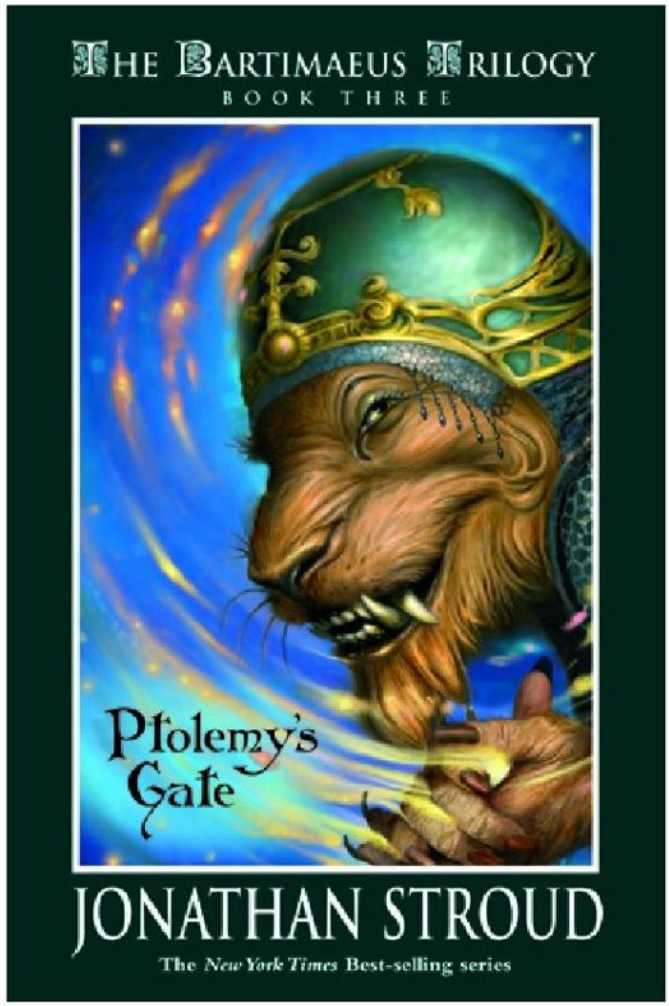

THE

BARTIMAEUS

TRILOGY

BOOK THREE

Ptolemy's Gale

THE

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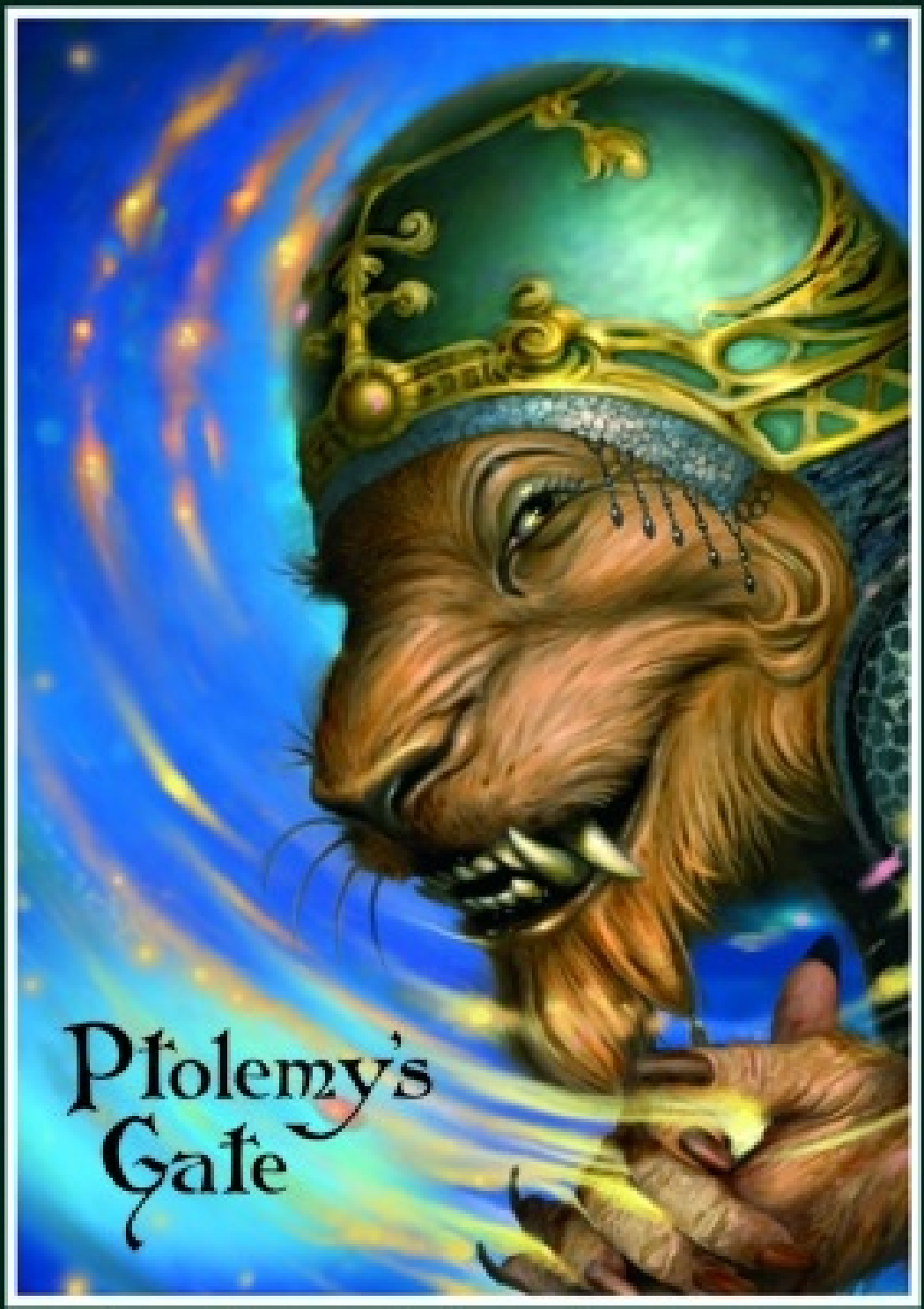

Ptolemy's Gate

JONATHAN STROUD

The *New York Times* Best-selling series

THE

BARTIMAEUS

TRILOGY

BOOK THREE

Ptolemy's Gale

THE

BARTIMAEUS

TRILOGY

B O O K T H R E E

Ptolemy's Gate

JONATHAN STROUD

M IR A M A X B O O K S

H Y P E R IO N B O O K S F O R C H IL D R E N

N E W Y O R K

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114 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10011-5690.

First Edition

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed in the United States of America

This book is set in 12-point Bembo.

Reinforced binding

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data on file.

ISBN 0-7868-1861-1

Visit

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For Isabel e, with love

The Main Characters

THE MAGICIANS

P r i m e M i n i s t e r o f G r e at B r i t ai n

M r . R u p e r t D e v e r e au x

an d t h e E m p i r e , an d ac t i n g C h i e f

o f P o l i c e

M r . C ar l M o r t e n s e n

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ForeignMinister

Ms.JessicaWhitwell

SecurityMinister

Mr.BruceCollins

HomeSecretary

Mr.JohnMandrake

InformationMinister

Ms.JaneFarrar

DeputyPoliceChief

Mr. QuentinMakepeace

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otherworks

Mr. HaroldButton

Magician, scholar, andbookc olector

Mr. SholtoPinn

Amerchant; proprietorofPin n's Accoutrements

of P ic c ad il y

M r . C l i v e J e n k i n s

M ag ic ian S ec on d L evel, D e p ar t m e n t o f In t e r n al

A f f ai r s

M s . R e b e c c a P i p e r

A s s i s t an t t o M r . M an d r ak e , In f o r mat i o n M i n i s t r y

THE CO MMO NER S

M s . K i t t y J o n e s

A s t u d e n t an d b ar m ai d

Mr. Clem Hopkins

An itinerant scholar

Mr. Nicholas Drew

A political agitator

Mr. George Fox

Proprietor of the Frog Inn, Chiswick

Ms. Rosanna Lutyens

A private tutor

THE SPIRITS

Bartimaeus

Adjinni—inserviceto Mr. Mandrake

Ascobol

Cormocodran

Mwamba

Greaterdjinn—inserviceto Mr. Mandrake

Hodge

Purip

Fritang

Lesserdjinn—inserviceto Mr. Mandrake

Acknowledgments

Mythankstо LauraCecil, Delia Huddy, Alessandra Baker, and Jonathan Burnham; tothelate Rod Hal; and to

everyoneat RandomHouse, Hyperion, and Miramax. And to Gina, mostoffall.

Part One

Alexandria: 125 B.C.

T h e as s as s i n s d r o p p e d i n t o t h e p al ac e g r o u n d s at m i d n i g h t , f o u r f l e e t s h ad o w s d ar k ag ai n s t t h e w al . T h e f al w as

h i g h , t h e g r o u n d w as h ar d ; t h e y m ad e n o m o r e s o u n d o n i m p ac t t h an t h e p att e r i n g o f r ai n . T h r e e s e c o n d s t h e y

c r o u c h e d t h e r e , l o w an d m o t i o n l e s s , s n i f f i n g at t h e ai r . T h e n aw ay t h e y s t o l e , t h r o u g h t h e d ar k g ar d e n s , am o n g t h e

t am ar i s k s an d d at e p al m s , t o w ar d t h e q u ar t e r s w h e r e t h e b o y l ay at r e s t . A c h e e t ah o n a c h ai n s t i r r e d i n i t s s l e e p ; f ar

aw ay i n t h e d e s e r t , j ac k al s c r i e d .

T h e y w e n t o n p o i n t e d t o e - t i p s , l e av i n g n o t r ac e i n t h e l o n g w e t gr ass . T h e i r r o b e s fl i t t e r e d at t h e i r b ac k s , fr ag m e n t i n g

t h e i r s h ad o w s i n t o w i s p s an d t r ac e s . W h at c o u l d b e s e e n ? N o t h i n g b u t l e av e s s h i f t i n g i n t h e b r e e z e . W h at c o u l d b e

heard? Nothingbutthewinds
ighingamongthepalmfronds
. Nosight, nonoise. Acrocod
iledjinni, standingsentryat

thesacredpool, wasundistur
bedthoughtheypassedwithi
nascale's breadthofhistail. F
orhumans, itwasn't badly

done.

Theheatofthedaywasamemo
ry; theairwaschill. Abovethe
palaceacoldroundmoonsh
onedown, slathering

silveracrossthe roofsandco
urtyards.1

1. This was one of the peculiarities of their sect: they acted only when the m oon was ful . I t

m ade their task s m ore difficult, their chal eng e g reater. A nd they had nev er failed. A side from

this, they wore only b lack , av oided m eat, wine, wom en, and the playing of wind instrum ents,

and curiously ate no cheese sav e that m ade from the m ilk of g oats b red on their distant desert

m ountain. B efore each j ob they fasted for a day, m editated b y staring unb link ing at the

g round, then ate sm all cak es of hashish and cum in seed, without water, until their throats

g lowed yellow. I t' s a wonder they ev er k illed anyone.

A w ay b e y o n d t h e w al , t h e g r e at c i t y m u r m u r e d i n t h e n i g h t : w h e e l s o n d i r t r o ad s , d i s t ant l au g h t e r f r o m t h e p l e as u r e

d i s t r i c t al o n g t h e q u ay , t h e t i d e l ap p i n g at i t s s t o n e s . L amp l i g h t s h o n e i n w i n d o w s , e m b e r s g l o w e d o n r o o f h e ar t h s ,

an d f r o m t h e t o p o f t h e t o w e r b e s i d e t h e h ar b o r g at e t h e g r e at

watchfireburneditsmessage outtosea. Its image

dancedlikeimp-lightonthe waves.

Attheirposts, theguardsplayedgamesofchance. Inthepillaredhals, theservantsslepttonbedsofrushes. The

palacegateswerelockedbytriplebolts, eachthickerthanaman. Noeyeswereturnedtothewesterngardens, where

deathcamecaling, secretasascorpion, onfourpairsofsilentfeet.

