

To Dye For

Mercedes Lackey

Tom Stone was lying flat on his back in the long grass in front of the geodesic dome, staring up at the sky when Mike Stearns and Doc Nichols showed up for the grass—as in, smokable grass—he'd promised them.

They arrived with a horse and cart, and one of the German boys driving; Tom had heard them coming for quite a while, but in his current state of flat-lined depression, it hadn't seemed important enough to get up just to greet them on his feet.

"Hey, Stoner!" Stearns called, when the hoofbeats and the creaking of the cart were getting pretty close. "Are you dead?"

Tom sighed gustily. "No," he admitted. "Catastrophically crushed, yes. Defeated, depressed, and debilitated. Out-of-time, out-of-luck, down-and-out. Bewitched, bothered, bereft and bewildered. But not dead."

He levered himself up out of the grass with an effort, for depression made his middle-aged body seem all the heavier, and clambered to his feet, while Stearns and the Doc watched him curiously. "Have you been sampling the product?" Stearns asked, finally.

He sighed again. "Would that I had, but not even a monster doobie, not even a full-filled bong of my patented West Virginia Wildwood Weed is going to make me forget my sorrows. I'd run off to join the Foreign Legion, but it hasn't been invented yet."

He took refuge from heartbreak in flippancy. What else could a man do, when he found the love of his life and lost her to something so stupid as money?

Doc Nichols looked completely blank, but a sudden expression of understanding crept across Mike's face. "Magdalena?" he asked.

Tom groaned; it was heartfelt. "Magdalena. Or rather, Herr Karl Jurgen Edelmann, whose considered opinion it is that I am no proper husband for *his* daughter."

"Ach, vell," said the German boy still on the seat of the wagon, "You aren't."

Tom gave him the hairy eyeball; bad enough that his feelings were exposed for all to see, but this commentary from the peanut gallery was adding insult to a mortal wound. "I resemble that remark, Klaus," he retorted bitterly.

"Vell, you *aren't*, Stoner," the boy persisted. "Vat haf you for to keep a guildmaster's daughter vith?"

"I am monarch of all I survey," Tom said sourly, opening his arms wide to include the geodesic dome he and the boys called home, laboriously built circa 1973 out of hand-hammered car hoods and scavenged windows by the founding members of Lothlorien Commune. The gesture swept in the two tiny camping trailers that had been added about 1976, the barn and now-derelict shotgun house that had been the original buildings on this property, and the greenhouse that Tom had made out of more salvaged windows.

"Und Magdalena vould haf better prospects elsevere," Klaus countered, stolidly. "You haf no *income*, Stoner. Effen der Veed, you gifs to der Doc."

Since Tom had heard all that already from the mouth of his beloved Magdalena's father, he wasn't in a mood to hear it again. "I am *not*," he growled, "Going to make a profit off of other people's pain."

Klaus only shrugged, though Doc Nichols looked sympathetic. "Dat earns you a place in Heaffen, maybe," the boy said with oxlike practicality. "But on Earth, no income."

It was an argument Tom had no hope of winning, and he didn't try. Instead, he turned back to Stearns, changing the subject to one less painful. "The stuff I was going to sell before the Ring hit us was already bagged, and I've added everything I could harvest without hurting the next crop, Mike," he said,

feeling his shoulders sagging with defeat. "Come on, give me a hand with it."

Stearns and Doc left Klaus with the wagon and followed Tom to the processing "plant" in the barn. Tom was Grantville's token holdover hippy, the last holdout of a commune that had been founded in 1965 by college dropouts long on idealism and short on practical skills—which basically described virtually every commune founded around that time.

"Maybe we can brainstorm something for you, Stoner," Mike said, as they followed the mown path between the dome and the barn—Tom didn't believe in wasting time and ruining perfectly good meadow grass—which provided habitat for an abundance of tiny songbirds—with a mower if he didn't have to. Stearns didn't sound hopeful, though, and Tom couldn't blame him. After all, he was something of the town loser. . . .

