THE MEMORY OF STONE

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THE Guildmaster Gilafas ADelios, commonly acknowledged by The Ten houses to be most powerful man in *Aver-alaan,* stood in front of the long window by which he might sur the eastern half of *Averalaan Aramarelas.* He had no throne, no place in the Hall of Wise Counsel, no direct route to the ears of the Kings, the two men who ruled the breadth of the Empire of Essalieyan. But money counted for much in the Empire; what The Ten owned in political realm, he rivaled by the simple expedient of wealth.

He was not a young man, nor a particularly tall one, and his hair, on those days whe had no onerous public duties, fell in a white plume down the back of his head.

On this particular day, it was a solid braid.

He glanced out of the window, his eyes skimming the surface of the ocean beyond seawall. Light sparkled there, in a pattern the makers of the east tower were doub attempting to capture. It reached his eyes but no more; he looked away.

The ocean's voice was strong. The strongest of the voices that he heard.

"Master Gilafas."

Certainly the most welcome voice. Gilafas was an Artisan. But in truth, he was only ba that; the weakest, the most insignificant of the Artisans the guild had produced in centuri galled him when he thought on it, and he was a maker; he could dwell upon any fact, wit pause to eat or drink—or sleep, for that matter—for a full three days.

Duvari, the man who had spoken, knew it.

He was called the Lord of the Compact, the leader of the Astari, the men who served i shadows the Kings cast. Although the

Lord of the Compact understood Artisans as well as any not maker-born could, he was by nature a patient man. Nor was he a man that anyone angered without reason, and that, on good one.

Gilafas ADelios turned. He did not bow; Duvari's rank did not demand such a gesture o respect. Indeed, his presence today almost demanded otherwise.

"Master Duvari."

"Duvari."

"Duvari, then. How may I help you?"

The insincerity of the question was not lost upon the Astari, but it brought a cold smi his lips, his austere face.

"You may help me by tendering to the Kings their due."

"You've become a tax collector, have you?" Testy, testy words. The door opened. San Gilafas's assistant, and a Master in his own right, froze beneath the steepled wooden frame robes swirling at his feet. Clearly he had run the length of the hall.

He had the brains to bow instantly. "Guildmaster."

"I am afraid, Sanfred, that we will begin the testing late today. Tell the adjudicato stand ready."

Sanfred was not a subtle man. He hesitated. But he was not an Artisan either; the madness that possessed him possessed him when he made, and none of the makers wo

without the leave of the Guildmaster during the testing. "There are—"

"Not now, Sanfred."

"Yes, Guildmaster."

The doors swung shut. Gilafas turned to face the man who ruled the Astari. "The applic
are waiting in the city streets."

"Indeed."

"The adjudicators will not begin without me."

"Then I will be brief."

"Good."

Again, the winter of Duvari's smile crept up his face. Gilafas wondered idly if Duvari
a smile that did not make his expression colder and grimmer. The Guildmaster was
however, a simple noble, to be intimidated by a mere expression. "The Astari had heard
you were to personally oversee these applicants. A highly unusual step for a man of your
is it not?"

"Your business, Duvari. Please."

"It is my business."

"You overstep yourself. It is guild business; an entirely internal matter."

"May I remind you, Guildmaster Gilafas ADelios, that in the history of the Guild o
Makers annals, the Guildmaster has only presided over the testing when he has had reaso
suspect that among the applicants, he will find someone . . . unusual?"

Gilafas shrugged, and considered, briefly, the folly of giving himself over to the occ
song. As Artisan, he could almost do so without giving offense. Frowning, he lifted his ha
they were shaking. He had not expected that. "A moment," he said, more curtly than he
intended. He reached out and gripped the edge of curtains heavy with the fall of chain l
They snapped shut audibly at the force of his pull.

"Guildmaster, is there any chance that you seek your successor among the applicants?"

Gilafas chuckled. "No chance whatsoever, Duvari. Is that all?"

Duvari did not move.

They stood a moment, two men assured by their successes in life of their rank, their pow

To Gilafas' surprise, it was Duvari who spoke first.

"I was sent to tell you," he said stiffly, "that the Orb in the Rod is now white."

Ah. Gilafas closed his eyes. Were he any other man, he might pretend that the words ha
significance; he might ask, in a pleasant, modulated tone, *What rod, what orb?* But that g
was not a game he could play. Not against Duvari; Duvari served the Kings.

Behind the shell of closed lids, he could see not the Kings, but the hands of Kings, an
them, the items gifted their line by an Artisan centuries ago: the Rod and the Sword. Wisd
Justice. Weapons for the oldest of the Empire's many wars, and the most important: the war
was its founding. Magic lay within them and upon them, bound to the blood of the god-born

He had never touched either Rod or Sword. Had prayed that he never would. He could
say what force they summoned, what spell they contained, but he knew them for more
simple ornament. They were weapons against old magic, old darkness, old wars.

And they had slept for centuries.

When he opened his eyes again, Duvari was closer; had closed the distance between

without making a sound. "You expected this," he said softly. It was the first accusation he made.

"Aye, we expected it," Gilafas replied, weary. Why now? Why today? He bru nonexistent hair from his eyes. Yes, his hands were shaking; the pull of the ocean was stro than it had been in weeks, and he would have to take care.

"What of the Sword, Duvari?"

"The Sword?"

"The gem in the sword hilt."

"It is as it has always been."

"And the runes upon the blade itself?"

"The King has had no cause to draw the Sword."

"He has cause," Gilafas said, forcing strength into words that wanted to come out whisper. "Tell him—ask him—to draw the blade. Read what is written there. Return word of what it says."

"I suspect, from your demeanor, that you already know." Duvari held his gaze, and that, was a threat. "Very well. I will return with your answer." He walked away then, and only w he reached the doors did he turn and proffer the most perfunctory of bows.

Gilafas waited until he left, and then he made his way to the grand desk that served as great room's foundation. There he paused, running his hands over the surface of a very sim box. It was a deep, deep red, and the carvings across its face were not up to the standard the least of the guild's makers.

But he had been told what lay within.

Cessaly stood between the twin pillars of her mother and her grandmother, her knuckles white as the alabaster statues in the distance.

Distance was a tricky thing to measure. There were men who could do it; they could you things by the length of cast shadows, the rise of buildings beneath the fall of sunlight s arcane measure of the shape of the land. Or so her father had once said. He had stayed in Free Town of Durant. Said his good-byes at the edge of the fields that had yet to be tilled planted, his face dark, his eyes squinting against the light. Except that the sun had been a back of his head, a shining glint over the brim of his weathered hat.

Her brothers, Bryan and Dell, had hugged her tight, lifting her in the twirl and spin of m younger years. They hadn't said good-bye. Instead, they had offered her the blessin *Kalliaris,* asking for the Lady's smile, and not her terrible frown.

She had offered them gifts. Wood carvings, things made from the blunt edge of chisel knife. *To remember me by,* she'd said. *In case I don't come back.*

A bird. A butterfly. Nothing useful.

But in those two things, some quickness of captured motion: tail feathers spread for f beak open in silent song; wings, thin and fine, veined and open, devoid only of the color might have lent them the appearance of life.

Dell had handled the butterfly as carefully as he might had it been alive; his clumsy, h hands, callused by the tools of their father's trade, hovering like wings above wings, memb of wings, afraid that his grip might damage the insect's flight.

Her father had taught them that, each in their turn, and butterflies sometimes sat on the p
of their steady fingers, wings closed to edge, feelers testing wind. Birds had been less trus
of course, and they were predators in their fashion, beaks snapping the skein of butterfly w
in a darting hunt for sustenance.

Cessaly loved them, hunter and hunted, because they were small and delicate whe
flight. She had never been large.

Her brothers took after their father; they were broad of shoulder,

silent, slow to move. But they put their backs into the labor that had been chosen for t
taking comfort in the Mother's season.

Cessaly had tried to do the same, she a farmer's daughter. But the hoes and the spades
standing blades of the scythes, often spoke to her in ways that had nothing to do with
Mother. She might be found carving mounds of dirt, or fallen stalks of wheat, into shapes:
fortresses, sprawling manors, even small castles— although the poverty of her splendor
become apparent only when she had reached the outskirts of Averalaan.

They thought her clever then.

Her father would often cry out her mother's name, and the deep baritone of his v
cracked by the dry air of the flat plains, returned to her. *Cecilia,* come see what your daug
has made!

Even her mother's habitually dour expression would ease into something akin to a s
when she came at her husband's call, and they would stand, like a family of leisure
moments at a time, oohing and aahing.

She had loved those moments.

But those moments had led to this one.

"How long?" her grandmother said, when the man in robes came out from the di
building and walked down the streets, a pitcher of water in hands as callused as her fath
She asked it again when he was ten feet away, repeated it when he was before them.

His face was lined with shadow, eyes dark; his chin was bereft of beard. But he sm
and if the smile was curt—and it was—it was also friendly. "I fear, good lady, that it wi
some hours yet. You are not at the halfway mark."

"You're sure that they'll see us all?"

Again, he offered her a curt smile. "Indeed."

"We've brought some of her work," her grandmother said. "If you'd like to see it."

"I would, indeed." His tone of voice conveyed no such desire. "But I fear that my opi
and the opinion of the guildmasters, do not have equal standing here."

Her grandmother frowned and nodded, allowing him to pass.

There were others in the line who were just as thirsty as they were, after all, and if she
anxious, she wasn't selfish.

"Cessaly, stand straight, girl."

I was, she thought sullenly, but she found an extra inch or two in the line of her shou
and used it to blunt her grandmother's nervous edge.

Her mother had not spoken a word.

The halls of the guild's upper remove were unlike the simple, unadorned stone that grac

its lower walkways. They were also unlike the halls in which the makers worked, for those stone walls were decorated, from floor to vaulted ceiling, with the paintings and tapestries statues, the interior gargoyles, that were proof of the superiority of the artists that had guild sanction.

No; in the halls of Fabril's reach, the walls were of worked stone. These contours, t rough surfaces, these smooth domes, took on the shape of trees, of cathedrals, of Lords Ladies, of gods themselves; they began a story, if one knew how to read it. There were few who could, in the history of the Guild of the Makers, for such a reading could no taught; it could be gleaned if one had the ability and the time.

No, Gilafas thought, with a trace of bitterness. It was the ability that mattered; time what the inferior could add, if they lacked ability in greater measure.

Guildmaster Gilafas, to his shame, was only barely an Artisan. No Artisans had survive the generation that preceded him in the guild, and no men remained who might have seen spark of his talent in time to kindle it, to bring it to fruition.

Or so he had told himself. It was not his fault; it was not his failing. And on the day th had been completely overtaken by the voice of the ocean, on the day that he made, ou crystal, a decanter that returned to the waters of that great body the clarity and the purity o essential nature, the acting guildmaster had cried tears of joy.

There is magic here, Gilafas. Look. He had lifted the decanter to the eye of the sun. *waters placed in this vessel can safely be drunk. Do you understand? You are n simple maker—you are an Artisan.*

The old man had, with great ceremony, ordered the opening of the upper remove, installed the young man within its stone folds. *What you need to learn, you will learn here so our history says.*

Aye, history.