Theboy'swindowwasonthefirstfloorofthepalace.Fourblackshadowshunchedbeneathethewall.Theleadermade

asignal.Onebyonetheypressedagainstthestonework;onebyonetheybegantoclimb,suspendedbytheir

fingertipsandthenailsoftheirbigtoes.2Inthismannertheyhadscaledmarblecolumnsandwaterfalsoficefrom

MassiliatoHadhramaut;therroughstoneblockswereeasyforthemnow.Uptheywent,likebatsuponacavewal.

M o o n l i g h t g l i n t e d o n b r i g h t t h i n g s g r i p p e d b e t w e e n t h e i r t e e t h .

2 . A ll horrid and curv ed they were, filed sharp lik e eag les' talons. The assassins took g ood care

of their feet, b ecause of their im portance in their work .They were washed freq uently, rub b ed

with pum ice, and m arinated in sesam e oil until the sk in was soft as eiderdown.

T h e f i r s t ' o f t h e as s as s i n s r e ac h e d t h e w i n d o w l e d g e : h e s p r an g t i g e r l i k e u p o n i t an d p e e r e d i n t o t h e c h am b e r .

Moonlightspiledacrossthe room;thepaletwaslitasifby day.Theboylayssleeping,mo tionlessasonealready

dead.Hisdarkhairfellooseu ponthecushions,hispalelam b'sthroatshoneagainstthesil ks.

Theassassintookhisdaggerf rombetweenhisteeth.With quietdeliberation,hesurve yedtheroom,gaugingits

extentandthepossibilityoft raps.Itwaslarge,shadowy,e mptyofostentation.Threepi llarssupportedtheceiling.

In

t h e d i s t an c e s t o o d a d o o r o f t e ak , b ar r e d o n t h e i n s i d e . A c h e s t , h al f f i l e d w i t h c l o t h e s , s at o p e n ag ai n s t t h e w al . H e

s aw a r o y al c h ai r d r ap e d w i t h a d i s c ar d e d c l o ak , s an d al s l y i n g o n t h e f l o o r , an o n y x b as i n f i l e d w i t h w at e r . A f ai n t

t r ac e o f p e r f u m e h u n g o n t h e ai r . T h e as s as s i n , f o r w h o m s u c h s c e n t s w e r e d e c ad e n t an d c o r r u p t , w r i n k l e d h i s n o s e .3

3 . The sect av oided perfum es for practical reasons, preferring to coat

them selv es with scents

appropriate to the conditions of each j ob : pollen in the g ardens, incense in the tem ples, sand-

dust in the deserts, dung and offal in the towns. They were dedicated fellows.

H i s e y e s n ar r o w e d ; h e r e v e r s e d t h e d ag g e r , h o l d i n g i t b e t w e e n f i n g e r an d t h u m b b y i t s s h i n i n g , g l e am i n g t i p . It

q u i v e r e d o n c e , t w i c e . H e w as g au g i n g t h e r an g e h e r e —h e 'd n e v e r m i s s e d a t ar g e t y e t , f r o m C ar t h ag e t o o l d C o l c h i s .

Everyknifehe'dthrownhadfoundits throat.

Hiswristflickered;thesilverarcofthekni fesflightcuttheairintwo.Itlandedwithas oftnoise,hilt-deepinthe

cushion,aninchfromthechild'sneck.

Theassassinpausedindoubt,stilcrouchedu ponthesil.Thebackofhishandsborethecr isscrossscarsthatmarked

himasanadeptofthedarkacademy.Anadeptn evermissedhistarget.Thethrowhadbeene

x ac t , p r e c i s e l y

c al i b r at e d ... y e t i t h ad m i s s e d . H ad t h e v i c t i m m o v e d a c r u c i al f r ac t i o n ? Im p o s s i b l e — t h e b o y w as f as t as l e e p . F r o m

h i s p e r s o n h e p u l e d a s e c o n d d ag g e r .4 A n o t h e r c ar e f u l ai m (t h e as s as s i n w as c o n s c i o u s o f h i s b r o t h e r s b e h i n d and

b e l o w h i m o n t h e w al l : h e f e l t t h e g r i m w e i g h t o f t h e i r i m p at i e n c e) . A f l i c k o f t h e w r i s t , a m o m e n t ar y ar c —

4 . I won' t say where he pul ed it from . L et' s j ust say that the k nife had hyg

iene issues as wel

as b eing q uite sharp.

W i t h a s o f t n o i s e , t h e s e c o n d d ag g e r l an d e d i n t h e c u s h i o n , an i n c h t o t h e other s i d e o f t h e p r i n c e 's n e c k . A s h e s l e p t ,

p e r h ap s h e d r e am e d —a s m i l e t w i t c h e d g h o s t l i k e at t h e c o r n e r s o f h i s m o u t h .

B e h i n d t h e b l ac k g au z e o f t h e s c ar f t h at m as k e d h i s f ac e , t h e as s as s i n f r o w n e d . F r o m w i t h i n h i s t u n i c h e d r e w a s t r i p

o f f ab r i c , t w i n e d t i g h t l y i n t o

a c o r d . In s e v e n y e ar s s i n c e t h e H e r m i t h ad o r d e r e d h i s fi r s t k i l l , h i s g ar r o t e h ad n e v e r

s n ap p e d , h i s h an d s h ad n e v e r f ai l e d h i m .5 W i t h l e o p ar d 's s t e al t h , h e s l i d fr o m t h e s i l an d s t o l e ac r o s s t h e m o o n l i t

f l o o r .

5 . The H erm it of the M ountain trained his followers in num erous m ethods of foolproof m urder.

They could use g arrotes, swords, k niv es, b atons, ropes, poisons, discs, b olas, pellets, and

arrows inim itab ly, as wel as b eing pretty handy with the ev il eye. D eath b y fing ertip and toe-

flex was also taug ht, and the furtiv e nip was a specialty. S tom ach-threads and tapeworm s were

av ailab le for adv anced students. A nd the b est of it was that it was al g uilt-free: each

assassination was j ustified and condoned b y a powerful relig ious disreg ard for the sanctity of

other people' s liv es.

In h i s b e d t h e b o y m u r m u r e d s

omething.Hestirredbeneath hissheet.Theassassinfrozerigid,ablackstatueinthe

centeroftheroom.

Behind,atthewindow,twoofhiscompanionsinsinuatedthemselvesuponthesil.Theywaited,watching.

Theboygavealittlesighandfelsilentoncemore.Helayfaceupamonghiscushions,adagger'shiltprotrudingon

eitherside.

Sevensecondspassed.Theas

s as s i n m o v e d ag ai n . H e s t o l e
ar o u n d b e h i n d t h e c u s h i o n s ,
l o o p i n g t h e e n d s o f t h e c o r d

ar o u n d h i s h an d s . N o w h e w as
d i r e c t l y ab o v e t h e c h i l d ; h e b
e n t s w i f t l y , s e t t h e c o r d u p o n
t h e s l e e p i n g t h r o at —

T h e b o y ' s e y e s o p e n e d . H e r e
ac h e d u p a h an d , g r as p e d t h e as
s as s i n ' s l e f t w r i s t an d , w i t h o
u t e x e r t i o n , s w u n g h i m

h e ad f i r s t i n t o t h e n e ar e s t w al
, s n ap p i n g h i s n e c k l i k e a r e e d
s t al k . H e f l u n g o f f h i s s i l k e n
s h e e t an d , w i t h a b o u n d ,

stoodfree,facingthewindow.

Uponthesil,silhouettedagainstthemoon,twoassassinshissedlikerocksnakes.Theircomrade'sdeathwasan

affronttotheircolectivepride.Onepluckedfromhisrobeapipeofbone;fromacavitybetweenhisteethhesucked

apelet,eggshelthin,filedwithpoison.Hesetthepipetohislips,blewonce:thepeletshotacrosstheroom,

directedatthechild'sheart.

Theboygaveaskip;thepelet shatteredagainstapilar,spat teringitwithliquid.Aplum eofgreenvapordrizzled

throughtheair.

Thetwoassassinsleapedinto theroom;onethisway,theot herthat.Eachnowheldascim itarinhishand;theyspun

themincomplexflourishes abouttheirheads,darkeyess canningtheroom.

Theboywasgone.Theroomw asstill.Greenpoisonnibble datthepilar;thestonesfizze

d w i t h i t .

N e v e r o n c e i n s e v e n y e ar s , f r o m A n t i o c h t o P e r g am u m , h ad t h e s e as s as s i n s l o s t a v i c t i m .6 T h e i r ar m s s t o p p e d

m o v i n g ; t h e y s l o w e d t h e i r p ac e , l i s t e n i n g i n t e n t l y , t as t i n g t h e ai r f o r t h e t ai n t o f f e ar .

6 . A nd they didn' t intend to start now. The H erm it was k nown to b e pretty sniffy ab out disciples

who returned in failure. There was a wall of the institute layered with their sk ins—an ing enious

display that encourag ed v ig or in his students, as wel as nicely k eeping out the drafts.

F r o m b e h i n d a p i l ar i n t h e c e n t e r o f t h e r o o m c am e t h e f ai n t e s t s c u f f l i n g , l i k e a m o u s e f l i n c h i n g i n i t s b e d o f s t r aw .

T h e as s as s i n s g l an c e d at e ac h o t h e r ; t h e y i n c h e d f o r w ar d , t o e -t i p b y t o e -t i p , s c i m i t ar s r ai s e d . O n e w e n t t o t h e r i g h t ,

p as t t h e c r u m p l e d b o d y o f h i s f e l l o w . O n e w e n t t o t h e l e f t , b e s i d e t h e g o l d e n c h ai r , d r ap e d w i t h t h e c l o ak o f k i n g s .

Theymovedlikeghostsaroundthemarginsoftheroom,circlinginuponthepilarfrombothsides.

Behindthepilar,afurtivemovement:aboy'sshapehidingintheshadows.Bothassassinssawit;bothraisedtheir

scimitarsanddartedin,fromleft,fromright.Bothstruckwithmantisspeed.

Adualcry,garglingandragged.Fromaroundthepilarcameastumbling,rollingmessofarmsandlegs:thetwo

assassins,lockedtogetherinatightembrace,eachoneskewereredontheother'sswor d.Theyfelforwardintothepool

ofmoonlightinthecenterofthechamber,twitchedgently,andlayquiet.

Silence.Thewindowsilhungvacant,nothinginitbutthemoon.Acloudpassedacrossthebrightrounddisc,blacking

outthebodiesonthefloor.Thesignalfireintheharbortowercastfaintrednessonthes

k y . A l w as s t i l . T h e c l o u d

d r i f t e d o u t t o s e a , t h e l i g h t r e
t u r n e d . F r o m b e h i n d t h e p i l
ar w al k e d t h e b o y , b ar e f e e t s o
u n d l e s s o n t h e f l o o r , h i s b o d
y

s t i f f an d w ar y , as i f h e s e n s e d a
p r e s s u r e i n t h e r o o m . W i t h c
ar e f u l s t e p s , h e n e ar e d t h e w i
n d o w . S l o w l y , s l o w l y ,

c l o s e r , c l o s e r ... h e s aw t h e s h
r o u d e d m as s o f g ar d e n s , t h e t r
e e s an d s e n t r y t o w e r s . H e n o t
i c e d t h e t e x t u r e o f t h e s i l l ,

t h e w ay t h e m o o n l i g h t c au g h t i

tscontours.Closer...nowhi
shandsrestedonthestoneits
elf.Heleanedforwardto

lookdownintothecourtyard
atthebottomofthewall.Hist
hinwhitethroatextendedout
....

Nothing.Thecourtyardwase
mpty.Thewalbelowwasshee
randsmooth,itsstonespicke
doutbymoonlight.The

boylistenedtothequietness
.Hetappedhisfingersonthes
il,shrugged,andturnedinsi
de.

Thenthefourthassassin,clinginglikeathinblackspidertothestonesabovethewindow,droppeddownbehindhim.

Hisfeetmadethenoiseoffeathersfalingintosnow.Theboyheard;hetwisted,turned.Aknifeflashed,swiped,was

deflectedbyadesperatehand—itsedgeclinkedagainststone.Ironfingersgrappledattheboy'sneck;hislegswere

knockedfromunderhim.Hefel,landinghardupontheflo or.Theassassin'sweightwasonhim.Hishandswere

p i n i o n e d . H e c o u l d n o t m o v e
.

T h e k n i f e d e s c e n d e d . T h i s t i
m e i t m e t i t s m a r k .

