

**PATTERNS**  
by Juleen Brantingham

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She never again dreamed of dancing.

There was movement, naturally; pat-terns formed, broke, reformed in color and light, streaming, whirling, always with grace, but not in the movements of the dance.

Someone who knew little of dancers might have thought it too much to hope to control dreams, but the apparent freedom of the dance is founded in rigid control; the discipline that permits such grace comes first from the mind. She would put it from her, never dream of it again, never ache for what was lost.

But she had lived for this since she was eight years old. Every act, every thought had been somehow related to her training. She had nothing now but pain and emptiness. And Richard. She did not even have herself because if she was no longer a dancer she did not know who she was.

He showed her. There would be some-thing more. They would go away and they would build it together.

It was late July and heat had settled into the valleys like liquid in a cup. All morning she had tried to distract her-self, to ignore the heat. Before moving south she had always thought of moun-tains as cool but this was the humidity of a lowland swamp, the heat of New York at its worst. While Richard was getting ready for work Anya had come out to the shop to throw open the windows, hoping for a breeze. But there was no breeze, no clouds, nothing but the pitiless glare of the sun. When he kissed her goodbye he fingered the damp tendrils at the back of her neck, making her shiver.

She was sitting at her work table when Elizabeth arrived to sweep and dust, to rearrange the quilts on the displays. The girl gossiped about the people of Drover Trail, giving her shy looks. There was a half-finished quilt lying slack on the frame, a Log Cabin pattern in shades of green, but she couldn't bear to work at something so heavy in this weather. She had been cutting pieces for a Double Wedding Ring but she pushed them aside. They were behaving perversely, sticking to each other, depositing a layer of furry lint on her hands.

She remembered the treasure of old silk she'd found in a secondhand shop weeks before. Silk promised coolness and though she knew it was an illusion, she asked Elizabeth to bring her the box from the closet in the house. She started with the shears, cutting away seams and button rows.

“Too hot to be working today. You should be setting in the shade sipping a cold drink.” He spoke from the door, surveying the room like a monarch, thumbs tucked into his gun belt.

“So should you. What could be so important that it takes you away from that air-conditioned office?”

Tom Dawson crossed the shop with ponderous dignity, as if claiming it for his own.

“Air-conditioned?” he scoffed. “You talking about the little fan we got and the glass of icewater we set in front of it?” He reached for her hand, then pulled back his own and wiped it on his shirt, which was sweat-stained, spat-tered, too, with what looked like dried blood.

“What have you been doing?”

“Oh, I been up the hill a ways,” he said, sounding disgusted.

The “hill” he referred to was what Anya would have called a mountain. She wondered where Tom came from. Though he softened the endings of his words, his accent wasn’t quite the same as Elizabeth’s. He’d taken a fatherly interest in Anya and Richard, even telling Richard who to see about the loan they needed to open Anya’s shop, but other than his occupation, his life was a mystery.

“Old man had himself a place up there in the woods. One of our local crazies. Guess you could say he got what he deserved.”

Anya pressed her lips together and looked at him, laughing silently. He shook his head in rueful agreement, sighed, and started over.

“This old man had buncha dogs. Kept them chained up, starved them, beat them, it looked like, just for the pure joy of having something that couldn’t hurt him back. ‘Cept one of them did. One of them tore his throat out sometime yesterday, then broke its chain and got away. Neighbor complained about the others howling, was how I found out. Came to warn you to keep your doors shut.” Anya started to object but he raised his voice and wouldn’t let her get a word in. “Keep ‘em shut and keep a watch on your yard. You see a strange dog hanging around, you call me right away.”

“It’s that dangerous, you think?”

He sighed again. “I don’t know, to tell you the truth. Could be so weak it crawled off to die. The others I found, three of them was so bad off I had to put them out of their misery. Even the ones I brought down, don’t know what’s going to be done with them. A dog that’s treated like that, he never gets over it. Turns

vicious. When you least expect it he'll jump you and tear your head off." He gave her a one-finger salute and left, closing the door. Elizabeth was wide-eyed.

"Put up the Closed sign and lock the door. Nobody will want to look at quilts in a stuffy shop. We'll go to the house."

"I'll get my things and go on home," the girl said.

"You're not going to walk that road with a dangerous dog on the loose. Richard can take you. Or you can call your father. If you think he can drive this time of day." She hadn't meant to sound critical but everyone knew Elizabeth's father was in a drunken stupor by noon. "You can look at my scrapbook," she added, and was re-warded with a smile. She picked up her canes and began the awkward process of getting to her feet.

No storm came through to cool the air, and sunset brought little relief. Richard suggested dinner out and a movie but even for the promise of air-conditioning it didn't seem worth the trouble. Anya spent the evening going through her pattern books, trying to decide how to use the silk. She kept imagining she heard noises; if it hadn't been so difficult to get up she would have gone to the window a dozen times.