That old man had been dead twenty years. Dead, a year and twelve months after the da had made his joyful discovery. Gilafas had attended him for the two weeks he lingered with a fever that he could not shake. Healers had been sent for, and healers had been tu away; the guildmaster would have none of them.

"I'm an old man," he had said, "And close to death, and I'll not drag a healer there and for the scant benefit of a few more months of life." His hair across the pillows was his shr his chosen shroud. "And I'm happy to go, Gilafas. You're here. You're Artisan. You will g our guild."

"The Artisans," he had said, "all went mad, Nefem."

"Not all."

"All of them."

"Not Fabril."

"I'm not Fabril, Nefem."

"No. But you *will* be guildmaster. You are an answer to the only prayer I have ever ma give you the responsibility of the guild, and its makers. They are fractious. You've seen But fractious or no, there is no greater power in the Empire." He lifted a hand. "Say what will. The mages can kill men; they can raise them to power. But they cannot accomplish we have built here."

"The Kings—"

"Even the Kings, when they choose to come here, come as supplicants. Be the guildma Gilafas. While you are alive, the guild will have no other. Listen to the halls in the u remove, hear the voices that we *cannot* hear. You have the ability." His cheeks were "Protect what *I* have built."

The maker's cry. "Protect what I have created." Never "protect *me."*

Gilafas had become a maker without parallel, and in the streets of the city, in the stree the Holy Isle, that counted. But here, within the stretch of the great hall in which the Art had lived and worked since the founding of the guild, he was almost inconsequential. walls spoke to him seldom, and when they did, they spoke in a language that was al entirely foreign. Until the day the demon voices had filled the Old City with the cries o dying.

The halls had been dark as thunder-clad sky when he had come to them, gasping for desperate now for the answers that his meager talent denied him. He had starved himself o sustenance: company, food, and water. For three days, while the moon rode high in the ha sky, while the winter waxed with the bright, jeweled ghosts of the Blood Barons and legacy of indulgence and death, he had had for company, for clothing, for sound, nothing bu walls themselves.

The walls. He had traced their passage from one end of the hall to another, over and creating a maze of his movements. Closed eyes, open eyes, breath creaking through the pas of a tight, dry, throat, he had lost his way. Become lost in his home of decades. Lo stonework. Lost to the hand of the Artisan.

And lost now, absolved of all dignity, of all power granted him by the accolades of men, he had come at last to the altar.

It was in a room that did not exist. Sanity knew: sanity had denied him entrance. Some of his mind, stubborn, sane, anchored to the world of his compatriots, could not be dislod but it had been shaken so thoroughly he had at last his proof of the truth of his existence.

The halls had opened the way, for him, and he had walked it. And he wept, to think of i now; wept bright tears, salt tears. Ocean tears.

For he had come across the broken body of a young woman, her pale, pretty face scarr three places by the kiss of blade's edge—her only kisses, he thought, the only ones she been permitted. Hands bleeding and blistered by some unseen fire, she was the sacrifice.

Demon altar. Dark altar.

And upon it, across the naked skin of her pale, upturned breasts, she clutched t broken, the Rod and the Sword of Kings.

He heard laughter; could not think that it could be hers, she was so still. This w monument the Barons would have been proud to own.

When Sanfred and Jordan found him again, wandering naked, bleeding, skeletal, they taken him in silence to the lower halls, and he had made good his escape.

But in escape, he carried knowledge: the Rod and the Sword would fail. The orb woul shattered, and the runes on the blade would speak in the tongue of an accusation he unders well: they were hollow vessels, their metal and their finery too superficial for the task at h

The line stretched on forever. Grandmother, mother, and daughter, they faced it li family faces drought: grimly, silently. Ces-saly was uncomfortable in the present, and she young, adept in ways that her elders, too slow and rigid, could no longer be. She sought Found it.

Cessaly's father, his pride contained in the scarcity of his words, had taken some o things she had made to market when the merchants began their spring passage through the Towns on their way to the Western Kingdoms, those lands made distant and mythical bec she would never set eyes upon them.

She had been younger, then; a good five years younger, and still prone to be mistaken boy whenever she traveled in the company of her brothers. But she had gone with her da he took the wagons into the common, and she had stood by his side while he offered merchants—at some great cost—the fruits of her half-forbidden, half-encouraged labor.

She had made horses, that year. Horses fleet of foot and gleaming with sunlight, manes flying, feet unfettered by the shod hooves that the merchants prized.

"You made these?" the merchant said, lifting the first of the horses.

Her father had shrugged.

"These are Southern horses. You've seen action, then?"

He said nothing. The Free Towners knew that her father had been born on the coast; k that he had survived the border skirmishes that were so common between the North and South. They also knew better than to ask about them.

"You've a good hand," the merchant continued, eyes narrowing slightly. "What do you for them?"

Her father had named a price.

The merchant's brows rose in that mockery of shock that was familiar to any Towner had cause to treat with him.

They had bickered, argued, insulted each other's birthplace, parents, heritage. And then had parted with what they valued: her father with the small horses, the merchant with money.

It might have ended that way, but Cessaly, impatient and bursting with pride and worry, said, "What'll you do with 'em?"

The merchant raised a brow. "Sell them, of course."

"To who?"

"To a little girl's parents in the West. Or in the East. They are . . . very good. Perhaps if had paint," he had added, speaking again to her father. "For a price—a good price—I migh able to supply that."

"You wouldn't know a good price if it bit you," her father replied, mock angry.

"We want the paint," she'd answered.

And he turned to look at her, at her eager eyes, her serious face.

"What will you do with paint, child?"

She smiled. "I don't know."

And then he frowned. "Did *you* make these?"

"Yes."

"By yourself?"

"Yes."
"And who taught you this, child?"

Her turn to frown, as if it were part of the conversation. She shrugged.

The merchant went away. But when he came back, he handed her—her and not father—a small leather satchel. "You can keep these," he told her, "if you promise that I have first pick of anything you make with them."

"If the price is right," her father told the man. "If we don't like the price, we're to take them elsewhere."

"Done."

To find sunlight again was a blessing. Master Gilafas paused at the foot of the steps bowed. Sanfred was at his side before his stiff spine had once again straightened. He fel younger man's solid hand in the crook of his elbow, and was grateful for it: the memorie that early passage through Fabril's reach had teeth, fangs, gravity. To struggle free of today was almost more than he was capable of.

Once, that would have pleased him. And perhaps, if he were honest, it pleased him in s fashion today. But triumph gave way to horror, and horror sent him scuttling away lik insect evading boot.

He cleared his throat. "The applicants?" "Waiting, Guildmaster."

"Good."

Sanfred had never once asked him why he had chosen to oversee this testing. No one ha

By unspoken consent, the makers, fractious as only the creative can be, granted him the privacy of their admiration. What he could make—in theory—no one among them could ev hope to make.

A mage could, he thought, irritable. *A mage of lesser talent and no ambition.* But he too great a love for his authority to speak the words aloud.

"Take me."

"Yes, Master."

"And bring the box on that desk. I do not need to remind you to handle it with care."

After that day, Cessaly's size was no longer a problem. Her father spent some of the summer building a small addition to his barn, and he placed her tools, her paints pieces of wood that he found for her use, beneath its flat roof. He had no money for glass the doors themselves opened toward the sun's light, and Cessaly worked from the mome crossed the threshold of the room, ceasing when it faded.

The merchant returned three times in the year, bringing different tools, different mater different paints. He asked if she had ever seen metal worked, and when she shook her hea offered to take her to a jeweler in the largest of the Free Towns. It was an offer that was f rejected by both her father and her mother.

They were very surprised when, two years later, that jeweler made the trek a merchant's side when the caravan returned.

"This had better not be a waste of my time," he said curtly to the merchant.

"I'm paying for your time," the merchant had replied, with a very small smile. "But I k
my business."

"Where is your young paragon of creativity, Gerrald?"

"In front of you."

"What, this girl?"

"The very one."

The jeweler frowned. He was balding, and the dome of his skull seemed to glow. "
old are you, child?"

"Twelve."

The frown deepened. "Twelve. And you've never apprenticed to anyone?"

She shook her head.

"Well. I'm not sure that I can offer you such a position—I've heard that your par
won't hear of you traveling, and this

town is not my home. But Gerrald has offered me much money to teach you for the sum
and I admit that the offer itself is unusual enough to have piqued my curiosity. If you
willing, I would teach you some small amount of my craft."

He brought with him gold and silver, sparkling gems and glossy pearls, opals and ebo
small dragon's hoard.

But he brought something better, something infinitely more alluring: fire. Fire, in the
of the rooms her father had built.

She had waited for her father's permission, and her father had granted it.

The man in robes came again, three times, the water jug heavy in his hands. She wat
his shadow against the cobbled stones, and her hands ached. Her grandmother's hands ache
well— but she blamed that ache on the ocean Cessaly could taste when her tongue touched
lips.

Cessaly had not yet seen the ocean; she had seen buildings, horses, and streets that wer
for as far as the eye could see. There were white birds in the air above, birds with a
raucous cries; there were insects beneath her feet among mice and rats; there were cats s
and slender, and dogs of all shapes, all sizes.

There was no workshop; she had been forbidden all of her tools. When traveling alon
road, she had been permitted to idly carve the pieces of wood she had taken from the farm;
were gone now.

She wanted them.

There was no dirt beneath her feet; there were stones, smooth and flat, longer than she
and at least three times as wide. There were fences, too, things of black iron or bro
Nothing that she could work with.

She plaited her hair instead, until her mother caught her at it, and grabbed both her ha
stilling them.

"Not here," she had said severely. "Not here."

Her hands began to ache; her eyes began to burn. She could not wait forever.

The jeweler stayed in Durant for four years. He bought a house for himself, very nea
common; he built his workshop, sent for his apprentices, and brought his business to the t

He also made a room for Cessaly, and her mother brought her to it, and took her from it, e
day except for the Mother's day.

Cessaly worked with gold, with silver, with platinum. She handled his diamonds
emeralds, his rubies, the blinking eyes of curved sapphires, the crisp edges of amethyst
firestone. He had begun by telling her what he wished her to achieve, and had ended, qui
by simply giving her material to work with.

He often watched as she worked; often worked by her side, making the settings upon w
he might place the results of her labor. He was not a man who was given to praise, and inc
he offered little of it—but his silence was like a song, and his expression in the frame of
silence, a gift. Cessaly liked him.

And because of that, she decided that she would make something for him. Not fo
merchant to whom all of her work eventually went, but for Master Sivold himself.

Because she wished the gift to be entirely hers, she chose wood to work with; wood
something that she could easily afford on her own. The merchants came in the spring, and w
they did, she asked if they might bring her something suitable. But she did not ask for
wood; did not choose the oak that came from the forests a few miles outside of the village.
requested instead a red, hard wood, something riven from the heart of a giant tree.

She was so excited when the merchant placed it in her hands; she was absorbed by the
of wood, its rough grain, the depth of its unstained color. She wanted to rush back to
workshop, to begin to work *right away*.

But she heard its voice, wood's voice, and it bade her *wait*. Voice? No, not voice, fo
the words it spoke were not quite words, and the wood offered her no more than that; s
could not speak to it, could ask it no question and receive no answer of use. But she could
it in the palms of her hands as if it were a living heart; could see it move, shrinking in size
the truth of its shape was revealed. She waited.