S o i t h ad f i n i s h e d as i t m u s t . C
r o u c h i n g ab o v e t h e b o d y o f t h
e b o y , t h e as s as s i n al o w e d h i
m s e l f a b r e ath — h i s f i r s t

s i n c e h i s c o l e ag u e s h ad m e t t h
e i r e n d s . H e s at b ac k o n h i s s i n
e w y h au n c h e s , l o o s e n e d h i s g
r i p u p o n t h e k n i f e , an d l e t

t h e b o y 's w r i s t d r o p f r e e . H e i
n c l i n e d h i s h e ad i n t h e t r ad i t i
o n al m ar k o f r e s p e c t t o t h e f al l

envictim.

Atwhichpointtheboyreachedupandpluckedtheknifefromthecenterofhischest.Theassassinblinkedin

consternation.

"Notsilver,yousee,"theboysaid."Mistake."Heraisedhishand.

Anexplosionintheroom.Greensparkscascadedfromthewindow.

Theboyrosetohisfeetandtossedtheknifeuponthepallet

. H e ad j u s t e d h i s k i l t an d b l e w
s o m e f l ak e s o f as h f r o m h i s

ar m s . T h e n h e c o u g h e d l o u d l
y .

T h e f ai n t e s t o f s c r ap i n g s . A c
r o s s t h e r o o m t h e g o l d e n c h ai
r s h i f t e d . T h e c l o ak d r ap e d o v
e r i t w as n u d g e d as i d e . O u t

f r o m b e t w e e n i t s l e g s s c r am b
l e d an o t h e r b o y , i d e n t i c al t o t
h e f i r s t , t h o u g h f l u s h e d an d t
o u s l e d f r o m m an y h o u r s o f

h i d i n g .

H e s t o o d o v e r t h e b o d i e s o f t h

e as s as s i n s , b r e at h i n g h ar d . T h e n h e s t ar e d u p at t h e c e i l i n g . O n i t w as t h e b l ac k e n e d

o u t l i n e o f a m an . It h ad a k i n d o f s t ar t l e d l o o k .

T h e b o y l o w e r e d h i s g az e t o t h e i m p as s i v e d o p p e l g an g e r w at c h i n g h i m ac r o s s t h e m o o n l i t r o o m . I g av e a m o c k s al u t e .

P t o l e m y b r u s h e d t h e d ar k h ai r f r o m h i s e y e s an d b o w e d .

"T h an k y o u , R e k h y t , " h e s ai d .

T i m e s c h an g e .

O n c e , l o n gag o , I w as s e c o n d t
o n o n e . I c o u l d w h i r l t h r o u g h
t h e ai r o n a w i s p o f c l o u d an d c
h u r n up d u s t s t o r m s w i t h

m y p as s i n g . I c o u l d s l i c e t h r o
u g h m o u n t ai n s , r ai s e c as t l e s
o n p i l ar s o f g l as s , f e l f o r e s t s
w i t h a s i n g l e b r e at h . I c ar v e d

t e m p l e s f r o m t h e s i n e w s o f t h
e e ar t h an d l e d ar m i e s ag ai n s t t
h e l e g i o n s o f t h e d e ad , s o t h att
h e h ar p e r s o f a d o z e n

l an d s p l ay e d m u s i c i n m y m e m
o r y an d t h e c h r o n i c l e r s o f a d

o z e n c e n t u r i e s s c r i b b l e d d o w n m y e x p l o i t s . Y e s ! I w as

B ar t i m ae u s — c h e e t ah q u i c k , s t r o n g as a b u l e l e p h an t , d e ad l y as a s t r i k i n g k r ai t !

B u t t h at w as t h e n .

A n d n o w . . . w e l l , rig ht n o w I w as l y i n g i n t h e m i d d l e o f a m i d n i g h t r o ad , f l at o n m y b ac k and g e t t i n g f l at t e r . W h y ?

B e c aus e o n t o p o f m e w as an u p t u r n e d b u i l d i n g . It s w e i g h t b o r e d o w n . M u s c l e s s t r ai n e d , t e n d o n s p o p p e d ; t r y as I

m i g h t , I c o u l d n o t p u s h f r e e .

In p r i n c i p l e t h e r e ' s n o t h i n g s
h am e f u l ab o u t s t r u g g l i n g w h
e n a b u i l d i n g f al s u p o n y o u . I ' v
e h ad s u c h p r o b l e ms b e f o r e ;

i t ' s p ar t o f t h e j o b d e s c r i p t i o
n . 1 B u t i t d oes h e l p i f t h e e d i f i
c e i n q u e s t i o n i s g l am o r o u s an
d l ar g e . A n d i n t h i s c as e , t h e

f e ar s o me c o n s t r u c t i o n t h at h
ad b e e n r i p p e d f r o m i t s f o u n d
at i o n s an d h u r l e d u p o n me f r o
m a g r e at h e i g h t w as n e i t h e r

b i g n o r s u mp t u o u s . It w as n ' t a t
e mp l e w al o r a g r an i t e o b e l i s

k . It w as n 't t h e m ar b l e d r o o f o f an e m p e r o r 's p al ac e .

1. There was the tim e when a sm all section of K hufu' s G reat P yram id collapsed upon m e one

m oonless nig ht during the fifteenth year of its construction. 1 was g uarding the z one that m y

g roup was work ing on, when sev eral lim estone b lock s tum b led down from the top, transfix ing

m e painfully b y one of m y ex trem ities. E x actly how it happened was nev er resolv ed, thoug h m y

suspicions were directed at m y old chum F aq uarl, who was work ing with a riv al g roup on the

opposite side. I m ade no outward com plaint, b ut b ided m y tim e while m y essence healed.

L ater, when F aq uarl was returning across the W estern D esert with som e N ub ian g old, I inv ok ed

a m ild sandstorm , causing him to lose the treasure and incur the pharaoh' s wrath. I t took him a

couple of years to sift all the pieces from the dunes.

No.Theobjectthatwaspinnin
gmehaplesslytotheground,
likeabutterflyonacollecto
r'stray,wasoftwentieth-

centuryoriginandofverysp
ecificfunction.

Oh,alright,itwasapublicl av
atory.Quitesizable,mind,b
utevenso.Iwasgladnoharper
sorchroniclershappened

tobepassing.

Inmitigation,Imustreportth
atthelavatoryinquestionhad
concretewalsandaverythic
kironroof,thecruelaura

o f w h i c h h e l p e d w e ak e n m y al
r e ad y f e e b l e l i m b s . A n d t h e r
e w e r e d o u b t l e s s v ar i o u s p i p
e s an d c i s t e r n s an d d e s p e r at e
l y

h e av y t ap s i n s i d e , al ad d i n g t o
t h e t o t al m as s . B u t i t w as s t i l a
p r e t t y p o o r s h o w f o r a d j i n n i
o f m y s t at u r e t o b e

s q u as h e d b y i t . In f ac t , t h e ab j e
c t h u m i l i at i o n b o t h e r e d m e m
o r e t h an t h e c r u s h i n g w e i g h t .

A l ar o u n d m e t h e w at e r f r o m t h
e s n ap p e d an d b r o k e n p i p e w o
r k t r i c k l e d aw ay m o u r n f u l l y i
n t o t h e g u t t e r s . O n l y m y

h e ad p r o j e c t e d f r e e o f o n e o f t h e c o n c r e t e w al s ; m y b o d y w as e n t i r e l y t r ap p e d .2

2 . The ob v ious solution would hav e b een to chang e form —into a wraith, say, or a swirl of

sm ok e, and j ust drift clear. B ut there were two prob lem s. O ne: I found it hard to chang e shape

these days, v ery hard, ev en at the b est of tim es. Two: the considerab le downward pressure

would hav e b lown m y essence apart the m om ent I softened it to m ak e the chang e.

S o m u c h f o r t h e n e g at i v e s . T h e g o o d s i d e w as t h at I w as u n ab l e t o r e j o i n t h e b at t l e t h at w as t ak i n g p l ac e u p an d

d o w n t h e s u b u r b an s t r e e t .

It w as a f ai r l y l o w -k e y s o r t o f b at t l e , e s p e c i al y o n t h e f i r s t p l an e . N o t h i n g m u c h c o u l d b e s e e n . T h e h o u s e l i g h t s w e r e

al o u t , t h e e l e c t r i c s t r e e t l am p s h ad b e e n t i e d i n k n o t s ; t h e r o ad w as d ar k as an i n k s t o n e , a s o l i d s l ab o f b l ac k . A f e w

s t ar s s h o n e c o l d l y o v e r h e ad . O n c e o r t w i c e i n d i s t i n c t b l u

e-greenlightsappearedandf
aded,likeexplosionsfaroff

underwater.

Thingshottedduponthesecon
dplane,wheretworivalflocc
ksofbirdscouldbeseenwhe
elingandswoopingateach

other,buffetingsavagelywi
thwings,beaks,claws,andtai
ls.Suchloutishbehaviorwo
uldhavebeenreprehensible

amongseagulsorotherdown-
marketfowl;thefactthatthes
ewereeaglesmadeitallthem
oreshocking.

O n t h e h i g h e r p l an e s t h e b i r d g u i s e s w e r e d i s c ar d e d al t o g e t h e r , an d t h e t r u e s h ap e s o f t h e f i g h t i n g d j i n n c am e i n t o

f o c u s .3 S e e n f r o m t h i s p e r s p e c t i v e , t h e n i g h t s k y w as v e r i t ab l y aw as h w i t h r u s h i n g f o r m s , c o n t o r t e d s h ap e s , an d

s i n i s t e r ac t i v i t y .

Truer, anyway. A t b ottom , we are al alik e in our seeping form lessness, b ut ev ery spirit has a

" look " that suits them , and which they use to represent them selv es while on E arth. O ur

essences are m olded into these personal shapes on the hig her planes, while—on the lower

ones—we adopt g uises that are appropriate to the g iv en situation. L isten, I ' m sure I ' v e told you

al this b efore.

F ai r p l ay w as e n t i r e l y d i s r e g ar d e d . I s aw o n e s p i k e d k n e e g o c r u n c h i n g i n t o an o p p o n e n t 's b e l l y , s e n d i n g h i m s p i n n i n g

aw ay b e h i n d a c h i m n e y t o r e c o v e r . D i s g r ac e f u l ! If I'd b e e n u p t h e r e I'd h av e h ad n o t r u c k w

i t h t h at .4

I ' d hav e k need him first, then stuck a wing tip in his eye, while k ick ing his shin for g ood

m easure. M uch m ore effectiv e. The techniq ues of these young dj inn were so inefficient, it

pained m e.

B u t I w as n 't u p t h e r e . I'd b e e n p u t o u t o f ac t i o n .

N o w , i f i t h ad b e e n an af r i t o r m ar i d w h o 'd d o n e t h e d am ag e , I c o u l d h av e l i v e d w i t h i t . B u t i t w as n 't . In f ac t m y

c o n q u e r o r w as n o n e b u t a t h i r d -l e v e l d j i n n i , t h e k i n d I c o u l d n o r m al y r o l u p i n m y p o c k e t an d s m o k e af t e r d i n n e r . I

c o u l d s t i l s e e h e r n o w f r o m w h e r e I l ay , h e r n i m b l e f e m i n i n e g r ac e r at h e r u n d e r m i n e d b y h e r p i g 's h e ad an d t h e l o n g

r ak e s h e c l u t c h e d i n h e r t r o t t e r s . T h e r e s h e w as , s t an d i n g o n a p o s t -b o x , l ay i n g l e f t an d r i g h t w i t h s u c h b r i o t h at t h e

g o v e r n m e n t f o r c e s , o f w h i c h I w as n o m i n al l y a p ar t , b ac k e d o f f an d l e f t h e r w e l al o n e . S h e w as a f o r m i d ab l e

customer, with experience in Japan if her kimono was anything to go by. In truth, I'd been misled by her rustic

appearance and had ambled close without upping my Shields. Before I knew it, there was a piercing oink, a blur of

movement, and —whump!— she'd left me pinned in the road, too ow ary to break free.