Richard was watching television, the sound turned low. When she noticed he'd fallen asleep, she didn't move to wake him, only smiled, feeling tender-ness. He was a quiet man whose manner was sometimes mistaken for a lack of ambition. But he'd had ambitions, once. He gave them up for her, to practice his legal skills here where there was little call for them.

Was that a whisper or a breeze? This time she had to know. Richard woke and came to stand beside her, gazing out at the moonlight. He slipped an arm around her, his cheek brushing her hair.

"Pretty isn't it," he said.

Not even a shadow moved. Why, then, did she have the feeling of being watched? She shivered.

"What's wrong?"

"It's still wild up here, isn't it? Parts of it."

He laughed, tightening his embrace. "Only a city girl could think of this place as wild."

"But there are —" She swallowed. "— bears in the woods?"

"You're afraid of that dog, aren't you?"

“Not afraid exactly.” The rest of it came in a rush. “He must be so angry! To be chained up, starved, tormented. To be strong and healthy once and then so helpless.” She caught herself then, only then, after revealing too much.

If he understood, he bore it in silence.

She never dreamed of dancing. But there was movement: colors whirled and streamed, patterns formed, broke, re-formed, as in a kaleidoscope: Wheel of Fortune, Country Roads, Castle Walls, Starry Pavement.

She woke with a start. She could still see the shapes, the final pattern: rays and arrows of color as if from a blazing eye, God’s Eye. In her dream it had been more than a pattern in patchwork; it had an almost sorcerous power. She slipped from bed, trying not to waken Richard and walked through the house to the shop. She didn’t turn on a light but opened the door, allowing moonlight to flood the room. She brought the silk, scissors, and pincushion to the front where the light was bright.

God’s Eye was an easy pattern she had made before, but in her dream there had been something odd about the center, a folded look she could not recall clearly. She cut and basted, forgetting time, forgetting the heat. Dissatisfied with the result, she ripped out her stitches and started again. Her mind provided the colors moonlight leached away.

The largest piece of silk was an eve-ning gown — must be, though when she’d pulled it from the rack in the store she thought she’d smelled orange blossoms, along with decades of mustiness. The hand-stitching, the embroidered bands on sleeves and hem, the hundreds of bugle beads hinted this was no ordinary gown but something crafted with hopes and dreams. But why would some-one make a wedding gown of sable-colored silk? Still, as she’d worked with it, she had thought of weddings and of promises made with the knowledge, so its color testified, that even in bright beginnings there is the certainty of sorrow to come.

The other pieces were not unusual, blouses, a skirt, and a scarf, in autumn colors. It would make a striking patch-work.

She knew when she had found the right combination of colors, when she’d found the trick of folding the center. Something clicked. It was the same as in her dream and it had a kind of power. Too excited then to sleep, she had to see how it would look when several blocks were assembled. Hours passed and she didn’t notice the sky lighten. She saw nothing but the pattern until she straightened to ease the ache in her back.

She saw the dog.

Her chest was suddenly tight. How long had he been there, leaning against the

door? Why hadn't she heard him panting? His tongue was hanging out, dripping drool, and his eyes were glazed with pain. His fur was dark brown but thinned by bad health. She could have counted his ribs but not his wounds, some scabbed, some pus-filled, some raw and bleeding. He was a large dog and even now, starving, must have weighed as much as she did.

The pattern and the colors danced before her eyes. She felt no fear. She should have, she knew, but it simply wasn't there.

She went to him and touched his head, placing her fingers on the only un-wounded part of it, between his ears. She felt a fever's heat. And something more. Something she couldn't name.

Richard stopped, his face frozen in mid-yawn. Beneath the kitchen table the dog lifted his head, his growl a deep rumble. Richard didn't move.

"Stop that," Anya ordered.

The dog dropped his head back to the floor, closed his eyes. Still Richard didn't move.

"What the Hell have you done?" Softly, almost in awe.

"Come and sit down. He's not going to bother you."

He took the cup of coffee she poured but he wouldn't sit and he never took his eyes from the dog.

"Have you called Tom yet?"

"No," she said. "You can if you want. I suppose he should know so people can leave their doors open again. But no one is taking Casey away from me."

He didn't ask about the name and she couldn't have told him. It was his name, that's all.

She wasn't a fighter, never had been. Her battles had always been within herself. Tell her there were rules, she would obey them. Put a block in her path, she would turn back; she wouldn't go around. When the doctors said she would never again walk without pain, she accepted it; she didn't look for miracles.

She fought that day, for Casey's life.

"Anya, get away from him. He killed a man."

Tom stood just inside the front door, his hand inches from his holstered

weapon, Richard by his side.

“Self-defense,” she said. “You’re not taking my dog.”