Four days later, at the height of summer, during the longest day of the year, she bega
carve. To cut. To burn. She worked until the sun had begun to touch the colors of the
worked until the first of the stars was bright.

And when she was finished, she saw that her mother was asleep in the great chair in
corner; that the lamp had been lit and rested on the table beside that chair; that the work
itself was empty.

She was very, very tired, but she tucked the box away, hiding it beneath the heavy c
that protected the gems and the metals from sawdust and insects. Then she woke her mother
together they went home.

The next day was the day that changed her life.

She came to the workshop later than she usually did; her mother had had a great de
difficulty waking her, and was concerned that she might have fetched ill. But Cessaly w
running a fever; she didn't cough or sneeze, didn't shake much, didn't throw up—and in the
her mother had relented and accompanied her to the jeweler's house.

There, shaking off lethargy, Cessaly ran inside, ran to her workbench, and grabbed the
she had made. It was simple, perhaps too simple for a man like Master Sivold. But it wa
without adornment; she had carved a pattern around the lip of the lid that made the
between lid and box almost invisible. Only with care could she see it herself.

"What's that, then, Cessaly?" he said, as she approached him.

"Last month you said that you'd run out of space for the things—the things that can't bear to part with."

"Did I?"

She nodded. "And I—you've done so much for me here, you've shown me so m new things, you've let me make what I—what I have to. I—"

His brow rose. "Is this for me?"

"Yes. I made it. For you. Only for you," she added. "It's not for Gerrald. And anyway doesn't matter if he does see it. It won't do him—or anyone else—any good."

He smiled and held out his hand. "It's very elegant, but a little

too plain for Gerrald's taste. Or for his customers." He lifted it, examining the car around its side. "Cessaly, what is this?"

His fingers brushed the trailing strokes of letters, letters hidden in the movement of lea the trailing fall of their branches.

"Your name," she told him.

"My name?" He frowned. And the frown deepened. "Why do you say that, child? It does say Sivold."

"It doesn't?" Her eyes widened then, with panic and fear. She reached for the box, and must have seen the horror on her face, for his frown eased. But he did not return it to her ha

"My eyes are not nearly as good as they once were, and your work here is so delic child. Perhaps I am misreading." He shook himself, and the smile returned to his face. "I d know that you knew how to spell or write."

She didn't. She said nothing.

After a moment, he lifted the lid from the box, and then his eyes grew wide, and wider his lashes seemed fixed to his brows.

"Master Sivold?"

He continued to stare.

"Master Sivold?"

And when he finally blinked, his eyes teared almost instantly. He closed the lid of the with great care, and set it down on the workbench. "When did you make this, Cessaly?"

"Yesterday."

"Yesterday?"

"Yesterday. And a little bit of the night."

He raised his hands to his face. "I knew we were doing you a disservice, child," he when he at last chose to lower them. "But I thought that your parents would be happi you—if you worked in the Free Towns." He shook his head. "You must send for your par child. Tell them I need to speak with them. Tell them it is urgent."

And so she had.

They had come to speak with Master Sivold, and the closed door came between her understanding and their adult words—but she had waited just beyond the reach of the door' swing, and when it opened, it opened upon her pale face, her wide eyes.

Master Sivold was angry. Her father was angry. Her mother, grim and silent, s

between them, hands curved in fists, knuckles white as the bone beneath stretched skin.

She knew better than to ask what had been said. It was obvious that their anger had ha good place to go, and she wasn't about to provide one.

But Master Sivold's anger was pointed, directed; when he turned toward her, it smoo itself away from the lines of his face. She almost wished it hadn't; he looked old as it left h

"Cessaly, I want to ask you a question."

She gazed sideways at her father; his glance spared her nothing, but his nod permission.

"How did you make the box?"

"How?"

He nodded. Gentle, that nod, as if she were a babe. She didn't like it. "Same as I m anything else."

"Tell me," he said again. "Take as long as you like."

"I chose that piece of wood," she said, "because it was the right wood. It took a while."

"How did you know what to carve?"

"Wood knows," she said quietly. She never talked about her work, and it made her ner to speak now. She wasn't sure why. "I wanted to make it for you," she added. "And I started minute I got the wood home, but it told me to wait. It told me to wait for the longest day."

"And how did you know what day that was?"

"I didn't," she said again. "The *wood knew."*

Master Sivold turned to look at her father. Her father, whose shoulders seemed sm somehow.

"And the sun knew," she continued, thinking about it, feeling the wood in her hand warmth of that sun on the back of her neck, her head, its light on the dark streaks of grain.

"Tell us what the sun said," Master Sivold told her.

She looked at his face for a moment, seeing in the lines around

his eyes and lips the movement of wood grain. She reached out, unthinking, to touch hi feel the surface of that skin, that grain.

And when she opened her mouth, when she began to speak, she left bruises there, ar his lips, where her fingers grazed flesh. There, and in the dark of his eyes.

They kept her until the harvest's end, and then they traveled east, east to the En of Essalieyan. Her father and mother had argued three days—and nights, tucked in battleground of their bed, their voices loud and rumbling, their words muted by log walls— in the end, her mother had won, as she often did. Her brothers were to stay; she was to t with the caravan until she reached the city, and from there she was to seek the Guild o Makers.

"But—but, Da—"

"It's your mother's decision, not mine. I don't send my kin to—"

"Father," her mother had said, clipping both ends of the words between tight teeth.

Cessaly wanted to be happy. Or she wanted him to be happy. She wasn't sure. "But if maker—we'll be rich. We'll be *rich,* Da."

"You'll be rich," he said gruffly. "And we'll be farmers, here, in Durant."

"I don't have to live there."

He looked at his wife. His wife said nothing.

She did what any sensible girl would do. She went in search of Dell. Bryan was older minded his father's commands.

"Dell?"

"Aye, Cessaly."

"Why can't I live here?"

"They think you're maker-born," he said.

"But all of the makers don't live in the Empire."

"No."

"Then why do I have to?"

"Because you made that damn box, is why."

She wanted to tell him to burn the box, then, but she couldn't quite say the words. W certain why. "I did bad?"

"You did too good," he told her, when he heard the tone of her voice. "And now they' afeared. Master Sivold—"

"What?"

He shook his head. "It's nothing. They think you'll go crazy, Cessaly."

"Then why are they sending me?"

He shrugged. "Because all the crazy people live in the Empire?"

So she hit him. Lots. He wasn't supposed to hit her back.

The crowds wavered like a heat mirage in Gilafas' vision. The great doors had been ro back, and light skittered off the sheen of marble and brass, abjuring its smoky green, its bla its curling grays. Beyond the open doors, the grapple of a thousand people moved and twis like the ocean's voice; he could make out no words because he could hear them all so clear

"Master Gilafas?"

He lifted a hand. "I think—I think, Sanfred, that I will have my pipe. Now."

"Your—ah. That one. Yes, Guildmaster." He hesitated for just a moment, and the waved another maker over and relinquished his grip on Gilafas' elbow, forgotten until moment.

Everyone hovered. It was annoying. Their shadows against the floor, the fall of their the drifting haze of their cloudy beards, made him think of the storm. He waved them a *Ocean voice*, he thought. *What am I to do today? It is not the time.*

Sanity. That was his curse. He listened to confusion dispassionately, refusing, as he always done, to allow it reign. His brief dalliance with insanity had given him no caus regret that decision.

The pipe came, and he lit it carefully, inhaling bitter smoke. It was not to his taste, an to his liking, and it would be less to his liking on the morrow when he woke to the tas something dead and stale on his tongue. But the alternative was less appealing.

"Send them, then."

"Yes, Master."

Hours passed. Of the many hundreds of hopeful applicants, Guildmaster Gilafas found he was certain belonged within the guild walls. He treated them not only with the respe their future rank, but with the affection reserved for kin, no matter how distant, who have f their way home against almost insurmountable odds. It was not an act. There w brotherhood among the men and women who were, by nature of birth and some quirky, d providence, driven to these strange acts of creation.

That brotherhood buoyed him, although he was not entirely certain that some part of warmth was not caused by the contents of his pipe. It had been some hours since he had f it, and he hesitated, hand over pouch, to do so again.

Looking up, he realized how costly that hesitation had been. He had never walked so c to the edge without realizing it; somehow he had stepped across it.

Had he the voice for it, he would have cried out in fear or horror. It was the only thi the long day that he would be grateful for later; his dignity was spared.

For the doors *were* there, they were open; the makers *were* in attendance; he was n Fabril's hall, and the visions of that complicated, terrible place did not hold him in painful grip.

Only memory did, but memory was enough, more than enough. He handed his pi Sanfred, hands shaking so much he feared to drop it before it held what he required.

And he tried to smile at the young woman who walked toward him.

In the privacy of his thoughts, he was still a coward, had always been a coward; he himself that he was mistaken, old, befuddled, that the voices of the ocean and the voices o Maker had grown strong because he had done too little, these past few days, to still them tried to tell himself that what he remembered could not be real.

But cowardice provided no shelter: he recognized the girl's face.

She had lain upon a bloodied altar in a hidden room that he had never tried to find agai

When Cessaly saw the man who sat behind a table that was larger than any she had eve seen—including Master Sivold's workbench—she froze.

"Cessaly," her mother said, impatient, fearful, angry.

But for once, her mother's voice was almost beneath her notice.

As if he were wood, or silver, or gold, the man caught the whole of her attention, dive daylight, the vast rise of ceiling, the width and breadth of wall. Only the ocean's t grew stronger as she met his eyes, and the inside of her mouth was dry as salt.

She should have remembered that when she approached wood, or gold, or silver, approached first with ax, chisel, knife, fire; that the only voice allowed these things that w transformation was hers.

She said to him, before she could think—and this, too, was akin to her movements wood, with silver, with gold—"You make things."

It lacked manners, which would have been a crime in a different place; lacked them i presence of a man of obvious import.

But it spoke to the heart of the matter.

"Yes," he said gravely. "I make things." His hand reached out, and out again, as if he w touch her; it stopped inches short of her face, and fell.

She had seen glass in windows, although her family's home had had none until the year of her work with Master Sivold, and she understood that the one that stood between now was closed.

You make things.

"Yes. Yes, I make things."

She lifted a hand.

"I do, too."

He would never hear the ocean again, not as he had. A man's mind had room for onl much madness, and Gilafas' less than any Artisan before him.

"Sanfred," he said, rising, pipe somehow no longer a danger.

"Master Gilafas?"

"I am done for the day. This girl is maker-born; ask her—mother?—for the informatio require, draw up those forms that you deem necessary, do what needs be done." rose. Picked up the box he had ordered carried to this table with such care.

"This was once yours," he said.

She looked at it, and her expression twisted. "It was never mine," she told him solemnl made it for Master Sivold." She frowned when she said it, and her face lost some of its lu some of its terrible lure. "Are you upset about it, too?"

He nodded. Before he could catch himself—if he would ever be able to catch himself- chin fell and rose in a sharp, jerky dip. "But for a different reason. I have not seen the insi the box. I could not open it."

"Would you like me to open it for you?"

"If you would."

