile, delicate as a cameo, and I decided

he must be an androgyne. Pity welled up in me, with a sense of helplessness, as

I thought of him opening the door to men, night after night, at his establishment in the Algedonic Quarter. "Yes," he said. "I will remain here for

the celebration, then go."

My mind was full of the picture old Rudesind had shown me in the corridor

outside, and I said, "Then you can show me where the garden is."

I sensed at once that he had been caught off guard, possibly for the first time

in many years. There was pain in his eyes, and his left hand moved (though only

slightly) toward the vial at his throat. "So you have heard of that . . ." he

said. "Even supposing that I knew the way, why should I reveal it to you? Many

will seek to flee by that road if the pelagic argosy sights land."

in

the stress of the moment how futile such precautions must be in that
deception-filled room, I looked about, seeking to assure myself that no
one

could overhear us, then found that without my having willed it
(consciously, I

had intended to question him before betraying my connection with
Vodalus) my

hand had taken the knife-shaped steel from the innermost compartment
of my

sabretache.

The androgyne smiled. "I felt you might be the one. For days now I have
been

expecting you, and I have kept the old man outside and many others
under

instructions to bring promising strangers to me."

"I was imprisoned in the antechamber," I said. "And so lost time."

"But you escaped, I see. It isn't likely you'd be released before my man
came to

search it. It's well you did - there isn't much time left . . . the three days

"You came to the correct part of the Secret House at least," the androgyne said.

"Otherwise we would have had to walk a weary way. Your pardon, while I read the message you brought."

He crossed to what I at first supposed was a glass-topped table, and put the

steel under it on a shelf. At once a light kindled, shining down from the glass,

though there was no light above it. The steel grew until it seemed a sword, and

its striations, in place of mere teeth on which to strike sparks from a flint, I

saw to be lines of flowing script.

"Stand back," the androgyne said. "If you have not read this before, you must

not read it now."

I did as he bid, and for some time watched him bending over the little object I

had carried away from Vodalus's glade. At last he said, "There is no help for it

cubits

wide - that stood with its cover of mottled blue-green leather facing me
much as

a corpse might had I opened the lid of an upright casket. Sheathing my
sword, I

gripped this great volume with both hands and placed it on the stand.
The

androgynous asked if I had seen it previously, and I told him I had not.

"You looked fearful of it, and tried . . . as it appeared to me - to keep
your

face from it when you carried it." He threw back the cover as he spoke.
The

first page, thus revealed, was written in red in a character I did not
know.

"This is a warning to the seekers of the path," he said. "Shall I read it to
you?"

I blurted, "It seemed to me that I saw a dead man in the leather, and
that he

was myself."

He closed the cover again and ran his hand over it. "These pavonine
dyeings are

I was blinded, almost, as I have been on dark nights by a discharge of lightning. The inner pages seemed of pure silver, beaten and polished, that

caught every wisp of illumination in the room and flung it back amplified a

hundred times. "They're mirrors," I said, and in saying it realized that they

were not, but those things for which we have no word but mirrors, those things

that less than a watch before had returned Jonas to the stars. "But how can they

have power, when they do not face each other?"

The androgyne answered, "Consider how long they faced each other when the book

was closed. Now the field will withstand the tension we put on it for some time.

Go, if you dare."

I did not dare. As he spoke, something shaped itself in shining air above the

open pages. It was neither a woman nor a butterfly, but it partook of both, and

before had seen the swirls and loops of writing on the steel through his glass.

It paused and turned to me and opened its wings that I might observe them. They

were marked with eyes.

The androgyne closed the book with a crash, like a door slammed shut.

"What did

you see?" he asked.

I could think only that I no longer had to look into the pages, and said,

"Thank

you, sieur. Whoever you may be, I am your servant from this time forward."

He nodded. "Perhaps sometime I may remind you of that. But I will not ask you

again what it was you saw. Here, wipe your forehead. The sight has marked you."

He handed me a clean cloth as he spoke, and I wiped my brow with it as he told

me, because I could feel the moisture running down my face. When I looked at the

cloth, it was crimson with blood.

map. I

only want to find the Green Room, as old Rudesind out there says it's called,

where the players are quartered. Did Vodalus's message say you were to kill the

bearer?" I was fumbling for my sword as I spoke, but when my hands gripped the

familiar hilt, I found I was too weak to draw the blade.

The androgyne laughed. It was pleasant laughter at first, wavering somewhere

between a woman's and a boy's, but it trailed off into tittering, as a drunken

man's sometimes does. Thecla's memories stirred in me; almost, they woke. "Was

that all you wished?" he said when he had control of himself again. "You asked

me for a light for your candle, and I tried to give you the sun, and now you are

burned. The fault was mine . . . I sought, perhaps, to postpone my time, yet

fact, I feared him, and feared that the androgyne would inform him if I professed disobedience.)

"But if I have no orders for you? Have you already disposed of the Claw?"

"I could not," I said.

There was a pause. He did not speak.

"I'll go to Thrax," I said. "I have a letter to the archon there; he's supposed

to have work for me. For the honor of my guild, I would like to go."

"That is well. How great, in truth, is your love of Vodalus?"

Again I felt the haft of the ax in my hand. For you others, as I am told, memory

dies; mine scarcely dims. The mist that shrouded the necropolis that night blew

against my face again, and everything I had felt when I received the coin from

Vodalus and watched him walk away to a place where I could not follow returned

to me. "I saved him once," I said.

The androgyne added. "Then here is what you are to do. You must go to Thrax as

Pelerines are

in the north. If you are given the opportunity, you must restore the Claw
to
them."

"That is what I had hoped to do."

"Good. There is something else you must do as well. The Autarch is
here, but

long before you reach Thrax he will be in the north too, with the army. If
he

comes near Thrax, you are able to go to him. In time you will discover
the way

in which you must take his life."

His tone betrayed him as much as Thecla's thoughts. I wanted to kneel,
but he

clapped his hands, and a bent little man slipped silently into the room.
He wore

a cowed habit like a cenobite's. The Autarch spoke to him, something I
was too

distracted to understand.

of the

contrived corridors of the Second House - and I watched the silver streams trace

ideographs across the solar disc.

"Straight ahead," the cowled figure murmured. "Follow the path through the Gate

of Trees. You will be safe among the players." The door shut behind me and

became the grassy slope of a hillock.

I stumbled toward the fountain, which refreshed me with windblown spray. I was

surrounded by a pavement of serpentine; for a time I stood there, seeking to

read my fortune in the dancing shapes, and at last I fumbled in my sabretache

for an offering. The praetorians had taken all my money, but while I felt among

the few possessions I yet carried there (a flannel, the fragment of whetstone,

and a flask of oil for Terminus Est; a comb and the brown book for myself) I

water made

against the sun.

A sword. That seemed clear enough. I would continue a torturer.

A rose then, and beneath it a river. I would climb Gyll as I had planned,
since

that was the road to Thrax.

Now angry waves, becoming soon a long, sullen swell. The sea,
perhaps; but one

could not reach the sea, I thought, by climbing toward the source of the
river.

A rod, a chair, a multitude of towers, and I began to think the oracular
powers

of the fountain, in which I had never greatly believed, to be wholly false.

I

turned away; but as I turned, I glimpsed a many-pointed star, growing
ever

larger.

Since I have returned to the House Absolute, I have twice revisited the
Vatic

received no true prophecy for their money. Yet I am unsure, recalling
the green
man, who drove off his visitors with his accounts of their futures. May it
not
be that these servants of mine, seeing only a lifetime of trays and
brooms and
ringing bells, reject it? I have asked my ministers as well, who doubtless
cast
in chrisos by the handful, but their answers are doubtful and mixed.
It was hard indeed to keep my back to the fountain and its lovely, cryptic
messages and walk toward the old sun. Huge as a giant's face and
darkly red it
showed as the horizon dropped away. The poplars of the grounds were
silhouetted
against it, making me think of the figure of Night atop the khan on this
western
bank of Gyoll, which I had so often seen with the sun behind it at the
close of
one of our swimming parties.
Not realizing that I was now deep within the bounds of tile House
Absolute and

velvet lawn, flower and trickling water, except myself. Lilies far taller than

I, their star-shaped faces spangled with unshaken dew, overhung the path; its

perfect surface showed behind me only the disturbance of my own feet.

Nightingales, some free, some suspended from the branches of trees in golden

cages, were singing still.

Once I saw before me, with something of the old feeling of horror, one of the

walking statues. Like a colossal man (though it was not a man) too graceful and

too slow to be human, it came across a small secretive lawn as if moving to the

inaudible notes of some strange processional. I confess I hung back until it had

passed, wondering if it could sense me where I stood in the shadow, and if it

cared that I stood so.

Just when I had despaired of finding the Gate of Trees, I saw it. There was no

side that great, green entranceway built of living wood as if of masonry.

I ran then.

22 PERSONIFICATIONS

Through the wide, dripping arch of the Gate of Trees I ran, and out onto
a broad

expanse of grass, now spangled with tents. Somewhere a megathere
roared and

shook its chain. There seemed to be no other sound. I halted and
listened, and

the megathere, no longer disturbed by my footfalls, settled back into the
death

- like sleep of its kind. I could hear the dew running from the leaves, and
the

faint, interrupted twitter of birds.

Something else there was as well. A faint whick, whick, quick and
irregular,

He flourished his cane as he spoke; the which, which had been his chopping at the heads of flowers.

"You have rejoined us just in time. Just in time! We perform tonight, and I would have been forced to hire one of these fellows to take your part. I'm delighted to see you! I owe you some money - do you recall? Not much, and between you and I, I think it false. But it is owed just the same, and I always pay."

"I'm afraid I don't recall," I said, "so it can't be a great sum. If Dorcas is all right I'm quite willing to forget it, provided you'll give me something to eat and show me where I can sleep for a couple of watches." The doctor's sharp nose dipped for an instant to express regret. "Sleep you may have in plenty until the others wake you. But I'm afraid we've no food. Baldanders, you know, eats like a fire. The Thiasus Marshal has promised to bring something today for all of us." He waved his stick vaguely at the

ropes to a

heliotrope dome. Baldanders's barrow stood at the door, and at last I felt certain I had found Dorcas again.

When I woke, it was as though we had never been separated. Dorcas's delicate

loveliness was unchanged; Jolenta's radiance threw it into shadow as always, yet

made me wish, when the three of us were together, that she would leave so that I

might rest my eyes on Dorcas. I took Baldanders to one side, an hour or so after

we were all awake, and asked him why he had left me in the forest beyond the

Piteous Gate.

"I was not with you," he said slowly. "I was with my Dr. Talos."

"And so was I. We might have sought him together and been of help to each

other."

There was a long hesitation; I seemed to feel the weight of those dull eyes on

He shook his head slowly, and I noticed that his thatch of coarse black hair was

touched with gray. "I woke one morning and there you were. I was thinking. You

left me soon."

"The circumstances were different then - we had arranged to meet again." (I felt

a pang of guilt when I recalled that I had never intended to honor that promise.)

"We have met again," Baldanders said dully; and then, seeing that the answer

failed to satisfy me, added, "There is nothing here real to me but Dr. Talos."

"Your loyalty is very commendable, but you might have remembered that he wanted

me with him as well as yourself." I found it impossible to be angry with this

dim, gentle giant.

"We will collect money here in the south, and then we will build again, as we

have built before, when they have forgotten."

that they seemed in need of it, or that I could have detected any but the most obvious lacks. A number of showmen were gathered around Jolenta, and Dr. Talos drove them away and ordered her to go into the tent. A moment later, I heard the smack of his cane on flesh; he came out grinning but still angry. "It isn't her fault," I said. "You know how she looks." "Too gaudy. Too gaudy by far. Do you know what I like about you, Sieur Severian? You prefer Dorcas. Where is she, by the way? Have you seen her since you came back?" "I warn you, Doctor. Don't strike her." "I wouldn't think of it. I'm only afraid she may be lost." His surprised expression convinced me that he was telling the truth. I told him, "We only got to talk for a moment. She's gone to fetch water." "That's courageous of her," he said, and when I looked puzzled he added, "She's

much more

than smile, and touch with incredulous hands. Now she came to me, putting down

the pails she carried, and seemed to devour me with her eyes. "I have missed you

so," she said. "I've been so lonely without you."

I laughed to think of anyone missing me, and held up the edge of my fuligin

cloak. "You missed this?"

"Death, you mean. Did I miss death? No, I missed you." She took the cloak from

my hand and used it to draw me toward the line of poplars that formed one wall

of the Green Room. "There is a bench I found where there are beds of herbs. Come

and sit with me. They can spare us for a while after so many days, and eventually Jolenta will come out and find the water, which was for her anyway."

As soon as we were away from the bustle of the tents, where jugglers tossed

narrow door. We passed into a grove of trees with white, perfumed boughs that reminded me sadly of the flowering plums through which the praetorians had dragged Jonas and me, though those had seemed planted for ornament, and these, I thought, for the sake of their fruit. Dorcas had broken a twig bearing half a dozen of the blossoms and thrust it into her pale golden hair. Beyond the orchard was a garden so old that I felt sure it had been forgotten by everyone save the servants who tended it. The stone seat there had been carved with heads, but they had worn away until they were almost featureless. A few beds of simple flowers remained, and with them fragrant rows of kitchen herbs - rosemary, angelica, mint, basil, and rue, all growing in a soil black as chocolate from the labor of countless years. There was a little stream too, where Dorcas had no doubt drawn her water. Its

in hers.

"I am afraid, Severian," she said. "I have such terrible dreams."

"Since I've been gone?"

"All the time."

"When we slept side by side in the field, you told me you had awakened
from a

good dream. You said it was very detailed and seemed real."

"If it was good, I have forgotten it now."

I had already noticed that she was careful to keep her eyes away from
the water

spilling from the ruined fountain.

"Every night, I dream I am walking through streets of shops. I am happy,
or at

least content. I have money to spend, and there is a long list of things I
wish

to buy. Again and again I recite the list to myself, and I try to decide in
what

parts of the quarter I can get each in the best quality for the lowest price.

"But gradually, as I go from shop to shop, I grow aware that everyone
who sees

the sound her thread makes behind me as it is pulled through the work."

I asked, "What is it you have come to buy?"

"Tiny clothes." Dorcas held her small, white hands half a span apart.

"Doll's

clothing, perhaps. I particularly remember little shirts of fine wool. At last

I

choose one and hand the old man money. But it is not money at all -

only a lump

of filth."

Her shoulders were shaking, and I put my arm about her to comfort her.

"I want to scream then that they are wrong, that I am not the foul specter

they

take me for. Yet I know that if I do, whatever I may say will be taken as

the

final proof that they are right, and the words choke me. The worst part is

that

just then the hissing of the thread stops." She had taken my free hand

again,

and now she gripped it as though to drive her meaning into me. "I know

that no

with

Agia and me. It belonged to a man named Hildegrin. Surely you must remember that

trip."

Dorcas shook her head. "It is not that boat but a much smaller one. An old man

poles it, and I lie at his feet. I am awake, but I cannot move. My arm trails in

the black water. Just as we are about to touch shore, I fall from the boat, but

the old man does not see me, and as I sink through the water I know that he has

never known I was there at all. Soon the light is gone, and I am very cold. Far

above me, I hear a voice I love calling my name, but I cannot remember whose

voice it is,"

"It's my voice, calling to wake you."