Little by little, however, my side was gaining the upper hand. See! Here strode Cormocodran, snapping off a lamppost

andswingingitlikeatwig;th
ereracedHodge,loosingoff
avolleyofpoisondarts.The
enemydwindledandbeganto

adoptevermorefatalisticgui
ses.Isawseverallargeinsect
sbuzzinganddodging,oneor
twowispstwisting

franticaly,acoupleofratshe
adingforthehils.Onlythesh
e-pigstubbornlymaintained
heroriginalappearance.My

coleaguessurgedforward.O
nebeetlewentdowninacork
screwcloudofsmoke;awisp
wasblownapartbyadouble

Detonation.Theenemyfled;
eventhepigrealizedthegame
wasup.Sheleapedgracefully
ontoaporch,

somersaultedupontoaroof,
andvanished.Thevictorious
djinnsetoffinhotpursuit.

Itwasquietinthestreet.Wate
rtrickledpastmyears.Fromt
opknottotoes,myessencew
asonelongache.Igavea

heartfeltsigh.

"Dearme,"avoicechuckled.
"Adamselindistress."

I s h o u l d h av e m e n t i o n e d t h at i n c o n t r as t t o al l t h e c e n t au r s an d o g r e s at m y s i d e , I'd b e e n w e ar i n g a h u m an g u i s e

t h at n i g h t . It h ap p e n e d t o b e t h at o f a g i r l : s l e n d e r , l o n g d ar k h ai r , f e i s t y e x p r e s s i o n . N o t b as e d o n an y b o d y i n

p ar t i c u l ar , o f c o u r s e .

T h e s p e ak e r ap p e ar e d ar o u n d t h e e d g e o f t h e p u b l i c c o n v e n i e n c e an d p au s e d t o s h ar p e n an ai l ag ai n s t a s n ag g y b i t o f

p i p e . N o d e l i c at e g u i s e f o r h i m ; as u s u al h e w as d e c k e d o u t

as a one-eyed giant, with lumpy muscles and long blond

hair braided in a complex and faintly girlyway. He wore a shapeless blue-gray smock that wouldhave been

considered hideous in a medieval fishing village.

"A poor sweet damsel, too frail to pry herself free." The cyclops considered one of his nails carefully; finding it a little

long, he bit at it savagely with his small sharp teeth and round

e d i t o f f ag ai n s t t h e p e b b l e d as h w al o f t h e l av at o r y .

"M i n d h e l p i n g m e u p ? " I i n q u i r e d .

T h e c y c l o p s l o o k e d u p an d d o w n t h e e m p t y r o ad . "B e t t e r w at c h o u t , l o v e , " h e s ai d , l e an i n g c as u al y o n t h e b u i l d i n g s o

t h at i t s d o w n w ar d p r e s s u r e i n c r e as e d . "T h e r e 's d an g e r o u s c h ar ac t e r s ab r o ad t o n i g h t . D j i n n an d f o l i o t s . . . an d

n au g h t y i m p s , w h o m i g h t d o y o u a m i s c h i e f ."

"C an i t, A s c o b o l," I s n ar l e d. "Y o u k n o w f u l w e l i t's m e."

T h e C y c l o p s's s i n g l e e y e b att e d b e c o m i n g l y u n d e r i t s l aye r o f m as c ar a. "B artim aeu s? " h e s ai d i n w o n d e r. "C an i t

p o s s i b l y b e. . . ? S u r e l y t h e gr e at B ar t i m ae u s w o u l d n o t b e s o e as i l y s n ar e d! Y o u m u s t b e s o m e i m p o r m o u l e r

c h e e k i l y ad o p t i n g h i s v o i c e an d. . . B u t, n o —I am w r o n g! It is y o u." H e r ai s e d h i s e y e b r o w i n an af f e c t ati o n o f s h o c k.

"In c r e d i b l e! T o th i nk th e n o b

leBartimaeushascometothis!Themasterwillbesorelydisappointed."

Isummonedmylastreservesofdignity."Almastersaretemporary,"Ireplied."Allhumiliationslikewise.Ibidemy

time."

"Ofcourse,ofcourse."Ascobolswunghisapelikearmsanddidalittlepirouette."Welspoken,Bartimaeus!Youdo

notletyourdeclinedepressyou.Nomatterthatyourgreatdaysareover,thatyouarenow

as r e d u n d an t as a w i l -o '-

t h e -w i s p ! 5 N o m at t e r t h at y o u r t as k t o m o r r o w i s as l i k e l y t o b e d am p -d u s t i n g o u r m as t e r 's b e d r o o m as r o am i n g f r e e

u p o n t h e ai r . Y o u ar e an e x am p l e t o u s al ."

5 . W i l l -o ' -t he-wi s p s : sm al spirits who strug g le to k eep up with the tim es.V isib le as flick ering

flam es on the first plane (althoug h rev ealed on others to b e m ore lik e capering sq uid) , wisps

were once em ployed b y m ag icians to

lure trespassers off rem ote paths into pits or q uag s. C ities

chang ed all that; urb an wisps hav e now b een forced into lurk ing ov er open m anhole cov ers, to

rather less effect.

I s m i l e d , s h o w i n g m y w h i t e t e e t h . "A s c o b o l , " I s ai d , "i t i s n o t I w h o h av e d e c l i n e d , b u t m y ad v e r s ar i e s . I h av e f o u g h t

w i t h F aq u ar l o f S p ar t a, w i t h T l al o c o f T o l l an , w i t h c l e v e r T c h u e o f t h e K al ah ar i —o u r c o n f l i c t s s p l i t t h e e ar t h , g o u g e d

r i v e r s . I s u r v i v e d . W h o i s m y
e n e m y n o w ? A k n o c k - k n e e d c
y c l o p s i n a s k i r t . W h e n I g e t o
u t f r o m h e r e , I d o n ' t s e e this

n e w c o n f l i c t l as t i n g l o n g ."

T h e c y c l o p s s t ar t e d b ac k , as i
f s t u n g . " S u c h c r u e l t h r e ats !
Y o u s h o u l d b e as h am e d . W e ar
e o n t h e s am e s i d e , ar e w e

n o t ? D o u b t l e s s y o u h av e g o o
d r e as o n s f o r s k u l k i n g o u t t h e
f i g h t u n d e r t h i s r e s t r o o m . B
e i n g p o l i t e , I w i l n o t t r o u b l e
t o

i n q u i r e , t h o u g h I m ay s ay t h at y

oulackyourn o r m al c o u r t e s y
."

"T w o y e ar s ' c o n t i n u al s e r v i c
e h as w o r n i t al l aw ay , " I s ai d . "I
am l e f t i r r i t ab l e an d j ad e d , w i
t h a p e r p e t u al i t c h i n m y

e s s e n c e t h at I c an n o t s c r at c h .
A n d t h at m ak e s m e d an g e r o u s ,
as y o u w i l s h o r t l y l e ar n . N o w
, f o r t h e l as t t i m e ,

A s c o b o l , g e t t h i s o f f ."

W e l , t h e r e w e r e a f e w m o r e t u
t s an d p o u t s , b u t m y p o s t u r i n g
h ad i t s e f f e c t . W i t h a s i n g l e s
h r u g o f h i s h ai r y

shoulders, the cyclops leve
red the lavatory up and off me,
sending it clattering away ont
o the opposite pavement. A

somewhat corrugated girl go
t uns teadily to her feet.

"At last," I said. "You took you
r own sweet time about it."

The cyclops plucked a bit of
debris from his smock. "Sorr
y," he said, "but I was too busy
winning the battle to help

you out before. Still, all's we
l. Our master will be pleased
—by my efforts, anyhow." He

g l an c e d at m e s i d e l o n g .

N o w th at I w as v e r t i c al I h ad n o i n t e n t i o n o f s q u ab b l i n g f u r t h e r . I c o n s i d e r e d th e d am ag e t o th e h o u s e s al ar o u n d .

N o t t o o b ad . A f e w b r o k e n r o o f s , s m as h e d w i n d o w s . . . Th e s k i r m i s h h ad b e e n s u c c e s s f ul y c o n t ai n e d . "A F r e n c h l o t ? "

I as k e d .

Th e c y c l o p s s h r u gg e d , w h i c h w as s o m e f e at g i v e n th at h e l ac k e d a n e c k . "M ay b e . P o s s i b l y th e C z e c h s o r S p an i s h . Wh o

cantel? They'reallnibbling atusnowadays. Well, timepr esses, andImustcheckonthe pursuit. Ileaveyoutonurse

yourachesandpains, Bartim aeus.Whynottrypeppermint teaoracamomilefootbath, li keothergeriatrics? Adieu!"

Thecyclopshitchedduphissk irtsand, withaponderousspring, launchedhimselfintot heair. Wingsappearedonhis

back; withgreatplowingstro keshedrewaway. Hehadalthe graceofafilingcabinet, but atleasthe'dgotthe

e n e r g y t o f l y . I h ad n't . N o t u n t i l I'd h ad a b r e at h e r , an y h o w .

T h e d ar k-h ai r e d g i r l c r e p t ac r o s s t o a b r o k e n s q u ar e o f c h i m n e y i n a n e ar b y g ar d e n . S l o w l y , w i t h t h e g as p s and

g i n g e r l y m o v e m e n t s o f an i n v al i d , s h e s l u m p e d d o w n i n t o a s i t t i n g p o s i t i o n and c u p p e d h e r h e ad i n h e r h and s . S h e

c l o s e d h e r e y e s .

J u s t a b r i e f r e s t . F i v e m i n u t e s w o ul d d o .

T i m e p as s e d , d aw n c ame . T h e

c o l d s t ar s f ad e d i n t h e s k y .

2

A s h ad b e c o m e h i s c u s t o m i n r e c e n t m o n t h s , t h e g r e at m ag i c i an J o h n M an d r ak e t o o k h i s b r e ak f as t i n h i s p ar l o r ,

s e at e d i n t h e w i c k e r c h ai r b e s i d e t h e w i n d o w . T h e h e av y c u r t ai n s h ad b e e n c ar e l e s s l y d r aw n b ac k ; t h e s k y b e y o n d

w as g r ay an d l e ad e n an d a s i n e w y m i s t t h r e ad e d i t s w ay b e t w e e n t h e t r e e s o f t h e s q u ar e .

T h e s m al l c i r c u l ar t ab l e b e f o

r e h i m w as c ar v e d f r o m L e b an
e s e c e d ar . W h e n w ar m e d b y s u
n l i g h t , i t g av e o f f a p l e as an t

f r ag r an c e , b u t o n t h i s p ar t i c u
l ar m o r n i n g t h e w o o d w as d ar k
an d c o l d . M an d r ak e p o u r e d c o
f f e e i n t o h i s g l as s , r e m o v e d

t h e s i l v e r c o v e r f r o m h i s p l at
e , an d s e t u p o n h i s c u r r i e d e g
g s an d b ac o n . In a r ac k b e h i n d t
h e t o as t an d t h e

g o o s e b e r r y c o n s e r v e s at a c r
i s p l y f o l d e d n e w s p ap e r an d
an e n v e l o p e w i t h a b l o o d -r e d
s e al . M an d r ak e t o o k a s w i g o f

coffeewithhisleftha nd;wit hhisrighthefl ickedthenew spaperopenonthetab le.He g lanc edatthefr ontpage,

grunteddismissively,andre achedfortheenvelope.Aniv orypaperknifehungfromape gupontherack;flingingdow n

hisfork,Mandrakeslittheen velopewithoneeasymotion anddrewoutafoldedparchm ent.Hereadthiswithcare,

browspuckeringintoafrow n.Thenherefoldedit,stuffe ditbackintotheenvelope,an

d w i t h a s i g h r e t u r n e d t o h i s

m e al .

A k n o c k at t h e d o o r ; w i t h m o u t h h al f f u l o f b ac o n , M an d r ak e g av e a m u f f l e d c o mm an d . T h e d o o r o p e n e d s i l e n t l y an d

a y o u n g , s l i m w o man s t e p p e d d i f f i d e n t l y t h r o u g h , a b r i e f c as e i n h e r h an d .