She took the box carefully, placing the left palm firmly beneath the center of its flat, le bottom. And when she opened it, Sanfred understood what Gilafas had not yet said, becaus was standing just to his right, and he was human enough to be curious.

The inside of the box itself was longer than the table at which the Makers now sat; it as deep as a man's arm from palm to shoulder.

"He needed more room," she told him gravely, "for the things that I made. Will you gi back to him?"

"Yes," he told her gently. He knew how important the answer was; she was maker-b after all.

It took some hours to settle not the girl, but her mother. She would not leave wi speaking to the Guildmaster—a sure sign of her ignorance of the workings of the Guil Makers.

Therefore, Gilafas, exhausted and on the edge of compulsion, drove himself for a se time from the confines of his quarters in Fabril's reach. Sanfred was nowhere to be s neither was the girl, although he had been quite specific.

It was only when he reached the visitor's lounge that he realized that hours had not, in passed; the sun was wrong for it—it was still in the sky. He steadied himself against dislocation as Sanfred appeared. Sanfred who could hide mortal concern behind a pl

workman's expression.

He sat in front of this dour woman, and she beside an older, dourer one. They forme sides of a triangle; Sanfred, attending, was simple shadow, and moved like a trick of the lig

Master Gilafas had only one desire when confronted with this woman, and it was st terrible, as visceral as any need to make, or make again, had ever been.

Take your girl, take her as far away from this place as you can, and still live. Go N to the barbarians; go South to the slavery of the Southern Courts; go West, to the kingd of which I know so little. Leave her anywhere but here.

But he did not.

"Will you take care of her?" the woman asked. She was fidgeting now.

"I assure you, there is not another place in all of the Empire where she will be—"

"Because she's always been a bit odd." The woman, having said the words, lost half a of height. Her hair, dark with streaks of gray, seemed to frame a face too pale to carry it. "S more than a bit odd now. We're her kin, we know what she means when she speaks; we k there's no harm in her wild ways. She's a good girl. She's an honest girl."

He started to speak, but she had not yet finished.

"She won't thieve, mind, not for herself. But she takes a fancy to things she sees—bi wood or stone, mostly—and she'll pick 'em up."

"We understand that, here."

"And she'll work funny hours, if you don't stop her. It's hard, but she needs to eat." Care worn lines deeply into the material of her face. "Don't forget it: she needs to eat. And d And sleep. She's got to be reminded; we let her work once, thinking she would stop in her time. Waited to see how long that was." Hands were clenched now.

He stared at her. To his surprise, he wanted to offer her comfort. "She will be treas here in a way that you cannot envision. Sanfred, the man who is hovering, was trained t two things: he is a painter, here, one of a very few. And he is a . . . baby-sitter. We *all* w the hours that your child would work, unminded. And we have learned to watch out for other. She will not go hungry; she will not go thirsty. Sleep is harder to dictate."

She wasn't satisfied. He could see it.

He said simply, "There are things that she is beginning to learn that she should learn on her own. The box—you saw it—is only the first sign of that. There are ot things she might have made. In our histories, a boy much her age walked into the blacksm forge shortly after a bandit raid. The raids that year were fierce and terrible, for most o land had seen little rain, and the fields would not take.

"He made a sword. It killed. That was all it did. It was his rage and his desire; he wie it. It sang. He carried it to the bandit's home, and he had his revenge, and it was bright bloody.

"But he had had *no* sword skills, and he was not a large lad; the sword itself contained the desire to kill and the ability. In the end, the bandits themselves were not enough to slak thirst, and he wandered into the village he had loved. Hundreds perished before the sh that would hold that sword was created."

She was pale, now, pale as light on his beloved ocean. But she asked, simply, "W happened to the boy?"

A mother's question.

"He was mad," he replied. "And he remained so."

"They didn't kill him?"

He hesitated. "No," he said at last, and gently, "they did not kill him. They gave
instead, to *our* keeping."

Before she could speak, he raised a hand. "And in our keeping, in the safety of these w
or in the stewardship of those best suited to such a task, he made such things as Kings w
and his work helped to change the face of the lands we now call the Empire. He was hon
he was revered. In his fashion, he was loved."

She closed her eyes. Opened them. "I can't take her home," she said, the stateme
question.

"No."

She rose then. "Let me say my good-byes, and I'll not trouble you further."

But she would. He could see it in the lines of her face, the depth of her concern. She w
go home, to Durant, and the fate of her daughter would draw her out, again and again, to
vast, intimidating place. She would see a stranger in this daughter, and the daughter—he
not certain what the daughter would see.

Because he was sane. Because he had always been blind, that way. He rose and offere
woman his hand; she accepted it as if it were an anchor on a short chain.

To be a failure was something Gilafas had contemplated for the better part of his adult
But he had contemplated it in the temple makers made of quarters an accident of birth
granted him. To do penance for his failure, he had strengthened the Guild of the Ma
immeasurably, giving it the steady guidance that a madman could never have conceive
This he did for the old man whose joy he had not the strength to live up to.

If he could not increase the mystery of the guild, if he could not add to the grandeur o
legends, he could at least do that.

And he had thought himself an honest man, had thought acceptance of his paltry ability
been his for the better part of a decade.

Now, it was unbearable.

The girl—Cessaly—had been moved to Fabril's reach the moment her mother had left
might have assigned the duty of settling her to Sanfred, or another of the makers who se
him directly, but cowardice prevented it, presenting him with the first of many menial tasl
was to adopt.

Because Sanfred could not fail to see in the girl what Gilafas himself lacked. How c
he?

So it was that Guildmaster Gilafas ADelios led her to the winding tower stairs that le
Fabril's reach.

She had taken the steps timidly at first, her hands faltering upon the fine rails beneath
grand sweep of open tower, the fading light. She had no experience of this world, sav
story—if that— and her fear made her precious to him, for he had no children.

But the fear itself was fleeting.

The light in her eyes was not; it was fire, of a sort, the fire of a forge, the fire of
maker-born who sees into the world of mages. Or gods. He could not himself say, althoug
had walked that path.

But he knew the moment that she lost fear to wonder; he could see it in her. Could he in the whisper of moving strands of her hair, taken by a breeze that did not—and never—touched him.

She carved birds; he remembered that the grandmother had mentioned it to Sanfred. B butterflies, creatures not bound to the earth. And he? He worked water, and whales, dolp things of the deep that might break the bounds of their element in fleeting steps, with will joy.

So she flew. Up, up, and up. She knew where the doors were. Were she not small, wer step not contained by the reach of short legs, she might have evaded him utterly. He coul let her do it. He could not let her make herself at home in Fabril's reach.

Was ashamed of the inability.

We are not judged by what we create; we create. Maker's motto. And what use that n now? It was a lie.

Vanity had its use.

Cessaly stopped two thirds of the way up the stairs and placed her hand gently upo wall. A recess in the smooth stone caught the shape of her palm, molding itself to her finge if the stone were liquid.

He heard the ocean's voice then. A roar, a roar of water breaking stone and wood, ren cloth, burying men. She opened a door that he had never found.

And turned to stare at him, her eyes wide, her brows lost beneath the edge of poorly hair. Honey eyes, he thought, a shade too brown to be the eyes of a child of the gods. "M Gilafas?"

He shook his head, lifting a hand to clear his vision. "I hear the ocean," he told her bitt "Only the ocean."

"Can you hear me?"

He stopped then, turned the full of his attention upon her, upon the question she had as She was a child. By age, she could be counted among adults, but there was nothing of th her expression; she was made of curiosity, insecurity, joy, and fear.

"Yes, Cessaly. I can hear you."

His answer was important. Because she could hear him. She could hear the ocean in hi voice, could see it in his eyes, her first glimpse of the blue surface against which sun scudd She smiled, her hand against something soft and warm. "I can hear stone," she whispered. " can hear wood growing. I can hear wind in the leaves, and the rain dance. I can hear the bi seabirds, great birds. I can hear the sun's voice."

She had heard these things before, in the dells of Durant, in the furrows of her fat fields, in the quiet of log and peat and moss yards from the river's edge, where the w pooled before resuming its passage.

"I can hear silver," she told him. "And gold. And the voices of rubies and diamo Sapphires are quiet." She stopped. She had never said so much before.

"But I hear the voices. There, past the door. Other voices."

"Open the door, then, Cessaly."

She started to. Started, and then stopped. She felt the cold in the cracks between stone.

voices she knew fell silent, one after the other; the cold remained, and she began to unders
that it had a voice of its own.

Death. Death there. The death of all things.

She drew back. Shook her head, although it was hard; all of her was shaking.

"Cessaly?"

Her hand fell away from the wall. "No," she told him sadly. "The cold will kill *us.*"
turned to look at him, and she saw the shadows that the walls contained, straining for free
for something that might have looked like flight to a person who had never seen birds. N
made them, inch by inch, never carved the length of their flight feathers, the stretch of
pinions.

It was dark now. The world was dark.

But Master Gilafas was still in it.

He caught her hand; it was blue.

"Come," he said gently. "We are not yet there, and there is no cold in Fabril's reach."

"Where is Fabril's reach?"

"Up," he told her gently. "Up these steps."

"I can't see them."

"No. Sometimes they are hard to see." The lights in the wall sockets were bright
steady; they had never failed, and he was certain they never would. Fabril had made
himself, had made this tower, the reach.

"Will you take me there?"

"Yes, Cessaly. Can you feel my hand?"

She appeared to be thinking, as if thought were her only vision. He waited.

"I can feel it."

"Good. You have never made hands," he said. "But when we arrive, I will bring you w
and tools, and you must try."

"Just hands?"

"For now, Cessaly. Just hands." Speaking, he began to walk, the steps as solid and re
the fading light of day, the passage of time, the Holy Isle.

After she had made her way up the stairs—and in his estimation it took some
hours—she had to face the gauntlet of the great hall.

It was in the great hall that his envy, his bitterness, his resentment gave way to some
more visceral: fear.

She screamed.

She screamed, and pulled away from him. Pulled back, turned to flee. He lost her, then.
hall swallowed her whole. She was gone.

He cursed as he had not done in years, the reserve and distance of age swallowed who
the intensity of emotion.

She heard the voice of stone. The voice of mountains, old as the world; the voice o
molten rock in the heart of its ancient volcanoes; the voice, insistent, of its cracking, sli
fall. All the voices she had heard in her life were made small and insignificant; she lifted h

to capture them, and they came up empty.

She had no tools. No way to speak to stone with stone's voice, no way to soothe it.

But that didn't stop her from trying.

Trying, now, clawing at things too heavy and solid, her arms aching with effort, h bleeding.

Past midnight, the fear left him, sudden as it had come. He was drained of it, li shattered vessel of liquid, and what remained was the residue that had haunted his adult lif

Think. Think, Gilafas.

What a maker heard—if a maker heard what an Artisan heard at all—did not destro world; it did not unmake a reality. Fa-bril's reach, in all its frustrating, distant glory, was before him. And he knew that the girl had come with him, slowly and hesitantly, wandering across the face of its carved, misshapen walls.

And what of the door, Gilafas? What of the door that did not exist until she placed against wall?

It did exist. It always existed. I never found it. I never thought to look. I knew wha shape of the tower was—and is—/ knew that such a door at that place could not exist.

Think.

