

City of Chimeras

by Richard Bowes

1.

Salome's hand is the hinge and John the Baptist's head is the hammer on the door knocker at the Studio Caravaggio. I slam the brass head held by its brass hair on the door a few times before the spy slot on the iron door opens and closes.

To mortal eyes here in the Middle World even a half-breed Fey like me can appear a bit translucent, with his hands and hair trailing away like phosphorous. In my case most of that is the effect of Prince Calithurn's Glamour having rubbed off on me. But at this address I'm recognized and expected. Though since I've come on time, I am by local standards early to the point of madness.

Just then I feel the probe of another mind. By instinct I block it. Some nuances of the Tall Elves' politics, such as the natural antipathy of king and heir, father and son, I easily understand. It's why my lover, Prince Cal and I had to flee to Gotham.

Recently certain ones have appeared here who can scan and probe as well as Calithurn. These newcomers mean us no good. This time, however, it's Prince Cal himself scanning, and I let him make contact.

"Enemies from this world and Faery are at my throat," he announces in full dramatic flight. *"Though my father has abandoned me, his enemies have not. My cousins from the South and their friends from the West are closing in. I need you by my side, Jackie Boy."*

I am the bastard son of The Knight of Wands, but I was raised by my mortal mother and had no contact with either the fairy courts or the lands of men. The twists and feuds of the Fey are a mystery I have little interest in solving.

A half-breed with half a talent, I can block probes but I have no ability to reply. In any case there hasn't been much I've wanted to say to Calithurn lately. The fairy folk neither laugh nor cry. I inherited that from my father. I didn't cry when he abandoned my mother and me. And I don't cry for love gone cold.

I know there's time before I need to be back beside him. Part of my half-Fey birthright is the gift of Foretelling. And even in the worst future I have seen, he won't depart this mortal city until this afternoon.

The studio door swings open. Power is out in the city and, seen from out here in the silver morning sunlight, the interior of the studio looks like a dark cavern.

The gate keeper is a mortal, young naturally in this house, a girl I am certain. What I had thought last time was short, feathery gold hair I see now is short gold feathers that cover her head, legs, and arms. A small russet robe is draped over the rest of her body.

She steps aside, saying, "He's still in bed," and indicates the way. I seem to see this city through a silk scrim, and between the moment that someone speaks and when I hear their words, there is a few seconds' gap.

The skylights above are dirty; most of the tall windows are curtained. In a jumble of costumes and props, I make out a green and silver farthingale, an amber and blue doublet and hose tossed over a pool table, a Wehrmacht helmet hung on the high back of a wooden throne. A sudden shaft of sun points up a blue and white pattern of pagodas and willow trees on a stretch of tiled wall.

As I approach the Japanese privacy screens at the far end of the studio, a spaniel with the eyes of a child barks and backs up. A naked boy with a V of reddish hair on his chest is flushed from behind the screens and scuttles out of my path, one hand half concealing his crotch, the other clutching a donut. Green eyes and white teeth flash in what might be a fox's smile or snarl. I think I can hear the click of his nails on the floor.

Since I first saw him here, I have been curious about the fox boy. I calculate that, by the reckoning of the middle Earth, I'm in my early twenties and he's a year or so younger. But time has already put a mark or two on him. As a half-Fey, I am untouched and forever young.

I part two screens and look inside. On his huge, disorderly bed, half covered with a sheet, lies a large man with a big belly, dark hair on his face and body, thin hair on his head. Scars new and old: the jagged ones on his left shoulder and chest are more recent rough repairs of knife or broken bottle wounds. Neat laser traces on the knee outside the sheet indicate sleek, old-fashioned replacement surgery.

The artist who calls himself Caravaggio is half awake. "Jackie Boy, all ethereal and flickering," he says focusing his eyes on me. I don't much like that nickname and he knows it. In the land of the Fey, Jackie Boy is a way of indicating my half human status. In this place, the word boy refers not to age so much as lack of money and position.

"Getting awakened by an angel is not necessarily a good sign." He sits up with a groan with the sheet still around him. "Nope, still alive. Everything hurts."

"You said you had something to show me."

"Well, to show you and your lord. I was hoping against hope that he would stop by," he says, and stumbles out of bed with a rueful smile. I see in the man's eyes what I believe is his desire for Calithurn.