"Forgive my asking, but since I'm not from around here, just what *are* you good at?" the Doc asked

"Other than the obvious?" He had to shrug. "Not much. I was a pharmacy major at Purdue in the late seventies, in no small part so that I could learn how to make mind-opening drugs for my own consumption. There were a lot of us like that back then. I kind of went on to graduate school for lack of anything else, then I lost interest in school and eventually ended up here."

Given that he hadn't been motivated to get a graduate degree, it hadn't taken a lot of persuasion to get him to drop out a year short of his masters degree to move out here, to what his friends and fellow freaks had decided to call Lothlorien Commune—although the fact that his old lady Lisa had been the one who urged the move also had a lot to do with it.

"So you followed the old Timothy Leary mantra, 'turn on, tune in, drop out'?" the Doc hazarded.

"Something like that. Some friends of my friends started this place—I think one of them inherited it from a relative. He left about 1984, and I haven't heard from him since, so I guess he's either dead, in prison or doesn't give a damn. I kept up the property tax payments, so maybe the brain cells that held the fact that he's the owner went offline." He swung open the barn door and they moved into the hay-scented gloom. At the further end was another of his scavenged-window greenhouses, but this one was his drying shed. "Now, of course, it's moot."

At first, in those early days, all had been well, surrounded as they were in a haze of high-grade weed and windowpane acid. But as with virtually every commune founded in the sixties and early seventies, by the time he got there, part of the last wave of the hippie generation, Lothlorien was showing early signs of disintegrating.

Part of it was having to deal with the reality of hardscrabble dirt-farming. All of them were city- or suburban-bred, and grand designs of completely organic farming quickly fell by the wayside under onslaughts of every bizarre bug known to the entomologist. From that slippery slope, it was a straight-down slide, and plans for a completely vegetarian lifestyle became necessity when all they could afford were rice and beans, and the only money coming in was from well-intentioned "businesses" that somehow never lasted very long. The leather-worker left after an argument with the hard-line vegetarians. The pottery was good enough, but no one around here would buy it. Macrame belts and pot-hangers didn't quite match that coal-mining couture. . . .

A total of three SCAdians bought the yurts. Beaded jewelry and embroidered shirts required a lot of time, and a boutique willing to take them. But most of all, businesses needed business-minded people to run them, and no one could stay motivated long enough to make a business work.

"You probably didn't need to bring the cart," he told them, showing them the pile of nicely-compacted kilo "bricks," hot-sealed in vacuum-formed plastic wrap, with pardonable pride in workmanship. *His* plants practically had resin oozing out of every leaf-pore, and they packed down beautifully. "Doc, don't unwrap these until you're ready to use one. They're exactly like flavoring herbs; air is your enemy."

"Right," Nichols said, hefting a brick and regarding it with reluctant admiration. "I suppose we're talking trial-and-error on dosage, here?"

"It's pretty hard to OD on grass," Tom pointed out. "Especially when you're using it medicinally. By

the way, strongly flavored baked goods are the vehicle-of-choice for an oral vector, though I used to get good reviews on my spaghetti sauce."

Part of the reason for the collapse of Lothlorien was rebellion on the part of the women—who very soon found that a "natural lifestyle" meant unassisted child-rearing, childbirth aided only by Tom's hasty self-taught knowledge of midwifery, and nonstop housekeeping necessitated by the fact that there *were* no handy modern conveniences like—say—electricity. The chicks came and went, but in that final wave, Lisa bailed first, leaving Tom to solo-parent their son, Faramir.

Faramir. I must have been so stoned. How could that name ever have seemed like a good idea?

By the early '90s, all the women were gone, taking the girl-chicks, but leaving the other two boys born to the group with Tom "because he was such a good role-model." Elrond *might* have been his, but Gwaihir wasn't, and no one had *any* doubt of that, not with the kid's hair redder than a stop-sign. The only reason Tom was on the birth certificate as father-of-record was because the boy's mother was so stoned during and after the birth that she couldn't remember anyone else's last name.

By the time Gwaihir was born, Tom was no longer just the guru of drug-assisted meditation and provider of the sacred sacraments. Necessity and the fact that he was the *only* one with any medical training had made him the de facto doctor for the group, as well as midwife. More of a root-doctor than a sawbones, though he'd set broken bones in plenty, so long as the injury was pretty straightforward.