"Perhaps." The whip mark Dorcas had carried from the Piteous Gate burned on her

cheek like a brand.

wish we

had sat on the grass under those trees."

"Why do you hate it? It seems beautiful to me."

"Because it is here in the sunshine, but by its own nature it runs down
and down

forever, away from the light."

"But it rises again," I said. "The rain we see in spring is the same water
we

saw running the gutters the year before. Or so Master Malrubius taught
us."

Dorcas's smile flashed like a star. "That is good to believe, whether it's
true

or not. Severian, it's silly for me to say you're the best person I know,
because you're the only good person I know. But I think if I met a
thousand

others, you would still be the best. That was what I wanted to talk to you
about."

"If you need my protection, you have it. You know that."

"It isn't that at all," Dorcas said. "In a way I want to give you mine. Now
that

You told me once that you don't have much imagination, but you must have sensed that."

"Is that what you want to protect me from - loneliness? I would welcome such protection."

"Then I will give you all I can, for as long as I can. But most of all, I want to protect you from the opinion of the world. Severian, do you remember what I

told you of my dream? How all the people in the shops, and on the street,

believed that I was only some hideous ghost? They may be right."

She was shaking, and I held her.

"That is part of the reason the dream is so painful. The other part comes from

knowing that in some other way they are wrong. The foul specter is in me. It is

me. But there are other things in me too, and they are what I am as much as it is."

"You could never be a foul specter, or anything foul."

instant? And how we went walking down a road between trees until we saw a light

ahead, and it was Dr. Talos and Baldanders, ready to put on their show with

Jolenta?"

"You held my hand," I said. "And we talked about philosophy. How could I

forget?"

"When we came to the light and Dr. Talos saw us - do you remember what he said?"

I cast my mind back to that evening, the end of the day on which I had executed

Agilus. In memory I heard the roar of the crowd, Agia's scream, and then the

roll of Baldanders's drum. "He said that everyone had come now, and that you

were Innocence, and I was Death."

Dorcas nodded solemnly. "That's right. But you're not really Death, you know, no

matter how often he calls you that. You're no more Death than a butcher is

people to be people. They throw names over them and lock them in, but I don't want you to let them lock you in. Dr. Talos is worse than most. In his own way, he's a liar . . ."

She left the accusation unfinished, and I ventured, "I once heard Baldanders say he seldom lied."

"In his own way, I said. Baldanders is right, Dr. Talos doesn't lie the way other people understand lying. Calling you Death wasn't a lie, it was a . . . a . . ."

"Metaphor," I suggested.

"But it was a dangerous, bad metaphor and it was aimed at you like a lie."

"Do you think Dr. Talos hates me, then? I would have said he was one of the few people who've showed me real kindness since I left the Citadel. You, Jonas - who's gone now - an old woman I met while I was imprisoned, a man in a yellow

that's what he does most often."

"Baldanders seems to love him, though," I said. "I used to have a crippled dog,

and I've seen Baldanders look at the doctor the way Triskele used to look at

me."

"I understand you, but it doesn't strike me that way. Have you ever thought of

how you must have looked, when you looked at your dog? Do you know anything

about their past?"

"Only that they lived together near Lake Diurturna. The people there appear to

have set fire to their house to drive them away.

"Do you think Dr. Talos could be Baldanders's son?"

The idea was so absurd that I laughed, happy to have the release from tension.

"Just the same," Dorcas said, "that's how they act. Like a slow-thinking, hard-working father with a brilliant, erratic son. At least so it seems to me."

23 JOLENTA

The old orchard and the herb garden beyond it had been so silent, so
freighted

with oblivion, that they had recalled to me the Atrium of Time, and
Valeria with

her exquisite face framed in furs. The Green Room was pandemonium.
Everyone was

awake now, and sometimes it seemed that everyone was shouting.
Children climbed

the trees to free the caged birds, pursued by their mothers' brooms and
their

fathers' missiles. Tents were being struck even while rehearsals
continued, so

that I saw a seemingly solid pyramid of striped canvas collapse like a
flag

thrown down and reveal beyond it the grass-green megathere rearing
on his hind

legs while a dancer pirouetted on his forehead.

upon within

the Wall of Nessus. Servants from the House Absolute, it seemed, had brought

timbers and nails, tools and paint and cloth in quantities much greater than we

could possibly make use of. Their generosity had waked the doctor's bent toward

the grandoise (which never slumbered deeply) and he alternated between assisting

Baldanders and me with the heavier constructions and making frantic additions to

the manuscript of his play.

The giant was our carpenter, and though he moved slowly, he worked so steadily,

and with such great strength - driving a spike as thick as my forefinger with a

blow or two and cutting a timber it would have taken me a watch to saw through

with a few strokes of his ax - that he might have been ten slaves toiling under

the whip.

the illusion is complete only in total darkness. It is best, therefore, to strengthen it with painted scenes behind, and Dorcas created those with skill,

standing waist high in mountains as she thrust her brushes through the daylight-faded images.

Jolenta and I were of less value. I had no painter's hand, and too little understanding of the necessities of the play even to assist the doctor in arranging our properties. Jolenta, I think, rebelled physically and psychically

against any kind of work, and certainly against this. Those long legs, so slender below the knees, so rounded to bursting above them, were inadequate to

bear much weight beyond that of her own body; her jutting breasts were in

constant danger of having their nipples crushed between lumber or smeared with

paint. Nor had she any of that spirit that animates the members of a group

forwarding the group's purpose. Dorcas had said that I had been alone the night

garner admiration.

She touched my arm, and without speaking rolled enormous emerald eyes to

indicate the edge of our natural amphitheater, where a grove of chestnuts lifted

white candles among their pale leaves.

I saw that none of the others were looking at us and nodded. After Dorcas,

Jolenta walking beside me seemed nearly as tall as Thecla, though she took small

steps instead of Thecla's swinging strides. She was a head taller than Dorcas at

least, her coiffure made her seem taller still, and she wore boots with high,

riding heels.

"I want to see it," she said. "It's the only chance I shall ever have."

That was a palpable lie, but as though I believed it I said, "The opportunity is

symmetric. Today and only today the House Absolute has the opportunity to see

you."

I did so.

"If I don't smile, make them leave. Understand?"

Grass much longer than that in the natural amphitheater, but softer than fern,

grew among the chestnuts; the path was of quartz pebbles shot with gold.

"If only the Autarch saw me, he would desire me. Do you think he will come to

our play?"

To please her I nodded, but added, "I have heard he has little use for women,

however beautiful, save as advisors, spies, and shield maids."

She stopped and turned, smiling. "That's just it. Don't you see? I can make

anyone desire me, and so he, the One Autarch, whose dreams are our reality,

whose memories are our history, will desire me too, unmanned or not.

You have

wanted women other than me, haven't you? Wanted them badly?"

I admitted I had.

same ones come to our performances again and again, and send me their food and

their flowers, scarfs, shawls, and embroidered kerchiefs with oh, such sisterly,

motherly notes. They're going to protect me, protect me from my physician, from

his giant, from their husbands and sons and neighbors. And the men! Baldanders

has to throw them in the river."

I asked if she were lame, and as we emerged from the chestnuts, I looked about

for some conveyance for her, but there was nothing.

"My thighs are chafed and it hurts to walk. I have an unguent for them that

helps a bit, and a man bought a jennet for me to ride, but I don't know where

it's pastured now. I'm really only comfortable when I can keep my legs apart."

"I could carry you."

She smiled again, displaying perfect teeth. "We'd both enjoy that, wouldn't we?"

I heard the sound of water sliding over stones, and having no better goal
to
seek made for it. We passed through a hawthorn hedge whose spotted
white
blossoms seemed from a distance to present an insurmountable barrier,
and saw a
river hardly wider than a street, on which swans sailed like sculptures of
ice.

There was a pavilion there, and beside it three boats, each shaped like
the wide
flower of the nenuphar. Their interiors were lined with the thickest silk
brocade, and when I stepped into one I found that they exuded the odor
of
spices.

"Wonderful," Jolenta said. "They won't mind if we take one, will they? Or
if
they do, I'll be brought before someone important, just as it is in the
play,
and when he sees me he'll never let me leave. I'll make Dr. Talos stay
with me,
and you if you want. They'll have some use for you."

she would wear

next year. Agia had no feature that was not inferior to Jolenta's; she had been

hardly taller than Dorcas, with hips over-wide and breasts that would have

seemed meager beside Jolenta's overflowing plenitude; her long, brown eyes and

high cheekbones were more expressive of shrewdness and determination than passion

and surrender. Yet Agia had engendered a healthy rut in me. Her laughter, when

it came, was often tinged with spite; but it was real laughter. She had sweated

with her heat; Jolenta's desire was no more than the desire to be desired, so

that I wished, not to comfort her loneliness as I had wished to comfort Valeria's, nor to find expression for an aching love like the love I had felt for Thecla, nor to protect her as I wished to protect Dorcas; but to shame and

punish her, to destroy her self-possession, to fill her eyes with tears and tear

straining

bodice would be unable to contain her that I averted my eyes. When I looked

again, she was sleeping.

A slender oar trailed behind the boat. I took it and found that despite the circularity of the hull above the water, there was a keel below. In the center

of the river the current ran strongly enough that I needed only to steer our

slow progress along a series of gracefully sweeping meanders. Just as the hooded

servant and I had passed unseen through suites and alcoves and arcades when he

had escorted me along the hidden ways of the Second House, so now the sleeping

Jolenta and I passed without noise or effort, almost completely unobserved,

through leagues of garden. Couples lay on the soft grass beneath the trees and

in the more refined comfort of summerhouses and seemed to think our craft hardly

beside her on the cushions. There was a purity in her sleeping face,
however
artificial, that I had never observed when she was awake. I kissed her,
and her
large eyes, hardly open, seemed almost Agia's long eyes, as her red-
gold hair
appeared almost brown. I loosened her clothing. She seemed half
drugged, whether
by some soporific in the heaped cushions or merely by the fatigue
induced by our
walk in the open and the burden of so great a quantity of voluptuous
flesh. I
freed her breasts, each nearly as large as her own head, and those
wide thighs,
which seemed to hold a new-hatched chick between them.

When we returned, everyone knew where we had been, though I doubt
that
Baldanders cared. Dorcas wept in private, vanishing for a time only to
emerge

Talos

chaffer with various officials of the House Absolute, and in rehearsal.

Since I

have already said something of what it was to act in Dr. Talos's play, I propose

to give an approximation of the text here - not as it existed on the fragments

of soiled paper we passed from hand to hand that afternoon, which often contained

no more than hints for improvisations, but as it might have been recorded by

some diligent clerk in the audience; and as it was, in fact, recorded by the

demonic witness who dwells behind my eyes.

But first you must visualize our theater. Urth's laboring margin has climbed

once more above the red disc; long-winged bats flit overhead, and a green

quarter moon hangs low in the eastern sky. Imagine the slightest of valleys, a

down toward the tiny arch of our proscenium; they are dotted with men
and women
in the fantastic costumes of a masque-costumes drawn largely from
remote ages,
so that I, with no more than the smattering of history furnished me by
Thecla
and Master Palaemon, scarcely recognize one of them. Servants move
among these
masquers carrying trays loaded with cups and tumblers, heaped with
delicious-smelling meats and pastries. Black seats of velvet and ebony,
as
delicate as crickets, face our stage, but many in the audience prefer to
stand,
and throughout our performance the spectators come and go without
interruption,
many remaining to hear no more than a dozen lines. Hylas sing in the
trees, the
nightingales trill, and atop the hills the walking statues move slowly
through
many poses. All the parts in the play are taken by Dr. Talos,
Baldanders,

Being a dramatization (as he claimed) of certain parts
of the lost Book of the New Sun

Persons in the Play:

Gabriel

The Giant Nod

Meschia, the First Man

Meschiane, the First Woman

Jahi

The Autarch

The Contessa

Her Maid

Two Soldiers

A Statue

A Prophet

The Generalissimo

Two Demons (disguised)

The Inquisitor

His Familiar

carrying a crystal clarion.

GABRIEL: Greetings. I have come to set the scene for you - after all, that is my

function. It is the night of the last day, and the night before the first. The Old Sun has set. He will appear in the sky no more. Tomorrow the New Sun will

rise, and my siblings and I will greet him. Tonight . . . tonight no one knows.

Everyone sleeps.

Footsteps, heavy and slow. Enter NOD.

GABRIEL: Omniscience! Defend your servant!

NOD: Do you serve him? So do we Nephilim. I will not harm you, then, unless he suggests it.

GABRIEL: You are of his household? How does he communicate with you?

NOD: To tell the truth, he doesn't. I'm forced to guess at what he wishes me to do.

GABRIEL: I was afraid of that.

NOD: Have you seen Meschia's son?

late.

NOD: (Nods slowly, not understanding.) If you should see him-

Enter MESCHIA and MESCHIANE, with JAHl following. All are naked,
but JAHl wears

jewelry.

MESCHIA: What a lovely place! Delightful! Flowers, fountains, and
statues -

isn't it wonderful?

MESCHIANE: (Timidly.) I saw a tame tiger with fangs longer than my
hand. What

shall we call him?

MESCHIA: Whatever he wants. (To GABRIEL:) Who owns this
beautiful spot?

GABRIEL: The Autarch.

MESCHIA: And he permits us to live here. That's very gracious of him.

GABRIEL: Not exactly. There's someone following you, my friend. Do
you know it?

MESCHIA: (Not looking.) There's something behind you too.

GABRIEL: (Flourishing the clarion that is his badge of office.) Yes, He
is

behind me!

house. It

must rain often here - see how green the grass is.

MESCHIA: (Examining NOD.) Why, it's only a statue. No wonder he
wasn't afraid

of it.

MESCHIANE: It might come to life. I heard something once about
raising sons from

stones.

MESCHIA: Once! Why you were only born just now. Yesterday, I think.

MESCHIANE: Yesterday! I don't remember it . . . I'm such a child,
Meschia. I

don't remember anything until I walked out into the light and saw you
talking to

a sunbeam.

MESCHIA: That wasn't a sunbeam! It was . . . to tell the truth, I haven't
thought of a name for what it was yet.

MESCHIANE: I fell in love with you then.

Enter the AUTARCH.

AUTARCH: Who are you?

MESCHIA: As far as that goes, who are you?

AUTARCH: The owner of this garden.

MESCHIA: In appearance, at least.

AUTARCH: Well, it is inevitable, I suppose. Not that I am attempting to excuse

it now. But I was young, and though it would be better to confine oneself to

women nearer one's own station, still there are times - as you would understand,

young man, if you had ever been in my position - when a little maid or country

girl, who can be wooed with a handful of silver or a bolt of velvet, and will

not demand, at the most inconvenient moment, the death of some rival or an

ambassadorship for her husband . . . Well, when a little person like that becomes a most enticing proposition.

While the AUTARCH has been speaking, JAHl has been creeping up behind MESCHIA.

Now she lays a hand on his shoulder.