“He’s got to be put down. He’s danger-ous.”

“Self-defense,” she repeated.

“Anya, we’re talking about a dog. I’m sorry as Hell about what that old man did. If I’d known in time I’d a found a way to stop it. But it’s done and he killed the man. He’s turned vicious. He can’t ever be trusted.”

“Look at him,” she said, turning to look herself. He gazed up at her with adoring eyes, as if she were a candle burning in the darkest night of his life.

“Means nothing,” Tom said. “He was hurt and you made him feel better. He’s still weak. When he’s healthy again, when someone does something that re-minds him of how he was hurt before, he’s going to defend himself. Suppose it’s a child? Hell, Anya, a full-grown man might come out second-best in a fight with that brute. I don’t mind admitting I’m leery of him myself.”

“He’s not vicious. He’s not going to hurt anyone.”

Tom made a sound of exasperation. Anya knew then she was holding her own. Tom and Richard could have taken him by force; she couldn’t have stopped them. But he was still trying to convince her, which meant she had a chance, Casey had a chance.

Richard’s eyes said sorrowfully this was betrayal. In a way it was true but Richard’s life wasn’t in danger. She refused to believe that.

Casey had no one else.

Her legs trembled, her hands and arms ached but it was Tom and Richard who turned away, finally. With another accusing look, Richard murmured some-thing about walking Tom to his car. They hadn’t given up; they were only retiring from the field to plot new strategy. She almost smiled but caught herself as Tom turned back to point a finger.

“You let him loose once,” he threat-ened, “just once without a leash and I will hunt him down and I will shoot him where he stands.”

Casey’s body filled out, his wounds healed as quickly as the quilt took shape in her hands. She watched him pace, his eyes bright, his coat shiny, muscles sliding under his skin; the sight was so beautiful her breath caught in her throat. Here was health and strength, things she had never truly appreciated when she still had them.

Richard and the dog tolerated each other. Though he said no more about turning Casey over to Tom — biding his time — his silences could have been no colder if she had taken a lover.

Anya had to walk Casey. She couldn't ask Richard to do it and even Elizabeth was afraid of him. The first time, she thought he would get the leash tangled around her canes, jerk her off her feet, but it never happened. With almost human understanding, he took the role of protector, not only careful in his own movements but alert to other dangers.

Once when they were walking, a toad popped out of the grass near her feet. Instantly, Casey leaped to stand between her and the small brown thing, hackles rising, a fearsome growl coming from his throat. The toad disappeared. Laughing, she knelt to throw her arms around the dog.

He stayed beside her in the shop. The tourists who came to look at quilts or wall hangings kept their distance but their children knew what they did not. They patted his head, climbed on his back, pulled his tail. Casey enjoyed the attention, though he never willingly left her side.

When the silk patchwork was assembled she was reluctant to begin quilting; she didn't want to finish, to risk having to sell it. For over a week she left it rolled up.

Richard had gone to Asheville and wouldn't be back until late. He hadn't said why he was going. He said less and less these days.

Anya wandered through the house, dusting haphazardly, trying to deny her unease. Casey's toenails clicked behind her as she went from room to room. The heat wave had broken weeks before but tonight the air was heavy. Hoping for a breeze she opened the side window, the one she usually kept closed because it was unscreened and had a low sill. It didn't occur to her there was any risk. Casey was so obedient, sensing what she wanted even when she didn't speak.

With one brief, apologetic look he leaped over the sill and was gone.

She dropped her canes to lean out, calling in an urgent whisper, afraid to raise her voice. Someone might be passing, someone who would report to Tom. Casey bounded through the yard, over the fence. For a moment she could not move. Tom. His threat. Her own weakness. She was alone with this and help-less.

Something called to her, a whispered promise.

Awkwardly, struggling with her canes and the slippery silk, she carried the top, now basted to batting and lining, to the quilting frame. She hadn't stenciled in

the pattern. The light was weak. But she had to keep busy or she would go mad with worry. Her ears strained to detect the sound of a shot.

He bounded through the field, reveling in the scents. There was joy in movement, the ripple of muscles, the freedom. His ears pricked to the smallest sounds, a rabbit darting through the grass, hiss of tires on the road below, a distant voice. Nothing fettered him, not walls, nor the leash, nor the woman.

Sitting in the closed-up shop, stitching, she tried to imagine where he was, what he was doing. With her whole being she wished him safe. Like a sorceress crouching over a bowl of water she felt/heard/scented all that he might be experiencing. It brought a rush of remembrance: lights and heat, a body moving in a pattern, the thrill of being truly alive. This was the thing he'd been created for. He needed freedom to the same degree he needed air — as she did, though she had denied it.

Light glistened on the needle as it licked in and out of the fabric.