But with all of the old ladies gone, the rest of the guys lost interest in keeping things together. One by one, they drifted off, too, leaving Tom alone with three kids to raise. The three mothers never did come back even to check on their boys; he never knew why.

On the other hand—without a bunch of dopers lounging around, he had a lot fewer mouths to feed, and by then he wasn't bad at subsistence farming. The vegetable garden, the chickens, and the yearly pigs took care of most of their food needs. Wind-generators, one of the last things the commune had built together, brought much-needed electricity, and once Tom himself had gotten the greenhouse built, he was able to grow veggies all year long *without* having to fight bugs. He'd had a surprisingly green thumb, all things considered.

And of course—though by the time he and the kids were living here alone it was to bring in *much* needed money for the kids' needs, rather than to supply the group with smoking materials—that wasn't all he grew in there. A trusted friend had made a little pilgrimage to Holland once the greenhouse was operational, bringing back precious seeds, and Tom had been breeding the best of the best back every year. By the time it was just the four of them, he had some finest-kind weed flourishing amongst the zucchini.

"Want to see the greenhouse?" he asked, more out of politeness than anything else. Somewhat to his surprise, they did.

He was irrationally proud of the place, which had started life as the windows from every building that was about to be wrecked that he could scrounge, with a frame of similarly salvaged timber. That was before old barn-wood became such a hot item with decorators, and every time a tilting barn came down, he'd been there with the communal pickup and flatbed. Most of the farmers had been glad to let him haul it off.

"Damn," Nichols said, looking at the place from the inside for the first time. "How the hell did you manage to keep *this* under wraps?"

Made of barn-boards up to waist-high, with a relatively low eight-foot ceiling, he'd put windows with screens at the bottom where he could open them in hot weather, and solid windows for the roof. Now he'd segregated the pot plants at the rear, with the veggies and herbs up front—though in the days when the law might come a-calling, he'd mingled pot and beans, using the vines of the latter to screen the former.

He shrugged. "Stayed under the radar," he said. "Didn't get greedy. We didn't need a lot of cash to get along, so I didn't deal in more than that."

The boys had kept their dear little mouths shut, when he explained the economics of the situation in

terms of toys, treats, and new clothing. An additional bribe—the promise of never telling *anyone* what their real names were, and signing them into the Grantville school system as "Frank," "Ronald," and "Gerry," made sure they wouldn't tell, wouldn't bring samples out to their friends, and wouldn't allow the friends *in* the greenhouse, ever. After all, as Tom knew only too well, peer-pressure among the male of the species is a dreadful thing, and a name can become a deadly weapon. "Gwaihir" was too funny for words, "Elrond" had any number of nasty permutations, and as for "Faramir"—well. Any idiot could quickly figure out just what sort of nickname would come out of "Faramir" in the mouths of a pack of boys.

No, Tom never grew too much and never sold it in or near Grantville. One of the former members of Lothlorien came and collected the crop four times a year, paying in cash, taking it—well, Tom didn't know where he took it, but it definitely went far, far away. It wasn't a lot of cash, but it was enough to keep them in shoes and T-shirts, Tonka trucks and the occasional Twinkie.

So yes, he managed to stay far below the radar, so far as the law was concerned. From time to time, he ventured out into legitimate mercantile ventures, but aside from the sale of eggs, they never amounted to much, and some were outright disasters.

Then came the Ring of Fire, and everything changed.

At first, he and the boys had just been concerned about surviving the experience. But—that was months ago. Survival was no longer the issue—thriving was.

It had not escaped him that suddenly he was the only person in all of the New United States that was producing a pain-killer instead of consuming it. He'd never given up on the ethics that had brought him out here in the first place, and as soon as things settled down some, he brought himself and a sample of his crop straight to James Nichols, figuring that an ex-'Nam vet out of the 'hood was going to be a tad bit more open-minded about what had been going on in the greenhouse than the Law, and might be willing to intervene on his part.

As it happened, by then, the practicalities of the situation had not been lost on anyone who was in charge of Grantville, and though there had been some official growling and posturing on the part of the Law, it was all bluff and face-saving, and everyone knew it. Besides, it wasn't as if he was selling it.