JAHl: Now you see that he, whom you have esteemed your divinity, would

two my leave

to camp here, and you shall wear a rich gown this night, and your mouth shall

run with wine, and that slender figure shall be rendered a shade less graceful,

perhaps, by larks stuffed with almonds and candied figs.

JAH! Go away, old man.

AUTARCH: What! Do you know who I am?

JAH! I am the only one here who does. You are a ghost and less, a column of

ashes upheld by the wind.

AUTARCH: I see, she is mad. What does she want you to do, friend?

MESCHIA: (Relieved.) You hold no resentment toward her? That is good of you.

AUTARCH: None at all! Why, a mad mistress should be a most interesting

experience - I am looking forward to it, believe me, and there are few things to

look forward to when you've seen and done all I have. She doesn't bite, does

she? I mean, not hard?

AUTARCH: I grant no favors after six - that's a rule I've had to make to keep my sanity. I'm sure you understand.

MESCHIA: (Somewhat taken aback.) That's good to know. But I wasn't going to ask for something, really. Only for information, for divine wisdom.

AUTARCH: In that case, go ahead. But I warn you, you must pay a price. I mean to have that demented angel for my own tonight.

MESCHIA drops to his knees.

MESCHIA: There is something I have never understood. Why must I talk to you when you know my every thought? My first question was: Knowing her to be of that

brood you have banished, should I not still do what she proposes? For she knows

I know, and it is in my heart to believe that she puts forward right action in

the thought that I will spurn it because it comes from her.

AUTARCH: (Aside.) He is mad too, I see, and because of my yellow robes thinks

holy ground.

CONTESSA: Liege, who is this fool?

AUTARCH: A madman I found wandering with two women as mad as he.

CONTESSA: Then they outnumber us, unless my maid be sane.

MAID: Your Grace-

CONTESSA: Which I doubt. This afternoon she laid out a purple stole with my green capote. I was to look like a post decked with morning-glories, it would seem.

MESCHIA, who has been growing angrier as she speaks, strikes her, knocking her down. Unseen behind him, the AUTARCH flees.

MESCHIA: Brat! Don't trifle with holy things when I am near, or dare do anything but what I tell you.

MAID: Who are you, sir?

MESCHIA: I am the parent of the human race, my child. And you are my child, as she is.

MESCHIA: (Pointing.) A giant! A giant!

CONTESSA: Oh! Solange! Kyneburga!

MAID: I'm here, Your Grace. Lybe is here.

NOD: Too early for the New Sun by some time still.

CONTESSA: (Beginning to weep.) The New Sun is coming! We shall
melt like
dreams.

MESCHIA: (Seeing that NOD intends no violence.) Bad dreams. But it
will be the
best thing for you, you understand that, don't you?

CONTESSA: (Recovering a little.) What I don't understand is how you,
who
suddenly seem so wise, could mistake the Autarch for the Universal
Mind.

MESCHIA: I know that you are my daughters in the old creation. You
must be,
since you are human women, and I have had none in this.

NOD: His son will take my daughter to wife. It is an honor our family has
done
little to deserve - we are only humble people, the children of Gea - but
we will

see him. (

To the CONTESSA:) Has it not struck you that I may know more of him
you call

the Universal Mind than your Autarch does of himself? Not only your
Universal

Mind, but many lesser powers wear our humanity like a cloak when they
will,

sometimes only as concerns two or three of us. We who are worn are
seldom aware

that, seeming ourselves to ourselves, we are yet Demiurge, Paraclete,
or Fiend

to another.

CONTESSA: That is wisdom I have gained late, if I must fade with the
New Sun's

rising. Is it past midnight?

MAID: Nearly so, Your Grace.

CONTESSA: (Pointing to the audience.) All these fair folk - what will
befall

them?

MESCHIA: What befalls leaves when their year is past, and they are
driven by the

my loins . . .

MESCHIA: If it did, you might wander Urth for a time longer, a lost thing
that

could never find its way home. But I will not bed you. Do you think that
you are

more than a corpse? You are less.

MAID faints.

CONTESSA: You say you are the father of all things human. It must be
so, for you

are death to woman.

The stage darkens. When the light returns, MESCHIANE and JAHl are
lying together

beneath a rowan tree. There is a door in the hillside behind them.

JAHl'S lip is

split and puffed, giving her a pouting look. Blood trickles from it to her
chin.

MESCHIANE: How strong I would be still to search for him, if only I
knew you

would not follow me.

JAHl: I move with the strength of the World Below, and will follow you to
the

endure past endurance - even as I am more beautiful than you, I am a
more tender
creature by far.

MESCHIANE: We've seen that, I think.

JAH! I warn you again, and there will be no third warning. Strike me at
your
peril.

MESCHIANE: What will you do? Summon up Erinyes to destroy me? I
have no fear of
that. If you could, you would have done it long before.

JAH! Worse. If you strike me again, you will come to enjoy it.

Enter FIRST SOLDIER and SECOND SOLDIER, armed with pikes.

FIRST SOLDIER: Look here!

SECOND SOLDIER: (To the Women:) Down, down! Don't stand, or
like a heron I'll
skewer you. You're coming with us.

MESCHIANE: On our hands and knees?

FIRST SOLDIER: None of your insolence!

He prods her with his pike, and as he does there is a groaning almost
too deep

order came

to search the garden, special mention was made of you two, and orders given to

bring you back. Ten chrisos you'll be worth, or I'm a cobbler.

He seizes JAHI, and as soon as he does so, MESCHIANE darts off into the

darkness. FIRST SOLDIER runs after her.

SECOND SOLDIER: Bite me, will you!

He strikes JAHI with the shaft of his weapon. They struggle.

JAHI: Fool! She's escaping!

SECOND SOLDIER: That's Ivo's worry. I've got my prisoner, and he let his escape,

if he doesn't catch her. Come on, we're going to see the chiliarch.

JAHI: Will you not love me before we leave this winsome spot?

SECOND SOLDIER: And have my manhood cut off and shoved into my mouth? Not !!

JAHI: They'd have to find it first.

SECOND SOLDIER: What's that? (Shakes her.)

JAHI: You take the office of Urth, who will not trouble herself for me. But wait

-release me only for a moment and I will show you wonderful things.

stand.

JAH: No more can I.

SECOND SOLDIER: I'll hold your necklace - the chain looks stout enough. If

that's sufficient, show me what you can do. If it's not, come with me. You'll be

no freer while I have you.

JAH raises both hands, with the little fingers, index fingers, and thumbs extended. For a moment there is silence, then a strange, soft music filled with

trillings. Snow falls in gentle flakes.

SECOND SOLDIER: Stop that!

He seizes one arm and jerks it down. The music stops abruptly. A few last

snowflakes settle on his head.

SECOND SOLDIER: That was not gold.

JAH: Yet you saw.

SECOND SOLDIER: There's an old woman in my home village who can work the weather

too. She's not as quick as you, I admit, but then she's a lot older, and feeble.

hand.

JAHl: Lover . . . lover . . . lover. Have you no greeting for me?

STATUE: E-e-e-y!

SECOND SOLDIER: What's this? Stop! Woman, you said you had no power while I held

you.

JAHl: Behold my slave. Can you fight him? Go ahead - break your spear on that

broad chest.

The STATUE kneels and kisses JAHl'S foot.

SECOND SOLDIER: No, but I can outrun him.

He throws JAHl across his shoulder and runs. The door in the hill opens. He

enters, and it slams shut behind him. The STATUE hammers it with mighty blows,

but it does not yield. Tears stream down his face. At last he turns away and

begins to dig with his hands.

GABRIEL: (Offstage.) Thus stone images keep faith with a departed day, Alone

in the desert when man has fled away.

The tramp of marching men is heard offstage. There is a shouted order.

AUTARCH: Generalissimo!

Enter a PROPHET. He wears a goat skin and carries a staff whose head has been

rudely carved into a strange symbol.

PROPHET: A hundred portents are abroad. At Incusus, a calf was dropped that had

no head, but mouths in its knees. A woman of known propriety has dreamed she is

with child by a dog, last night a shower of stars fell hissing onto the southern

ice, and prophets walk abroad in the land.

AUTARCH: You yourself are a prophet.

PROPHET: The Autarch himself has seen them!

AUTARCH: My archivist, who is most learned in the history of this spot, once

informed me that over a hundred prophets have been slain here - stoned, burned,

torn by beasts, and drowned. Some have even been nailed like vermin to our

AUTARCH: Do you not know?

PROPHET: I know. But I know you for a practical man, concerned with the affairs

of this universe alone, who seldom looks higher than the stars.

AUTARCH: For thirty years I have prided myself on that.

PROPHET: Yet even you must know that cancer eats the heart of the old sun. At

its center, matter falls in upon itself, as though there were there a pit without bottom, whose top surrounds it.

AUTARCH: My astronomers have long told me so.

PROPHET: Think on an apple rotten from the bud. Fair still without, until it collapses into foulness at last.

AUTARCH: Every man who finds himself still strong in the latter half of life has

thought on that fruit.

PROPHET: So much then for the old sun. But what of its cancer? What know we of

that, save that it deprives Urth of heat and light, and at last of life?

Sounds of struggle are heard offstage. There is a scream of pain, and a crash as

the

things we know is no slave to its own nature.

Enter NOD, bleeding, prodded by pikes held offstage.

AUTARCH: What is this miscreation?

PROPHET: The very proof of those portents I spoke to you. In future times, so it

has long been said, the death of the old sun will destroy Urth. But from its

grave will rise monsters, a new people, and the New Sun. Old Urth will flower

then as a butterfly from its dry husk, and the New Urth shall be called Ushas.

AUTARCH: Yet all we know will be swept aside? This ancient house in which we

stand? Yourself? Me?

NOD: I have no wisdom. Yet I heard a wise man - soon to be a relative of

marriage -say not long ago that all that is for the best. We are but dreams, and

dreams possess no life by their own right. See, I am wounded. (Holds out his

why.

Exit PROPHET.

NOD: I feel sure your bells have begun the welcome of the New Sun. It is what I

came to do myself. It is our custom, when an honored guest arrives, to roar and

beat our chests, and pound the ground and the trunks of trees all about with

gladness, and lift the greatest rocks we can, and send them down the gorges in

honor of him. I will do that this morning, if you will set me free, and I feel sure Urth herself will join me. The very mountains will leap into the sea when

the New Sun rises up today.

AUTARCH: And from where did you come? Tell me, and I'll release you.

NOD: Why, from my own country, to the east of Paradise.

AUTARCH: And where is that?

NOD points to the east.

AUTARCH: And where is Paradise? In the same direction?

NOD: Why, this is Paradise - we are in Paradise, or at least under it.

Enter the GENERALISSIMO, who marches to the throne and salutes.

AUTARCH: What of the other two, the naked man and his wife?

GENERALISSIMO: There is no trace of them.

AUTARCH: Repeat your search, and this time look well.

GENERALISSIMO: (Salutes.) As my Autarch wills.

AUTARCH: And have the jeweled woman sent to me.

NOD begins to walk offstage, but is stopped by pikes. The
GENERALISSIMO draws
his pistol.

NOD: Am I not free to leave?

GENERALISSIMO: By no means!

NOD: (To AUTARCH.) I told you where my country lies. Just east of
here.

GENERALISSIMO: More than your country lies. I know that area well.

AUTARCH: (Fatigued.) He has told the truth as he knows it. Perhaps
the only
truth there is.

NOD: Then I am free to go.

AUTARCH: I think that he whom you came to welcome will arrive
whether you are
free or not. Yet there is a chance - and such creatures as you cannot be
allowed

burst of

sparks. NOD seizes the AUTARCH and is about to dash him to the stage when two

DEMONS disguised as merchants enter, throw him down, and restore the AUTARCH to

his throne.

AUTARCH: Thank you. You will be richly rewarded. I had given up hope of being

rescued by my guards, and I see I thought rightly. May I ask who you are?

FIRST DEMON: Your guards are dead. That giant has smashed their skulls against

your walls and broken their spines upon his knees.

SECOND DEMON: We are two traders merely. Your soldiers took us up.

AUTARCH: Would that they were traders, and in their places I had such soldiers

as you! And yet, you are in appearance so slight I would think you incapable of

even ordinary strength.

a temple older than man, a shrine overgrown with rank vegetation until it seemed

hardly more than a leafy mound, we spoke to an ancient shaman who foretold great

peril to your realm.

FIRST DEMON: With that intelligence we hastened here to give you the alarm

before it should be too late, arriving at the very wince of time.

AUTARCH: What must I do?

SECOND DEMON: This world that you and we treasure has now been driven round the

sun so often that the warp and woof of its space grow threadbare and fall as

dust and feeble lint from the loom of time.

FIRST DEMON: The continents themselves are old as raddled women, long since

stripped of beauty and fertility. The New Sun comes-

AUTARCH: I know!

FIRST DEMON: -and he will send them crashing into the sea like foundered ships.

the plain

so long, yields to the plow and so gives way to wheat.

SECOND DEMON: But what if the seed were burned? What then? The tall man and the

slight woman you met not long ago are such seed. Once it was hoped that it might

be poisoned in the field, but she who was dispatched to accomplish it has lost

sight of the seed now among the dead grass and broken clods, and for a few

slights of hand has been handed over to your Inquisitor for strict examination.

Yet the seed might be burned still.

AUTARCH: The thought you suggest has already passed through my own mind.

FIRST & SECOND DEMON: (In chorus.) Of course!

AUTARCH: But would the death of those two truly halt the coming of the New Sun?

FIRST DEMON: No. But would you wish it? The new lands shall be yours.

the

screens show the image of the AUTARCH multiplied many times. The stage does

dark.

When the lights go up again, the INQUISITOR sits at a high desk in the center of

the stage. His FAMILIAR, dressed as a torturer and masked, stands beside the

desk. To either side are various instruments of torment.

INQUISITOR: Bring in the woman said to be a witch, Brother.

FAMILIAR: The Contessa waits outside, and as she is of exalted blood, and a

favorite of our sovereign's, I beg you see her first.

Enter the CONTESSA.

CONTESSA: I heard what was said, and as I could not think you would be deaf,

Inquisitor, to such an appeal, I have made bold to come in at once. Do you think

me bold for that?

INQUISITOR: You toy with words. But yes, I own I do.

fickle moon. And never have I come till now, and now, trembling.

INQUISITOR: Here the good need have no fear. Yet even so, I think you
grown bold

by your own testimony.

CONTESSA: And am I good? Are you? Is he? My confessor would tell
you I am not.

What does yours tell you, or is he in fear? And is your familiar a better
man

than you?

FAMILIAR: I would not wish to be.

CONTESSA: No, I am not bold - nor safe here, as I know. It is fear that
drives

me to these grim chambers. They have told you of the naked man who
struck me.

Has he been taken?

INQUISITOR: He has not been brought before me.

CONTESSA: Scarcely a watch ago some soldiers found me moaning in
the garden,

where my maid sought to comfort me. Because I feared to be outside by
dark, they

passed by, I saw in one the figure of a man, tall and clean-limbed, wide
of
shoulder and slender of waist.

INQUISITOR: There are many such men.

CONTESSA: So I thought. But in a little time, the same figure appeared
in

another window - and another. Then I appealed to the soldiers who
carried me to

fire upon it. They thought me mad and would not, but the party they sent
to take

that man returned with empty hands. Still he looked at me through the
windows,

and appeared to sway.