It seems my lord has conquered this mortal artist, this pot bellied man whose scars are the most interesting thing about his body. Some passions aren't even forlorn wishes. And I think that the one he has for Calithurn qualifies.

The sheet falls away and the fox boy, now in the loose boxer shorts that are often all the clothing a street urchin wears, reappears from the dusk. He holds out a dark green hooded robe into which Caravaggio inserts his arms without looking. The fox and I may be about the same age, but I am a young man with connections and a bit of money. I've started wearing silk drawers in the same style as his under my riding breeches. But a boy like the fox probably owns not much more than the knee-length shorts he has on.

The kitchen, I know, lies through a nearby door. From there comes the smell of coffee and toasting bread and the sound of an alto singing a chant. That singer is joined by a husky not quite human voice, way off key. Laughter follows, and silence.

Half walking, half stomping, flicking switches and cursing when they don't respond, Caravaggio makes his way across the floor until we reach the screening area. There he touches a wall panel and a small generator hums up on the roof. The alto from the kitchen, with fur as black as a panther's, chants as he brings out large mugs of coffee.

The artist hits a couple of buttons and on a screen before us is an old map of Gotham. The magic island between two rivers lies at the center, with New Jersey and the outer boroughs around the edges. Then the map tears open and a winged horse with a rider in gold armor leaps through: Prince Calithurn.

No such event has actually taken place, of course. My lord is not in the habit of intentionally performing circus stunts.

The screen fades to a tumbledown street where Cal, impossibly tall and semi-translucent, seems to disappear into the broad daylight, only to flicker back into sight as he speaks to a crowd: "We will take what is best from here and what is best from the Kingdom Beneath The Hill. We will make of these a new realm on Earth..."

This actually did happen. It was during our first days here. The prince was cheered by mobs of people who were looking for a hero of any kind

That was when I first spotted Caravaggio and his camera. The crowd, when the camera pans it, is colorful; one or two sporting wings where there should be arms, a couple with faces that slip between human and animal. But everyone, human and chimera alike, is enraptured, a rabble willing to be roused.

Then on screen I see that the almost ethereal Calithurn, without missing a beat, has his sword in his hand. The blade twirls in the air, cuts in two a man with a drawn pistol. This also happened but not on the same day, nor in the same place.

The artist says, "I need so little from you and your prince to tell my story. Just a few samples. Computers will do the rest."

On the screen is a large room where the only light is coming through the windows, a place of dark split by areas of sunlight full of girls and boys with bare feet, knees and torsos, but who wear raffish feathered hats, elbow length gauntlets, belts with daggers.

These young ruffians watch, half mocking and half in awe, as an angel in gold and jewels, brushed leather jacket and polished knee boots, suede knickers and a flowing silk shirt, his hair a halo, his ringed fingers trailing away like phosphorus, stands before a tough man in a battered motorcycle jacket and says, "I summon you in the name of my Lord Calithurn."

The man is Caravaggio himself, sporting a beard that he doesn't have. The angel is me, standing where I never stood and saying what I have never said: all of this through the worldly magic of cameras and computers.

"This is the look I'm driving for, the film I'm striving to create," he says. "One where men at their worktables are summoned to greatness by angels while their pretty little friends look on, amazed."

As he says that I look at the crowd of urchins and realize that not only am I the angel but I am also one of the street boys. "I especially like the look of you all bare and informal like that," he says, and gives a raucous laugh at my evident surprise.

I pretend to ignore him but all of this startles me. That image is as real as any of my dreams. Foretelling is a skill of the Fey in which some of us have visions of possible futures. This disheveled mortal may have a magic at least as great.

Suddenly the power comes back on in Gotham and all around us in the studio the mysterious shapes and muted colors are revealed to be broken furniture, piles of tattered costumes, and random accumulations of junk.

My host turns and shouts, "Dowse them!" The black figure moves gracefully, humming, smiling, flicking switches, until we are back in a circle of artificial light.

"Turn this way, you creature of another world," the artist says, viewing me through a lens. "Yes, that expression is perfect for an angel. Polite impatience."

To mortals here on their Earth the Fey, even half-breeds, are creatures of wonder and, they hope,

salvation. Caravaggio calls himself a director, an auteur. What he is, at least in part, is a scavenger of images. Scavenging is the local industry.