He lifted his head. With a bark of delight he dashed to the left, ignoring the rhododendrons that brushed his coat. He stopped again where the land dropped away. The sound of panting was loud. One scent, one in particular, created in him a long-unfelt tingling tightness.

The needle rose like a blind thing from the other side. Anya knew where she was, what she did, but the other scene was more real to her than any she had lived, except in the places, lost to her now, where life was distilled to its essence.

Picturing what might lie before the dog's eyes, she recognized the sagging barn, the ramshackle house half-hidden by the barn, the rusting blue Chevy. She had seen this before but from another perspective, a car parked in the yard when she came to buy eggs. A stoop-shouldered farmer came from the barn, fastened the door with a length of wire. Billy Vance, perpetually sour, scowling.

The smell thickened, making Casey quiver.

Vance walked to the house. Desire drew the dog, slinking and wary, down the slope. There was the clack of a screen door.

Behind the weathered gray siding, the object of Casey's attention was yipping softly as if she sensed the need for quiet. The urge was so strong Anya couldn't keep her thoughts separate — if they ever had been, as if this was happening anywhere but in her own mind. A hunger she had not felt for over a year made her ache.

Casey sniffed the lower edge, found a weakness and began to scabble. Dirt and splinters flew. His former wariness was forgotten. He knew nothing but need



and the intoxicating scent.

The needle was hot. Once more it plunged and then the tingle became a smothering wave. Her hips jerked, twice, unstoppably. The movement brought no release. She leaned forward, clutched the quilting frame, aware of the darkness beyond the windows, the light illuminating her as if she were on a stage. Exposed. Her shame was one with the punishing pain. It was a long moment before the spasm released her and she could raise her head.

Hours later she heard a soft thud, the click of toenails. She pulled herself from bed, hurried to close the window. His eyes laughed in the lamplight; his tongue lolled. She got out a rag to wipe the dirt from his coat before Richard returned, before he could see and guess what she had done — allowed.

It would never happen again, she promised herself.

He saw her face touched by moon-light, lines of pain erased by that magic light. He wanted to kiss her awake, to talk, to remove the shadow that had grown between them. But when he went to her he found Casey on the floor between their beds. The dog gave him a look that might have been contempt or warning. Richard turned away.

In the morning it all seemed foolish. She was cheerful, buoyantly so, and carried Richard along with her mood. At breakfast they talked as if nothing had ever been wrong. Leaving, he tossed a comment over his shoulder, something about seeing if Elizabeth could take care of the shop so they could get away. He didn't notice her fading smile.

When the car was out of sight, she hurried into the shop, giving in to a longing she'd felt the moment she opened her eyes. She slowed when she came near the frame. Nearly a third of the design had been filled in.

They did not go away that week-end. Richard took a hard look at their bank balance, noted that a payment was due on the loan, and said they would have to put off their holiday. Unless, he said, smiling, she sold a quilt.

Anya feigned disappointment, feeling like a traitor. She didn't want to leave Casey

The next afternoon, Friday, some-thing happened that made her forget her own problems. A party of tourists had just come in when Elizabeth's father appeared, his face sweaty, un-shaven. He threatened the girl, his words obscene. Elizabeth cowered; the tourists fled. Anya levered herself from her chair. In fumbling for her canes she dropped one. As she groped for it she shouted at him to leave Elizabeth alone. Fear thinned her voice, made her sound like a weak old woman.

“Stay out of this! This is all your fault — don’t think I don’t know it — teach-ing her to paint herself like a slut —” He pulled things from his pockets, lipsticks, brushes, small bottles.

From nowhere it seemed, because he was so well-behaved in the shop she almost forgot him, Casey leaped, snarl-ing like something from a nightmare. It happened so fast Anya couldn’t tell whether he actually bit the man or whether he simply put on a show. She made no attempt to call him off. Shak-ing with rage, she felt like an animal herself; she wanted to howl, wanted the satisfaction of ripping flesh.

Crashing into displays, kicking use-lessly at that snarling mass of muscle and teeth, he escaped, stopping in the yard to scream threats. But with Casey braced in the doorway, hackles raised and fangs showing, he wouldn’t dare come back.

Anya held Elizabeth while she cried and between fits of sobbing the story came out. It wasn’t just the make-up, though that was bad enough in the eyes of someone with his rigid beliefs — beliefs that didn’t preclude taking her pay to spend on booze, Anya commented to herself. Elizabeth had been sneaking out to see someone, waiting until her father was too drunk to know what she was doing. He’d found out somehow; someone must have seen them. His quarrel with her had started at break-fast. She showed Anya the bruises, swollen and purple.

No point in keeping the shop open now. Anya took Elizabeth into the house.

It was near sunset when Elizabeth’s grandmother arrived.