"What I want to know is how you're keeping the kids out of the stuff," Mike asked, with one eyebrow raised. "Now that the secret's out, I can't believe you aren't getting midnight raids on your crop."

"Peer pressure," Tom said promptly. "I had my boys spread the word that the Doc here was going to prescribe it for the ladies who are having—um—" He blushed. "Monthly problems?"

"Not a bad idea. From what I've read, it's actually got fewer associated problems for that application than anything else around," Nichols admitted.

"Anyway, I let it be known via the kids that the crop is severely limited in quantity, and if there was so much as a single leaf missing, the culprit *would* be found and I would personally spread his name to all the women and let them take matters into their own hands." He'd been rather proud of that solution—having had to pacify the commune women himself when a crop came up short in similar circumstances.

"Damn!" Stearns laughed. "That's *harsh!*"

He shrugged. "I can't stop them from getting seeds and growing their own in the woods, but that's not *my* problem, that's Grantville's problem and you'll have to figure out how the town wants to handle recreational smoking yourself."

"Well, let's pack up and get out of here," Nichols decreed. "Good operation, Stoner."

Tom wasn't unhappy with the exchange, because it *was* an exchange. He *had* gotten something from Grantville for his contribution to the public good. Free electricity from the power-plant, some help with fixing things up around the place, including more insulation against winters that were undoubtedly going to be a lot harsher here than they'd been in West Virginia. The free electricity had allowed him to put the wood-walled extension he'd just added to the greenhouse under the powerful lights he'd bought

specifically to grow enhanced pot, but never used, because his own power reserves weren't up to it. That made the Wildwood Weed a lot more potent, true medicinal quality, which made both the Doc and the dentist very happy when they tested and found it powerful.

"You got any more plans for the greenhouse?" Doc asked, as they loaded up with bricks to take them out to the cart.

"More medicinal herbs next, I thought—it makes a lot more sense to use it for things that no one else can grow or preserve, not without lights or protection from the harsh weather." He got a raised eyebrow from Stearns.

"Opium-poppies?" Doc asked carefully.

He shook his head. "I was talking to some of Rebecca's relatives. It's cheaper to buy the raw opium through them and crank out something approaching the morphine you're used to using, Doc. Something that you can inject without lumps clogging the veins of your patients, anyway, something with a consistent strength. What I had in mind was things like foxglove, hyssop, coltsfoot—I've got seeds in the freezer for a lot of stuff out of Culpepper's that I never got around to growing and using. Doctor Abrabanel will probably recognize a lot of them."

"I think we might have to put you on the town payroll," Mike offered.

But Tom shook his head. "You've got some regular pharmacists in town. One of them probably still has all his old compounding manuals, and between him, the chemistry teacher, Rebecca's dad, and the lab at the High, you've got more expertise and equipment than I have. This—" he waved his hand at the piled-up bricks in the back of the cart. "This is a public service. It costs me a little time. Grantville's giving me juice and help with the greenhouse when I need it, and the kids and I are getting medical and dental and that's enough. I'm no good at fighting, never was, so I'm useless for community defense. You've got to have analgesia and anesthetic, whisky isn't good enough, and since I'm not toting a gun, I owe it to the rest of you to do this as my share."

Mike Stearns laughed, and the Doc snorted. "You really *are* a holdover hippie, aren't you?"

"No income," Klaus said, gloomily.

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The kids came home from school to find him moping around, puttering in the greenhouse with some defrosted foxglove seeds. Frank unbent enough to give his old man an awkward hug. He looked just like his father had at the same age—skinny, puppy-dog eyes—well, except for the hair. Instead of Tom's mane, his boy had a buzz-cut, something that *he* couldn't understand. . . .

"We heard about it, Pop," he said, without specifying *it*. "Wish we could do something to help. Magdalena's pretty cool, I think she'd make a great stepmom."

"Stepmom, heck," Gerry said, a wistful expression on his round, freckled face. "She can *cook*."

Tom's throat ached, and his chest felt squeezed with misery. What kind of cruel fate was it for him to find his soulmate four hundred years in the past, only to have her wrenched away from him? And the worst irony of all of this was that up until the moment that Tom had evidenced interest, Magdalena had been the "unwanted" spinster-daughter of her family—a victim of her times. Betrothed three times, all three of her husbands-to-be had met with nasty demises, and after that, a combination of a lack of suitors that met her father's rigorous standards and the reputation for being a romantic jinx kept her on the shelf.