"What you saw is what I finished yesterday," Caravaggio says. "I'm going to play it by ear and eye. Since I don't know what Calithurn and you have planned.

"Please tell him," he says, "that I'll go wherever he wishes for as much or as little a time as he has to spare me. I'll immortalize him. People will flock to him. He will be a hero, a mayor, a president, a king."

He pauses. "You're impressed by my impudence."

I'd come here this morning to see if what he had done was good enough for him to be entrusted with showing Lord Calithurn to the mortal world. "I'm impressed," I tell him. "I want you with me and with Calithurn today. If you agree we'll go to him right now."

He jumps up immediately. "I can have my rig packed and ready in a few minutes. Bring my crew..."

"No. This could be dangerous and it will be hard. Just you and that camera you had that first day. Get ready!"

He gives me an angry look but selects a camera, goes through the contents of a canvas bag, grabs items and stuffs them in. Then he pulls on pants, steps into sandals, flips the hood on his robe over his head, and shambles towards the door.

In the land of the Fey, fairy/mortal mongrels like me live in the Maxee, the demimonde that has grown up around the Kingdom Beneath the Hill. We never grow old but are never admitted to the true Elven lands.

Cross-breed here has another meaning. The sly-faced boy who has just made Caravaggio's bed and now sits on it cross-legged, smiling at me as I depart, the black-as-night alto, the feathered girl who opens the door to let us out, are by-blows of the chimera craze that possessed this city in the years before the bombs and the earthquake. Genetic manipulation was illegal and thus enticing.

The day is growing warm. On the street, small bare children play in the water spraying from a busted fire hydrant. For a moment I am caught, reminded of doing that back in the Maxee.

Suddenly a bicyclist, a youth whose red skin blends with his entire wardrobe of scarlet silk drawers and the red bandana on his head, rides through the spray, sending shrieking children and drops of water in all directions. His lizard eyes flicker my way.

Longingly I watch him speed down the broken street. The Maxee too had wild boys of a sort, but I was the child of a Fey and so was kept a bit apart. I thought about them and envied them their lack of status when I was a child.

Caravaggio looks at the bicyclist and at me and seems amused. I think this whole city is a hunting ground for him. I picture Caravaggio when the want assails him, going out and snagging a partridge girl or cat boy and carrying them indoors to dress a set, to warm a bed.

Heads turn as we hurry along the buckled sidewalks of this devastated but vital place. I hear someone murmur, "The devil steps out with an angel." And I see us reflected in a broken pane of glass: him stomping along as if he has hooved feet and me glowing like a minor sun.

My companion calls out, "Morning, Al. Morning, Flo," to the couple opening the soup kitchen on the corner. Under his breath he identifies them to me: "Albert Schweitzer and Florence Nightingale."

It still amazes and amuses me, all these mortals with immortal names. Jimi Hendrix, one-eyed and white-haired, plays guitar and sings old songs on the street. Calamity Jane collects scrap metal in a big truck that's mostly scrap metal itself. John Henry rides shotgun for her.

Then I hear rolling thunder from further uptown and realize that once again I've allowed myself to be distracted by this city

Suddenly I am probed by a stranger. I block and get probed again. They're trying to see what I see, to find out where I am. Immediately after that, I receive a command from Calithurn. "*Jack, get back here, now!*"

At that same moment there is a yellow flash and Lionel Standler appears at the wheel of his cab. With a dead cigar stub in his mouth and a cap pulled down over his eyes, Lionel too has taken a name from the legendary past: the original was an actor who played cab drivers in old movies.

Standler is the chauffeur for the House of Calithurn. I told him to stay out of sight after he drove me down here this morning. I help Caravaggio haul himself into the back seat and jump in beside him as the cab takes off.

Deftly swerving around pits in the street, jumping only once onto the sidewalk to avoid a fresh rubble heap on Eighth Avenue, Lionel rolls towards the park and the Palace Calithurn.

The city, Gotham, is a hodgepodge of trash built on the ruins of wonders. Wherever two streets cross, at least one of the four buildings on the corners will have been reduced to a pile of rubble years ago and left that way. The lights go off at odd hours of the day and night.

Old men with lined faces and beards point up to where silver spires once pierced the sky. Women can be gotten to talk of the wonderland of stores that existed here in their youth. They sit on broken benches in a park where an arch has collapsed and a gibbet stands ready and waiting. They say that at night music could once be heard from the open doors of a thousand clubs and blasting out of car radios, and that musicians played on subway platforms under the streets.