Richard’s secretary claimed he was in his office with a client but he didn’t return her phone calls. Any other time Anya might have entertained jealous fears; now she had no time. She hadn’t dared phone Tom to ask what could be done to protect the girl. She would have had to tell him what Casey had done. With the ugly scene fresh in her mind she mistrusted all men. Elizabeth in-sisted she must go home, face her father, get the punishment over with or it would be worse when he caught her. Her grandmother arrived before she had found the courage to leave but the sick, fearful look in the woman’s eyes warned Anya there would be little help from her.

“I can take her in for the night,” she said. “But it won’t do any good. She’s his daughter. She’s got to go back. She shouldn’t have made him so mad.”

Anya’s pleading came to nothing. They thought it was right for a man to beat a disobedient child, beat her sense-less, if he chose. Grandmother scoffed at Elizabeth’s bruises, implying they were nothing compared to what she’d suf-fered herself. Anya mentioned shelters, counselling, legal protection. She might have been speaking a foreign language. Such things, they said, would only make him more angry; he would find the girl wherever she was hiding and he would kill her, as well as anyone who tried to interfere.

When they left, Anya stumped through the house, wanting to strike out at the walls, the furniture, but the thought of even these small acts of violence frightened her. She hated all men, despised her own weakness. Such brutality should be stopped and all she had offered was words. How was she different from Elizabeth and her grand-mother, passively accepting this as if it had been decreed by God?

But what if they were right? What if her interference finally tipped that man over the edge?

She wanted Richard, wanted him now. She needed to talk, to be with him.

He phoned to say he would be late, no explanation for it or for his earlier failure to return her calls. She didn't mention what had happened. Her hands trembled as she put down the phone.

Blood thoughts. Ghosting through darkness on pads that made no sound. The air was electric with the terror of small things that sensed his presence. Sniffing the air, seeking. Lips wrinkled back in a soundless snarl, saliva drip-ping. Moon's light, witchlight, turning the night to silver and shadows. Muscles sliding under taut skin, stalking, his steps an ancient choreography. Dancing, to vengeance.

Anya stitched, crouched over the frame like an old woman, unaware what her hands were doing, alive only in her mind. God's Eye. All-seeing.

She lusted for revenge as only the powerless can.

Hours later she straightened. Pain was fire. She felt ancient, a crone poisoned by decades of hatred, sucked dry by the sorcery that was her only strength. She looked at her hands and was almost surprised to find they were not wrinkled, gnarled, liver-spotted. She was the same. But in spite of pain and self-disgust, she felt cleaner for having indulged in that orgy of imagined ven-geance. She was purged of her desire to repay suffering with death.

Elizabeth came to work as usual. Richard slept until noon. They had three customers in the shop all day; none of them made a purchase. Casey licked his paws and stared at nothing, darkly. The quilting pattern was nearly finished.

On Sunday afternoon Tom came to ask what happened in the shop on Friday. He had, apparently, already been told something but he did not mention Casey, nor did Anya. Elizabeth's father was missing; he'd not been seen since late Friday night. Richard waited until the sheriff was gone, then looked at her accusingly.

"When I got home on Friday the side window was open."

"Where were you on Friday?" she countered. His he was thin and he knew

she knew it.

She spent the afternoon cutting pieces, stitching blocks for a new patch-work, pretending to be absorbed in her work. He washed the car, taking twice as long as the job warranted.

Child-like, she wondered if because she had wished for a death she had caused it. Wished fervently. Plotted what she would have done if she'd had Casey's strength, his murderous rage, his powerful jaws.

But that was only dreaming and dreams had no power.

Summer's heat had fled; there was a chill in the air every morning. School started and Elizabeth came to the shop only in the afternoons.

She was staying with her grand-mother. Anya could scarcely believe the change in her; her face glowed when she mentioned the boy she was seeing. Grandmother, she said, had given only grudging approval. The sheriff learned that her father owed someone a great deal of money. Only his mother believed he would be back any time soon.

Anya had taken the silk patchwork from the frame, still unfinished. It would bring a good price and, with little coming in this time of year, Richard was worried about making payments on the loan. But she didn't want to finish it. She didn't want to sell it, lose it.

It seemed sheer bad luck that the very hour when her guilt had compelled her to spread the God's Eye silk on her work table to make plans for finishing and binding it, Richard came into the shop with a stranger, a man he introduced as Ben Geller.

"He's going to be our neighbor, just signed the papers for that white house down the road."

"I always liked that house," Anya said. "It has a wonderful view of the valley."

Geller nodded absently, staring at the patchwork.

"This is God's Eye, isn't it? I've never seen that folded thing in the center before. Your own design?"

When he touched it Anya shiv-ered. With growing dread, with grow-ing certainty that it was, in some way, part of a pattern, she heard him say he was a collector. There in Richard's hearing he made an offer that stunned her. He knew what he wanted and was, apparently, wealthy enough to get it. She didn't have to look at Richard to know he was calculating how many loan payments that sum

would cover.