S h e h al t e d . " I ' m s o r r y , s i r , " s h e b e g an . " A m I t o o e ar l y ? "

" N o t at al l , P i p e r , n o t at al . " H e w av e d h e r o v e r , i n d i c at e d a c h air o n t h e o t h e r s i d e o f h i s b r

e ak f as t t ab l e . "H av e y o u

e at e n ? "

"Y e s , s i r ." S h e s at . S h e w o r e a d ar k b l u e s k i r t an d j ac k e t w i t h a c r i s p w h i t e s h i r t . H e r s t r ai g h t b r o w n h ai r w as s c r ap e d

aw ay f r o m h e r f o r e h e ad an d c l i p p e d at t h e b ac k o f h e r h e ad . S h e s e t t l e d t h e b r i e f c as e o n h e r l ap .

M an d r ak e s p e ar e d a f o r k f u l o f c u r r i e d e gg . "F o r g i v e m e i f I k e e p e at i n g , " h e s ai d . "I w as u p u n t i l t h r e e , r e s p o n d i n g t o

thelatestdisturbance.Kent, thistime."

Ms.Pipernodded."Iheard,sir.Therewasamemoatthemini stry.Wasitcontained?"

"Yes;asfarasmyglobecouldtell,atanyrate.Isentafewdemonsdown.Wel,weshalseepresently.Whathave

yougotformetoday?"

Sheundippedthebriefcaseanddrewoutsomepapers."Anumberofproposalsfromthejuniorministers,sir,

regardingthepropagandacampaignsintheoutlyingregions.Foryourapproval.Somenewposterideas..."

"Let'ssee."Hetookagulpofcoffee,heldoutahand."Anythingelse?"

"Theminutesofthelast Councilmeeting—"

"I'llreadthatlater.Postersfirst."Hescannedthetopmostpage."'Signuptoserveyourcountryandseetheworld'..

.What'sthatsupposedtomean?Morelikeaholidaybrochure

thanrecruitment.Fartoosoft
...Keeptalking,Piper—

I'mstillistening."

"We'vegotthelatestfrontlin
ereportsfromAmerica,sir.
I'veorderedthemalittle.We
shouldbeabletomake

anotherstoryoutoftheBosto
nsiege."

"Stressingtheheroicattemp
t,nottheabjectfailure,Itrus
t...."Balancingthepaperson
hisknee,hesmearedsome

gooseberryconserveupona

pieceoftoast."Wel,I'ltrywri tingsomethinglater....Now then,thisone'sokay—

'Defendthemothercountry andmakeyourname'...Good. They'resuggestingafarm-bo ytypelookingmanly,

whichisfine,buthowaboutp uttinghisfamilygroup—say, parentsandlittlesister—int hebackground,looking

vulnerableandadmiring?Pl aythedomesticcard."

Ms.Pipernoddedeagerly."C ouldshowhiswifetoo,sir."

"No.We'reafterthesingleones.It'sthewivesw hoaremosttroublesomewhentheydon'tcomeback." Hecrunched

onhistoast."Anyothermessages?"

"OnefromMr.Makepeace,sir.Camebyimp.Wondersifyou'ldropbyandseehimthismorning."

"Can't.Toobusy.There'lbetimelater."

"Hisimpalsodroppedoffthisflyer...." Witharuefulface, Ms.Piperheldupalilac-colo

r e d p ap e r . "It 's ad v e r t i s i n g th e

p r e m i e r e o f h i s p l ay l at e r th i s w e e k . From W ap p in g to W estm in ster, i t 's c al l e d . T h e s t o r y o f o u r P r i m e M i n i s t e r 's r i s e t o

g l o r y . A n e v e n i n g w e w i l n e v e r f o r g e t , ap p ar e n t l y ."

M an d r ak e g av e a g r o an . "If o n l y w e c o u l d . P u t i t i n th e b i n . W e 've g o t b e tt e r th i n g s t o d o th an d i s c u s s th e at e r . W h at

e l s e ? "

"M r . D e v e r e au x h as s e n t a me

moaroundtoo.Owingtothe'troublesometimes,'sir,he'splacedthenation'smost

importanttreasuresunderspecialguardinthevaultsofWhitehal.Theywillremainthereuntilhesaysotherwise."

Mandrakelookedupthen,frowning."Treasures?Suchaswhat?"

"Hedoesn'tsay.Iwonderifit'llbe—"

"It'llbetheStaffandtheAmuletandtheothergrade-oneitems."Hehissedbrieflythroughh

isteeth."That'snotwhat

heshouldbedoing,Piper.We needthemused''

"Yes,sir.There'salsothisfro mMr.Devereaux."Shebroug htoutaslenderpacket.

Themagicianeyeditgrimly. "Notanothertoga?"

"Amask,sir.Forthepartythis evening."

Withacry,heindicatedthee nvelopeintherack."I'vealre adygottheinvitation.Itbegg arsbelief:thewar'sgoing

badly, the Empire's teetering on the brink, and all our Prime Minister can think about is plays and parties. Alright.

Keep it with the documents. I'll take it along. The posters see mo kay." He handed back the papers. "Maybe not

snappy enough...." He thought for a moment, nodded. "Got a pen? Try 'Fight for Freedom and the British Way.'

Doesn't mean anything, but it sounds good."

Ms. Piper considered it. "Ith

inkit'sratherprofound,sir."

"Excellent.Thenthecommoners'lsnapitup."Hestood,dabbedhismouthwithanapkin,andtossededitdownupon

thetray."Well,we'dbetterseehowthedemonshavebeenegettingon.No,no,Piper,please—afteryou."

IfMs.Piperregardedheremployerwithmorethanalittlewide-eyedadmiration,shewasbynomeansaloneamong

thewomenoftheelite.JohnMandrakewasanattractiveyo

ungman, and the scent of power hung about him, sweet

and intoxicating, like honey suckle in the evening air. He was of medium height, slender of body, and swift and

confident in action. His pale, slim face presented an intriguing paradox, combining extreme youth—he was still only

seventeen years old—with experience and authority. His eyes were red ark and quick and serious, his forehead

prematurely lined.

Hisintelectualself-assurance,whichhadonceperilouslyoutstrippedhisotherskills,hadnowbeenbolsteredbya

certainsocialpoise.Topeersandinferiorsalikehewascourteousandcharmingatalltimes,althoughalsosomewhat

remote,asifdistractedbyaninnermelancholy.Alongsidethecrudeappetitesandeccentricitiesofhisfellow

ministers,thissubdueddetachmentattainedanelegancethatonlyaddedtohismystique

.

Mandrakeworehisdarkhairc
loseinamilitarycrop—acon
sciousinnovationtohonorth
emenandwomenstilatwar.

Ithadbeenasuccessfulgestu
re:spiesnotedthat,amongco
mmoners,hewasthemostpop
ularmagician.Hishaircut

hadthusbeenmimickedbym
anyothers,whilehisdarksui
tshadlikewiseinspiredabri
efvogue.Henolonger

botheredwithatie:thecolar
ofhisshirtwascasualyunbutt

o n e d .

M r . M an d r ak e w as c o n s i d e r e d b y h i s r i v al s t o b e f o r m i d ab l y , i n d e e d d an g e r o u s l y , t al e n t e d , an d — f o l l o w i n g h i s

p r o m o t i o n t o In f o r m at i o n M i n i s t e r — t h e y r e s p o n d e d ac c o r d i n g l y . B u t e ac h at t e m p t e d as s as s i n at i o n h ad b e e n c u r s o r i l y

r e b u f f e d : d j i n n f ai l e d t o r e t u r n , b o o b y t r ap s r e b o u n d e d o n t h e s e n d e r , h e x e s s n ap p e d an d w i t h e r e d . A t l as t , t i r i n g o f

t h i s , M an d r ak e m ad e a p o i n t o

f p u b l i c l y c h al l e n g i n g an y h i d d e n e n e m y t o c o m e f o r w ar d an d t ac k l e h i m i n m ag i c al

c o m b at . N o o n e an s w e r e d h i s c al , an d h i s s t an d i n g r o s e h i g h e r t h an e v e r .

H e l i v e d i n an e l e g an t G e o r g i an t o w n h o u s e s u r r o u n d e d b y o t h e r e l e g an t G e o r g i an t o w n h o u s e s o n a b r o ad an d

p l e as an t s q u ar e . It w as h al f a m i l e f r o m W h i t e h al , an d s u f f i c i e n t l y f ar f r o m t h e r i v e r t o e s c ap e i t s s m e l i n s u m m e r .

T h e s q u ar e w as a g e n e r o u s e x

panseofbeechtreesandshady walkways,withanopengreen inthecenter.Itwas

quietandunfrequented,thou ghneverunobserved.Gray-u niformedpolicepatroledth eperimeterbyday;afterdark,

demonsintheformofowlsan dnightjarsflittedquietlyfr omtreetotree.

Thissecuritywasduetothei nhabitantsofthesquare.Itwas hometoseveralofLondon's greatestmagicians.Onthe

southsideMr.Collins,ther

ecentlyappointedHomeSec
retary,dweltinacream-colo
redhousedecoratedwithfak
e

pilarsandbuxomcaryatids.T
othenorthwestsprawledthe
grandiosepileoftheWarMin
ister,Mr.Mortensen,witha

goldendomeglintinguponth
eroof.

JohnMandrake'sresidencew
aslessostentatious.Aslend
erfour-storybuilding,paint
edbuttercup-yelow,itwas

reachedbyarowofwhitemar

blesteps;whiteshuttersbor
deredthetalwindows.Thero
omswereresoberlyfurnished
,

withdelicatelypatternedw
alpapersandPersianrugsupo
nthefloors.Theministerdi
dnotflaunthisstatus;he

displayedfewtreasuresinth
ereceptionrooms,andempl
oyedjusttwohumanservants
tokeephouse.Heslepton

thethirdfloor,inaplain,whi
tewashedroomadjoininghis
library.Thesewerehisspriv
atechambers,whichnoone

visited.

Onthefloorbelow,separatedfromtheotherroomsoftheh
ousebyanempty,echoingcorridorlinedwithpanelsof

stainedwood,wasMr.Mandrake's study.Hereheconducted muchofhisdailywork.

Mandrakewalkedalongthecorridor,chewingavestigeof toast.Ms.Pipertrippedalongbehind.Attheendofthe

corridorwasasolidbrassdoor,decoratedinitscenterby amoldedbrassfaceofsurpass

i n g u g l i n e s s . I t s b u l b o u s

b r o w s ap p e ar e d t o b e m e l t i n g
d o w n ac r o s s t h e e y e s ; t h e c h i
n an d n o s e j u t t e d o u t l i k e n u t c
r ac k e r h an d l e s . T h e

m ag i c i an h al t e d an d g az e d at t h
e f ac e w i t h d e e p d i s ap p r o v al .

"I t h o u g h t I t o l d y o u t o s t o p d o
i n g t h at , " h e s n ap p e d .

A t h i n - l i p p e d m o u t h o p e n e d ;
t h e j u t t i n g c h i n an d n o s e k n o c
k e d t o g e t h e r i n d i g n an t l y . "D
o w h at ? "

"T ak i n g o n s u c h a h i d e o u s ap p

e ar an c e . I'v e j u s t h ad m y b r e ak f as t ."

A s e c t i o n o f b r o w l i f t e d , al o w i n g an e y e b al t o r o l l f o r w ar d w i t h a s q u e l c h i n g s o u n d .T h e f ac e l o o k e d

u n ap o l o g e t i c ."S o r r y , m at e , " i t s ai d . "It 's j u s t m y j o b ."

"Y ou r j o b i s t o d e s t r o y an y o n e e n t e r i n g m y s t u d y w i t h o u t au t h o r i t y . N o m o r e , n o l e s s ."

T h e d o o r g u ar d c o n s i d e r e d . "T r u e . B u t I s e e k t o p r e em p t e n t r y b y s c ar i n g t r e s p as s e r s aw ay . T o m y w ay o f t h i n k i n g ,

deterrenceismoreaesthetical ysatisfyingthanpunishment."

Mr.Mandrakesnorted."Trespassersapart,you'llikelyfrightenMs.Piperheretodeath."

Thefaceshookfromsidetoside,aprocessthatcausedthenosetowobblealarmingly."Notso.Whenshecomes

alone,Imoderatemyfeatures.Ireservethefulhorrorforthoseiconsidermoralyvicious."

"Butyoujustlookedthatwayto me!"

"Thecontradictionbeing...?"

Mandraketookadeepbreath, passedahandacrosshiseyes andgestured.Thefaceretreated intothemetalto

becomethefaintestoftoutlines;thedoorswungopen.The greatmagicianandrewhimselfup and,usheringMs.Piper

alongbeforehim,walkedinto hisstudy.