The life I lived in the Maxee was not so far removed from the ones I see around me. My mother came from that powerful and prosperous Gotham decades ago in human terms; years as the Fey reckon it.

In Elfland she met and lost my father, a Fey who rose to high rank and deserted us. She owned The Careless Rapture, a café in the Maxee district, and left it to me when she died.

It was there that Calithurn found me when he was having trouble with his father, Clathurin, the King Beneath the Hill. He hid out in my bedroom upstairs from the café when the King's officers were looking for him.

I had visions of the two of us in Gotham. We rode through cheering crowds; we two alone stood confident and defiant, facing our enemies on a rain-swept hill.

They were like scenes from the legends. It seemed that I had a map of our future. I was the only one he took with him when he fled from that place of well-ordered magic and quiet oppression to the gut-wrenching stench and glimpses of grandeur, the chaos and chimeras of the mortal world and the city of Gotham.

Remembering those images as we bounce over the pavement, I see myself in high summer with the fox boy and some of the others from the studio. We are on a sidewalk, walking down to the river. I am dark-tanned, not ethereal in the least, dressed as in Caravaggio's film in nothing but my street boy shorts

and the blue bandana tied around my head.

Visions like this I don't share with Cal. And as I've withheld more from him, blocked his access to my mind, he has become more mistrustful. Prince Calithurn has told me many times that we will not go back; surrender does not enter into it. We will face death right here, the two of us, together always. I no longer think he really believes this. And in the future I foresee, that obviously hasn't happened.

What magic I have is passive. Prepared for troubles today, I wear my favorite Fey clothing and my most precious ornaments and jewelry. I have a wallet with sixty thousand dollars in local currency in the pouch pocket of my riding breeches. In my jacket pocket is a rap gun that can knock down ten men at fifty paces. In my right boot is a jump knife that will come to my hand from three feet away.

2.

From a few blocks away, I can see the Palace Calithurn bathed in Glamour and the noonday sun. Flecks of light, like bits of diamonds, shine in the black stone surface. The flags of the prince, a silver unicorn leaping over a blue globe with the inscription in Elvish *I Invite Your Envy*, fly in a constant magic breeze above the turrets.

Lionel stops when I tell him to. "There may be trouble. Keep out of sight," I say. "Be ready to take Caravaggio back to his studio."

When the earth moved and the city fell, some parts that were built on solid rock or saved through fate stood while all else went down. The big old buildings that remain on the west side of the overgrown park are like armed forts, like compounds, where the magnates of the city live.

It was through Calithurn's cleverness, or the kind of instinct for ruling that he'd inherited from his father, that he had ensorcelled this palace among the castles of the wealthy and powerful. Almost as soon as we arrived, he took a devastated building, not much more than a pile of rubble, and through magic and enchantment raised this breath-taking, infuriating place.

It lies so close to the headquarters of the Bank of Shanghai, which owns the city's future, and to the home of Santee, the boss who makes and unmakes mayors, that no one dares to assault it or bomb it from the air. A tank lying smashed in the street is testimony to mortal frailty and the eternal vigilance of Lord Calithurn.

Caravaggio pauses for a moment pointing his camera up. "Chutzpah," he mutters. "Hubris. Balls beyond those of mortal men."

As we approach the front gates, the building shimmers for a moment. Only I notice that the Fey Glamour has faltered.

The guards who keep back the constant throngs of favor seekers and gawkers call themselves Fess Parker and John Wayne. Parker is a tall thin man in buckskin and a raccoon cap, one blue eye squinting against the sun, the other wide and clear. He cradles an AK47. The other man is husky, hands like hammers, guns strapped on both hips. His eyes are hidden in the shadow of his Stetson brim. But Wayne telegraphs in his blunt, artless way that he's staring at your every move.

They nod, almost bow, to me and wave along my companion who pauses to film them. We pass through the gates into the courtyard where the magic horses, Bellerophon and Callisto, snort and flap their wings.

Not two months ago, Cal and I rode these chimeras out of Elfland and into this city. I argued back then

that we should let them go home and make ourselves inconspicuous, live among the people and get some sense of this place. Cal would have none of this. He is a prince. So we lived in this palace he wrought and we made ourselves known and envied.