INQUISITOR: And you believe this man you saw to be the man who
struck you?

CONTESSA: Worse. I fear it was not he, though it resembled him.
Besides, he

would be kind to me, I am sure, if only I treated his madness with
respect. No,

on this strange night, when we, who are the winter-killed stalks of man's
old

soldiers

of our sovereign the Autarch that they betrayed their oath and turned their

weapons upon their comrades and their officers. (He rises, and lights a large

candle at one side of his desk.) I now most solemnly adjure you to confess this

sin, and if you have so sinned, what power aided you to accomplish it, and the

names of those who taught you to call upon that power.

MESCHIANE: The soldiers only saw I meant no harm, and were afraid for me. I-

FAMILIAR: Silence!

INQUISITOR: No weight is given to the protestations of the accused unless they

are made under duress. My familiar will prepare you.

FAMILIAR seizes MESCHIANE and straps her into one of the contrivances.

CONTESSA: With so little time left to the world, I shall not waste it in watching this. Are you a friend to the naked man of the garden? I am going to

subject, for I shall return shortly.

FAMILIAR: There is another, Inquisitor. Of similar crimes, but less, perhaps, in potency.

INQUISITOR: Why did you not tell me? I might have instructed both together.

Bring her in.

FAMILIAR exits and returns leading JAHl. The INQUISITOR searches among the papers on his desk.

INQUISITOR: It is alleged against you that you so charmed seven of the soldiers

of our sovereign the Autarch that they betrayed their oath and turned their

weapons upon their comrades and their officers. I now most solemnly adjure you

to confess this sin, and if you have so sinned, what power aided you to accomplish it, and the names of those who taught you to call upon that power.

JAHl: (Proudly.) I have done all you accuse me of and more than you know. The

FAMILIAR: (Locking JAHl in a contrivance on the other side of the desk.) He

had your paper again. I'll point his error out to him diplomatically, you may be

sure - when he comes back.

JAHl: You charmed the soldiers? Then charm this fool, and free us.

MESCHIANE: I have no chant of power, and I charmed but seven of fifty.

Enter NOD, bound, driven by FIRST SOLDIER with a pike.

FAMILIAR: What's this?

FIRST SOLDIER: Why, such a prisoner as you've never had before. He's killed a

hundred men as we might puppies. Have you shackles big enough for him?

FAMILIAR: I'll have to link several pairs together, but I'll contrive something.

NOD: I am no man, but less and more - being born of the clay, of Mother Gea,

whose pets are the beasts. If your dominion is over men, then you must let me

go.

FIRST SOLDIER: You'll have some fun, won't you, when I'm gone.

He reaches for JAHI, who spits like a cat.

FIRST SOLDIER: I don't suppose you'd be a good fellow and turn your back for a moment?

FAMILIAR: (Preparing to torture MESCHIANE.) If I were such a good fellow as that, I'd find myself broken on my own wheel soon enough. But if you wait here until my master the Inquisitor returns, you may find yourself lying beside her as you wish.

FIRST SOLDIER hesitates, then realizes what is meant, and hurries out.

NOD: That woman will be the mother of my son-in-law. Do not harm her. (He strains at his chains.)

JAHI: (Stifling a yawn.) I've been up all night, and though the spirit is as willing as ever, this flesh is ready for rest. Can't you hurry with her and get to me?

FAMILIAR: (Still looking at MESCHIANE, whom he is to flaring.) She is held,
never fear.

MESCHIANE: Giant! Can you free yourself? The world depends on it!

NOD: strains at his bonds, but cannot break them.

JAH! (Walking out of her shackles.) Yes! It is I who answer, because in the
world of reality I am far larger than any of you. (She walks around the desk

and leans over the FAMILIAR'S shoulder.) How interesting! Crude, but interesting.

The FAMILIAR turns and gapes at her, and she flees, laughing. He runs clumsily
after her, and a moment later returns crestfallen.

FAMILIAR: (Panting.) She's gone.

NOD: Yes. Free.

MESCHIANE: Free to pursue Meschia and ruin everything, as she did before.

FAMILIAR: You don't realize what this means. My master will return soon, and I
am a dead man.

ways, and he

is very strong. What's more, I can tell you an oath that he will never break.

Give him the key to his shackles, then stand by me with your sword at my neck.

Make him swear to find Jahi, return her her; and bind himself again.

The FAMILIAR hesitates.

MESCHIANE: You've nothing to lose. Your master doesn't even know he's supposed

to be here. But if she's gone when he returns . . .

FAMILIAR: I'll do it! (He detaches a key from the ring at his belt.)

NOD: I swear as I hope to be linked by marriage to the family of Man, so that we

giants may be called the Sons of the Father, that I will capture the succubus

for you, and return her here, and hold her so that she shall not escape again,

and bind myself as I am bound now.

FAMILIAR: Is that the oath?

MESCHIANE: Yes!

everything.

(Exits.)

FAMILIAR: I must continue with you. I hope you understand . . .

The FAMILIAR tortures MESCHIANE, who screams.

FAMILIAR: (Sotto voce.) How fair she is! I wish that we were met when
better
things might be.

The stage darkens; JAHl'S running feet are heard. After a time, a faint
light

shows NOD loping through the corridors of the House Absolute. Moving
images of

urns, pictures, and furniture behind him show his progress. JAHl
appears among

them, and he exits stage right in pursuit. JAHl enters stage left, with
SECOND

DEMON walking in lockstep behind her.

JAHl: Where can he have gone? The gardens are burned black. You
have no flesh

beyond a seeming - cannot you make yourself an owl and seek him out
for me?

SECOND DEMON: (Mocking.) Who-o-o?

lie by

making it come true.

JAHl: (Turning on him.) You little foul sniveler! You scabbler at windows!

SECOND DEMON: (Jumping back.) And now you are exiled to the land of Nod, east of Paradise.

NOD'S footfalls are heard offstage. JAHl hides behind a clepsydra, and

SECOND

DEMON produces a pike and stands with it in the attitude of a soldier as NOD

enters.

NOD: How long have you been standing there?

SECOND DEMON: (Saluting.) As long as you want, sieur.

NOD: What news is there?

SECOND DEMON: All you want, sieur. A giant as high as a steeple has killed the

throne-guards, and the Autarch's missing. We've searched the gardens so often

that if only we'd been carrying dung instead of spears, the daisies'd be as big

by that how much water's flowed.

NOD: (Examining the clepsydra.) There is nothing like this in my land.

Do

these puppets move by water?

SECOND DEMON: Not the big one, sieur.

JAH! bolts offstage, pursued by NOD, but before he is fully out of sight of the

audience, she dives between his legs, reentering. He continues off, giving her

time to hide in a chest. Meanwhile, SECOND DEMON has disappeared.

NOD: (Reentering.) Ho! Stop! (Runs to opposite side of stage and returns.)

My fault! My fault! In the garden there - she passed close by me once. I could

have reached out and crushed her like a cat - a worm - a mouse - a snake. (

Turns on audience.) Don't laugh at me! I could kill you all! The whole poisoned

race of you! Oh, to strew the valleys with your white bones! But I am done - I

am done! And Meschiane, who trusted in me, is undone!

NOD seats himself on the chest in which JAHN hides, and buries his face
in his
hands. As the lights dim, the chest begins to splinter beneath his weight.
When the lights come up again, the scene is once more the
INQUISITOR'S chamber,
MESCHIANE is on the rack. The FAMILIAR is turning the wheel. She
screams.
FAMILIAR: That made you feel better, didn't it? I told you it would.
Besides, it
lets the neighbors know we're awake in here. You wouldn't believe it,
but this
whole wing is full of empty rooms and sinecures. Here the master and I
do our
business still. We do it still, and that's why the Commonwealth stands.
And we
want them to know it.
Enter the AUTARCH. His robes are torn and stained with blood.
AUTARCH: What place is this? (He sits on the floor, his head in his
hands in an
attitude reminiscent of NOD'S.)

FAMILIAR: We have claret, but no wine. And I can hardly bar the door,
since I
expect my master back.

AUTARCH: (More forcefully.) Do as I tell you.

FAMILIAR: (Very softly.) You are drunk, friend. Go out.

AUTARCH: I am - What does it matter? The end is here. I am a man
neither worse
nor better than you.

NOD'S heavy tread is heard in the distance.

FAMILIAR: He has failed - I know it!

MESCHIANE: He has succeeded! He would not come back so soon
with empty hands.

The world may yet be saved!

AUTARCH: What do you mean?

Enter NOD. The madness he prayed for is upon him, but he drags JAH
behind him.

The FAMILIAR runs forward with shackles.

MESCHIANE: Someone must hold her, or she will escape as she did
before.

The FAMILIAR drapes chains on NOD and snaps closed the locks, then
chains one of

JAHl slip down. The FAMILIAR seizes her by the foot and pulls her to where the AUTARCH sits.

FAMILIAR: Here, you, you'll do.

He jerks the AUTARCH erect and swiftly imprisons him in such a way that one hand

is clamped about JAHl'S wrist, then returns to torture MESCHIANE. Unseen behind

him, NOD is fleeing himself of his chains.

25 THE ATTACK ON THE HIERODULES

Though we were outdoors, where sounds are so easily lost against the immensity

of the sky, I could hear the clatter Baldanders made as he feigned to struggle

with his bonds. There were conversations in the audience, and I could hear those

of the rack, letting the pawl drop with a satisfying clack, I risked a sidelong

look at those who watched us.

No more than ten chairs were in use, but lofty figures stood at the sides of the

seating area, and behind it. There were a few women in court dresses much like

the ones I had once seen in the House Azure, dresses with very low décolletages

and full skirts that were often slit, or relieved with panels of lace. Their hair was simply dressed, but it was set off with flowers, jewels, or brilliantly

luminous larvae.

Most of those in our audience seemed men, and more arrived momentarily. Many

were as tall as or taller than Vodalus. They stood wrapped in their cloaks as

though they were chilled by the soft spring air. Their faces were shadowed

heneath broad-brimmed, low-crowned petasoses.

The giant was feigning madness, as his role required. His coarse hair hung about his eyes; and they, behind its screen, blazed so wildly I could see them despite it. His mouth hung slack, drooling spittle and showing his yellowed teeth. Arms twice the length of my own groped toward me. What frightened me - and I was frightened, I admit, and wished heartily I had Terminus Est in my hands instead of the iron flambeau - was what I can only call the expression beneath the lack of expression on his face. It was there like the black water we sometimes glimpse moving beneath the ice when the river freezes. Baldanders had found a terrible joy now in being as he was; and when I faced him I realized for the first time that he was not so much feigning madness on the stage as feigning sanity and his dim humility off it. I wondered then how much

pretended or was

genuinely enraged at our growing audience, I cannot say. Perhaps both those

explanations are correct.

However that might be, he jerked the flambeau from me and turned on them,

flourishing it so the burning oil flew about him in a shower of fire. My sword,

with which I had threatened Dorcas's head a few moments before, lay near my

feet, and I stooped for it instinctively. By the time I had straightened up again, Baldanders was in the midst of the audience. The flambeau had gone out,

and he swung it like a mace.

Someone fired a pistol. The bolt set his costume afire, but must have missed his

body. Several exultants had drawn their swords, and someone - I could not see

who -possessed that rarest of all weapons, a dream. It moved like tyrian smoke,

burden

to their cause, did not seem to affect Baldanders. He strode forward still,
and

the flambeau smashed clear a path for him.

Then, in the moment more that I watched (for I soon recovered enough
self-command to flee that mad fight) I saw several figures throw aside
their

capas and - as it appeared - their faces too. Under those faces, which
when they

were no longer worn seemed of a tissue as insubstantial as that of the
notules,

were such monstrosities as I had not thought existence could support: a
circular

mouth rimmed with needle teeth; eyes that were themselves a thousand
eyes,

clustered like the scales of a pine cone jaws like tongs. These things
have

remained in my memory as everything remains, and I have stared again
at them in

the dark watches of the night. I am very glad, when at last I rouse myself
to

I ran then not so much from Baldanders's fury, or from the cacogens in
the
audience, or from the Autarch's praetorians (who I felt would surely
arrive
soon), but in pursuit of Dorcas. Searching for her and calling her name
as I
went, I found nothing but the groves and fountains and abrupt wells of
that
endless garden; and at last, winded and with aching legs, I slowed to a
walk.

It is impossible for me to set down on paper all the bitterness I felt then.
To
have found Dorcas and lost her so soon seemed more than I could
bear. Women
believe - or at least often pretend to believe - that all our tenderness for
them springs from desire; that we love them when we have not for a
time enjoyed
them, and dismiss them when we are sated, or to express it more
precisely,
exhausted. There is no truth in this idea, though it may be made to
appear true.

I had not enjoyed her since we had slept in the fortress of the dimarchi,
beyond
the Sanguinary Fields) because I had poured out my manhood again
and again with
Jolenta in the nenuphar boat. Yet if I had found Dorcas I would have
smothered
her with kisses; and for Jolenta, whom I had been prone to dislike, I now
had
conceived a certain affection.

Neither Dorcas nor Jolenta appeared, nor did I see hastening soldiers or
even
the revelers we had come to entertain. The thiasus, it seemed clear, had
been
confined to some certain part of the grounds; and I was now far from
that part.

Even now, I am unsure how far the House Absolute extends. There are
maps, but
they are incomplete and contradictory. There are no maps of the
Second House,
and even Father Inire tells me that he has long ago forgotten many of its

hatches and retreated regretfully into an artificial air still laced with the odors of vegetable growth and decay, I have often wondered whether some passage

or other does not reach the Citadel. Old Ultan hinted once that his library

stacks extended to the House Absolute. What is that but to say that the House

Absolute extended to his library stacks? There are parts of the Second House

that are not unlike the blind corridors in which I searched for Triskele; perhaps they are the same corridors, though if they are, I ran a greater risk

than I then knew.

Whether these speculations of mine are rooted in fact or not, I had no notion of

them at the time of which I write now. In my innocence I supposed that the

borders of the House Absolute, which extended both in space and in time so much

further than the uninformed would guess, could be strictly delimited; and that I

the clammy cistern beneath the Bell Keep; again I replaced Josephina's
toy imp
with the stolen frog; again I stretched forth my hand to grasp the haft of
the
ax that would have slain the great Vodalus and so saved a Thecla not
yet
imprisoned; again I saw the ribbon of crimson creep from under Thecla's
door,
Malrubius bending over me, Jonas vanishing into the infinity between
dimensions.
I played again with pebbles in the courtyard beside the fallen curtain
wall, as
Thecla dodged the hooves of my father's mounted guard.
Long after I had seen the last balustrade, I feared the soldiers of the
Autarch;
but after some time, when I had not so much as glimpsed a distant
patrol, I grew
contemptuous of them, believing their ineffectiveness to be a part of that
general disorganization I had observed in the Commonwealth so often.
With or

as it

recognized a master. Thecla had seen him often; those memories of Thecla's were

now my own, and it was he. If Vodalus had won already, why did he remain in

hiding? Or was Vodalus merely a creature of the Autarch's? (If so, why did

Vodalus refer to the Autarch as though he were a servitor?) I tried to persuade

myself that everything that had passed in the chamber of the picture and the

rest of the Second House had been a dream; but I knew it was not so, and the

steel was gone.