He took her to the Vance farm to buy eggs. A dog ambled across the yard, a young bitch, heavily pregnant. Vance cursed the stray that had broken into his barn when she was in heat. She had papers, he said, and he'd wanted to wait until she was older before breeding her. Anya counted back and felt sick. Richard looked at her strangely. Of course he didn't mind, he said. The sheriff's office wasn't far out of their way.

But Tom knew no more than before. "I wouldn't worry about Elizabeth if I was you. Likely by the time her daddy gets back she'll have a husband and a baby to show him."

"But she has two years before graduation."

"Girls get married young around here."

He was probably right. They would marry young if the situation at home was like Elizabeth's, and possibly they'd find themselves trapped in the same pattern of violence.

As they were leaving, Tom leaned back in his swivel chair, making it screech. "How's that dog of yours doing?"

"Fine. He's never a bit of trouble."

"Someone said he saw him one night a few weeks back. Out by Henson's. Recognized him as the one from your shop."

Henson's was on the other side of Drover Trail, near the trailer where Elizabeth had lived with her father.

"Must have been another dog," she said. "Casey never goes out without his leash."

Tom nodded, then added softly, "I'd be worried about him if I was you. Some day when you least expect it he might just turn on you."

Richard's silence was chilly.

She cupped Casey's head in her hands, looked into his golden brown eyes. He gazed back trustfully. He doesn't have an ounce of meanness in him, she thought, remembering how gentle he was with children. But I do. She thought about possession, still wanting to believe imagination had no power. She thought about God's Eye. She would have to finish it soon. Richard had mentioned the loan payment coming due.

She had to know. But what would it prove?

Richard was out for the evening, meeting with someone about a will. When leaving he'd made a wide detour around Casey, sprawled on the rug. He still disliked and mistrusted the dog. The feeling was mutual.

When she came back from the porch, Casey was waiting at the window. It made her wonder how he always knew what she was thinking. For a time she stared into his eyes until she could see nothing else. Finally she forced herself to look away, her eyes tearing. She went to the window and thumbed the catch.

“This is the last time. The very last time.”

His muscles tensed. He sprang and was gone.

The needle slid in and out of the silk. Touched with fire from the overhead light, the sight dazzled her, made her lose all sense of her surroundings.

Racing through darkness. The elastic feel of healthy muscles being used as they were meant to be. Head up, scent-ing, questing. Blood thoughts. Remem-bering. In her waking dream, their thoughts and souls were one.

As before he avoided roads, bounding through fields and stands of fragrant pine, pausing in clearings to sniff, to listen before hurrying on. No hate this night, only urgency. By scent alone s/he followed the path below the road, the tunnel roofed with pine, walled with brush, behind the trailer. The path known only to the man who had walked it, night after night. If it existed, but of course it did not. Thoughts were tan-gled, not as they had been before. There was no joy tonight. Discovering the expected scent, dark and unpleasant.

Someone shook her violently. Richard, his face strangely both pale and shad-owed.

“What’s wrong? Are you sick?”

“I didn’t hear you come in.”

“Damn right you didn’t,” he said, straightening. “I’ve been shaking you for five minutes.”

He helped her to her feet. Her legs were as responsive as wood, but wood aflame with pain. She would not cry out, would not look up because then he would see how bad it was. Instead she looked at the pattern of quilting stitches. It was complete, every tiny white thread part of a swirl that drew the eye to the center of God’s Eye. What did it mean, now that it was finished?

Tonight s/he had found what she hoped/dreaded to find because she had written the script and painted the sce-nery. It meant nothing.

“What? What did you say?”

He eased her into the chair next to the side window, now closed. Casey ambled from the bedroom, yawning and stretch-ing as if he had been there all evening.

“I said Elizabeth’s father won’t hurt her again. Some boys found his body in a hollow about a quarter of a mile from their trailer. As soon as I heard, I came to tell you.”

“How did he die?”

She couldn’t avoid looking at Casey. Richard looked also, but incuriously.

“A broken neck.”

She felt no relief.

“He must have been drunk. Stumbled on the trail and fell.”

Or trying to escape a wrathful horror, an animal possessed, that leaped at him from the darkness. Her mouth was dry. She couldn’t ask if Richard had closed the window. Had she opened it? Or had that — too — been imagination?

“That quilt is finished, isn’t it?”

She shivered slightly and he seemed to think she had shaken her head.

“I know you don’t want to sell it. It’s your own design. If money wasn’t so tight now I wouldn’t ask. But Geller knows the value of what he’s buying. Finish it, Anya. We’ll take some of that money and get away for a real vacation. You need it. We need time together, time to talk.”