He ran to the closed doors of his workrooms, those vast, open spaces in which dwelled when there was any light at all. He opened drawers and cupboards, looking chisels, for the knives which woodworkers used; wood was not his medium, but all make note often dabbled.

When he dropped a drawer on his foot, when the slender tubes made for blowing shattered about him, he paused long enough to avoid its splinters. Just that.

He did not think to call Sanfred, and would wonder why later. For now, he continue search until he found the oldest of his supplies; blocks of wood as long as his forearm.

Thus armed, he paused again. *Think, Gilafas. Think.*

No. Not think.

Listen.

By dawn, he found her, and in finding her, he found a room that he had never seen.

It lay behind the stonework on the west wall, between the arch made of the raised arm two men whose likenesses were said to be perfect: the first Kings of Essalieyan. They not overly tall, and the space between them just large enough to fit a small girl with eas large man would not have been able to follow that passage, and if he had never felt cause t thankful for his lack of stature before, he was grateful now.

The passageway was narrow and poorly lit; it was cold with lack of light, and al silent; his breath was captured by folds of cloth, muted.

He could not have said why he chose to follow this path. But having begun, he heard and hearing her, saw her clearly, small, fine-boned, clear-eyed. He thought of what she m be, robbed of color and lent the clarity of glass or crystal, and this helped; he could imagin fires, the glass, the workroom, the movement of hands and lip, the changing contours medium that was fluid, as close to the ocean in texture as anything solid could be.

He had never had to work so hard just to walk in Fabril's reach.

Fabril's reach will teach you everything you need to know.

For the first time in years, he turned those words over in his mind's eye, blending them Cessaly until they were a part of her, a part of his making. *What, Master Nefem, do I nee know? And if this is a part of it, why do I need to know it?*

The hall ended; it opened into a room that had windows for a ceiling, a dome of fract light. Crystal cut its fall into brilliant hues that traced the sun's progress.

She huddled in their center, her hands scratching the surface of the floor. She did no him; could not see him. What she saw, he could not say, but he knew that she would see it she found some release from it, until it was exorcised.

He could see what she could not: blood, dried and crusted upon the palms of her fla hands.

He did not touch her. Instead, he knelt by her side and placed those tools he had found the hands that were so ineffectual.

For the first time since he had entered the room, her focus changed. He placed the v before her, but above the flat, smooth surface of stone.

He would take her from this room, in time. But that time was not yet come.

"Cessaly," he said, although he was certain she wouldn't hear him, "make what you m will return."

She loved the sound of Master Gilafas' voice.

No one had ever had a voice like his, and she marveled at it, for there was a te beneath the surface of his words and his emotions that moved her to listen. She had thoug miss home; to miss her da and her mother; to long for Bryan and Dell, the two people who brought her close to flight in the days of her childhood.

She forgot that longing quickly. The soles of her feet forgot the earth and the tall g forgot the slender silver stream; forgot the soft mosses, the heavy leaves of undergrowth. stone spoke to her in a voice that was so close to her own she felt it as a part of her. To that would kill her.

And the only person with whom she could share this strange homecoming was M Gilafas. His friends, Sanfred and Jordan, were as deaf as the man who had helped to birth

Master Gilafas understood her. He came to her with bits of wood, smooth stone, raw g he gave her room in his workshop, and brought to her the glass that he loved. She did not it, but she listened to its voice as it spoke to him, and sometimes, when the world was and her hands could be still, she would sing a harmony to its quiet voice.

But at other times, the stones would lead her to rooms that Master Gilafas could not fin his own. She was afraid of the stone, then; afraid of being alone. She hated the darkness lingered at its edges; it hurt her, and it promised to hurt her more.

She knew it. Because she heard what the stones said to *him* when he walked by her She would glance anxiously at his face when the stones spoke in their sharp, cold voices.

Sometimes she would ask him about the voices.

And he would take her hands in his and smile gently. "Yes," he would say, "I hear t But they are only words, Cessaly. Pay them no heed."

And she would see her death in these stones, but his words and his voice were stronger

He was reduced, he thought, to being a baby-sitter.

He had, in that first month, attempted to foist that duty upon

Sanfred's broad shoulders, and Sanfred was more than willing to accept it.

But the greatness of the talent that all but consumed Cessaly was denied in its entire Sanfred. He could not hear what she heard. He could not see what she saw. Instead, he h madness, and only madness.

The stories were there, of course. Every apprentice, every young journeyman, every who desired to be called Master— and there were not a few of those in the guild—knev stories.

The Artisans were mad. Gloriously, dangerously, mad.

Only madness could conceive of a small jeweled box in which the whole of a room n be contained. Only madness could create Fabril's reach, bending the fabric of the real an solid to the vision of its maker. Only madness, yes.

But madness had created more, much more.

And Gilafas was doomed to understand it. To see what he could not be; to almost t what he could not acheive. His curse.

Sanfred lost Cessaly for two days. He came to Gilafas, ashen and terrified, and all bu in a groveling heap at the Guild-master's feet, weeping. Two days, Gilafas searched; two d he listened.

He found her at last in a room he had visited once in nightmare, standing before the e of altar upon which her naked body lay, cradling rod and sword. What he found in searc Cessaly, he was never allowed to lose again. It waited, that room.

He had carried her from it with care and difficulty; she had in her hands the softe stones, and powder flew from it as she carved and polished its face, her eyes unseeing ears bleeding.

Two days later, she had begged him for gold. He had brought that, and more bes gemstones, large as eyes. She was thin as a bird; lifting her, he could believe that her b were hollow. She said, "I'm flying, Master Gilafas. You've made me fly!" And laug delirious. Insane.

He loved the sound of that laugh, and he understood, when he called Sanfred again, Sanfred not only did not love it, but in fact, was terrified by it.

The fear galled Gilafas; the pity and horror that Sanfred could not hide when he next sa Cessaly enraged him. He had not expected that. Had he, he might have been more temperate

More cautious.

"Do you not understand what you have witnessed?"

Sanfred was mute in the face of his words.

"The guild has not been graced by a talent as pure as hers since its founding. Do not understand the significance of her presence?"

An ill display indeed, for he knew the answer. No. How could he?

"You . . . are not . . . as she is."

"No, Sanfred, I am not. To my profound sorrow, I am not. Get out. Get out; I will tend myself."

He was her captive. He came to understand that. The whole of his life, his authority, stature meant nothing to her. And where was the justice in that? For his life revo around her. The hours of his rising, the hours in which he might sleep, were dictated by and she slept the way a newborn does: unaware of the strictures of day and night, light darkness.

She took food at her whim, and when that whim was weak, at his; she drank becaus demanded it. Sometimes, when he was exhausted beyond all measure, he went to apothecary and fed her bitter brew; it dulled her for some hours while he slept.

Sanfred, unable to champion Cessaly, became in all things Gilafas' ears and eyes; upon royal command did Gilafas choose to leave Fabril's reach. He had lost Cessaly for days; he did not intend to do so again.

Captivity breeds either hostility or resignation, and in Gilafas it bred both.

He was surprised, then, to find that in the stretch of the days from summer to Hende had learned to love the cage.

He discovered it thus: Duvari came to visit.

It had been months since their first meeting in the heights of

Fabril's reach; the Astari had sent no word, and by its lack, Gilafas understood tha Sword at least was whole.

But when Duvari appeared in the doorway of his workroom, he knew that the lull ended. Cessaly was in the corner, by the cooling glass. She had, in her fashion, been sin and together they had blown a bubble in which one of her butterflies was encased, its brought out by light. They had learned to work together in this fashion, Gilafas the hands be their mutual will.

"Remember, Cessaly, not to touch it yet. It will burn your hands, and you will not be ab make until they are healed."

She nodded, too absorbed to look up.

Trusting her, then, he stepped away.

He was not dressed for an audience; indeed, he wore the oldest of aprons, the most wo gloves. The glass that protected his eyes sat upon his head like a wayward helm; he al lowered it when he saw Duvari. The threat in his presence was palpable.

But he did not do it. Cessaly was sensitive to gesture this close to making's end, and was always sensitive to the tone, the texture, of his voice.

"I would speak a moment in private," Duvari said quietly.

In that, they were of a mind. Gilafas nodded politely. "I . . . would prefer . . . to rema sight of her."

"It was not a request. The matter is of a sensitive nature."

"As is she," Gilafas replied evenly.

Duvari frowned. The frown was unlike the one that normally adorned his features, Gilafas instantly regretted his words.

"Very well, Guildmaster. King Reymalyn has sent me with a message."

"And that?"

"The Sword," he said softly, "was drawn this morning."

Heart's blow. He lifted a feeble hand to ward it, but it was far too late.

"I confess that I could not read what was writ in the runnels, although the words were c to me. King Reymalyn labored under no such handicap."

"The sword was forged by Fabril," Gilafas said, the words leeched of the pride once might have lodged within them. "If I was to guess, I would say that no one but the King Reymalyn— with the possible exception of the King Cormalyn—might read what is written there."

"You are correct."

"Why have you come?"

"If you must play at ignorance, I will indulge you. I came—"

"Gilafas, look!"

Cessaly had run from the room's corner, her eyes bright. She reached out and caught apron, tugging at it insistently. "Come, look, look!"

He followed her, aware that he risked Duvari's wrath. Like a shadow, the Astari follo dogging his steps. Gilafas, mindful of this, pried her fingers free, replacing cloth with the of gloveless hand.

In the circular globe, the butterfly hovered, wings flapping. They brushed the concave s of the glass, and the glass trembled in response.

Duvari said quietly, as if there had been no interruption, "The Sword must be reforged Rod remade. They were meant to stand against the Barons; they were not created to s against the darkness."

"Then you are doomed," he said, but without hope, "for the man who made those emb of the Kings' power is long dead."

"Indeed. But it is not by his hands that they must be remade."

Gilafas stiffened. He was surprised, but he shouldn't have been. The Lord of the Com it seemed, made all secrets, all hidden histories, his business. "I had thought it might b yours, Guildmaster." He bowed, and when he rose from the bow, his face was as smooth a surface of the glass that now contained the floating butterfly.

Gilafas had a moment of clarity, then, standing before the most feared man in the Em He saw the pity in Duvari's face; the pity and the ruthlessness.

"It is trapped," Duvari said, speaking for the first time to Cessaly.

"Oh, no," she said, eyes round, face serious. "It is *safe."* And then she frowned. "I something for you," she told him. "Can you wait here?"

He nodded gently. He, who had never done a gentle thing in his life.

Cessaly floated from the room, bouncing and skittering around the benches, her flapping.

"Understand," Duvari said quietly, when she had vanished, "that the Kings have no ch in this. The darkness has risen, and it is gathering. The Kings cannot go unarmed into battle, and they *will* go."

"She is a child," Gilafas replied.

"She is an Artisan, and if I understand the hidden histories well enough, she is the Ar for whom Fabril built the reach. What she needs to learn, she must learn here, and she

learn it quickly."

The Guildmaster closed his eyes.

"Because if I am not mistaken, she will not survive long."

"She is not the power that Fabril was."

"She does not have his knowledge," Duvari replied, "nor the allies with whom he wo so long and so secretly. But the power?" Again, something akin to pity distorted his feat "Affection is a dangerous burden, Guildmaster. We go, in the end, to war, and the chanc victory is so slight we can afford to spare nothing."