Thinking of Vodalus reminded me of the Claw, which the Autarch himself had urged

me to return to the order of priestesses called Pelerines. I drew it out. Its light was soft now, neither flashing as it had been in the mine of the man-apes

nor dull as it had been when Jonas and I had examined it in the antechamber.

and walked on.

Dawn found me on a narrow path that straggled through a forest more sumptuous in

its decay even than that outside the Wall of Nessus. The cool fern arches I had

seen there were absent here, but fleshy-fingered vines clung to the great

mahoganies and rain-trees like hetaerae, turning their long limbs to clouds of

floating green and lowering rich curtains spangled with flowers. Birds unknown

to me called overhead, and once a monkey who might, save for his four hands,

have been a wizened, red-bearded man in fur, spied on me from a fork as high as

a spire. When I could walk no farther, I found a dry, well shaded spot between

pillar-thick roots and wrapped myself in my cloak.

Often I have had to hunt down sleep as though it were the most elusive of

drop terminated in a spreading lake that at once was and was not the azure pool

of the Claw. Baldanders lifted his terrible flambeau, and I had somehow become

the childish figure I had seen beneath the sea. The gigantic women, I felt,

could not be far away. The mace crashed down.

It was broad afternoon, and flame-colored ants were making a caravan across my

chest. After two or three watches spent in walking among the pale leaves of that

noble yet doomed forest, I struck a broader path, and in another watch (when the

shadows were lengthening) I halted, sniffed the air, and found that the odor I

had detected was indeed the reek of smoke. I was wracked with hunger by that

time, and I hurried forward.

came running to

kiss me, and I glimpsed Dr. Talos's fox-like face over Baldanders's massive shoulder.

The giant, whom I ought to have known at once, was changed almost out of

recognition. His head was swathed in dirty bandages, and in place of the baggy

black coat he had worn, his wide back was covered with a sticky ointment that

resembled clay and smelled like stagnant water.

"Well met, well met," Dr. Talos called. "We've all been wondering what became of

you." Baldanders indicated with a slight inclination of his head that it was

actually Dorcas who had been wondering, which I think I might have guessed

without the hint.

"I ran," I said. "So did Dorcas, I know. I'm surprised the rest of you weren't

killed."

But then

some sphais came - I would like to have their animals harnessed to my carriage

someday, they were very fine - and they had with them a high official of the

sort that cares nothing for women. I hoped then that I would be taken to the

Autarch whose pores outshine the stars themselves - the way it nearly happens in

the play. But they made my exultant leave, and instead it was back to the

theater where he," she gestured toward Baldanders, "and the doctor were. The

doctor was putting salve on him, and the soldiers were going to kill us, although I could see they didn't really want to kill me. Then they let us go,

and here we are."

Dr. Talos added, "We found Dorcas at daybreak. Or rather, she found us, and we

have been traveling slowly toward the mountains ever since. Slowly, because ill

"Dr. Talos stopped him," Dorcas said. "Isn't that right, Doctor? That's how he was captured. It's surprising that both of them weren't killed."

"Yet as you see" Dr. Talos said, smiling, "we yet walk among the living. And

though we are somewhat the worse for wear, we are rich. Show Severian our money, Baldanders."

Painfully, the giant shifted his position and took out a bulging leather purse.

After looking at the doctor as though for additional instructions, he loosened

the strings and poured into his huge hand a shower of new-minted chrisos.

Dr. Talos took one of the coins and held it up so it caught the light. "How long

do you think a man from one of the fishing vilages about Lake Diuturna would

build walls for that?"

I said, "At least a year, I should imagine."

since last time, let me tell you!"

I interposed. "I assume that a part of that money is mine, and that a part belongs to these women - does it not?"

Dr. Talos relaxed. "Oh, yes. I had forgotten. The women have already had their

shares. Half of this is yours. After all, we wouldn't have had it without you."

He scooped the coins out of the giant's hand and began to create two stacks on

the ground before him.

I supposed that he meant only that I had contributed to the success of his play,

such as it was. But Dorcas, who must have sensed that something more lay behind

the credit he had given me, asked, "Why do you say that, Doctor?"

The fox-face smiled. "Severian has friends in high places. I own I have thought

so for some time - a torturer wandering the roads like a vagrant was a bit too

much even for Baldanders to swallow, and I have, I fear, an excessively narrow

respects it is, as you may have observed, at least in appearance critical of the

Autarchy."

"Somewhat," Jolenta lisped sarcastically.

"Yet surely, to send a torturer from the Citadel to frighten a couple of strolling mountebanks would be an absurd overreaction. Then I realized that we,

by the very fact that we were staging the play, served to conceal you. Few would

suspect that a servant of the Autarch would associate himself with such an

enterprise. I wrote in the Familiar's part so that we should hide you better by

giving your habit a reason for existence."

"I know nothing of this," I said.

"Of course. I have no desire to force you to violate your trust. But as we were

setting up our theater yesterday, a highly placed servant from the House Absolute - an agamite, I think, and they are always close to the ear of authority - came asking if our troupe was the one in which you performed, and if

audience."

It was one of the few times I saw Baldanders appear hurt by his physician's

jibes. Though it clearly cost him pain to do so, he swung his big body about

until he faced away from us.

Dorcas had told me that when I had slept in Dr. Talos's tent, I had slept alone.

Now I sensed that the giant felt so; that for him the clearing held only himself

and certain small animals, pets of whom he was tiring.

"He has paid for his rashness," I said. "He looks badly burned." The doctor

nodded. "Actually, Baldanders was fortunate. The Hierodules dialed down their

beams and tried to turn him back instead of killing him. He lives now through

their forbearance, and will regenerate."

Dorcas murmured, "Heal, you mean? I trust so. I feel more pity for him than I

can say."

to the place where men are pulled apart by their destinations. We had halted

here, Severian, not only because we were fatigued, but because it is here that

the route toward Thrax, where you are going, and that toward Lake Diuturna and

our own country diverge. I was loath to pass this point, the last at which I had

hopes of seeing you, without making a fair division of our gains - but that is

accomplished now. Should you communicate again with your benefactors in the

House Absolute, will you own that you have been equitably dealt with?"

The stack of chrisos was still on the ground before me. "There is a hundred

times more here than I ever expected to receive," I said. "Yes. Certainly." I

picked up the coins and put them into my sabretache.

A glance passed between Dorcas and Jolenta, and Dorcas said, "I am going to

Thrax with Severian, if that is where Severian is going."

this time on his thigh.) "Come, Baldanders, we must be away."

The giant lumbered to his feet, and though he made no moan, I could see how much

he suffered. His bandages were wet with mingled sweat and blood. I knew what I

had to do, and said, "Baldanders and I must speak privately for a moment. Could

I ask the rest of you to move off a hundred paces or so?"

The women began to do as I had asked, Dorcas walking down one path and Jolenta

(whom Dorcas had helped up) down another; but Dr. Talos remained where he was

until I repeated my request that he go.

"You wish me to leave as well? It's quite useless. Baldanders will tell me anything you tell him as soon as we are together again. Jolenta! Come here,

dear."

"She is leaving at my request, just as I asked you to."

"Yes, but she's going the wrong way, and I cannot have it. Jolenta!"

"Doctor, I only wish to help your friend - or your slave, or whatever he is."

can't I go with you?"

"Of course not," he said as coolly as if a child had asked for a second slice of

cake. Jolenta collapsed at his feet.

I looked up at the giant. "Baldanders, I can help you. A friend of mine was

burned as much as you are not long ago, and I was able to help him. But I won't

do it while Dr. Talos and Jolenta look on. Will you come with me, only a short

way, back down the path toward the House Absolute?"

Slowly, the giant's head swung from side to side.

"He knows the lenitive you offer," Dr. Talos said, laughing. "He himself has

provided it to many, but he loves life too much."

"Life is what I offer - not death."

"Yes?" The doctor raised an eyebrow. "Where is your friend?" The giant had

picked up the handles of his barrow. "Baldanders," I said, "do you know who the

Conciliator was?"

creature

until we are well gone?"

I was still sick with the thought of the giant's pain and my own failure; but I

managed to say, "As a member of the guild, I can accept commissions only from

the legally constituted authorities."

"We will kill her then, when we are out of your sight."

"That is a matter between you and her," I said, and started after Dorcas.

I had hardly caught up with her before we heard Jolenta's screams.

Dorcas halted

and grasped my hand more tightly, asking what the sound was; I told her of the

doctor's threat,

"And you let her go?"

"I didn't believe he meant it."

As I said that, we had turned and were already retracing our way. We had not

gone a dozen strides before the screams were succeeded by a silence so profound

her running toward us, her knees together as if her legs were hampered
by her
generous thighs, her arms crossed over her breasts to steady them. Her
glorious
red-gold hair fell across her eyes, and the thin organza shift she wore
had been
slashed to tatters. She fainted when Dorcas embraced her. "Those
devils, they've
beaten her," Dorcas said.
"A moment ago we were afraid they would kill her." I looked at the welts
on the
beautiful woman's back. "These are the marks of the doctor's cane, I
think.
She's lucky he didn't set Baldanders on her."
"But what can we do?"
"We can try this." I fished the Claw from my boot top and showed it to
her. "Do
you remember the thing we found in my sabretache? That you said was
no true gem?
This is what it was, and it seems to help injured people, sometimes. I
wanted to

worst."

Dorcas carried Terminus Est, and I did as she suggested, finding Jolenta nearly

as heavy as a man. For a long while we trudged thus beneath the pale green

canopy of the leaves before Jolenta's eyes opened. Even then she could hardly

walk or stand without help, however, or so much as comb back that extraordinary

hair with her fingers to let us better see the tear-stained oval of her face.

"The doctor won't let me come with him," she said.

Dorcas nodded. "It seems not." She might have been talking to someone far

younger than herself.

"I will be destroyed."

I asked why she said that, but she only shook her head. After a time she said,

"May I go with you, Severian? I don't have any money. Baldanders took away what

the doctor had given me." She shot a sidelong glance at Dorcas. "She has money

the order of Pelerines."

Jolenta looked at me as if I were mad. "I've heard they roam the whole world.

Besides, they accept only women."

"I don't want to join them, only to find them. The last news I had was that they

were on the way north. But if I can find out where they are, I'll have to go there - even if it means turning south again."

"I'm going where you go," Dorcas declared. "Not to Thrax."

"And I'm going nowhere," Jolenta sighed.

As soon as we no longer had to support Jolenta, Dorcas and I drew somewhat ahead

of her. When we had been walking for some time, I turned to look back at her.

She was no longer weeping, but I hardly recognized the beauty who had once

accompanied Dr. Talos. She had held her head proudly, and even arrogantly. Her

shoulders had been thrown back and her magnificent eyes had flashed like

'Do you

know who the Conciliator was?' But I couldn't tell if you didn't know yourself,

or were only seeking to discover if they knew."

"I know very little - nothing, really. I've seen pictures that are supposed to

be of him, but they differ so much they can hardly be of the same man."

"There are legends."

"Most of them I've heard sound very foolish. I wish Jonas were here; he would

take care of Jolenta, and he would know about the Conciliator. Jonas was the man

we met at the Piteous Gate, the man who rode the merychip. For a time he was a

good friend to me."

"Where is he now?"

"That's what Dr. Talos wanted to know. I don't know, and I don't wish to speak

of it. Tell me about the Conciliator, if you want to talk."

No doubt it was foolish, but as soon as I mentioned that name, I felt the silence of the forest like a weight. The sighing of a little wind somewhere

he was hardly more than a boy. Some say he was not a human being at all - not a cacogen, but the thought, tangible to us, of some vast intelligence to whom our actuality is no more real than the paper theaters of the toy sellers. The story goes that he once took a dying woman by the hand and a star by the other, and from that time forward he had the power to reconcile the universe with humanity, and humanity with the universe, ending the old breach. He had a way of vanishing, then reappearing when everyone thought he was dead - reappearing sometimes after he had been buried. He might be encountered as an animal, speaking the human tongue, and he appeared to some pious woman or other in the form of roses."

I recalled my masking. "Holy Katharine, I suppose, at her execution."

"There are darker legends, too."

"Tell them to me."

27 TOWARD THRAX

Our path ran through the stricken forest for as long as the light lasted; a watch after dark we reached the edge of a river smaller and swifter than Gyll,
where by moonlight we could see broad cane fields on the farther side waving in
the night wind. Jolenta had been sobbing with weariness for some distance, and
Dorcas and I agreed to halt. Since I would never have risked Terminus Est's
honed blade on the heavy limbs of the forest trees, we would have had little
firewood there; such dead branches as we had come across had been soaked with
moisture and were already spongy with decay. The riverbank provided an abundance
of twisted, weathered sticks, hard and light and dry.

were soon comforted by a roaring blaze. Jolenta was fearful of wild
beasts,
though I labored to explain to her how unlikely it was that the soldiers
would
permit anything dangerous to live in a forest that ran up to the gardens
of the
House Absolute. For her sake we burned three thick brands at one end
only, so
that if need arose we could snatch them from the fire and threaten the
creatures
she dreaded.
No beasts came, our fire drove off the mosquitoes, and we lay upon our
backs and
watched the sparks mount into the air. Far higher, the lights of fliers
passed
to and fro, filling the sky for a moment or two with a ghostly false dawn
as the
ministers and generals of the Autarch returned to the House Absolute or
went
forth to war. Dorcas and I speculated about what they might think when
they

for her friends of the year before, the fallen leaves.

Jolenta lay between our fire and the water, I suppose because she felt safer

there. Dorcas and I were on the opposite side of the fire, not only because we

wanted to be out of her sight as nearly as possible, but because Dorcas, as she

told me, disliked the sight and sound of the cold, dark stream slipping by.

"Like a worm," she said. "A big ebony snake that is not hungry now, but knows

where we are and will eat us by and by. Aren't you afraid of snakes, Severian?"

Thecla had been; I felt the shade of her fear stir at the question and nodded.

"I've heard that in the hot forests of the north, the Autarch of All Serpents is

Uroboros, the brother of Abaia, and that hunters who discover his burrow believe

they have found a tunnel under the sea, and descending it enter his mouth and

knowing that she wanted me to make love to her, though we could not
be sure

Jolenta was asleep on the other side of the fire. Indeed, from time to
time she

stirred, seeming because of her full hips, narrow waist, and billowing
hair, to

undulate like a serpent herself. Dorcas lifted her small, tragically clean
face

to mine, and I kissed her and felt her press herself to me, trembling with
desire.

"I am so cold," she whispered.

She was naked, though I had not seen her undress. When I put my
cloak about her,

her skin felt flushed - as my own was - from the heat of the blaze. Her
little

hands slipped under my clothes, caressing me.

"So good," she said. "So smooth." And then (though we had coupled
before),

"Won't I be too small?", like a child.

seemed so

foolish as they had, and I got up and, after making certain she and Dorcas were

unharmed, found more wood for our dying fire. I remembered the notules, which

Jonas had told me were often sent forth by night, and the thing in the antechamber. Night birds sailed overhead - not only owls, such as we had in

plenty nesting in the ruined towers of the Citadel, birds marked by their round

heads and short, broad, silent wings, but birds of other kinds with two-forked

and three-forked tails, birds that stooped to skim the water and twittered as

they flew. Occasionally, moths vastly larger than any I had seen before passed

from tree to tree. Their figured wings were as long as a man's arms, and they

spoke among themselves as men do, but in voices almost too high for hearing.

wholly closed to me.