After that first assault failed, the magnates of the city didn't dare attack us. But there were those in Elfland, enemies of his father, who were happy to find the prince alone except for his half-breed boyfriend. At first Calithurn slapped them away. Now they have returned in numbers.

Inside, on the main stairs, Selesta sweeps past us, her small ears drawn back, and hisses her defiance. An actress, a singer, Calithurn's newest mistress, she still thinks that I'm jealous when all I am is disappointed. About his favorites of the moment, Cal told me, "Mortal toys, Jack, nothing more."

Whereas I, only part mortal, would count as only partly a toy.

I hear what sounds like distant thunder. The palace gives a small lurch and I see us again, Calithurn and myself, just the two of us standing with our horses on a hill with wind and rain and our enemies all around us.

We find Cal in the roof garden, sprawled on the longest couch in all of Gotham. He stands and embraces me and for a moment, with his golden hair and dark eyes, he is the lover I first knew, the one who could suddenly appear swinging in my bedroom window and who, when he departed, would stride across the dawn sky waving farewell.

We came to middle Earth, to this city, to form an alliance with the wronged and desperate mortals. With them, we said, we would return to the land of the Fey and break the hold of Clathurin, the King Beneath the Hill and the father of Cal. Our idea was naïve and dangerous.

Where all was sunshine a few minutes before, clouds have rolled in. I find myself deflecting a mental probe from not that far away, and then another. These aren't attempts to communicate. The Fey who have reached out are trying to smash their way into my consciousness.

Calithurn's eyes flicker and I know he's feeling the same thing. Then he closes his eyes and with arms outstretched, turns 360 degrees. Briefly the probes cease, the sky lightens.

I'd forgotten about Caravaggio. But he's still present, still filming. I turn to introduce him. And I realize that I got something wrong in this strange land. What he feels toward Prince Calithurn isn't lust but jealous envy.

Calithurn doesn't misunderstand. His lip curls. He shows the two of us a house in a neighborhood of similar houses, a fat, fairly happy looking little boy on a tricycle, an ordinary couple smiling at what is obviously their child.

As we see the images we are told: "*Louis Falco, born in Bethpage fifty years ago, child of a civil servant and a dentist. They never understood why you took the name Caravaggio. You blight this world. Turn that camera off or you and it will be a puddle on the floor.*"

I catch the anger in Caravaggio's eyes, the contempt in Calithurn's glance, and step between them. With my lord in such a mood, expressing his rage would be fatal for the mortal.

At that moment, the attack begins again. Thunder rolls and lightning splits the sky. One probe after another hits us. This distracts Calithurn enough that his Glamour, the magic that holds the palace together, flickers. I hear the building groan.

"We need to get everybody out before people are hurt," I say. "We're drawing fire and putting them in

danger."

Calithurn shrugs. "It is time we set out on our travels," he says, sounding almost bored.

I yell for the palace to be evacuated and we head for the stairs. The building shakes as we descend. In the courtyard Bellerophon and Callisto stamp and unfurl their wings. Servants stream past. Chunks of stone fall around us. Selesta is there with a suitcase full of what she considers to be valuables. Calithurn mounts Bellerophon and lifts her up without ceremony. I'm on Callisto when the gates open and we canter out into the street.

"Get the people away from this place," I hear myself shouting. Fess Parker and John Wayne and the other guards force the crowds back. The horses spread their wings and glide across the street and into the park.

I hear a roar and a collective gasp and look back. My lord has abandoned his toy. Without his attention, the Palace is gone, disappeared in a cloud of dust. The rubble we first found is all that remains. I spot Caravaggio filming it all.

3.

Entering the park, I know that Calithurn is going back to Elfland and that his time in Gotham has been a kind of royal tantrum, his talk of helping the mortals idle chatter. Cal has been my lover and is my lord. I will be loyal to him and true while he is here. But as I've fallen out of love with him, I've fallen in love with this city.

We pause on a grassy rise and it is somewhat like what the Foretelling showed me. But that was a wilderness and a blasted heath and this is an overgrown park with buildings or the ruins of buildings visible through the trees, with Selesta whimpering and the remains of squatters' camps underfoot.

It's dark, though, with the wind blowing rain as I'd foreseen, and I can see figures, some mounted on winged steeds, in the trees before us. This is the beginning of the road to Elfland and we are not going to get through it without a fight. Cal looks around and it occurs to me that he has run out of ideas and is waiting to be rescued.