"It is not in my hands," he said stiffly.

That was his truth. It was not, it had never been in his hands.

"Is it not?"

She came then, before he could frame an answer, and her hands, so often spread wid touch the surfaces of the world around her, were clenched in loose fists. Sunlight caugh edges of gold, the brilliant flash of diamond.

She walked up to Duvari without even a trace of her usual caution. "These are for you," told him gravely.

"Forme?"

"Well, maybe for the Kings."

He held out his palms very slowly, as if she were a wild creature. She placed in t two pendants. They were eagles, the guildmaster thought, wings spread in flight, f feathers trailing light. At their heart, large as cat's eyes, sapphires. To Gilafas' eyes, glowed.

"These will help," she told him quietly. "With the shadows."

"The shadows, Cessaly?"

She nodded. "We have them here, and I *don't like them*. I made one for me, When I wear it, I don't hear shadow voices. Only the other ones. The stones," she added way of explanation. "The wood, and the gold—the sapphires are quiet, but you need quiet—and Master Gilafas."

"You hear the shadows here?"

"Don't ask her that!" Gilafas cried out.

But her face had turned, from Duvari, from him. Skin pale, her eyes darted along workroom's walls. Here, the voices of nightmare were weakest; this *was* Gilafas' space.

But the nightmares had been growing stronger; there was now not a single moment in w she could safely be left alone without some sort of work in her hands. She jerked twice, struck, and then turned and fled the room.

Gilafas, prepared in some fashion for these episodes, ran to the workbench and swep the satchel in which the most portable of her tools were contained.

"Guildmaster," Duvari began.

"Not *now,* Duvari."

He did not expect argument; he did not receive it. But he was angry enough that he c not stop himself from speaking as he strode to the door. "If I have lost her again, you will One day, she will go someplace where she *cannot* be found; she will be beyond us, wor until she starves. If that day is today, I swear to you—and to the Kings you protect—tha Guild of the Makers will never again serve at your command."

He did not wait for the reply.

And perhaps he would have been surprised to know that none was made.

Cessaly did not run far.

Had she been afraid of Duvari, she would have, but she found

herself liking the man; he was very quiet. He wasn't cruel, but he wasn't kind; he almost like the stonework on the walls: made of a single piece, and finished. He ne nothing from her.

The shadows were not afraid of him either. The moment he mentioned their voices, heard them clearly, and they were some part of his. But although they touched him, he some did not touch *them*.

Important, that he never heard their voices.

She had used sapphires to capture quiet, and diamonds to capture light; the eagle simply the ferocity of a flight that did not necessarily mean departure. She had made tho the round room because she had been afraid. But she had made *three*. One, she wore; bec she wore it, she could now find her way up— and down—the winding stairs that led t below.

But two she had simply held, and when she had seen Duvari— when he appeared a side as the butterfly began its flight—she knew why: they were for him.

But she didn't like his "thank you" very much, and she wasn't certain if she wanted t him again.

Maybe. Maybe she wanted to be able to see *him*.

She frowned. Things she had not tried now suggested themselves in the brilliant hues o floor of the round room. She had her stone, of course, and she carved while she paced floor, a hollow feeling in throat and stomach. She would ask Gilafas for what she needed always gave her what she needed.

He found her almost instantly, which should have stilled his anger; it did not. She working, although not in a frenzy, and when he entered the chamber—her workroom, as often called it—she offered him a smile at home in the deep, soft rainbows cast by sun.

"Master Gilafas," she said, as he bent a moment and set his knees against those co "could you bring me a loom?"

"Yes. Yes, Cessaly. After lunch, I will bring you a loom." He did not tell her that suc undertaking would take more than a single morning, and did not ask her where the loom sh be set; he did not speak to her of cost, the responsibility of expenses, the things that had alw balanced his momentary, frenzied desires.

She did not care; could not.

And in truth, neither did he.

The loom should have been foreign to her; the working of metal was a gift that had been taught over the course of months. But he was not surprised to hear the clacking of the great, wooden monstrosity that now occupied some part of his workroom. There were no other ro that could house it in Fabril's reach—at least none that he was aware of, and if Cessaly kne otherwise, she did not choose to enlighten him.

He considered her carefully as he worked, and he *did* work; the voices were upon him they rode him unmercifully. He no longer knew if ocean's voice drove his hands, or if did—or worse, if his own now moved him, with its anger and its self-contempt. Not good, he knew it; not good to be driven by that last voice. Men died for less, grabbing in a fren those things that might still it—and not only the maker-born; all men with hollow power.

But it drove him.

Glass was before him, broken, colored, and around it a skein of lead; the things he k better than he knew himself.

The loom was racked with the passage of her hands. It seemed fitting that they should w in this fashion. He was surprised that he was aware of her at all, for he knew by the feel o glass in his hands that he should have been beyond her.

He failed in his duty, this day; he forgot to feed Cessaly. Forgot to feed himself.

Was not aware, until Sanfred forcibly removed his hands from his tools, of what he making.

But Sanfred, having wrested the cutters from his hands paused, frozen, in front o mosaic.

For the first time, Gilafas permitted himself to see what the glass contained.

Cessaly.

Cessaly, who, in bleeding hands, carried two things: a Rod with a crystal Orb that deny all hint, all taint, of darkness, and a Sword whose edge glittered like the diamond w of her eagles.

And he looked at the sky, red and dark, sun bleeding into the night of the horizon. T days, for three more days, the light would wane early, the night sustain itself. The heart o month of Henden would arrive, and with it, the longest night.

Duvari returned two days after his first visit with Cessaly. He came without warn which was wise; had he offered warning, the Guildmaster would have forbidden him entra and personally would have dismissed anyone who disobeyed that order.

But he offered no such introduction; worse, he did not come alone. The companion he chosen to bring to the Guildhall had caused concern and quiet outrage long before the two had mounted the stairs that led to Fabril's reach.

Gilafas understood why the instant he laid eyes on the second man. His hair was long white; it fell across his shoulders like the drape of an expensive cape. He had not chose bind it, which was unusual; Gilafas had never seen that hair escape the length of formal bra

"Guildmaster," the man said.

"Member APhaniel," he replied coolly. "To what do I owe this . . . singular . . . honor?

"To the busy schedule of Sigurne Mellifas, alas. The Council of the Magi occupies a her waking time at the moment."

"I had heard there was some difficulty."

Meralonne APhaniel shrugged broadly. "Among mages, there is *always* difficulty."

"Among makers, the same can be said." But only grudgingly. "Although I confess that I seldom had cause to resent the difficulties that keep Member Mellifas away, I resent them day."

A pale brow rose in a face that was entirely too perfect on a man of Meralonne's age.

"It is understood. Sigurne is better at handling difficulties of this nature. In all ways perhaps I am not entirely truthful."

Gilafas snorted. "Of a certainty, you are not entirely truthful."

"No? Ah, well, perhaps my reputation precedes me." A glimmer of a smile then. "And day, when we both have time, you must tell what that reputation is. The dour incommunicative Duvari cedes not even the most paltry of rumors to the mage-born. H significantly less . . . suspicious of the maker-born."

"Not, apparently, of their guildmaster."

"Well, no, of course not. The Guildmaster actually possesses power."

"Gentlemen," Duvari said coldly, "may I remind you of the scarcity—and therefore value—of our time?"

Meralonne reached into his robes and drew from it a long-stemmed pipe. "May I?"

"Of course."

"You might join me, Guildmaster."

Gilafas started to say that he did not smoke, and thought better of it. He did, and he gue that the mage-born member of the Order of Knowledge knew exactly what it was that burn his pipe when he chose to bring it to his lips. He reached for pipe and box, and bitter, b weed. Spread dry leaf in the flat bowl of his pipe.

"I have seen the work of your apprentice," Meralonne said, when smoke lingered in the "The two pendants."

"And they?"

"You must guess at what they do, Guildmaster."

"I confess that I have not the resources—nor the desire—to test them. They are effecti some measure against the— against our enemies?"

"Yes." Meralonne's cheeks grew concave as he inhaled. "I had not thought to see their again, not newly made. But yes." He turned, then, to the corner of the room in which Ces lay sleeping. In sleep she was much like a cat; she found it as it came, and took it where sat, stretching out against floor or chair.

"She is young," he said at last.

"She is."

"Do you understand what it is that is asked of her?" He could not find the words, bu once, he didn't need to. He turned to his bench, and lifted the gauze he had placed acros work, setting it aside with care; he wanted no dust, no wood shavings, no metallic sli caught in its threads. Then he lifted the glasswork, the mosaic of transparent color, an turned its bitter accusation toward the magi.

Through the wild skein of her hair, he saw the golden skin of Meralonne APhaniel.

"I see," the magi said quietly, "that she is not the only Artisan to busy herself in Fabril's reach."

"I have always worked in Fabril's reach," Gilafas said dryly. "Oh, indeed. But you hav only twice created something that blends the skill of the maker with the deeper, wilder magicks. Ah, I stand corrected; this is the third, and if I were to guess, the most subtle, the m powerful, of the three." Gilafas' turn to be surprised. "Is it?" "The most powerful?" "A wor

"Do you not know?" He said nothing.

"Magic—such as mine—is not sanctioned within these halls, Guildmaster, but were it, not certain it would divine the purpose behind your creation. Certainly it will not tell me than you yourself know. But I will say this, and perhaps I say too much. I am not Duvari. aware of what is asked, of both you and your apprentice. Duvari accepts all cost and acc all debt in the cause of the Kings. I? I do not believe that debt ever goes unpaid, and I am to accumulate it. "And I believe your apprentice is waking." Gilafas frowned; he had h nothing. But he did not doubt the Magi. He turned to see that Cessaly had taken to her feet. was smiling shyly.

"Have you come to see my work?"

"I have," Meralonne replied. "And I have come to bring you something. Which would y have me do first?"

"My work." Her smile was unfettered by such things as caution or suspicion. She walke over to the closet Gilafas had emptied for her use, and drew from it three bundles of cloth. was as blue as cloudless sky, one as dark as midnight, and one the color of light seen throug the fog of cloud. "I made these," she said, as if it were not obvious.

"Did you make them for anyone?"

"I don't know. But I made them. They are all too large for me. The loom moves quickly the cloth chatters."

She handed him the darkest of the three, and as he unfolded it, Gilafas saw that it h hood. A cloak, he thought.

"Put it on." Her little, imperious voice was the only one in the room.

Meralonne did not hesitate. He laid a hand against the weave of the cloth, and ran fingers across it, his eyes wide. "Child," he said softly. Just that. But there was no mista the longing—and the wonder—in the single word. "You remind me of my youth." He caugh cloak by its upper edge, and twirled it backward until it fell over his back, obscuring the le of his hair.

He raised the hood, and then, with a smile, fastened the silver clasps that hung at his co Gilafas was not surprised to see him vanish.

Cessaly clapped her hands in glee.

The hood fell, and the man reappeared. "My lady," he said, and he fell to one knee be her laughing face. "We have come to beg a boon of you."

"Member APhaniel—"

"We have brought, for your inspection, two things." He gestured. *Magic,* the Guildm thought.

"I have the Kings' writ," Duvari said evenly, before Gilafas could voice even t outrage.