I sought to recall that celebration of Holy Katharine's day that fell the year

after I became captain of apprentices; but the preparations for the feast were

hardly begun before other memories came crowding unbidden around it.

In our

kitchen I lifted a cup of stolen wine to my lips - and found it had become a

breast running with warm milk. It was my mother's breast then, and I could

hardly contain my elation (which might have wiped the memory away) at having

reached back at last to her, after so many fruitless attempts. My arms sought to

clasp her, and I would, if only I could, have lifted my eyes to look into her

face. My mother certainly, for the children the torturers take know no breasts.

The grayness at the edge of my field of vision, then, was the metal of her cell

chamber

whose windows were mirrors, mirrors that at once illuminated and reflected.

Around me were beautiful women twice my height or more, in various stages of

undress. The air was thick with scent. I was searching for someone, but as I

looked at the painted faces of the tall women, lovely and indeed perfect, I

began to doubt if I should know her. Tears rolled down my cheeks. Three women

ran to me and I stared from one to another. As I did, their eyes narrowed to

points of light, and a heart-shaped patch beside the lips of the nearest spread

web-fingered wings.

"Severian."

I sat up, uncertain of the point at which memory had become dream. This voice

was sweet, yet very deep, and though I was conscious of having heard it before,

as I

had never known - not when I had clasped Agia to me on the Adamnian Steps, not

when I had first seen Jolenta on Dr. Talos's stage, not even on the innumerable

occasions when I had hastened to Thecla in her cell. Yet it was not Dorcas I

desired; I had enjoyed her only a short time ago, and though I fully believed

she loved me, I could not be certain she would have given herself so readily if

she had not more than suspected I had entered Jolenta on the afternoon before

the play, and if she had not believed Jolenta to be watching us across the fire.

Nor did I desire Jolenta, who lay upon her side and snored. Instead I wanted

them both, and Thecla, and the nameless meretrix who had feigned to be Thecla in

the House Azure, and her friend who had taken the part of Thea, the woman I had

forest,

had stirred at the sound. I drew Terminus Est and let her blade catch the cold

dawn light, so that whoever had spoken should know me armed.

All was quiet again - quieter now than it had ever been by night. I waited,

turning my head slowly in my attempt to locate the one who had called my name,

though I was conscious it would have been better if I could have appeared to

know the correct direction already. Dorcas stirred and moaned, but neither she

nor Jolenta woke; there was no other sound but the crackling of the fire, the

dawn wind among the leaves, and the lapping water.

"Where are you?" I whispered, but there was no reply. A fish jumped with a

silver splash, and all was silent again.

"Severian."

However deep, it was a woman's voice, throbbing with passion, moist with need; I

It was no trick, or at least not the trick I had at first feared. It was from downstream that the voice spoke.

"Come. Please. I cannot hear you where you stand."

I said, "I did not speak," but there was no reply. I waited, reluctant to leave

Dorcas and Jolenta alone.

"Please. When the sun reaches this water, I must go. There may be no other chance."

The little river was wider at the sandbar than below or above it, and I could

walk upon the yellow sand itself, dryshod, nearly to the center. To my left the

greenish water gradually narrowed and deepened. To my right lay a deep pool

perhaps twenty paces wide, from which water flowed swiftly yet smoothly. I stood

on the sand with Terminus Est gripped in both hands, her square point buried

between my feet. "I'm here," I said. "Where are you? Can you hear me now?"

on the upper side of the bar and swam away in long undulations.

Through the

body, he had been as thick as my forearm.

"Do not fear. Look. See me. Know that I will not harm you."

Green though the water had been, it grew greener still. A thousand jade tentacles writhed there, never breaking the surface. As I watched, too fascinated to be afraid, a disc of white three paces across appeared among them,

rising slowly toward the surface.

It was not until it was within a few spans of the ripples that I understood what

it was - and then only because it opened eyes. A face looked through the water

at me, the face of a woman who might have dandled Baldanders like a toy. Her

eyes were scarlet, and her mouth was bordered by full lips so darkly crimson I

had not at first thought them lips at all. Behind them stood an army of pointed

teeth; the green tendrils that framed her face were her floating hair.

"I have come for you, Severian," she said. "No, you are not dreaming."

"We watched the giant, and so found you. Alas, we lost sight of you too soon,
when you and he separated. You believed then that you were hated, and did not
know how much you were loved. The seas of the whole world shook with our
mourning for you, and the waves wept salt tears and threw themselves despairing
upon the rocks."

"And what is it you want of me?"

"Only your love. Only your love."

Her right hand came to the surface as she spoke, and floated there like a raft
of five white logs. Here, truly, was the hand of the ogre, whose fingertip held
the map of his domain.

"Am I not fair? Where have you beheld skin clearer than mine, or redder lips?"

"You are breathtaking," I said truthfully. "But may I ask why you were observing

gift - as easily as you breathe the thin, weak wind here, and whenever
you wish
you shall return to the land and take up your crown. This river
Cephisus flows
to Gyoll, and Gyoll to the peaceful sea. There you may ride dolphin-back
through
current-swept fields of coral and pearl. My sisters and I will show you
the
forgotten cities built of old, where a hundred trapped generations of your
kin
bred and died when they had been forgotten by you above."
"I have no crown to take up," I said. "You mistake me for someone
else."
"All of us will be yours there, in the red and white parks where the
lionfish
school."
As the undine spoke, she slowly lifted her chin, allowing her head to fall
back
until the whole plane of face lay at an equal depth, and only just
submerged.

to so

monstrous a thing; yet I wanted to believe her, to go with her, as a
drowning

man wants to gasp air. If I had fully credited her promises, I would have
plunged into the pool at that moment, forgetting everything else.

"You have a crown, though you know not of it yet. Do you think that we,
who swim

in so many waters - even between the stars - are confined to a single
instant?

We have seen what you will become, and what you have been. Only
yesterday you

lay in the hollow of my palm, and I lifted you above the clotted weed lest
you

die in Gyoll, saving you for this moment."

"Give me the power to breathe water," I said, "and let me test it on the
other

side of the sandbar. If I find you have told the truth, I will go with you.

I watched those huge lips part. I cannot say how loudly she spoke in the
river

that I should hear her where I stood in air; but again fish leaped at her
words.

with a

roar like breaking surf. It was as though a lake had been flung at my head, and

it struck me like a stone and tumbled me in its wash like a stick. A moment

later, when it receded, I found myself far up the bank, soaked and bruised and

swordless. Fifty paces away the undine's white body rose half out of the river.

Without the support of the water her flesh sagged on bones that seemed ready to

snap under its weight, and her hair hung lank to the soaking sand. Even as I

watched, water mingled with blood ran from her nostrils.

I fled, and by the time I reached Dorcas at our fire, the undine was gone save

for a swirl of silt that darkened the river below the sandbar.

Dorcas's face was nearly as white. "What was that?" she whispered.

"Where were

you?"

"You saw her then. I was afraid . . ."

was soaked with blood where Jolenta lay.

There were two narrow cuts in her left wrist, each about the length of my thumb;

and though I touched them with the Claw, it seemed the blood that welled from

them would not clot. When we had soaked several bandages torn from Dorcas's

scant store of clothing, I boiled thread and needle in a little pan she had and

sewed the edges of the wounds shut. Through all this Jolenta seemed less than

half conscious; from time to time her eyes opened, but they closed again almost

immediately, and there was no recognition in them. She spoke only once, saying,

"Now you see that he, whom you have esteemed your divinity, would countenance

and advise all I have proposed to you. Before the New Sun rises, let us make a

new beginning." At the time, I did not recognize it as one of her lines.

should do. I

told her of my dream, the night before I met Baldanders and Dr. Talos, and then

about hearing the undine's voice while she and Jolenta slept, and what she had

said.

"Is she still there, do you think? You were down there when you found your

sword. Could you have seen her through the water if she were near the bottom?"

I shook my head. "I don't believe she is. She injured herself in some way when

she tried to leave the river to stop me, and from the pallor of her skin, I doubt she would stay long in any water shallower than Gyll's under the sun of a

clear day. But no, if she had been there I don't think I would have seen her -

the water was too roiled."

Dorcas, who had never looked more charming than at this moment, sitting on the

that she

could no longer do it."

"But before that she swam up filthy Gyll, and then up this narrow little river.

She must have been hoping to seize you when we crossed, but she found she could

not get above the sandbar, and so she called you down. Altogether, it can't have

been a pleasant trip for someone accustomed to swimming between the stars."

"You believe her, then?"

"When I was with Dr. Talos and you were gone, he and Jolenta used to tell me

what a simple-minded person I was for believing people we met on the road, and

things that Baldanders said, and things they said themselves, too. Just the

same, I think that even the people who are called liars tell the truth much more

often than they lie. It's so much easier! If that story about saving you wasn't

gulf.

She was winged. Not like birds' wings, but enormous continuous planes
of thin,

pigmented material. Wings that could beat against the starlight."

Dorcas looked interested. "Is it in your brown book?"

"No, another book. I don't have it here."

"Just the same, it reminds me that we were going to see what your
brown book has

to say about the Conciliator. Do you still have it?"

I did, and I drew it out. It was damp from my wetting, so I opened it and
laid

it where the sun would strike its leaves, and the breezes that had sprung
up as

Urth's face looked on his again would play over them. After that, the
pages

turned gently as we talked, so that pictures of men and women and
monsters took

my eye between our words, and thus engraved themselves on my mind,
so that they

are there yet. Occasionally too, phrases, and even short passages,
glowed and

"I don't know. I was sleeping and dreaming of . . . the kind of thing I
always
do. And I went into a toy shop. There were shelves along the wall with
dolls on
them, and a well in the center of the floor with dolls sitting on the coping.
I
remember thinking that my baby was too young for dolls, but they were
so pretty,
and I had not had one since I was a little girl, so I would buy one and
keep it
for the baby, and meanwhile I could take it out sometimes and look at it,
and
perhaps make it stand before the mirror in my room. I pointed to the
most
beautiful one, which was one of those on the coping, and when the
shopman picked
it up for me I saw it was Jolenta, and it slipped from his hands. I saw it
falling down very far, toward the black water. Then I woke up. Naturally I
looked to see if she was all right . . ."
"And you found her bleeding?"

bite it

was a fairly small one, and no more to be feared than any other little animal

with sharp teeth and a bad disposition."

"Severian, I remember being told that there were blood bats farther north. When

I was just a child, someone used to frighten me by telling me about them. And

then when I was older, once a common bat got into the house. Somebody killed it,

and I asked my father if it were a blood bat, and if there were really any such

things. He said there were, but they lived in the north, in the steaming forests

at the center of the world. They bit sleeping people and grazing animals by

night, and their spittle was poisoned so that the wounds of their teeth bled

on."

Dorcas paused, looking up into the trees. "My father said that the city had been

talk so much about your past life before. Do you remember your father now, and

the house where the bat was killed?"

She stoed; though she tried to look brave, I could see that she was trembling.

"I remember more each morning, after my dreams. But, Severian, we must go now.

Jolenta will be weak. She must have food, and clean water to drink. We can't

stay here."

I was ravenously hungry myself. I put the brown book back into my sabretache and

sheathed Terminus Est's freshly oiled blade. Dorcas packed her little bundle of

belongings.

Then we set out, fording the river well above the sandbar. Jolenta was unable to

walk alone; we had to support her on either side. Her face was drawn, and though

she had regained consciousness when we lifted her, she seldom spoke. When she

woman to Dorcas's child, she seemed a flower too long blown, the very
end of
summer to Dorcas's spring.

As we walked thus along a narrow, dusty track with sugarcane already
higher than
my head to either side, I found myself thinking over and over of how I
had
desired her in the short time I had known her. Memory, so perfect and
vivid as
to be more compelling than any opiate, showed me the woman as I had
believed I
had seen her first, when Dorcas and I had come around a grove of trees
by night
to find Dr. Talos's stage gleaming with lights in a pasture. How strange it
had
seemed to see her by daylight as perfect as she had appeared in the
flattering
glow of the flambeaux the night before, when we set off northward on
the most
glorious morning I can remember.

Vodalus's leman of the heart-shaped face and cooing voice, the woman
I now knew
to be Thecla's half-sister Thea. So that as we trudged between the walls
of
cane, when desire had fled and I could only look at Jolenta with pity, I
found
that though I had believed I cared only for her importunate, rose-flushed
flesh
and the awkward grace of her movements, I loved her.

29 THE HERDSMEN

For most of the morning we walked through the cane, meeting no one.
Jolenta grew
neither stronger nor weaker, so far as I could judge; but it seemed to me
that
hunger, and the fatigue of supporting her, and the pitiless glare of the
sun

from

Master Palaemon that Terminus Est seemed burdensome to me. My
shoulder grew raw

under the baldric.

I cut cane for us, and we chewed it for the sweet juice. Jolenta was
always

thirsty, and since she could not walk unless we aided her, and could not
hold

her stalk of cane when we did, we were forced to stop often. It was
strange to

see those long legs, so beautifully molded, with their slender ankles and
ripe

thighs, so useless.

In a day we reached the end of the cane and emerged onto the edge of
the true

pampa, the sea of grass. Here there were still a few trees, though they
were so

widely scattered that each was in sight of no more than two or three
others. To

each of these trees the body of some beast of prey was lashed with
rawhide, its

upon

the cattle.

These cattle represented a far greater danger to us than the cats did.

The herd

bulls will charge anything that comes near them, and we were forced to give each

herd we came across as much room as would prevent their short-sighted eyes from

seeing us, and to move downwind of each. On these occasions, I was forced to let

Dorcas prop Jolenta's weight as best she could, so I could walk ahead of them

and somewhat nearer the animals. Once I had to leap aside and strike off the

head of a bull as it charged. We built a fire of dry grass and roasted some of

the meat.

The next time I recalled the Claw, and the way in which it had ended the attack

of the man-apes. I drew it out, and the fierce black bull trotted to me and

I seemed to feel his eyes upon my back, yellow eyes as large as pigeon's eggs.

My own tongue was swollen with his thirst. I gave Dorcas the gem to hold and

went back and cut him down, thinking all the while that he would surely attack

me. He fell to the ground too weak to stand, and I, who had no water to give

him, could only walk away.

A little after noon, I noticed a carrion bird circling high above us. It is said

they smell death, and I remembered that once or twice when the journeymen were

very busy in the examination room, it was necessary for us apprentices to turn

out to throw stones at those who settled on the ruined curtain wall, lest they

give the Citadel a reputation more evil than it already possessed. The thought

below, I

knew them to be Cathartidae. Thus the first, whose wings had three times the

spread of theirs, was a mountain teratornis, the breed that is said to attack

climbers, raking their faces with poisoned talons and striking them with the

elbows of its great pinions until they fall to their deaths. From time to time

the other two approached it too closely, and it turned upon them. When that

occurred we sometimes heard a shrill cry come drifting down from the ramparts of

their castle of air. Once, in a macabre mood, I gestured for the birds to join

us. All three dove, and I brandished my sword at them and gestured no more.