Stupid, that was—she was clever, sweet-natured, attractive, and exceedingly well educated—the fact that she was over thirty shouldn't have mattered. They'd met quite by accident; she'd come along with her father when a group of guildmasters from Jena arrived as a trade delegation and Faramir had volunteered his old man to act as a guide for a small group that included her.

He'd never believed in love at first sight, and this wasn't it. It was, however, the attraction of kindred souls. Love came later. Not *much* later, but later.

And the irony was that if he'd just listened to *her* and let *her* handle her father, they'd be scheduling a wedding right now. *She* liked the commune, liked the boys, wasn't afraid of hard work, rather admired his public-spirited attitude—irony of ironies, because of *his wardrobe*, her father had *thought* he was

rich. If he'd just let *her* handle it. . . .

"I dunno why you got as far as you did with her old man," Ron said callously, helping himself to a tomato—teenage boys took a lot of filling. "I mean, we're trailer-trash compared to the Edelmenn family."

"Believe it or not, it was my T-shirts," he sighed. "Dyes like that, only the rich can afford—"

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And that was when it hit him, and why it had taken so long, he couldn't imagine—except, maybe, that the Adventure of the Tie Dyed Festival Shirts had been something so traumatic that he had repressed the memory.

"Pop—" Frank said warningly. "If you're thinking what I think you're thinking—remember what happened the last time!"

"Yeah," Ron chimed in. "People want their shirts colored, not themselves!"

Which was what had happened, after a sudden heavy rain shower . . . rainbow-colored customers, dripping dye all over their pants, their cars, their friends. Not good. Not good at all. Lothlorien had folded the tent and snuck out the back way, leaving behind a lot of angry people looking for someone to strangle with tie-dyed rope.

The dyes got stored, the remaining shirts distributed among the rest of the commune, and no one, *no one* talked about it anymore.

"Yeah, but there's two things different this time—the big one being that I'm *not* stoned. Come on, give me a hand, let's see if the dyes are still any good!"

If they weren't—well, he still had some ideas, and he could not believe that no one else in Grantville had realized the profit-making potential lying around unused and dusty in the grocery, the hardware-store, and the pharmacy, *all* of whom had their own little racks of commercial dyes that no one had even *looked* at. This might work. This just might work!

"Mordants," he explained, as they headed for the barn, the loft of which formed the main storage facility for all the assorted flotsam and jetsam, useless for all practical purposes but too good to throw out. "That's what we need. Mordants."

"Sounds like an RPG villain," said Frank, holding open the barn door.

"Mordants are the things that chemically bind dye to fiber," he explained. "That was where I went wrong. I forgot about mordants." Then, shamefacedly, and because he had a policy of always being honest with his kids, "Actually, I was too stoned to remember about mordants."

That was when the unexpected happened, the thing that made every bit of the pain he'd gone through in the last several years worthwhile. Frank grabbed his elbow and stopped him.

"Pop," he said, looking straight into his father's eyes (when had he gotten so tall?), his own honest brown ones the image of Tom's own, "Pop, you have not once, in the past fifteen years, been *stoned*. Don't think we haven't noticed. Once in a while, about half as often as most guys' dads drink a six-pack, you've been a little buzzed. Never when we needed you. Maybe the rest of the town thinks you're a dooper, but *we* know better. Always have. You've been a damn fine dad, as good as the best, and better than most. No shit."

He was very, very glad for the whole honesty-policy then, because he honestly broke down and cried, and *they* cried, and everyone hugged. Then the kids got embarrassed and covered it by punching each other, he had to break it up, and they all went up into the loft to check on those dyes.

"The main problem is that I know what a mordant *is* and what it *does*," he continued, as he passed boxes of giant wooden beads back to Gerry, "But I don't actually know what any of them *are*."

"How hard can that be to figure out, Pop?" Gerry retorted. "After all, you made LSD in the sixties!" He screwed up his freckled face in a caricature of bliss. "Oh wow—like, taste the colors, man!"