Itwasafunctionalroom—high,airyandwhite-painted,litbytwowindowslookingoutuponthesquare.Ithadno

excessdecoration.Onthisparticularmorningthickcloudscoveredthesun,soMandrakeswitchedontheceilinglights

asheentered.Bookcasesranalongtheentiretyofonewal,whiletheoppositesidewasbareexceptforagiantpin

board,coverediinnotesanddiagrams.Thewoodenfloorwassmoothanddark.Fivecircl

eswereinscribeduponit,

eachwithitsownpentacle,runes,candles,andincensepots.Fourofthesewereofaconventionalsize,butthefifth,

nearestthewindow,wassignificantlylarger:itcontainedwithinitaful-sizedesk,filingcabinet,andseveralchairs.

Thismaster-circlewasjoinedtothesmalleronesbyaseriesofpreciselydrawnlinesandrune-chains.Mandrakeand

Ms.Pipercrossedintothel

argestcircleandsatbehindth
edesk,spreadingouttheirp
apersbeforethem.

Mandrakeclearedhisthroat.
"Rightthen.Tobusiness.Ms
.Piper,wewilldealwiththe
ordinaryreportsfirst.Ifyou

wouldactivatethepresencei
ndicator."

Ms.Piperspokeabriefincan
tation.Instantlythecandles
aroundtheperimetersoftwo
ofthesmalercirclesflicker
ed

intolife;wispsofsmokeros

etotheceiling.Inthepotsbe
sidethem,flakesofincenses
tirredandshifted.Theother

twocirclesremainedquiet.

"PuripandFritang," Ms.Pipe
rsaid.

Themagiciannodded."Purip
first." Heutteredaloudcom-
mand.Thecandlesintheleftm
ostpentacleflared;witha

queasyshimmering,aformap
pearedinthecenterofthecir
cle.Itwasshapedlikeamanan
drespectfulydressedin

asobersuitanddarkbluetie. Itnoddedbrieflyinthedirection ofthedeskandwaited.

"Remindme," Mandrakesaid.

Ms.Piperglancedathernotes."Puriphasbeenobservingtheresponsetoourwarpamphlets andotherpropaganda,"

shesaid."Watchingthecommoners'mood."

"Verywel.Purip—whathaveyouseen?Speak."

Thedemonbowedslightly. "Thereisnotmuchnewtorep

ort. The people are like a herd of Ganges meadow cattle,

half-starved but complacent, unused to change or independent thought. Yet the war pressures on their minds, and I

believed discontent is spreading. They read your pamphlets, just as they buy your newspapers, but they do so without

pleasure. It does not satisfy them."

The magicians scowled. "How is this discontent expressed?"

"I d e t e c t i t i n t h e c ar e f u l b l ank n e s s o f t h e i r f e at u r e s w h e n y o u r p o l i c e d r aw n e ar . I s e e i t i n t h e h ar d n e s s o f t h e i r e y e s

as t h e y p as s t h e r e c r u i t m e n t b o o t h s . I w at c h i t p i l e u p s i l e n t l y w i t h t h e f l o w e r s at t h e d o o r s o f t h e b e r e av e d . M o s t w i l

n o t d e c l ar e i t o p e n l y , b u t t h e i r an g e r at t h e w ar an d at t h e i r g o v e r n m e n t i s g r o w i n g ."

"T h e s e ar e j u s t w o r d s , " M an d r ak e s ai d . "Y o u g i v e m e n o t h i n g t an g i b l e ."

T h e d e m o n s h r u g g e d i t s s h o u

l d e r s a n d s m i l e d . " R e v o l u t i o n i s n o t t a n g i b l e — n o t t o b e g i n w i t h . T h e c o m m o n e r s b a r e l y

k n o w t h e c o n c e p t e x i s t s , b u t t h e y b r e a t h e i t w h e n t h e y s l e e p a n d t h e y t a s t e i t w h e n t h e y d r i n k . "

" T h a t ' s e n o u g h r i d d l e s . C o n t i n u e w i t h y o u r w o r k . " T h e m a g i c i a n s n a p p e d h i s f i n g e r s ; t h e d e m o n s p r a n g o u t o f t h e

c i r c l e a n d v a n i s h e d . M a n d r a k e s h o o k h i s h e a d . " A l l b u t u s e l e s s . W e l , w e ' l s e e w h a t F r i t a n g h a s t o o f f e r . "

Anothercommand:thesecondcirclefl aredintolife.Inacloudofincenseanewdemonappeared—ashort,fat

gentlemanwitharoundredfaceandplaintiveeyes.Itstoodblinkingagitatedlyinthearti fi cialllight."Atlast!"itcried.

"Ihaveterriblenews!Itcannotwaitanothermoment!"

MandrakeknewFritangofold."AsIunderstandit,"hesaidslowly,"youhavebeenpatrolingthedocks,huntingfor

spies. Does your news have anything to do with this?"

A pause. "Indirectly..." the demon said.

Mandrake sighed. "Goon, then."

"I was carrying out your orders," Fritang said, "when—oh, how the memory appalls me!—my cover was blown. Here is

my account. I had been conducting inquiries in a wineshop. As I exited, I found myself surrounded by a tribe of street

urchins, somescarcelytaler thanmyknee. Iwasdisguised as a manservant, goingaboutmyquietbusiness. Ihad

madenoloudnoisesorextravagantgestures. Nevertheless Iwassingledoutandhitbyfifteeneggs, mostlythrown

withforce."

"Whatwasyourexactguise? Perhapsthatwasitselfaprovocation."

"Iwasasyouseeme. Gray-haired, sober, andstraight-backed, themodeloftediousvirtu

e."

"Evidentlytheyoungscoundrelsdecidedtowaylayamanofsuchqualities.Youwereunlucky,thatisal."

Fritang'seyeswidenedanditsnostrilsflared."Therewasmoretoitthanthat!Theyknewmeforwhat I am!"

"Asademon?" Mandrakeflickedskepticalyataparticleofdustuponhissleeve."Howcouldyoutell?"

"Mysuspicionswerearousedbytheirrepetitivechantin

g:'Getout,getout,viledemon.Wehateyouandyour

danglingyelowcrest.'"

"Realy?Thatisinteresting..." Themagicianappraised Frit angcarefulythroughhislenses."Butwhatyelowcrestis

this?Idon'tseeit."

Thedemonpointedataspace aboveitshead."Thatisbecauseyoucannotseethesixthorseventhplanes.Onthose,

mycrestisself-evident,resplendentasasunflower.Im

ay ad d t h at i t i s n ot d an g l i n g , t h o u g h c ap t i v i t y d oes m ak e i t

d r o o p a l i t t l e ."

"T h e s i x th an d s e v e n th p l an e s . . . an d y o u 'r e q u i t e s u r e y o u d i d n 't l e t y o u r g u i s e s l i p f o r a m o m e n t ? Y e s , y e s ."

M an d r ak e h e l d u p a h as t y h an d as t h e d e m o n b e g an a v e h e m e n t p r o t e s t .

"I'm s u r e y o u 'r e r i g h t an d I am g r at e f u l f o r t h e i n f o r m at i o n . Y o u w i l l d o u b t l e s s w an t t o r e s t af t e r y o u r e g g t r au m a. B e

g o n e ! Y o u ar e d i s m i s s e d."

W i t h a y e l o f d e l i g h t, F r i t an g d e p ar t e d i n c o r k s c r e w m o t i o n t h r o u g h t h e c e n t e r o f t h e p e n t ac l e, as i f s u c k e d n o i s i l y

d o w n a p l u g h o l e. M an d r ak e an d M s. P i p e r l o o k e d at e ac h o t h e r.

"An other c as e, " M s. P i p e r s ai d. "C h i l d r e n ag ai n."

"M m m." T h e m ag i c i an l e an e d b ac k i n h i s c h ai r an d s t r e t c h e d h i s ar m s o u t b e h i n d h i s h e ad. "Y o u m i g h t j u s t c h e c k t h e

files, get the exact number. I must summon the demons back from Kent."

He sat forward, his elbows on the desk, and made the incantation in an undertone. Ms. Piper got up and crossed to

the filing cabinet on the edge of the circle. She opened the topmost drawer and drew out a bulging manila file.

Returning to her seat, she removed the elastic around the file and began sifting rapidly through the documents within.

Theincantationendedamida suffusionofjasmineandsweetbriar.Intheright-handpentacleahulkingform

appeared—agiantwithblond,braidedhairandasinglegl aringeye.Ms.Piperwentonreading.

Thegiantperformedalowandcomplexbow."Master,Igreetyouwiththebloodofyourenemies,withtheircriesand

lamentations!Victoryisours!"

Mandrakeraisedaneyebrow.

"S o y o u c h as e d t h e m aw ay , t h e n ."

T h e c y c l o p s n o d d e d . "T h e y fl e d l i k e m i c e b e f o r e l i o n s . L i t e r al y , i n s o m e c as e s ."

"In d e e d . T h at w as t o b e e x p e c t e d . B u t d i d y o u c ap t u r e an y ? "

"W e k i l e d a g o o d m an y . Y o u s h o u l d h av e h e ar d t h e m s q u e ak ! A n d t h e i r fl e e i n g h o o v e s fai r l y s h o o k t h e e ar t h ."

"R i g h t . S o y o u d i d n't c ap t u r e a s i n g l e o n e . W h i c h w as e x p r e s s l y w h at I o r d e r e d y o u an d t h e o t h e r s t o d o ." M an d r ak e

r ap p e d h i s f i n g e r s o n t h e t ab l e . "In a m att e r o f d ay s t h e y w i l at t ac k ag ai n . W h o s e nt t h e m ? P r ag u e ? P ar i s ? A m e r i c a?

W i t h o u t c ap t i v e s i t i s i m p o s s i b l e t o s ay . W e ar e n o f u r t h e r f o r w ar d ."

T h e c y c l o p s g av e a c r i s p s al u t e . "W e l , m y w o r k i s d o n e . I am p l e as e d t o h av e g i v e n s at i s f ac t i o n ." It p au s e d . "Y o u

s e e m l o s t i n t h o u g h t , O m as t e r ."

T h e m ag i c i an n o d d e d . "I am d e b at i n g , A s c o b o l , w h e t h e r t o

subjectyoutothetheStipplesoftheUnfortunateHug.Doyou

haveapreference?"

"Youcouldnotbesocruel!"Thecyclopswiggledago-nizedlybackandforth,toyingwithabraidofhair."Blame

Bartimaeus,notme!Onceagain,hetookusefulpartintheaction,butwaswaylaidbyasingleblow.Iwasdelayed

fromthechasebyhisloudrequeststohelphimupfromben eathapebble.Heisasweakasatadpoleandvicious

withit:youshouldsubjecthimtotheStipplesforthwith."

"AndwhereisBartimaeusnow?"

Thecyclopsgaveapout."Iknownot.Possiblyhehasexpiredfromexhaustionintheinterim.Hetookknopartinthe

chase."

Themagiciansighedddeeply."Ascobol—begonefromhere."Hemadeadismissivesign.Thegiant'sflutingcriesof

thankswereabruptlycutoff; itvanishedinagoutofflame. Mandraketurnedtohisassistant. "Anyjoy, Piper?"

Shenodded. "Thesearetheunauthorizeddemonsightings ofthelastsixmonths. Forty-two—no, forty-three nowin

total. Asfarasthedemonsgo, there'snopattern: we'vehadafrits, djinn, imps, andmitesalspotted. Butwhenyou

lookatthecommoners..." Sheglanceddownattheopenfile. "Mostarechildren, andmostofthosechildrenare

young. In thirty cases the witnesses were under eighteen. What's that? Seventy percent or so. And in over half of

those the witnesses were under twelve." She looked up. "They're being born with it. With the power to see."

"And who knows what else." Mandrake swiveled his chair and stared out over the bare gray branches of the trees in

the square. Mists still meandered around them, cloaking the ground from view. "Alright," he said, "that's enough for

now. It's nearly nine, and I've p
rivate work to do. Thanks for
your help, Piper. I'll see you at
the ministry later this

morning. Don't let that door g
uard give you any cheek as you
go out."