When the western horizon had climbed nearly to the sun, we reached a low house,

scarcely more than a hut, built of turf. A wiry man in leather leggings sat on a

certain what

the bull would do when it was no longer in his sight. In the event he did nothing, plodding ahead with the two women on his back as before.

When we

reached the sod house I lifted them down, and he raised his muzzle and sniffed

the wind, then looked at me from one eye. I waved toward the undulating grass,

both to show him I had no more need of him and to let him see that my hand was

empty. He wheeled and trotted away.

The herdsman took his pewter straw from between his lips. "That was an ox," he

said.

I nodded. "We needed him to carry this poor woman, who is ill, and so we

borrowed him. Is he yours? We hoped you wouldn't mind, and after all, we did him

no harm."

"No, no." The herdsman made a vaguely deprecating gesture. "I only asked because

he slapped the metal hilt that protruded above his broad belt, "and pointed it
to the sun to swear that I saw something between the ox's legs. But if I were
not such a fool I would know that no one can ride the bulls of the pampas. The
red panther does it, but then he holds on with his claws, and sometimes he dies
even so. No doubt it was an udder the ox inherited from his mother. I knew her,
and she had one."
I said I was a city man, and very ignorant of everything that concerned cattle.
"Ah," he said, and sucked his maté. "I am a man more ignorant than you. Everyone
around here but me is one ignorant eclectic. You know these people they call
eclectics? They don't know anything - how can a man learn with neighbors like
that?"

established to

his own satisfaction that it was I, and not Dorcas, who had tamed the bull. "I'm

very sorry for your friend," he said, "who I can see must have been a lovely

woman once. But even though I've been sitting here cracking jokes with you, I

have a friend of my own, and right now he's lying inside. You're afraid your

friend is dying. I know mine is, and I'd like to let him go with no one to bother him."

"We understand, but we won't disturb him. We may even be able to help him."

The herdsman looked from Dorcas to me and back again. "You are strange people

-what do I know? No more than one of those ignorant eclectics. Come in, then.

But be quiet, and remember you're my guests."

He rose and opened the door, which was so low I had to stoop to get through it.

bedding beyond that on which the sick man lay, but we spread Dorcas's ragged

blanket on the earthen floor and laid Jolenta on it. For a moment her eyes

opened. There was no consciousness in them, and their once clear green had faded

like shoddy cloth left in the sun.

Our host shook his head and whispered, "She won't last longer than that ignorant

eclectic Manahen. Maybe riot as long."

"She needs water," Dorcas told him.

"In back, in the catch barrel. I'll get it."

When I heard the door shut behind him, I drew out the Claw. This time it flashed

with such searing, cyaneous flame that I feared it would penetrate the walls.

The young man who lay on the pallet breathed deeply, then released his breath

with a sigh. I put the Claw away again at once.

"It hasn't helped her," Dorcas said.

"Perhaps the water will. She's lost a great deal of blood."

known her. Dr. Talos gave her something that made her better for a time, but now

he has driven her away - she used to be very demanding, and he has had his

revenge."

"I can't believe he meant it to be as severe as this."

"Neither can I, really. Severian, listen; he and Baldanders will surely stop to

perform and spy out the land. We might be able to find them."

"To spy?" I must have looked as surprised as I felt.

"At least, it always seemed to me that they wandered as much to discover what

passed in the world as to get money, and once Dr. Talos as much as admitted that

to me, though I never learned just what they were looking for."

The herdsman came in with a gourd of water. I lifted Jolenta to a sitting position, and Dorcas held it to her lips. It spilled and soaked Jolenta's tattered shift, but some of it went down her throat as well, and when the gourd

was empty and the herdsman filled it again, she was able to swallow. I asked him

surely through the stone town."

"There is a city near here, then?"

"There is a city, yes, but no people. The ignorant eclectics who live near there

believe that no matter which way a man goes, the stone town moves itself to wait

in his path." The herdsman laughed softly, then sobered. "That is not so.

But

the stone town bends the way a man's mount walks, so he finds it before him when

he thinks he will go around it. You understand? I think you do not."

I remembered the Botanic Gardens and nodded. "I understand. Go on."

"But if you are going north and west, you must pass through the stone town

anyway. It will not even have to bend the way you walk. Some find nothing there

but the fallen walls. I have heard that some find treasures. Some come back with

fresh stories and some do not come back. Neither of these women are virgins, I

think."

I nodded and was about to ask for further information when the sick man opened

his eyes and sat up. His blanket fell away and I saw there was a bloodstained

bandage over his chest. He started, stared at me, and shouted something.

Instantly, I felt the cold blade of the herdsman's knife at my throat. "He won't

harm you," he told the sick man. He used the same dialect, but because he spoke

more slowly I was able to understand him. "I don't believe he knows who you

are."

"I tell you, Father, it is the new lictor of Thrax. They have sent for one, and

the clavigers say he's coming. Kill him! He'll kill all of them who haven't died

already."

I was astounded to hear him mention Thrax, which was still so far away, and

knife, but I caught his arm and broke it, then broke the knife too under
the
heel of my boot. His son, Manahen, tried to rise; but if the Claw had
restored
his life it had, at least, not made him strong, and Dorcas pushed him
down on
his pallet again.

"We will starve," the herdsman said. His brown face was twisted by the
effort he
made not to cry out.

"You cared for your son," I told him. "Soon he will be well enough to
care for
you. What was it he did?"

Neither man would tell.

I set the bone and splinted it, and Dorcas and I ate and slept outside
that
night after telling father and son that we would kill them if we so much
as
heard the door open, or if any harm was done Jolenta. In the morning,
while they

30 THE BADGER AGAIN

Despite what the herdsman had told me, I hoped for some place like
Saltus, where

we might find pure water and a few aes would buy us food and rest.
What we found

instead was scarcely the remnant of a town. Coarse grass grew
between the

enduring stones that had been its pavements, so that from a distance it
seemed

hardly different from the surrounding pampa. Fallen columns lay among
this grass

like the trunks of trees in a forest devastated by some frenzied storm; a
few

others still stood, broken and achingly white beneath the sun. Lizards
with

bright, black eyes and serrated backs lay frozen in the light. The
buildings

line of blue on the horizon; yet they were a presence, as the mad clients
on the
third level of our oubliette were a presence though they were never
taken up a
single step, or even out of their cells. Lake Diuturna lay somewhere in
those
mountains. So did Thrax; the Pelerines, so far as I had been able to
discover,
wandered somewhere among their peaks and chasms, nursing the
wounded of the
endless war against the Ascians. That too lay in the mountains. There
hundreds
of thousands perished for the sake of a pass.
But now we had come to a town where no voice sounded but the
raven's. Although
we had carried water in skin bags from the herdsman's house, it was
nearly gone.
Jolenta was weaker, and Dorcas and I agreed that if we did not find
more by
nightfall, it was likely she would die. Just as Urth began to roll across the

lost the sunlight.

To have come upon a simple campfire would have seemed a miracle.

What we

actually saw was stranger but less startling. Dorcas pointed to the left. I looked, and a moment later beheld, as I thought, a meteor. "It's a falling star," I said. "Did you see one before? They come in showers sometimes."

"No! That's a building - can't you see it? Look for the dark place against the

sky. It must have a flat roof, and someone's up there with flint and steel."

I was about to tell her that she imagined too much, when a dull red glow no

bigger, it seemed, than the head of a pin, appeared where the sparks had fallen.

Two breaths more, and there was a tiny tongue of flame.

It was not far, but the dark and the broken stones we rode over made it seem so,

and by the time we reached the building the fire was bright enough for us to see

dark clothes, that's all."

"So you do . . . so you do. Who's dying? Not little pale hair . . . big red-gold. We've wine here and a fire, but no other physic. Go around, that's

where the stair is."

I led our animals around the corner of the building as she had indicated.

The

stone walls cut off the low moon and left us in blind darkness, but I stumbled

on rough steps that must have been made by piling stones from fallen structures

against the side of the building. After hobbling the two destriers, I carried Jolenta up, Dorcas going before us to feel the way and warn me of danger.

The roof, when we reached it, was not flat; and the pitch was great enough for

me to fear falling at every step. Its hard, uneven surface seemed to be of tiles

- once one loosened, and I heard it grating and clattering against the others

until it fell over the edge and smashed on the uneven slabs below.

our

proximity to the witches required.) Now, when I know of the horror our own tower

inspired not only in the people of the quarter but to an equal or greater degree

in the other residents of the Citadel itself, I find a flavor of quaint naiveté in the recollection of my own fear; yet to the small and unattractive boy I was,

it was very real. I had heard terrible stories from the older apprentices, and I

had seen that boys unquestionably braver than I were afraid. In that most gaunt

of all the Citadel's myriad towers, strangely colored lights burned by night.

The screams we heard through the ports of our dormitory came not from some

underground examination room like our own, but from the highest levels; and we

knew that it was the witches themselves who screamed thus and not their clients,

up a witch

who should be immensely dignified and humiliating, who would not shrink from

punishing me in some particularly repulsive way for daring to carry a letter to

her in red hands and would send me back with a scornful report to Master

Malrubius as well.

I must have been very small indeed: I had to jump to reach the knocker.

The

smack of the witches' deeply worn doorstep against the thin soles of my shoes

remains with me still.

"Yes?" The face that looked into mine was hardly higher than my own. It was one

of those - outstanding of its kind among all the hundreds of thousands of faces

I have seen - that are at once suggestive of beauty and disease. The witch to

whom it belonged seemed old to me and must actually have been about twenty or a

had actually been given voice, they seemed as inevitable as the procession of the seasons.

I entered a tower very different from our own. Ours was oppressively solid, of

plates of metal so closely fitted that they had, ages ago, diffused into one

another to become one mass, and the lower floors of our tower were warm and

dripping. Nothing seemed solid in the witches' tower, and few things were. Much

later, Master Palaemon explained to me that it was far older than most other

parts of the Citadel, and had been built when the design of towers was still

little more than the imitation in inanimate materials of human physiology, so

that skeletons of steel were used to support a fabric of flimsier substances.

With the passing of the centuries, that skeleton had largely corroded away -

there was

little furniture, and the air seemed colder than that outside.

After climbing several stairs and a ladder lashed together from the unpeeled

saplings of some fragrant tree, I was ushered into the presence of an old woman

who sat in the only chair I had yet seen there, staring through a glass tabletop

at what appeared to be an artificial landscape inhabited by hairless, crippled

animals. I gave her my letter and was led away; but for a moment she had glanced

at me, and her face, like the face of the young-old woman who had brought me to

her, has of course remained graven in my mind.

I mention all this now because it seemed to me, as I laid Jolenta on the tiles

beside the fire, that the women who crouched over it were the same. It was

again and again.

"What is the matter with her?" the younger woman asked, and Dorcas and I

explained as well as we could.

Long before we finished, the older one had Joenta's head in her lap and was

forcing wine from a clay bottle into her throat. "It would harm her if it were

strong to harm," she said. "But this is three parts pure water. Since you do not

wish to see her die, you are fortunate, possibly, to have come across us so.

Whether she is also fortunate, I cannot say.

I thanked her, and inquired where the third person who had been at their fire

had gone.

The old woman sighed, and stared at me for a moment before returning her

attention to Jolenta.

"There were only the two of us," the younger woman said. "You saw three?"

no clue.

"The seeress," Dorcas supplied. "And who are you?"

"Her acolyte, My name is Merryn. It is significant, possibly, that you, who are

three, saw three of us at the fire, while we who are two at first saw but two of

you." She looked to the Cumaean as if for confirmation, and then, as if she had

received it, back to us, though I saw no glance pass between them.

"I'm quite sure I saw a third person who was larger than either of you," I said.

"This is a strange evening, and there are those who ride the night air who

sometimes choose to borrow a human seeming. The question is why such a power

would wish to show itself to you."

The effect of her dark eyes and serene face was so great that I think I might

have believed her if it had not been for Dorcas, who suggested with an almost

"It's a good thing for her that the two of you had so much wine," I said.

The old woman did not rise to the bait, saying only, "Yes, it is. For you
and

possibly even for her."

Merryn picked up a stick and stirred the fire. "There is no death."

I laughed a little, mostly, I think, because I was no longer quite so
worried

about Jolenta. "Those of my trade think otherwise."

"Those of your trade are mistaken."

Jolenta murmured, "Doctor?" It was the first time she had spoken since
morning.

"You do not need a physician now," Merryn said. "Someone better is
here."

The Cumaean muttered, "She seeks her lover."

"Who is not this man in fuligin then, Mother? I thought he seemed too
common for

her."

"He is but a torturer. She seeks a worse."

Merryn nodded to herself, then said to us, "You will not wish to move
her

you

now?" Nevertheless, I rose to go.

The Cumaean looked up. "She's right," she croaked. "Though she does not know it,

and only speaks by rote like a starling in a cage. Death is nothing, and for

that reason you must fear it. What is more to be feared?"

I laughed again. "I can't argue with someone as wise as you. And because you

gave us what help you could, we will go now because you wish it."

The Cumaean permitted me to take Jolenta from her, but said, "I do not wish it.

My acolyte still believes the universe hers to command, a board where she can

move counters to form whatever patterns suit her. The Magi see fit to number me

among themselves when they write their short roll, and I should lose my place on

it if I did not know that people like ourselves are only little fish, who must swim with unseen tides if we are not to exhaust ourselves without finding

had carried an

unpleasant reminder of the undine; and as I studied her face I had come to doubt

that she was an old woman at all, and to recall only too clearly the hideous

faces of the cacogens who had removed their masks when Baldanders had rushed

among them.

"You shame me, Mother," Merryn said. "Shall I call to him?"

"He has heard us. He will come without your call."

She was right. I already detected the scrape of boots on the tiles of the other

side of the roof.

"You are alarmed. Would it not be better to put down the woman as I instructed

you, so you might take up your sword to defend your paramour? But there will be

no need."

By the time she had finished speaking, I could see a tall hat and a big head and

Hildegryn.

31 THE CLEANSING

"You may tell your master I delivered his message," I said.

Hildegryn smiled. "And have you a message to return, armiger?

Remember, I'm from

the quercine penetralia."

"No," I said. "None."

Dorcas looked up. "I do. A person I met in the gardens of the House

Absolute

told me I would encounter someone who identified himself thus, and that

I was to

say to him, 'When the leaves are grown, the wood is to march north.' "

Hildegryn laid a finger beside his nose. "All the wood? Is that what he said?"

"He gave me the words I have already recited to you, and nothing more."

"Dorcas," I asked, "why didn't you tell me this?"

he was

your friend, and told me."

"And told you to tell me."

Dorcas shook her head.

Hildegryn's thick-throated, chuckle might almost have come from underground.

"Well, it don't hardly matter now, does it? It's been delivered, and for myself

I don't mind tellin' you I wouldn't have minded if it had waited a little longer. But we're all friends here, except maybe for the sick girl, and I don't

think she can hear what's said, or understand what we're talkin' about if she

could. What did you say her name was? I couldn't hear you too clear when I was

over there on the other side."