Tom straightened, indignant. "I will have you know that LSD was a *sacrament*, not a—a—"

"Whatever." Gerry shrugged, and took the box out of his hands. "The point is, how hard can it be?"

* * *

"Alum?" the town pharmacist looked at him with a puzzled and peculiar expression. "Yeah, I have alum. Why?"

"I want it. All of it," Tom replied, trying to look casual. "I've got a project. And I'll swap you a dozen eggs for every pound."

He'd already sent the boys around to corral every packet of dye and every bottle of food coloring in town. He'd decided, given the slim state of the family funds, he had to confide his plan to a few select movers-and-shakers. It was going to cost him later, in ten percent of the profit, but it was worth it.

A couple of days of research later—some of it in some pretty odd places, like historical novels—and he had his answer. The easiest mordant to get hold of and the safest to use was alum; alum had the added advantage that he could get more of it in the here-and-now once the last of the Grantville supply was used up.

A little dickering later, and he had his alum. And one more thing, his secret weapon—Magdalena.

His local fiber expert. She knew what he didn't—about fibers and dyeing, textiles and fabric, what would be profitable and what wouldn't. *She* suggested that he produce embroidery thread, *not* dyed fabric as he had originally planned. The town's relatively small stock of such things—Grantville hadn't had a hobby store—was long since exhausted by hundreds of color-starved handcrafters. Old clothing was being picked apart for the colored *threads*, for heaven's sake! If he could produce brilliantly colored, color-fast embroidery thread—he'd soon be as rich as her father had first thought he was.

That was what Magdalena said, anyway, and this time, he was going to let *her* run the show. Along with everything else in the loft had been skein after skein of fine cotton thread, bought surplus and mill-end, undyed cream and white and beige, meant to be used in a knitting machine that no one had ever been able to figure out. The machine itself was rusted into an unusable whole, but the cartons of thread had been right up there next to the boxes of dye. Later, Magdalena said, they would use fine-spun wool or linen, but this was going to be more than enough to prove to Herr Edelmann that Thomas Stone *was* going to be able to support a guildmaster's daughter, and any future offspring, in the style to which she was accustomed.

Two hours later, dye-pots a-bubbling, the games began.

The pigments were too precious to waste *any*, and dye-lots were not precisely an issue in the seventeenth century. The barn became a drying shed, with the bolts of cord from the macrame-business serving as clothesline, strung back and forth between the walls at just above head-height. When the bubbling pot held only dregs that wouldn't even produce a pastel, Tom went on to the next color, so that a literal spectrum spread itself across the twine. By the time he went to bed, exhausted, the barn was full—the barn floor looked like Jackson Pollock had come for an extended stay—and the tests he'd run on every new batch had proved that the dyes were *as* colorfast as anything contemporary, and more so than most.

He fell into bed, and for the first time in a week, really slept.

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Edelmann didn't speak English; he left that up to his underlings, so Tom had recruited the sour and cynical Klaus. Somehow—he didn't ask how—Magdalena had persuaded her father to drive them all out to the commune in the Edelmann's own carriage. She and her father sat on the bench across from them; Magdalena with her eyes cast down and a deceptively demure expression on her face, her father wearing a frown. From time to time, he uttered something for Klaus to translate.

"He says dat he does not need to see dis farm to know it iss not sufficient to change hiss mind," Klaus would dutifully repeat in English. "He has done this as a favor to Magdalena, to make her be seeing dat dis iss impossible." Or, "Herr Stearns hass spoke vell uff you, but vords vill not support a wife."

After each such disparaging comment, Magdalena would murmur something to her father that Klaus did not trouble to translate. Klaus's glum expression would have dampened the spirits of a manic on the upswing, but Tom was armored in his secret, and kept smiling, something that clearly puzzled Herr Edelmann.

Edelmann's expression of disapproval changed only once in the walk from the yard to the barn, and that was when he dismounted from the carriage and was confronted with the dome. It clearly took him aback—but he recovered quickly. "A man would go mad, liffing in such a place," he muttered, according to Klaus's dutiful translation.

Finally, they reached the barn, where all three boys waited, wearing their best—or at least, their brightest—outfits. Here Tom paused to make his own little speech.