Then I'm hit by mental probes, one after another. I've never been punched repeatedly in the face but that's what I think of when I can't block all of them and some get through. I feel bits of memory, my mother's tired smile, my father's constant surprise at his half mortal son, the streets of the Maxee where I grew up, being yanked out of my skull.

Someone catches images from my Foretelling, sees as I saw the pair of us surrounded in the wind and rain. Someone else finds the fear I feel as this happens and twists it. Poor Callisto, whom I'd been trying to protect, gets spooked and rises up in terror, bucks and throws me.

Then I'm on the ground fallen on my right shoulder. There is shooting pain, my limbs are jerking and my head is banging up and down. There's blood in my throat, my left eye is clouded and my shoulder feels as if it's broken.

Cal is standing over me broadcasting dramatically: *"Off of him, you cowards! Who will fight me? Let each of you sons of bitches challenge me one at a time!"*

If against all my visions this is to be the end of us, I want to be on my feet beside him. Then all at once there is a huge bang and bright light. The rain is gone and a great voice bellows, "WHO DARES DO

THIS TO MY SON?"

Cal is silent, staring, and I manage to half rise and look where he does. King Clathurin and all his host are here, thousands of Fey with their armor glittering. Clathurin is a big man, but at this moment he is gigantic.

"STAND FORTH AND FACE ME," he commands and waves his scepter wand. When I look over to the trees, there are bodies strewn about on the grass and none of them are moving.

King Clathurin looks around for a moment then he turns and comes to Prince Calithurn, who steps forward. They embrace and King Clathurin's host raise their weapons in salute.

I struggle to my feet when I see the king walking away with his arm around his son. And I understand that Calithurn's expedition to Gotham was just a way of getting the attention of The King Beneath the Hill.

The presence of so much Glamour makes my eye clear, stops the bleeding in my mouth and the pain in my shoulder.

Cal hasn't even looked back. I'm having trouble thinking. But I understand that if I do return, he and I will not be together. I will live again in the Maxee, the great demimonde, like my mother and all the other past and present lovers of the Fey. I will become one of the local legends. "That half breed was the lover of Calithurn. Long ago, they went off to mortal lands together."

Selesta trails after Lord Calithurn, not understanding that she's already forgotten just as I am. I wonder if my old coffee house, the Careless Rapture, is still there, and if they will think to give it to her.

Would I have gone back with them if King Clathurin had taken me in his arms as he did his son? Probably. But that wasn't going to happen. I am a half-breed who has become inconvenient.

Will I follow Cal if he turns and gestures for me? No. I am going to remain here with the other chimeras.

Then, as suddenly as he appeared, King Clathurin is gone, along with Prince Calithurn and the rest, gone with not a trace of their Glamour left behind.

And I'm alone in this strange land, feeling like the insides have been knocked out of me. The Fey do not laugh and do not cry. I did not cry at my mother's death and I do not cry at this.

It strikes me that the futures I foresaw for Cal and myself may just have been scenes from movies that hadn't yet been made. At that moment, the Foretelling takes me again.

I see myself, framed in river light, dive naked off a ruined pier. It would seem to be late summer, four or five months from this moment. And I'm too dizzy and confused to know what to make of it.

"Jackie, you look like you're lost," I hear Caravaggio say. He's right beside me but sounds like he's far off and under water. "You took quite a fall there."

He turns me around and I see the yellow cab up on the grass. Lionel helps me into the back seat. Caravaggio gets in on the other side and we make a U turn.

"It doesn't seem like he can take care of himself," Lionel says "His boyfriend's got enemies that would love to pick him clean. No doubt waste him."

None of this feels like it has anything to do with me. We drive out of the park. A mob of scavengers is crawling over the rubble of the Palace Calithurn, a couple of them spot the cab, one or two have guns.

But Lionel is too fast for them and speeds away.

"I can hide Jackie among the crew at the studio," Caravaggio says. "But we need to make him less noticeable."

"Here's a place." The cab swerves and suddenly it's twilight in an alleyway between two buildings. I notice that Caravaggio has attached a small camera to the cab ceiling. Lionel opens my door of the cab. "OK, Jackie," he says. "Hand over the clothes and valuables."

"Why?" I try to go for the rap pistol.