For some moments after his as
sistant's departure the magici
an remained motionless, tapp
ing his fingers together

aimlessly. Finaly he leaned o
ver and opened a side drawer i
n his desk. He pulled out a sm
all cloth bundle and set it

downinfrontofhim.Flickingthefabricaside,herevealedabronzedisc,shinywiththeuseofyears.

Themagicianstareddowntothescryingglass,wilingitintolife.Somethingstirredinitsdepths.

"FetchBartimaeus,"hesaid.

3

Withdawn,thefirstpeopleretурnedtothelittletown.Hesitant,fearful,gropingtheirwaylikeblindmenupthe

s t r e e t , t h e y b e g a n t o i n s p e c t t h e d a m a g e w r o u g h t t o t h e i r h o u s e s , s h o p s , a n d g a r d e n s . A f e w N i g h t P o l i c e c a m e w i t h

t h e m , o s t e n t a t i o u s l y f l o u r i s h i n g I n f e r n o s t i c k s a n d o t h e r w e a p o n s , t h o u g h t h e t h r e a t w a s l o n g s i n c e g o n e .

I w a s d i s i n c l i n e d t o m o v e . I s p u n a C o n c e a l m e n t a r o u n d t h e c h u n k o f c h i m n e y w h e r e I s a t a n d r e m o v e d m y s e l f f r o m

t h e h u m a n s ' s i g h t . I w a t c h e d t h e m p a s s i n g w i t h a b a l e f u l e y e .

Myfewhours'resthaddonem
elittlegood.Howcouldit?It
hadbeentwowholeyearssinc
eI'dbeenalowedtoleave

thiscursedEarth;twofulye
arssinceI'dlastescapedthebr
ainlessthrongingmassofsw
eethumanity.Ineeded

morethanaquietkiponachim
neystacktodealwiththat,Icant
elyou.Ineededtogohome.

AndifIdidn't,Iwasgoingtod
ie.

Itistechnicalypossiblefora
spirittoremainindefinitely

o n E ar t h , an d m an y o f u s at o n e t
i m e o r an o t h e r h av e

e n d u r e d p r o l o n g e d v i s i t s , u
s u al y c o u r t e s y o f b e i n g f o r c i
b l y t r ap p e d i n s i d e c an o p i c j
ar s , s an d al w o o d b o x e s , o r o t h
e r

ar b i t r ar y s p ac e s c h o s e n b y o u
r c r u e l m as t e r s .1 D r e ad f u l p u
n i s h m e n t t h o u g h t h i s i s , i t at l
e as t h as t h e ad v an t ag e o f

b e i n g s af e an d q u i e t . Y o u ar e n
't c al l e d u p o n t o d o an y t h i n g , s
o y o u r i n c r e as i n g l y w e ak e n e
d e s s e n c e i s n o t

i m m e d i at e l y at r i s k . T h e m ai n t h r e at c o m e s f r o m t h e r e m o r s e l e s s t e d i u m , w h i c h c an l e ad t o i n s an i t y i n t h e s p i r i t i n

q u e s t i o n .2

1. W hen g oaded into inv ok ing the spel of I ndefinite C onfinem ent, m ag icians usual y com press

the spirit into the first ob j ect they spy close at hand. I once cheek ed a m aster a little too

clev erly during his afternoon tea; b efore I k new it I was im prisoned inside a half-fil ed pot of

strawb erry j am and would hav e rem ained there, possib ly for all eternity, had not his apprentice

opened it b y m istak e at supper that sam e ev ening . E v en so, m y essence was infested with

stick y little seeds for ag es after.

2 . The afrit H onorius was a case in point: he went m ad after a hundred years' confinem ent in a

sk eleton. A rather poor show; I lik e to think with m y eng ag ing personality I could k eep m yself

entertained a l i t t l e long er than that.

Mycurrentpredicamentwasi
nstarkcontrast.Notformeth
eluxuryofbeinghiddenaway
inacozylamporamulet.

No—dayin,dayout,Iwasadji
nnionthestreet,ducking,di
ving,takingrisks,exposing
myselftodanger.Andeach

dayitbecamealittlemoredif
ficulttosurvive.

ForIwasnolongerthecarefr
eeBartimaeusofold.Myesse
ncewasraddledwithEarth's c
orruption;mymindwas

blearywiththepain.Iwaslo

w e r , w e ak e r , d i s t r ac t e d fr o
m r n y t as k s . I f o u n d i t h ar d t o c
h an g e f o r m . In b at t l e m y

at t ac k s w e r e s p u t t e r i n g an d w
e ak —m y D e t o n at i o n s h ad t h e e
x p l o s i v e p o w e r o f l e m o n ad e
, m y C o n v u l s i o n s t r e m b l e d

l i k e j e l y i n a b r e e z e . A l l m y s t
r e n g t h h ad g o n e . W h e r e o n c e ,
i n t h e p r e v i o u s n i g h t 's s c r ap ,
I w o u l d h av e s e n t t h at

p u b l i c c o n v e n i e n c e r i g h t b
ac k at t h e s h e -p i g , ad d i n g a p h o
n e b o x an d a b u s s t o p f o r g o o d
m e as u r e , n o w I c o u l d d o

n o t h i n g t o r e s i s t . I w as v u l n e r ab l e as a k i t t e n . A f e w s mal b u i l d i n g s i n t h e f ac e , I c o u l d s t an d . B u t al r e ad y I w as

p r ac t i c al y at t h e m e r c y o f s e c o n d -r at e f o p s s u c h as A s c o b o l , a f o o l w i t h n o g r e at h i s t o r y t o s p e ak o f .3 A n d i f I m e t a

f o e w i t h e v e n a g r ai n o f p o w e r , m y l u c k w o u l d s u r e l y e n d .

3 . I t is a curious fact that, despite our fury at b eing sum m oned into this world, spirits such as I

deriv e a g ood deal of retrospectiv e satisfaction from our ex ploits. A t the

tim e, of course, we do

our darnedest to av oid them , b ut afterward we often display a certain weary pride in the

clev erest, b rav est, or m ost j am m y ev ents on our resum e. P hilosophers m ig ht speculate this is

b ecause we are essential y d ef i n ed b y our ex periences in this world, since in the O ther P lace we

are not so easily indiv idualiz ed. Thus, those with long and g littering careers (e.g . m e) tend to

look down on those (e.g . A scob ol)

whose nam es hav e b een unearthed m ore recently, and

hav en' t am assed so m any fine achiev em ents. I n A scob ol' s case, I also dislik ed him for his sil y

falsetto v oice, which il b ecom es an eig ht-foot cyclops.

A w e ak d j i n n i i s a b ad s l av e —b ad t w i c e o v e r , s i n c e h e i s b o t h i n e f f e c t i v e an d a l au g h i n g s t o c k . It d o e s a m ag i c i an n o

f av o r s t o m ai n t ai n o n e i n t h e w o r l d . T h i s i s t h e r e as o n w h y t h e y u s u al y al o w u s b ac k t o t h e O t h e r P l ac e o n a

t e m p o r ar y b as i s , t o r e p ai r o u r e s s e n c e an d r e n e w o u r s t r e n g t h . N o m as t e r i n h i s r i g h t m i n d w o u l d p e r m i t a d j i n n i t o

d e t e r i o r at e as f ar as I h ad d o n e .

N o m aster in his rig ht m ind . . . W e l , t h at o f c o u r s e w as t h e p r o b l e m .

I w as i n t e r r u p t e d i n m y g l o o m y c o g i t at i o n b y a s t i r r i n g i n m i d ai r . T h e g i r l l o o k e d up .

A b o v e t h e r o ad ap p e ar e d t h e f ai n t e s t s h i m m e r i n g — a d e l i c at e t i n g l i n g o f p r e t t y p i n k and

y e l o w l i g h t s . I t w as i n v i s i b l e

o n t h e f i r s t p l an e , an d t h u s w e n t u n n o t i c e d b y t h e p e o p l e t r u d g i n g u p t h e s t r e e t , b u t i f an y c h i l d r e n h ad s e e n i t , t h e y 'd

p r o b ab l y h av e g u e s s e d i t t o b e f ai r y d u s t .

W h i c h s h o w s h o w w r o n g y o u c an b e .

W i t h an ab r u p t s c r at c h i n g n o i s e , t h e l i g h t s f r o z e an d w e r e d r aw n b ac k f r o m t h e m i d d l e l i k e t w o c u r t ai n s . B e t w e e n

t h e m ap p e ar e d t h e g r i n n i n g f ac e o f a b al d b ab y w i t h b ad ac n e . It s e v i l l i t t l e e y e s w e r e r e d an d s o r e , i n d i c at i n g an

o w n e r w h o k e p t l o n g h o u r s an d b ad h ab i t s . F o r a f e w m o m e n t s t h e y p e e r e d m y o p i c al y t o an d f r o ; t h e b ab y s w o r e

u n d e r i t s b r e at h an d r u b b e d i t s e y e s w i t h d i r t y l i t t l e f i s t s .

A l at o n c e i t n o t i c e d m y C o n c e al m e n t an d l e t o u t a d r e ad f u l o at h .4 I r e g ar d e d i t w i t h c o o l i m p as s i v i t y .

4 . P rob ab ly G erm anic in orig in—it

inv olv ed nailing som eone' s entrails to an oak tree.

"O i , B ar t ! " t h e b ab y c r i e d . "T h at y o u i n t h e r e ? S t i r y o u r s e l f ! Y o u 'r e w an t e d ."

I s p o k e c as u al y . "B y w h o m ? "

"Y o u k n o w f u l w e l . A n d b o y , ar e y o u i n t r o u b l e ! I r e c k o n i t 's t h e S h r i v e l i n g F i r e f o r s ur e t h i s t i m e ."

"Is t h at s o ? " T h e g i r l r e m ai n e d f i r m l y s e at e d o n t h e b r o k e n c h i m n e y an d c r o s s e d h e r s l e n d e r ar m s . "W e l , i f M an d r ak e

w a n t s m e , h e c a n c o m e a n d g e t m e h i m s e l f ."

T h e b a b y g r i n n e d n a s t i l y . "G o o d . I w a s h o p i n g y o u 'd s a y t h a t . N o p r o b l e m , B a r t y ! I'l p a s s t h a t o n . C a n 't w a i t t o s e e

w h a t h e 'l d o ."

T h e i m p 's m a l i c i o u s g l e e i r r i t a t e d m e .5 If I'd h a d a l i t t l e m o r e e n e r g y I'd h a v e l e a p e d u p a n d s w a l l o w e d i t t h e r e a n d

t h e n . I c o n t e n t e d m y s e l f w i t h s n a p p i n g o f f a c h i m n e y p o t a n d t h r o w i n g i t w i t h u n e r r i n g a i m . It s t r u c k t h e b a b y 's b a l d

f at h e ad w i t h a s at i s f ac t o r y r i n g i n g s o u n d .

5 . W e were, after all, slav es tog ether; we had b oth suffered long at M andrak e' s hands. A b it of

em pathy would not, I think , hav e b een out of place. B ut the im p' s long confinem ent had rather

soured its worldv iew, which has happened to far b etter spirits than it ov er the years.

"A s I t h o u g h t , " I s ai d . "H o l o w ."

T h e u n l o v e l y g r i n c o n v e r t e d

intoascowl."Youcad!Justy
ouwait—we'lseewho'slaughi
ngwhenIwatchyouburn."

Propeledbyagustofripelan
guage,itpoppedbackbehind
itscurtainsofglimmeringli
ghtsanddrewthemsmartly

together.Twinklingsoftly,
thelightsdissipatedontheb
reeze.Theimpwasgone.

Thegirlpushedastrandofhai
rbehindoneear,refoldedhe
rarmsgrimly,andsettledbac
ktowait.Nowtherewould

beconsequences,whichwas

exactlywhatIneeded.Itwastime foraproperconfrontation.

Tobeginwith,yearsbefore, mymasterandIhadgotalongwelenough.Idon'tmeanamicably,oranything

ridiculouslikethat,butour mutualirritationwasfoundedonsomethingapproximating respect.Duringaseriesof

earlyincidents,fromtheLovelaceconspiracytothegolemaffair,I'dbeenforcedtoacknowledgeMandrake'sverve

anddaring,hisenergyandeve
n(faintly)theglimmeringso
fhisconscience.Itwasn'tmu
ch,admittedly,butitmade

hisprissiness,stubbornnes
s,pride,andambitionalittle
lesshardtostomach.Inreturn
,Iobviouslyhadnoshortage

ofwonderfultraitsforhimto
admire,andanyway,hecould
barelygetupinthemorningw
ithoutneedingmetosave

hissorryskin.Wecoexisted
inawarystateoftoleration.