“I just have to do the binding,” she said weakly, knowing it would be taken as agreement. She didn’t want to leave — to leave Casey.

Had she let him out? Or was that part of her nightmare fantasy?

While Richard stopped to turn out the lights, Anya went to bed. She’d taken something for the pain and her thoughts were fuzzy but she couldn’t get comfort-able. She twisted this way and that, finally pinpointing the source of her discomfort as a small hardness between the sheets. She pulled out a brown button.

Must have fallen off her dress when she was changing the sheets.

She held it to her nose, imagining she smelled something unpleasant. She looked at Casey, lying between the beds as if to make certain Richard would have trouble reaching her for their goodnight kiss. He yawned and dropped his head to the rug.

The morning Ben Geller came to pick up the quilt, their bags were packed, Elizabeth had arrived to take care of Casey, and the car was ready. They only had to stop in town to cash Geller's check.

She'd gone over the arrangements with Elizabeth several times. The girl seemed almost as excited about this as Richard. She promised to walk the dog often and no, she said, she wasn't afraid of him now. The shop would remain closed. Casey's care was more important than another sale.

Finally she couldn't invent another reason for delay.

They drove to the coast, to a motel near the beach. They would, Richard promised, do nothing more than soak up sun, eat too much, and read. And talk. She had brought fabric and thread for a new quilt. Richard sighed when he saw the workbag but he said nothing. To placate him she didn't open it for two days.

But they didn't talk, not really. They each skirted the edges of the thing as if afraid to stick a toe in the water.

The big dog was thirsty. He paced through the shop, whining at the places where the woman usually sat, the familiar smell of the things she handled. He felt shame for having relieved himself here. But worse than shame was the thirst, its torment as bad as anything he had suffered in the other place. He had long since stopped trying the door to the house. There was never a response to his scratching, only sometimes laughter, voices.

Her hands itched for something to do. She waited until Richard went to town to pick up a newspaper, then pulled out the green and white fabric and the pattern for Hunter's Star. It was a relief to work. She was sick with worry and weary of the effort to convince Richard she was having a good time. She became absorbed in the familiar motions of cutting and stitching. It wasn't the same as with God's Eye — though she tried, freeing her mind, concentrating on thoughts of him running free — but of course he wasn't running free.

When the phone rang, she dropped the scissors. It wasn't a wrong number or Richard calling with news from town. She knew.

Tom walked across the graveled lot in front of the shop. Window broken out, just like the neighbor reported. He paused there, guessing what had happened from



the fact that shards of glass and pieces of the frame were outside. It was a shame, a damn shame.

The girl's shirt was buttoned wrong. Alone? Of course she was — but her eyes said she lied — and no, she hadn't heard anything. Tom didn't ask permission and she didn't refuse, not in words, but he bulldozed his way in like he had a right to be here. The boy was gone. Caught a glimpse of a shirttail when he looked out the back window but no point in chasing him. Both of them needed spanking, not arresting. The dog, he asked.

Wide, innocent eyes. She'd tried, she said, but he wouldn't let her near. She showed him marks on her arm, could have been made by teeth or could have been rough play with the boyfriend.

Anya would be heartbroken. A damn shame. Tom was sorry as Hell about the whole thing.

She found herself holding a completed block, crumpled and sweaty. She smoothed it out, traced the pattern with her finger. Where was he? Tom had offered little hope. He would try to take the dog without hurting him, he said, but he wouldn't risk anyone's safety. Satisfaction in his voice he scarcely tried to conceal. He'd only been waiting for this chance.

Richard's foot was heavy on the accelerator. Anya interpreted his silence as relief and an attempt to spare her feelings. He wouldn't be sorry to find Casey dead when they got back. It made her furious but she couldn't risk a fight now. She needed him.

But she hated them both — all men — hated them.

Thirst slaked and hunger satisfied, the dog felt playful, his ordeal forgotten. Running, breathing deep, muscles strained but not nearly to their limits. Pausing to scent the air he heard a rustle in some brush, wheeled, and started after the rabbit. He nearly ran it down but at the last, when another leap would have brought him near enough to close his jaws around it, he dropped his forepaws to the ground, his rear still sticking up in the air, tail wagging, and he let it get away.

Rising, shaking himself, he trotted on.

Beneath some pines overlooking a road he stopped again. Something in the air. Something sharp, sweetly piercing. He trembled. Whined. Crouched. Shivering constantly now with joy-turned-to-pain, he tried to burrow into the carpet of pine needles. No escape. It came closer.

Another mile, maybe two. Anya gasped.

“You all right?” He took his hand from the wheel, touched hers, lying like a dead thing in her lap.

She still felt the trembling inside. Where — But he was alive; it couldn't have been imagination, wishful think-ing. He was alive and she might be in time to save him. If she only knew where. She looked down, found the Hunter's Star in pieces. She'd picked out all the threads.