"Guildmaster," he said, speaking slowly, giving Klaus plenty of time to make a thorough translation, "I can understand completely why you felt that I was not worthy of your beautiful and gracious daughter, whom God has endowed with so many gifts."

Behind Edelmann's back, Gerry made a gagging face. Tom ignored him.

"But there is one thing that you may not understand yet about Americans," he continued. "And that is that we all live by the proverb, 'Where there is a will, there is a way.' I vowed that I would find a way to prove to you that I *am* worthy of her. I swore that I would *make* myself worthy of her. I pledged that before I asked you a second time for her hand, I would *have* the means, not only to support her, but to impress you with my ability to rise to exceed anything you could demand of me in order to win her. And here, Guildmaster, are the first fruits of my labors—"

Frank and Ronald flung open the barn doors. He'd run an extension cord out there, and set up a couple of flood-lights, which now played on the display that he and the boys had set up for maximum effect.

The drying cords had been restrung, so that instead of lacing back and forth the length of the barn, they went back and forth between the walls from floor to ceiling. And draped over the cords, skein after skein of the dyed cotton thread, forming an entirely new wall of color. He'd used up all of the cotton, though he'd only made a dent in the amount of dye he had stockpiled.

Edelmann stared. Klaus stared. Magdalena looked up at last, and smiled into Tom's eyes, and his heart turned over in his chest. There was a long silence.

Then Edelmann stepped forward and reached for one of the skeins to examine it closely. Slowly he began to ask questions. Was the color impervious to wetting? How quickly would it fade? Was this all of the thread, or did he have more? Was this all of the dye? Tom fielded the technical questions with ease, having been coached by Magdalena in what her father would probably ask. Questions about marketing the thread, he left to her to answer, which she did. Her father didn't seem to notice.

Evidently he was so used to being managed that it didn't impinge on his conscious mind anymore.

Finally, silence again. And when Guildmaster Edelmann turned back to face them, he was wearing an entirely different expression than the one he'd arrived here with.

"Also," he said. "Ja, gut. Und wann moechten Ihr beiden heiraten?"

Tom didn't need Klaus's translation for that. Magdalena's shining blue eyes were enough.

Preliminary negotiations over, Tom handed his betrothed back into the carriage, following her father, and waved at them until the vehicle was out of sight.

Boxes of thread adorned the top of the carriage; samples to go back to Jena with her father. He pretended he knew what he was doing, all the time basically repeating what Magdalena had coached him to tell her father, while she sat modestly out of earshot in the carriage, pretending that she hadn't any idea what was going on between the men.

Magdalena was going to take care of negotiating the sale of this first batch, and Tom was perfectly content to leave that part of it up to her. He *knew* he didn't have a head for business, and she clearly did.

"Well, Pop, what are you going to do for an encore?" Ronald asked, when the carriage was gone.

"Another batch with wool instead of cotton—or maybe linen," he said, vaguely, still basking in the roseate glow of knowing that Magdalena was his, *his!*

"Yeah, but the dye we've got isn't going to last forever," Ronald persisted. "Probably not even a year, so what are you going to do for an encore?"

"What'dye think? He'll come up with something!" Frank countered, punching Ronald's arm. "After all, he made LSD by the gallon in the sixties! How hard can it be to come up with dye?"

"Dammit, I didn't make it by the gallon, it was a *sacra*—" he began, but all that reading up on dyes and mordants was still in the forefront of his mind, and Ronald's question suddenly made his brain lurch down another path.

Coal-tar dyes . . . Victorian coal-tar dyes . . . ummm. Reds, purples, good god, mauve! Damn! What a great way to get Porter to put a smoke-scrubber on the power-plant stack, a profit out of selling me the acid and the tars! Eco-sound and profitable! Oh, man that's not all—coal-tar salve, microscopy stains—Doc will canonize me—by god, I'm going to convert Grantville to Green yet!

He heard himself start to chuckle with glee, and the boys stopped their roughhousing to stare at him.

"You're right!" he said cheerfully, lengthening his steps into a stride as he headed for the dome, already planning his next course of research. "I made LSD in the sixties! How much harder can it be?"