Caravaggio says, "Because there are two men and a boy in this cab," and pins my arms. Lionel pulls my ibex leather jacket and silk shirt off over my head. There's a burst of pain in my shoulder and I cry out.

"Look at those bruises!" Lionel says.

"Nothing broken anymore or he'd be screaming. He heals fast is my guess. That black eye is fading already. I think maybe there's a bad concussion," says Caravaggio.

As they talk they're working on me. My head spins, pain shoots through my shoulder and I can't stop them. In moments the rings on my fingers, the one my mother gave me, the one that my father owned, are drawn off my hands. My watch and bracelets and earrings and the gold collar around my neck, love gifts of Calithurn, are taken.

"Make a move for that jump knife, Jackie, and I'll break your other arm!" Lionel says. My boots of Elven leather, the hose woven in Moir, the belt with the heavy silver buckle, are stripped off me.

I hold onto the waist of my riding breeches and beg to keep them. Even these knee pants would be a small sign of status and there's the wallet and money in the side pouch. It's just about all I have left.

"I looked forward to doing this," Caravaggio says, and yanks them off me. "And this," he adds riffling through my wallet and papers. Lionel pulls down my undershorts to make sure I haven't got anything else to steal, but he lets me keep them.

"A young man of affairs wearing a small fortune on his back one minute," says Lionel, gathering everything up. "A boy with nothing in the world but his silk drawers the next."

It's a warm day but I understand what's been done to me and feel as if I've been run through with an icicle. Even if I could find the way, I can't go back to Elfland like this, and I have no one here to turn to.

Caravaggio pulls my hair into a tight knot in back, ties a bandanna on my head. He pops open a palm sized screen and shows me the picture the camera is capturing. I'm amazed to see myself as I appeared in the Foretelling.

Caravaggio murmurs, "You think only Fey can read minds, Jackie Boy? I've seen how you looked at my crew, at the boys on the street. You were curious but disdainful. Now you're going to find out about that life first hand."

Driving downtown, Caravaggio speaks softly. "If we hadn't gotten you out of the park, you'd be dead by now. We could have left you in that alleyway and you'd be dead by midnight. You're still alive and I'm going to keep you that way. You're going to learn how to survive in this world."

He has his arm around me and massages my neck as if I'm a nervous show animal. "With what I shot today and my half of the take from what you had on you, I'm going to make the greatest film to come out

of this city in a decade."

I want to ask him why I've been robbed and humiliated and what is going to become of me. Then we arrive outside the studio and Lionel opens the cab door. It seems that in the course of an afternoon I've lost everything and now am nobody. And anyone who sees me from now on will know that. I flinch away and want to hide.

But Caravaggio forces me out onto the sidewalk. "Get used to it, Jackie. I wanted to take everything away from Calithurn. Especially his beautiful, arrogant boy. The first time you ever ordered me around, which was the first time we met, I told Lionel I'd lead you into my studio dressed the way you are right now."

"And I thought you were crazy," Lionel laughs.

Before he leaves he says, "Go easy on him, Caravaggio. He always tried to do right by me and the others."

Caravaggio has hold of my good arm or I'd try somehow to cover myself. I did not cry for my mother or for Lord Calithurn and I do not cry at this, but if I were mortal I think I would.

This world has traps a Fey could never imagine. This morning I strode down this street and heads turned. Now the pavement is rough on my bare feet and I need to watch out for broken glass. In the Foretelling I walk on it easily. But I don't know if that is truly my future or a dream of Caravaggio's.

Ordinary passersby pay almost no attention to one like me. But when the feathered girl opens the door I see in her eyes awe that her boss has magic that can turn an arrogant Fey into this cringing street urchin.

The rest of the chimeras, more than I ever guessed were there, gather as I'm led by the hand through the studio. Some are astounded; some are highly amused that the well-heeled visitor of the morning has returned to the zoo, stripped and bruised, as the newest addition to the menagerie. I hear giggles and whispers as I'm shown to Caravaggio's bed.

In the Foretelling these are my friends and I can look people in the eye. But that's a future possibility. There's more wonder and terror in any square foot of Gotham than in all of Elfland.

Exhaustion is about to take me when I hear Caravaggio say, "His name is Jackie Boy and he's come from a long way off to find his true home among us." Then he tells the story of how I lost everything I thought I had.