With a cry, Richard wrenched at the wheel. The car swerved, there was an explosive sound, shuddering, an instant on the edge of loss of control. He stopped the car at the side of the road.

“What's wrong?”

He raised a shaking hand to his head. “Something came at us. Didn't you see? Jumped in front of the car.” He fumbled for the door handle.

“We can't stop now!” But he wasn't there to hear. She followed, found him staring at a front tire, nearly shredded.

“Good thing we weren't going any faster. Would have killed us.”

Relief in his voice. Oh, yes. Anything to give Tom more time. Fury left her weak — she was always — would always be weak and useless. She clenched her teeth. Her legs were trembling so she had to lean against the car. Rage, blind-ing her. He'd always resented Casey, resented anyone else coming into her life. He wanted to be the strong one, the protector — the possessor. A cane dropped from her nerveless hand.

He was at the trunk, wrestling with the spare, his face red/black/red/black in the blink of the flashers. A mask, the face of a monster, not someone she knew.

Anya moved toward him. On the ground, shreds of cloth, shapes in green and white.

Where was she?

Running, magic silver light changed to the color of blood, the scent of blood in the air, and joy. A strong, healthy body exulting in freedom, racing through the night.

No.

She stopped, looked down at the tips of her canes on the paving, her useless legs. She was panting for breath and her hands ached from gripping her canes. Where was the car? She recognized the road, knew she was about a mile from their

house but where was Richard? Why was she here, alone?

Blood. The scent of it in the air, the slick feel of it on her hands. An image of Richard, falling, a look of terror on his face, red/black/red/black.

Her cry was an animal sound. What was happening? What had she done?

Once more she lost herself, lost the pain that fettered her, lost the weakness that shackled her to the life of an invalid, dependent on the strength of others. Once more she ran free on strong legs, her healthy body racing for the sheer joy of it. Scorn for those who feared her, those men who would stop her, kill her if they could.

A blink, a cry. She slipped into pain as fingers would slip into a glove. Was she losing her self, her soul? Was it sorcery or only insanity?

Only. She laughed, a ragged sound. Her husband dead or dying on the road and when they found her, the blood on her hands, they would decide she was only insane. They would lock her in a prison. But she knew about prisons; her body was one. Only. Insane.

She stumped along the road, slowed by her useless legs, trapped in nightmare. Where was she going?

She knew when she saw the house set back from the road. Geller's house. The quilt, the God's Eye patchwork. That was the pattern that had called him to her, trapped them in the center of God's Eye.

Gravel spewed as Richard wrenched at the wheel and jammed on the brakes. The house was dark. Blood dripped into his eyes from the gash in his head; he rubbed it away, stabbed the house key into the lock, nearly broke down the door when it didn't unlatch the first time. Common sense was telling him — he wasn't listening — that if the house was dark, the door still locked, she wasn't here. He went from room to room, turning on lights, shouting her name. She had to be here. Where else? Why had she left him after he fell, scraping his head on the jack? Had she gone for help?

That Goddamn dog. Jumping on them like that. Of course he was glad to see her. She was his angel, his protector. Casey's devotion to Anya was the only reason Richard tolerated him. Couldn't take that from her, that happiness, after she'd lost, suffered so much. But he'd never jumped at her like that before. What had gotten into him tonight?

Richard slumped in a chair, her chair, not knowing what to do. He'd lost consciousness for a minute or two, which had to be why he was confused now. Tom. The sheriff. Of course. He reached for the phone and it shrilled, like a terrified

animal expecting a blow from his raised hand.

Lights blazed from Geller's house and from the light bar on the sheriff's car, clicking, turning. The door was open. They were waiting for him, Tom and Ben Geller, not speaking, not going near her.

She looked a thousand years old, her legs asprawl, hair tangled, hands lying beside her as if they didn't belong to her. On the floor, shreds of colored silk. She didn't look up, didn't respond to their presence. Staring at nothing as if her mind was gone. Richard couldn't speak.

The silk, like a drift of autumn leaves: golden brown, sable, orange, emerald green. It looked as though at first she had tried to pick them apart and then, giving in to impatience, ripped at them with her teeth. There was a thread hanging from her mouth.

No one moved or spoke.

Click of toenails. Casey looking up with an expression that could only be laughter. Whining, gazing adoringly at him, ignoring Anya. His tail, his whole rear end, wagging. With a yip the dog rose on his hind legs, braced his paws on Richard's shoulders, licked his face. Richard, shocked, pulled away.

A bark, a playful crouch, then a leap out the door, into the night.

Movement. Darkness and light. Col-ors whirled and streamed in patterns that formed, broke, reformed, as in a kaleidoscope. Rays and arrows of color as if from a blazing eye, God's Eye. Anya never again dreamed of dancing.