"That was because I didn't say it at all," I told him. "But her name is Jolenta." As I pronounced Jolenta, I looked at her and seeing her in the firelight realized she was Jolenta no longer - nothing of the beautiful woman

Jonas had loved remained in that haggard face.

you? Not with you talkin' of goin' north and lightin' a officer of the
Septentrions. I saw you fight and saw you take that fellow's head off - I
helped

to catch him, by the bye, because I thought he might be from the House
Absolute

for true - and I was in the back of the people that watched you on the
stage

that night. I didn't lose you till the affair at the gate the next day. I seen
you and I seen her, though there's not much left of her now except the
hair, and

I think even that's changed."

Merryn asked the Cumaean, "Shall I tell them, Mother?"

The old woman nodded. "If you can, child."

"She has been imbued with a glamour that rendered her beautiful. It is
fading

fast now because of the blood she lost and because she has had a
great deal of

exercise. By morning only traces will remain."

Dorcas drew back, "Magic, you mean?"

"There is no magic. There is only knowledge, more or less hidden."

Hildegryn was staring at Jolenta with a thoughtful expression.

a slender

waist, breasts like melons, and so on. They may have been used to add
calf to

her legs as well. Cleaning and the application of healing broths to
the

skin freshened her face. Her teeth were cleaned too, and some were
ground down

and given false crowns - one has fallen away now, if you'll look. Her hair
was

dyed, and thickened by sewing threads of colored silk into her scalp. No
doubt

much body hair was killed as well, and that at least will remain so. Most
important, she was promised beauty while entranced. Such promises
are believed

with faith greater than any child's, and her belief compelled yours."

"Can nothing be done for her?" Dorcas asked.

"Not by me, and it is not a task of the kind the Cumaean undertakes,
save in

great need."

"But she will live?"

"As the Mother told you - though she will not wish it."

the Liege of Leaves, just like me. The armiger here can help me fetch
up this

Apu-Punchau, and what with my two fellows bein' killed on the road, I'll
be glad

to have him. So what's to keep us from goin' ahead?"

"Nothing," the Cumaean murmured. "'The star is in the ascendant."

Dorcas said, "If we're going to assist you with something, shouldn't we
know

what it is?"

"Bringin' back the past," Hildegrin told her grandly. "Divin' back into the
time

of old Urth's greatness. There was somebody who used to live in this
here place

we're sittin' on that knew things that could make a difference. I intend to
have

him up. It'll be the high point, if I may say it, of a career that's already
considered pretty spectacular in knowin' circles."

I asked, "You're going to open the tomb? Surely, even with alzado-"

The Cumaean reached out to smooth Jolenta's forehead. "We may call
it a tomb,

but it was not his. His house, rather."

are."

I said, "I had been given to understand that the Cumaean served Father Inire."

"She pays her debts," Hildegrin announced smugly. "Quality always does. And you

don't have to be a wise woman to know it might be wise to have a few friends on

the other side, just in case that's the side that wins."

Dorcas asked the Cumaean, "Who was this Apu-Punchau and why is his palace still

standing when the rest of the town is only tumbled stones?"

When the old woman did not reply, Merryn said, "Less than a legend, for not even

scholars now remember his story. The Mother has told us that his name means the

Head of Day. In the earliest eons he appeared among the people here and taught

them many wonderful secrets. Often he vanished, but always he returned. At last

he did not return, and invaders laid waste to his cities. Now he shall return

here magic then magic lives while we do it. In ancient days, in a land far off,
there stood two empires, divided by mountains. One dressed its soldiers in
yellow, the other in green. For a hundred generations they struggled. I see that
the man with you knows the tale."
"And after a hundred generations," I said, "an eremite came among them and
counseled the emperor of the yellow army to dress his men in green, and the
master of the green army that he should clothe it in yellow. But the battle continued as before. In my sabretache, I have a book called The Wonders of Urth
and Sky, and the story is told there."
"That is the wisest of all the books of men," the Cumaeian said. "Though there
are few who can gain any benefit from reading it Child, explain to this man, who
will be a sage in time, what we do tonight."

the dead there, and receive intelligence of things to come. Those who, like the

Mother, have learned to enter the same state while waking live surrounded by

their own lives, even as the Abraxas perceives all of time as an eternal instant."

There had been little wind that night, but I noticed now that such wind as there

had been had died utterly. A stillness hung in the air, so that despite the softness of Dorcas's voice her words seemed to ring. "Is that what this woman

you call the Cumaean will do, then? Enter that state, and speaking with the

voice of the dead tell this man whatever it is he wishes to know?"

"She cannot. She is very old, but this city was devastated whole ages before she

came to be. Only her own time rings her, for that is all her mind comprehends by

direct knowledge. To restore the city, we must make use of a mind that existed

when it was whole."

take the

right hand of your sick friend, and Hildegrin's. Your paramour must take the

sick woman's other hand, and Merryn's . . . Now we are linked, men to one side,

women to the other."

"And we'd best do somethin' quick" Hildegrin grumbled. "There's a storm comin',

I would say."

"We shall, as quickly as may be. Now I must use all minds, and the sick woman's

will be of little help. You will feel me guiding your thought. Do as I bid you."

Releasing Merryn's hand for a moment, the old woman (if she were in truth a

woman at all) reached into her bodice and drew out a rod whose tips vanished

into the night as if they were at the borders of my field of vision, though it

was hardly longer than a dagger. She opened her mouth; I thought she meant to

my hand .

. . None of you shrink from my hand . . ."

In the stupor that had followed Vodalus's banquet, I had known what it was to

share my mind with another. This was different. The Cumaean did not appear as I

had seen her, or as a young version of herself, or (as it seemed to me) as

anything. Rather, I found my thought surrounded by hers, as a fish in a bowl

floats in a bubble of invisible water. Thecla was there with me, but I could not

see her whole; it was as if she were standing behind me and I saw her hand over

my shoulder at one moment, and felt her breath on my cheek at the next.

Then she was gone and everything with her. I felt my thought hurled off into the

night, lost among the ruins.

they

had become, to my sight, as vaporous as ghosts. A phantom Hildegrin sprawled on

my right - I thrust my hand into his chest and felt his heart beat against it like a moth that struggled to escape. Jolenta was dimmest of all, hardly present. More had been done to her than Merryn had guessed; I saw wires and

bands of metal beneath her flesh, though even they were dim. I looked to myself

then, at my legs and feet, and found I could see the Claw burning like a blue

flame through the leather of my boot. I grasped it, but there was no strength in

my fingers; I could not take it forth.

Dorcas lay as if in sleep. There was no foam flecking her lips, and she was more

solid in appearance than Hildegrin. Merryn had collapsed into a black-clad doll,

so thin and dim that slender Dorcas seemed robust beside her. Now that

found

none, though each of the patternings on the reptile's back was a face,
and the

eyes of each face seemed lost in rapture.

Dorcas woke while I looked from one to another. "What has happened
to us?" she

said. Hildegrin was stirring.

"I think we are seeing ourselves from a perspective longer than a single
instant's."

Her mouth opened, but there was no cry.

Although the threatening clouds had brought no wind, dust was swirling
through

the streets below us. I do not know how to describe it except by saying
that it

seemed as if an uncountable host of minute insects a hundredth the
size of

midges had been concealed in the crevices of the rough pavement, and
now were

drawn by the moonlight to their nuptial flight. There was no sound, and
no

But Dorcas whispered, "Look, they are dead."

She was correct. The swarms that had seethed with life a moment before now

showed bleached ribs; the dust motes, linking themselves just as scholars piece

together shards of ancient glass to recreate for us a colored window shattered

thousands of years before, formed skulls that gleamed green in the moonlight.

Beasts

- aelurodonts, lumbering spelaeae, and slinking shapes to which I could put no

name, all fainter than we who watched from the rooftop - moved among the dead.

One by one they rose, and the beasts vanished. Feebly at first, they began to

rebuild their town; stones were lifted again, and timbers molded of ashes were

laid into sockets in the restored walls. The people, who had seemed hardly more

they had

last beat a forest had stood about the town, for they reverberated as sounds

only reverberate among the boles of great trees. A shaman with a shaven head

paraded the street, naked and painted with pictographs in a script I had never

seen, so expressive that the mere shapes of the words seemed to shout their

meanings.

Dancers followed him, a hundred or more capering in lockstep, single file, the

hands of each on the head of the dancer before him. Their faces were upturned,

making me wonder (as I wonder still) if they did not dance in imitation of the

hundred-eyed serpent we called the Cumaean. Slowly they coiled and twined, up

and down the street, around the shaman and back again until at last they reached

bronze in

the mausoleum where I played as a boy. There were massive gold bracelets on his

arms, bracelets set with jacinths and opals, carnelians and flashing emeralds.

With measured strides he advanced until he stood in the center of the procession, with the dancers swaying about him. Then he turned toward us and

lifted his arms. He was looking at us, and I knew that he, alone of all the hundreds there, truly saw us.

I had been so entranced by the spectacle below me that I had not noticed when

Hildegrin left the roof. Now he darted - if so large a man can be said to dart -

into the crowd and laid hold of Apu-Punchau.

What followed I hardly know how to describe. In a way it was like the little

drama in the house of yellow wood in the Botanic Gardens; yet it was far stranger, if only because I had known then that the woman and her brother, and

rooftop

and as Isangoma had seen Agia and me. Yet I do not believe he saw Hildegrin as I

saw him, and it may be that what he saw seemed as strange to him as the Cumaean

had to me. Hildegrin held him, but he could not subdue him. Apu-Punchau

struggled, but he could not break free. Hildegrin looked up to me and shouted

for help.

I do not know why I responded. Certainly I no longer consciously desired to

serve Vodalus and his purposes. Perhaps it was the lingering effect of the

alzabo, or only the memory of Hildegrin's rowing Dorcas and me across the Lake

of Birds.

I tried to push the bandylegged men away, but one of their random blows caught

the side of my head and knocked me to my knees. When I rose again, I seemed to

Rain beating upon my upturned face awakened me - big drops of cold rain that
stung like hail. Thunder rolled across the pampas. For a moment I thought I had
gone blind; then a flash of lightning showed me wind-lashed grass and tumbled
stones.
"Severian!"
It was Dorcas. I started to rise, and my hand touched cloth as well as mud. I
seized it and pulled it free - a long, narrow strip of silk tipped with tassels.

"Severian!" There was terror in the cry.
"Here!" I called. "I'm down here!" Another flash showed me the building
and
Dorcas's frantic figure silhouetted on the roof I circled the blind walls
and
found the steps. Our mounts were gone. On the roof, so were the witches; Dorcas,

Here I pause again, having taken you, reader, from town to town - from
the

little mining village of Saltus to the desolate stone town whose very
name had

long ago been lost among the whirling years. Saltus was for me the
gateway to

the world beyond the City Imperishable. So too, the stone town was a
gateway, a

gateway to the mountains I had glimpsed through its ruined arches. For
a long

way thereafter, I was to journey among their gorges and fastnesses,
their blind

eyes and brooding faces.

Here I pause. If you wish to walk no farther with me, reader, I do not
blame

you. It is no easy road.

APPENDIXES

renders it doubly difficult, and nothing more than a sketch is presented here.

So far as can be determined from the manuscripts, the society of the Commonwealth appears to consist of seven basic groups. Of these, one at least

seems completely closed. A man or woman must be born an exultant, and if so

born, remains an exultant throughout life. Although there may well be gradations

within this class, the manuscripts indicate none. Its women are called "Chatelaine," and its men by various titles. Outside the city I have chosen to

call Nessus, it carries on the administration of day-to-day affairs. Its hereditary assumption of power is deeply at variance with the spirit of the

Commonwealth, and sufficiently accounts for the tension evident between the

exultants and the autarchy; yet it is difficult to see how local governance might be better arranged under the prevailing conditions - democracy would

deadly disease of the state. In the manuscripts, Thecla, Thea, and Vodalus are unquestionably exultants.

The armigers seem much like exultants, though on a lesser scale. Their name

indicates a fighting class, but they do not appear to have monopolized the major

roles in the army; no doubt their position could be likened to that of the samurai who served the daimyos of feudal Japan. Lomer, Nicarete, Racho, and

Valeria are armigers.

The optimates appear to be more or less wealthy traders. Of all the seven, they

make the fewest appearances in the manuscripts, though there are some hints that

Dorcas originally belonged to this class.

As in every society, the commonality constitute the vast bulk of the population.

Generally content with their lot, ignorant because their nation is too poor to

doubt

with good reason - are the servants of the throne. They are his administrators

and advisors, both in military and civil life. They appear to be drawn from the

commonality, and it is noteworthy that they treasure such education as they have

obtained. (For contrast, see Thecla's contemptuous rejection of it.) Severian

himself and the other inhabitants of the Citadel, with the exception of Ultan,

might be said to belong to this class.

The religious are almost as enigmatic as the god they serve, a god that appears

fundamentally solar, but not Apollonian. (Because the Conciliator is given a

Claw, one is tempted to make the easy association of the eagle of Jove with the

sun; it is perhaps too pat.) Like the Roman Catholic clergy of our own day, they

such a

roving group would have to be in their place and time) by armed male servants.

Lastly, the cacogens represent, in a way we can hardly more than sense, that

foreign element that by its very foreignness is most universal, existing in nearly every society of which we have knowledge. Their common name seems to

indicate that they are feared, or at least hated, by the commonality. Their

presence at the Autarch's festival would seem to show that they are accepted

(though perhaps under duress) at court. Although the populace of Severian's time

appears to consider them a homogeneous group, it appears likely that they are in

fact diverse. In the manuscripts, the Cumaean and Father Inire represent this

element.

The honorific I have translated as *sieur* would seem to belong only to the

I have found it impossible to derive precise estimates of the values of the coins mentioned in the original of The Book of the New Sun. In the absence of certainty, I have used chrisos to designate any piece of gold stamped with the profile of an autarch; although these no doubt differ somewhat in weight and purity, it appears they are of roughly equal value.

The even more various silver coins of the period I have lumped together as asimi.

The large brass coins (which appear from the manuscripts to furnish the principal medium of exchange among the common people) I have called orichalks.

The myriad small brass, bronze, and copper tokens (not struck by the central government, but by the local archons at need, and intended only for provincial circulation) I have called aes. A single aes buys an egg; an orichalk, a day's

within large cities such as Nessus.

The span is the distance between the extended thumb and forefinger - about eight

inches. A chain is the length of a measuring chain of 100 links, in which each

link measures a span; it is thus roughly 70 feet.

An ell represents the traditional length of the military arrow; five spans, or

about 40 inches.

The pace, as used here, indicates a single step, or about two and a half feet.

The stride is a double step.

The most common measure of all, the distance from a man's elbow to the tip of

his longest finger (about 18 inches), I have given as a cubit. (It will be observed that throughout my translation I have preferred modern words that will

be understandable to every reader in attempting to reproduce - in the Roman

alphabet - the original terms.)

occur, a chiliad designates a period of 1,000 years. An age is the interval

between the exhaustion of some mineral or other resource in its naturally

occurring form (for example, sulfur) and the next. The month is the (then) lunar

one of 28 days, and the week is thus precisely equal to our own week: a quarter

of the lunar month, or seven days. A watch is the duty period of a sentry:

one-tenth of the night, or approximately one hour and 15 minutes.

G.W.