A bundle appeared in Duvari's outstretched arms. He brought it to Meralonne APha and the magi unwrapped it with care, until he was left with two things.

Gilafas bore witness; he could not bring himself to move.

She came to Meralonne as if she could no longer see him; as if she had eyes only for he held. Bright, her eyes, like liquid, like the ocean in summer. And dark, like its depths.

She took them from his arms and did not even notice their weight, although she buc beneath it. She brought her knees to the ground, as if in obeisance, and touched the dull whi

the broken Orb, the black and gold of the Sword's scabbard. Her lips opened and closed, Gilafas knew a moment of pride, for he could hear her voice, and he was certain the o could not. After a moment, she raised her head, and she looked at Mera-lonne APhaniel, al in the lesser creation gone.

She said, "You should not have brought these here."

"We had no choice, Lady."

She rose, staggering; she would not allow him to touch their plain surface. "But the der will come now."

"Yes."

She woke in the dark of the night, in her bed, alone. She had gone to sleep there, her ha absorbed with the beads she had asked for, the strings upon which to place them almost ful Her fingers were stiff with the damp and the cold; she knew that she had worked them whil she slept. Master Gilafas would worry. She knew it.

It was why she had forced herself to walk the halls, to come to this room, to let sleep her while he watched. He only left her when she slept, and only when she was here.

But she had work to do; she knew it. The days. The days had gone; the nights had sl devoured them. They waited above her head and beneath her feet, gathering the shadows the darkness. All the voices were strong.

And steel's voice strongest of all.

She slid her feet out of bed; the floors were cold, but she dare not wear shoes. She wa no light, nothing to see by, and without it, her feet were her eyes; they knew the halls at lea well as her eyes did.

Beneath her bed, she found the Sword; found the Rod. Her hands knew them by more their weight, but it was their weight that troubled her, for the Sword was so long it *would* on the floor, the metal of its sheath creating sparks and noise.

She struggled alone.

She understood, dimly, that she was not a simple child, but the child in her was ofte only element that could survive the arduous task of making. The understanding clung to h she struggled: she was not a child. She had come to Fabril's reach *because* she was not a c and she had remained because no one— not even her beloved Master Gilafas—could hea voices of the wild as well as she.

But she was grateful; had she been at home, had she been in Durant, she was certai town would have perished this eve. The longest night.

She was not dour by nature; not grim. Master Gilafas, haunted and tired, was both of t things, but she understood that he had come to love her, and because of it, she knew she leave him. Because she understood the whole of Fabril's intent, and had, from the momen had found the room Master Gilafas so hated.

The Rod and the Sword were vessels; they were vessels, and those vessels had long empty.

She had listened to the ocean in Master Gilafas' voice. She understood vessels, and they contained, or could contain, because of that distant voice.

She was not so old that she had forgotten fear. In the dark of her room, she armed her she fastened the clasp of the pendant she had made, cold sapphire resting against the ho

between her collarbones. She drew cloak from an armoire that was otherwise empty, and from the box at her desk. She took no gloves, and paused a moment before the silver shee dark mirror.

In the dark, she drew the blade. She was not a swordsman; it was an awkward action she must do it; she must leave the sheath here. The blade, the Rod, they must go where traveled.

The moon was high. Fabril had loved light, and if gold was the color of day, silver s now, radiant and cool. Enough light to see by, but she did not need it; she could see in shadows.

She hesitated for just a moment, on the edge of the master's workroom. And there she down her burden, and ran lightly across the darkened threshold. Moonlight came through in all its muted color; she passed it by, again and again, until she reached the delicate glob blown glass Gilafas had given her.

Inside, floating and fluttering, the butterfly.

She pursed her lips, touched the cool glass, and with a simple word, she set the butt free. It broke the meniscus of glass surface as if it were liquid and passed above her, circ her head three times.

She let it go and turned again to her task.

The Rod and the Sword had been forged and quenched in the whole of a single day. knew it, by touch; understood what not even the cold man understood: that Fabril had m these in the light of the longest day, a measure of, and containment for, the summer. It wa her simple jewelry box had been, an act of affection, a desire to help those loved respected. And in summer's season, the Rod had served the son of Wisdom, and the Sword son of Justice: the Twin Kings who had, for centuries, given their lives to the Empir Essalieyan.

But all things living know time and its passage, and all things living know the shiftin seasons. Summer had passed, the season so long that winter had been forgotten.

Aiee, she hated the shadows, the sibilance of their terrible whisper.

But what was forged in the grim stillness of winter, what lived in its ice and its blanke pure, cold snow, was strong in a way that the summer itself was not strong, and that stre cold and terrible, existed *outside* of the shadows.

Terrible power, scouring and lonely.

She had heard of men who had died steps from their homes when the blizzards had c they could not see their way to safety, and what love and hope they carried as they strug ended there.

Kalliaris, she thought, for the first time since she had come to Fabril's reach. *Kalli smile.*

She walked the long hall, seeing the frozen stone about her, fitting company, and silent this last voyage. She was afraid of only one thing: That she would finish what she had born to

finish, that she would remake the Rod and the Sword that would be so necessary to Twin Kings upon whom the Empire depended, and that there would be no one to bring home.

Other fears would come later, to keep her company and ease her loneliness, but this was the wisest and the strongest.

She could not make anything while she walked, and she felt the gnawing hunger take hands, felt this scrap of reasoned fear, this almost adult comprehension, fray about the ed pulled like the loose thread in a weaving from her loom. So she cradled the blade with against the cloak that protected her from the sight of men, and she ran her fingers, over over, across the surface of what was writ in its runnels.

She began to descend the stairs, and it was hard: the floor was cold, and the steps s The lights that existed against the walls were dim; they did not speak a language that her understood. But she did not need them; she knew where she walked, and when she reache halfway mark, she set her hand against the wall and waited.

The door opened.

The door opened into the Scarran night, and the Winter Road wound from its step int hollows of the ancient, wild way.

Gilafas could not say what woke him, not at first.

He sat up in bed as if struck, the full face of the moon framed in the windows o chambers. The night was silent; he listened a moment and heard the distant thrum of o voice. It was not insistent.

He rose, clenching fists, and cried out in shock and pain; his left hand burned.

He spoke a word and the light flooded his vision, forcing his lids down; when they again, he stared at the open mound of his hand, his left hand.

In it, in the light, were shards of delicate glass, the broken form of butterfly wings a crescent pools of blood.

He listened, and he heard the ocean, and only the ocean, and then he understood.

He dressed like a madman, taking the time to don jacket over his sleeping robes grabbed a dagger, although it was futile; tore a light from the wall and clutched it i bleeding fist.

He took no care to be silent; silence was not his friend, and the noise was a distracti welcome one. He ran to his workroom, commanded light, banished moon. There, on the far reach of his personal bench, he saw what he had dreaded: the globe in which he had enc Cessaly's butterfly. This was their only common work, and it was empty now; what she l he had in the carelessness of sleep destroyed.

What night? What night, he thought, frenzied. Was *this the longest night? Or was it him, was it gone?*

But no: for once the darkness was blessed, for it lingered, deep and forbidding.

He began to search for Cessaly.

The first place he looked was her room, but it was empty; there was no trace o presence in it at all, although the sheets were turned back and her cupboard door swung as he approached.

The halls were long. He knew all of her rooms, for once she had opened the ways, could not be closed. And he knew his own: the room in which her death was carved in s the obscenity of it stronger every time he chanced upon it.

He visited them all. All of them, and he found her in none, although his own horror w

around every doorway and every corner.

He had left her. In his exhaustion, he had chosen to leave her. If he found her, he prom whatever capricious god might be listening he would never leave her again.

No, Gilafas, fool. No. *Think.*

But thought eluded him, deluded him, sent him in circles that ended, always, with workroom.

But the last time, the last circuit, had finished him; in agony, he retreated into the moon his hands shaking.

The lights were dim; he could not remember dimming them. He started to speak, and the words as he turned to the great windows that formed a casement for the moon. not the moon, but some light that was much like it: radiant and cool.

In its heart, standing in robes the color of night, stood a ghost, a demon. He had brough wind with him, and it was a foreign wind, devoid of the taste of salt.

He turned, and the light turned with him, and when at last this intruder faced Gilafa saw two things that he recognized.

The first, the least, Meralonne APhaniel, shorn of the emblem of the magi, the decora of mage-born rank. His hair was white and long, his eyes the color of new steel; he wor sword, no shield, no armor, but he was dressed for war.

The second, the source of the room's light: the mosaic he had made; the likeness of Ces Golden hair, honey eyes now shaded to the green that was either trick of light or whisp power, blue dress, and red, red blood, these burned in his vision. The lead that held the was grown insubstantial and weightless, or perhaps it was fluid; he could not see it cle Did not try.

"You asked," Meralonne APhaniel said softly, "what purpose this Work served, a believe I have divined it. It is of glass for a reason, Guildmaster.

"It is a window."

A window. He stepped toward it, and faltered in the glow of its light. "Why did come?"

"I told you. I am not Duvari."

"You are not truthful."

"Not entirely, no. This is Fabril's reach. Fabril was not seer-born; that was not his gift it is myth that he created the whole of this wing; he made it his own, but he chose it reason.

"For the summer, Guildmaster, and for the winter." His eyes were unblinking. "You d hear the summer voice; you do not hear the winter. That is both your gift and your curse. Fabril wrought does not speak to you. But it speaks to her, to your apprentice, and this i longest night, the Scarran night.

"And I believe that *she* speaks to you."

Truth, Gilafas thought, but not enough of the truth.

"Why did you come here, mage?"

He was silent a moment, and then he said, "I believe that she

will be drawn to the Winter Road, and if she enters into a great Work upon it, she never return.

"But her Work *must* return. Do you understand?"

Gilafas said nothing.

"Guildmaster."

Silence.

"The Guild of the Makers has been waiting for longer than you can imagine, guard against this age. It has waited so long, there have been those among you who have come, time, to believe the wait has been in vain, a thing of child's story. But you know now. A and the Kings. Open the window. Open it, Guildmaster, for I cannot."

He cursed his gift for the first time in his adult life. Cursed himself for a fool for cre this window so small, although it was the gift itself that had guided the making. His h shook as he approached her, trapped in glass, circled by lead. Her eyes were now closed.

They had not been closed when he had made her, for the width of her eyes was, amon many things about her, the one that he had come to love best.

He cried out in fear and reached for the glass, and his hands passed through it as if it mist, or smoke, or veil.

The winds tore past him, then, and in their folds, they carried the screams of the dying, high ululation, the keening of the damned.

His eyes teared at once, and his cheeks froze; the wind was dry and cold, and it allo for no liquid. Ocean voice denied him, then, and just as well. He saw darkness, felt it ac the length of his arms. Frost formed in the folds of his jacket; flakes gathered against cloth found purchase there.

Bodies lay aground, some writhing, most still. He saw an arm, a jerking hand, a f blade; saw a broken bow, its curve shattered, saw the spill of hair across snow, white white, with the thinning pink of spreading blood beneath it.

He could not count them all; he did not try. Once, in the whirl of the angry wind, he saw pale skin of an upturned face, its eyes wide, lashes made of snowflakes. *Too beautiful,* he thought, although clearly the man was dead. Too beautiful to be a demon.

He moved, although he could not say how; he knew that the window itself was too sm passage for a man of his size. Could not regret it either.

Until he saw her.

He knew her at once, although he could not see her face, for her hair was short and go not even the snow that clung there could obscure its color. He knew the bent shape of shoulders, the moving jerk of elbows at play; he knew the shape of her back, even seen without cloth to obscure it. He knew the soles of her feet, for in the vastness of Fabril's re she never wore shoes.

Had not, he saw, worn them now. She would freeze to death, she would freeze in wailing storm, and he thought her unaware of it, for the madness was upon her.

He could hear it so clearly he almost forgot himself.

But she was not alone in that clearing; the trees themselves, like wrought-iron fe surrounded her, and in their shadows a shadow rose, tall and slender and perfect.

It made a poverty of any beauty he had ever seen, and in the Guildhall, he had seen muc it. He was humbled, instantly, by the presence of this stranger, this Winter Queen.

She looked up then, and she smiled, and although she was beautiful, and the smile a gi
was chilled by it in a way that not even the slaughter had chilled him.

"Yes," she said softly, "I am the Winter Queen, and you are bold, to come here on
night."

He could not speak; his legs would not hold his weight and he felt himself begin to ben
that he might place his life where it properly belonged: at her feet. Or beneath them.

But something held him up, something sharp and sudden. "I do not walk the Winter Roa
he told her, the words flowing through him as if they belonged to another. "I have placed no
foot upon it, and I have taken nothing, touched nothing that belongs to the Queen who rules

Her smile deepened, and it was chilling; there was no pleasure in it. "You are wise,
appear to be a simple, mortal fool."

"I am not wise, Lady, or I would not be here, witness to winter; the mortal seasons ar
your seasons."

"No, indeed they are not, and mortals themselves are so fleeting." And her gaze, the gaz
coveted and feared, slid from his face to the shuddering back of Cessaly. "But not all th
mortal is beneath my interest. You have come for the girl."

"I have."

"Ah. But she has not your wisdom; she has set foot, unencumbered foot, upon my path,
she has taken the lives of those who serve me." She stepped toward Cessaly, and Gi
followed. Somehow he followed.

He wanted to shout, to give warning, to raise alarm; he was mute. The words that were
his words failed him.

The Winter Queen laughed in the wake of his silence, and her laughter was almost genu

She turned to him then. "Has it come to pass, little mortal? Have the gates been opened,
the Covenant shattered? Does the darkness stride the face of the mortal world once more?"

He was mute. Mute, still.

"Leave," she said. "Leave while I am amused and may know mercy."

"It is not for your mercy that I have come."

"Oh?"

"What the child carries belongs in the hands of the god-born; no other might wield or c
them."

"The hands of the god-born do not trouble them now," she replied, but amusement had
her face, and her lips were thinner. "And they have been made, remade, in *my* realm."

"They have been made and remade in the wild realm, Lady."

"And the wild realm knows no law but power."

"The wild realm knows no law but yours, it is true. But your vow is law in the realm
your oath ancient, so ancient that it is forgotten upon this plane. You cannot lay claim to
Rod or the Sword until those vows are fulfilled, and, Lady—if you seek to retain
one, they will never be fulfilled, and your power will be diminished by the binding."

Her hair swept past her face; the gale had returned in the clearing.

"Perhaps," she said, one hand falling to the hilt of the sword she carried, and the oth
the horn. "But so, too, will yours, and the mortal kingdom will surely fail. The Sword and
Rod came to me."

"Indeed."

"And they might lie here, unclaimed, until the seasons turn."

He fell silent again, the words stemmed.

And then she smiled. "I sense another presence, mortal. And perhaps this means that yo not understand what it is that you risk. What do you desire?"

His mouth opened. Closed.

Her eyes, her dark and golden eyes, flared; he felt a trickle of fire along his cheek, a ca that would leave a scar. "Speak," she said again. "And speak freely."

"I want the girl," he said. His words now. His own.

"Let me grant you a gift," she said coldly, "a gift of vision." She lifted her arms, on either side; in the wake of the moon's light across the fine, fine mesh of chain shirt, the w darkened.

Dark, he knew it: it was his own. He saw the spires of the three cathedrals, raised hi than even *Avantari*, the palace of the Kings. They burned; circled in air by winged beasts their riders, besieged by wind and shadow. They were empty, he thought; empty, he pra Beneath them, in the streets below, the flash of magic, the clash of armies.

Small armies, pockets of futile resistance.

The vision shifted as the wind changed; he flew over the dying city to the field Averalaan, and there he froze, for there he saw what they did not name.

Lord of Darkness.

It is not possible. It cannot be possible.

"Look well," she told him softly, "for you will see no Kings upon the field, and few arm All of the bodies are yours; the Lord of the Hells has risen.

"I cannot say that the Kings would triumph had they the Rod and the Sword for whic much has been offered. But you have not even the hope of that: the Kings perished in *Avar* bereft of the power granted them by the artifacts of Fabril. Yes, even with her hand upon t they are his."

She lowered her arms slowly, and the smile returned to her face. "I understand some s measure of mortality, Gilafas ADelios. It amuses me, and in this long, long winter, very does.

"So I will give you what I have given few: a choice. You may take the child, or you take the artifacts. But you may not take both. Choose," she said softly. "Choose; I will intervene as long as you take only one thing when you return. Either—she, or they—will l interest to me."

Gilafas was consumed by the winter, the winter's chill. "The dawn is coming," the Winter Queen told him. "In your world, in the world in which you now stand, the sun w soon rise. Delay, Gilafas, and you will have neither."

He reached out to touch Cessaly; his hand gripped her shoulder. He had thought she w not notice, for she often didn't.

But she turned to him, turned at once, snow spilling from her lap. Her hands were dark blood, but he could see, as she lifted her palms, that that blood was not her own. She had n been so still, in all the time he had known her. In all the brief time.

"Cessaly?"

Her face was a young woman's face, her eyes round and dark with exhaustion and fear. lifted her chin, and met his eyes, and he realized that she had poured so much of herself *this* making that she could at last, for a moment, know sanity.

It was terrible.

I will not do this, he thought. *She is Fabril's equal. She is his superior. What F made, she can make again, and better. If we have her. If only we have her.*

But he did not believe it. Desired belief more than he had desired anything, even the m of Fabril's legacy.

Cessaly touched his hands, pulling them from her shoulder.

She was so cold he would not have thought her living had she not moved; her lips blue.

And her eyes. Blue, he thought, and reddened.

"You can only take one thing," she said softly. She raised the Rod; its orb was whole glowing with fractured, colored light, a dance of fire, a thing not of this Winter place, alth it had been born to it. "These."

"Or you," he said, and the words cut him. Guildmaster. Keeper of Fabril's lega she were gone, he would again be the only Artisan to grace the guildhall.

She said, "I have made these. They are your responsibility and mine. Protect what I made, Gilafas. Protect my making."

Maker's words. Maker's ferocity, in her sanity.

He shook his head. He knew; he knew what must be done. The Winter Queen had sh him the truth of that need.

"No. No," he whispered. "Cessaly—"

She smiled, her jaw shuddering with the effort of maintaining that expression. "Thank she told him softly. "I know what has to be done . . . but . . . thank you."

Then, before he could speak, she placed the Rod and the Sword into his arms, and she quick and catlike, and she *pushed.*

Meralonne APhaniel was not Duvari, as he had promised. He restrained Gilafas whe Guildmaster almost threw himself into the window again; he forced him—as gently as could a man made wild and frenzied with grief—to see that the window had closed: he h mosaic, some proof of the existence of a girl he had foolishly learned to care for, and that all. To run at it would simply shatter it.

At the time, that would not have been a loss.

"You have what you want," he had said. "Get out!"

But the magi had carried the stained glass to the window, and he had gestured the moment, and when he had stepped back, it rested securely against the greater glass.

"This will not comfort you now," he said softly, "and perhaps it never will. But I say to you that the Winter Queen has always had an interest in the Artisans; that madness in the end is proof against the madness she would cause." He bowed. "I am s Guildmaster."

He looked up. "What did she mean?" he asked, dully. "When she spoke of the tu seasons, what did she mean?"

"Nothing," Meralonne replied. "For she speaks of the Summer Road, and it has forbidden her for so long, I do not know if it will ever return."

"And Cessaly?"

"She will never return."

He was required to come up with a story that might explain a young girl's disappearanc and he did, but Duvari judged the explanation itself unwise, and in the end, in disgust, he accepted the Lord of the Compact's version of events and burdened Sanfred with its spread

He labored in Fabril's reach in a fruitless search for a door, or a window, into the w world, and the days passed, spring becoming summer, summer fading into fall, and from t the rain and the shadows of Henden. He counted them, and lost count of them as he toile spoke with the wise, and when the wise gently turned him—and his money—away, he at surrendered.

He did not accept her loss.

And perhaps because he could not accept it, could not accept the terrible silence o absence of her voice, it was a full year before he chose to leave the guildhall, to take the that led to the Free Town of Durant. This was not his penance; it was his duty.

To the mother, he carried word of her daughter's greatest act of making, but the mothe no desire for the comfort of the accolade. Hero was a hollow word.

"You promised," she said.

And he had bowed his head, old now, and shamed beyond the simple use of words.

"How long?" she had said, her voice rising, the tone fierce and terrible. "How long you known?"

He could not answer.

"Why did you not come sooner?"

Why?

Because to come here, to make this pilgrimage, to stand before her just and terrible her keening loss, was to acknowledge what he had so desperately refused to acknowle Cessaly was gone. Cessaly would never return.

"She is not dead," he told her.

"How can you know that?"

He met her eyes, her wide, reddened eyes, and he bowed his head. "I know it," he bitterly. "And I had hoped that you might know it as well. She was your daughter."

Fabril's reach was no longer a cage. It was his home, the place from which he ruled guild in the splendor due his rank. Empty splendor, as it had always been, but empty in a different way. He heard the ocean, and only the ocean, and sometimes, in anger desperation, he gave himself to its voice. More often, he gave himself to the numb detach of bitterweed, and the business, the empty, hollow business, of the Guild of the Makers.

And then, one quiet morning, he felt it: something familiar, some hint of strangeness i tower walls. He rose slowly and dressed, and then he walked the hall, fingers trailing rounded surface of stone until he reached his workroom.

He opened the door, and as he did, something darted past him and down the hall. Ha been in any other place, he might have thought it a bat; in the heights, they were common.

But its flight was too delicate, too much the drunkard's spin, and he frowned as he ste through the door.

Froze there, in wonder. The upper reaches of his room were thick with butter Butterflies of glass, blown in every conceivable color; butterflies of silver and sapphir gold and ruby, of wood and stone. Among them, smaller than life, were birds, and the b too, were the hatchlings not of egg and warmth, but of the things that Cessaly had loved to with.

He turned to the window, to the stained glass, and his smile, in this room, was the firs had not been tainted by bitterness in a decade. He lifted his hand to touch it; felt glass, and glass, beneath his palm.

But the butterflies landed upon his shoulders, his head, his arms; they rested lightly the back of his hands, and they spoke to him, and each of their voices held some echo of he