Forayearorsoafterthedefeat

o f t h e g o l e m an d M an d r ak e 's p r o m o t i o n t o H e ad o f In t e r n al A f f ai r s , h e d i d n 't p u s h me

ar o u n d t o o m u c h . H e s u m m o n e d me f r o m t i m e t o t i m e t o h e l p o u t w i t h m i n o r i n c i d e n t s , w h i c h I h av e n 't g o t t i m e t o

g o i n t o h e r e , 6 b u t g e n e r al y s p e ak i n g h e l e f t m e p r e t t y m u c h al o n e .

6 . I f m em ory serv es, these included the case of the A frit, the E nv elope, and the A m b assador' s

W ife; the affair of the C uriously H eav y Trunk ; and the m essy episode of the

A narchist and the

O yster. M andrak e nearly lost his life in al of those. A s I say, none of them was of m uch

interest.

O n t h e o d d o c c as i o n t h at h e d i d c al m e , w e b o t h k n e w w h e r e h e s t o o d . W e h ad an ag r e e m e n t o f s o r t s . I k n e w h i s

b i r t h n am e , an d h e k n e w I k n e w i t . T h o u g h h e t h r e at e n e d m e w i t h d i r e c o n s e q u e n c e s i f I t o l d an y o n e , i n p r ac t i c e h e

t r e at e d m e w i t h c ar e f u l d e t ac

h m e n t i n al o u r d e al i n g s . I k e p t h i s n am e t o m y s e l f an d h e k e p t m e aw ay f r o m t h e m o s t

d an g e r o u s t as k s — w h i c h b as i c al l y b o i l e d d o w n t o t h e f i g h t i n g i n A m e r i c a. D o z e n s o f d j i n n w e r e d y i n g t h e r e —t h e

r e v e r b e r at i o n s o f t h e l o s s e s r an g h ar s h l y t h r o u g h t h e O t h e r P l ac e —an d I w as h ap p y t o h av e n o p ar t i n i t .7

7 . To those of us ab reast with hum an history, the cause of the latest war was drearily fam iliar.

F or years the A m ericans had refused

to pay the tax es dem anded of them b y L ondon. The

B ritish swiftly fel b ack on the oldest arg um ent of al , and sent ov er an arm y to b eat the

colonists up. A fter initial easy v ictories, stag nation set in. The reb els retreated into thick woods,

sending dj inn out to am b ush the adv ancing troops. S ev eral prom inent B ritish m ag icians were

k il ed; the S ix th and S ev enth fleets were sum m oned from the C hina S eas to b olster the

cam paig n—b ut stil the fig hting drib b led on. M onths went b y, the E m pire' s streng th was

frittered away in the A m erican wastes, and the repercussions resounded around the g lob e.

T i m e p as s e d ; M an d r ak e w o r k e d at h i s j o b w i t h h i s u s u al z e al . A n o p p o r t u n i t y f o r p r o m o t i o n c am e , an d h e ac c e p t e d i t .

H e w as n o w In f o r m at i o n M i n i s t e r , o n e o f t h e g r e at o n e s o f t h e E m p i r e .8

8 . H is chance cam e thank s to the war. The reb el g uerril as were causing the B

ritish arm y

prob lem s. A fter a year of attritional fig hting the F oreig n M inister, a certain M r. F ry, v isited the

colonies secretly with a v iew to arrang ing a truce. E ig ht m ag icians watched him as he trav eled;

a host of horlas g uarded his ev ery step: the m inister was inv ulnerab le. O r so they thoug ht. O n

his first nig ht in P hiladelphia he was treacherously slain b y an im p concealed in his ev ening pie.

A m id g eneral outrag e, the P rim e M

inister reshuffled his m inisters, and M andrak e j oined the

ruling C ouncil.

O f f i c i al y , h i s d u t i e s w e r e t o d o w i t h p r o p ag an d a—d e v i s i n g c l e v e r w ay s o f s e l i n g t h e w ar t o t h e B r i t i s h p e o p l e .

U n o f f i c i al l y , at t h e P r i m e M i n i s t e r 's b e h e s t , h e c o n t i n u e d m u c h o f h i s In t e r n al A f f ai r s p o l i c e w o r k , o p e r at i n g an

u n s av o r y n e t w o r k o f s u r v e i l l an c e d j i n n an d h u m an s p i e s , w h i c h r e p o r t e d d i r e c t l y t o h i m . H i s w o r k l o ad , w h i c h h ad

alwaysbeensevere,nowbecamecrippling.

Therefolowedadismalseachangeinmymaster'spersonality.Neverexactlyfamousforhislighthearted banter,he

becamepositivelyabruptandantisocial,evenlesswillingthanbeforetoshootthebreezewithadebonairdjinni.But

bycruelparadox,healsobeganto summonmemoreandmorefrequently,andforlessandlessreason.

Whydidhedoso?Mainlynod

o u b t b e c au s e h e w i s h e d t o mi
n i m i z e t h e c h an c e s o f m y b e i n
g s u m m o n e d b y an o t h e r

m ag i c i an . H i s o l d f e ar , n o w f u
e l e d b y c h r o n i c f at i g u e an d p
ar an o i a, w as t h at I w o u l d d i v u l
g e h i s b i r t h n am e t o an

e n e m y , r e n d e r i n g h i m v u l n e
r ab l e t o at t ac k . W e l , f ai r e n o u
g h , t h at w as al w ay s p ossible. I m
ig ht h av e d o n e i t . C an 't

s ay f o r s u r e . B u t h e 'd m an ag e d
w i t h o u t m e i n t h e p as t , an d n o t
h i n g h ad h ap p e n e d t o h i m . S o I
t h o u g h t s o m e t h i n g

elsewasgoingontoo.

Mandrakemaskedhisemotionswelenough,buthiswholelifewaswork—remorselessandnever-ending.Moreover,

hewasnowsurroundedbyagangofvicious,hot-eyedmaniacs—theotherministers—mostofwhomwishedhim

harm.Hisonlyclosеassociate,foratime,wasthehackplaywrightQuentinMakepeace,asself-servingasaltherest.

Tosurviveinthisfriendless

w o r l d , M an d r ak e c l o ak e d h i s b e t t e r q u al i t i e s u n d e r l ay e r s o f s m ar m an d s w an k . A l l h i s o l d

l i f e —t h e y e ar s w i t h t h e U n d e r w o o d s , h i s v u l n e r ab l e e x i s t e n c e as t h e b o y N at h an i e l , t h e i d e al s h e 'd o n c e e s p o u s e d —

w as b u r i e d aw ay d e e p d o w n . E v e r y l i n k w i t h h i s c h i l d h o o d w as s e v e r e d , e x c e p t f o r m e . I d o n 't t h i n k h e c o u l d b r i n g

h i m s e l f t o b r e ak t h i s l as t c o n n e c t i o n .

Iproposedthistheoryinmyusualgentleway,butMandrakewasunwilingtolistentomytaunts.Hewasaworried

man.9TheAmericancampaignswerevastlyexpensive,theBritishsupplylinesoverstretched.Withthemagicians'

attentiondiverted,otherpartsoftheEmpirehadbecometroublesome.Foreignspiesinfestedlondonlikemaggotsin

anapple.Thecommonerswerevolatile.Tocounteralthis,Mandrakeworkedlikeaslave

.

9 . I ' m stretching the term a b it here, I k now. B y now, in his m id to late teens, he m ig ht j ust

ab out hav e passed for a m an. W hen seen from b ehind. A t a distance. O n a v ery dark nig ht.

W e l , n o t literal y l i k e a s l av e . T h at w as m y j o b . A n d a p r e t t y t h an k l e s s o n e i t w as t o o . B ac k at In t e r n al A f f ai r s , s o m e

o f t h e as s i g n m e n t s h ad b e e n al m o s t w o r t h y o f m y t al e n t s . I'd i n t e r c e p t e d e n e m y m e s s ag e s an d d e c i p h e r e d t h e m ,

g i v e n o u t f a l s e r e p o r t s , t r a i l
e d e n e m y s p i r i t s , d u f f e d a f e
w o f t h e m u p , e t c . I t w a s s i m p l
e , s a t i s f y i n g w o r k — I g o t a

c r a f t s m a n ' s p l e a s u r e f r o m i t .
I n a d d i t i o n , I h e l p e d M a n d r a k
e a n d t h e p o l i c e i n t h e s e a r c h f
o r t w o f u g i t i v e s f r o m t h e

g o l e m a f f a i r . T h e f i r s t o f t h e s
e w a s a c e r t a i n m y s t e r i o u s m e
r c e n a r y (d i s t i n g u i s h i n g f e a t
u r e s : b i g b e a r d , g r i m

e x p r e s s i o n , s w a n k y b l a c k c l
o t h e s , g e n e r a l i n v u l n e r a b i l i
t y t o I n f e r n o s / D e t o n a t i o n s /
p r e t t y m u c h e v e r y t h i n g e l s e

). He'd

last been seen far away in Prague, and predictably enough we never got a whiff of him. The second was an even more

nebulous character, who mno one had even seen eye on. He apparently went by the name of Hopkins, and claimed to

be a scholar. He was generaly suspected of mastermindng the golem plot, and I'd hear d he 'd been involved with the

Resistance too. But he might as well have been a ghost or sh

adowforalthesubstancewecouldpindown.Wefound

aspiderysignatureinanadmissionsbookatanoldlibraryt hatmighthavebeenhis.Thatwasal.Thetrail,suchasit

was,wentcold.

ThenMandrakebecameInformationMinisterandIwassoo nengagedinmoredepressing work,viz.pastingup

advertson1,000bilboardsacrossLondon;distributingp amphletsto25,000homesacrossditto;corralingselecte

d

animalsforpublicholiday"entertainments"; 10supervisingfood, drink, and "hygiene" forsame; flyingbackandforth

acrossthecapitalforhoursonendtrailingpro-warbanners. Now, callmepicky, butI'darguethatwhenyouthinkof

a5,000-year-olddjinni, thescourgeofcivilizationsandconfidanteofkings, certainthingscometomind—

swashbucklingespionage, p

e r h ap s , o r v al i an t b at t l e s , t h r i l i n g e s c ap e s an d g e n e r al m u l t i p u r p o s e e x c i t e m e n t . W h at

y o u d on ' t r e ad i l y t h i n k o f i s t h at s am e n o b l e d j i n n i b e i n g f o r c e d t o p r e p ar e g i an t v at s o f c h i l i c o n c ar n e f o r f e s t i v al

d ay s , o r s t r u g g l i n g o n s t r e e t c o r n e r s w i t h b i l -p o s t e r s an d p o t s o f g l u e .

10 . F ol owing the R om an tradition, the m ag icians soug ht to k eep the people docile with reg ular

holidays, in which free shows were put on in all the m aj or park s. L ots of ex

otic b easts from

across the E m pire were displayed, as were m inor im ps and sprites alleg edly " caug ht" during

the war. H um an prisoners were paraded along the streets, or enclosed in special g lass v iewing

g lob es in the S t. J am es' s P ark pav ilions for the populace to j eer at.

E s p e c i al y w i t h o u t b e i n g al l o w e d t o r e t u r n h o m e . S o o n m y p e r i o d s o f r e s p i t e i n t h e O t h e r P l ac e b e c am e s o f l e e t i n g l

p r ac t i c al y g o t w h i p l as h t r av e

l i n g t h e r e an d b ac k . T h e n , o n e d ay , M an d r ak e c e as e d d i s mi s s i n g me al t o g e t h e r , an d t h at

w as i t . I w as t r ap p e d o n E ar t h .

O v e r t h e n e x t t w o y e ar s I g r e w s t e ad i l y w e ak e r , an d j u s t w h e n I w as h i t t i n g r o ck b o t t o m , s c ar c e l y ab l e t o l i f t a p o s t e r

b r u s h , t h e w r e t c h e d b o y b e g an s e n d i n g me o u t o n mo r e d an g e r o u s mi s s i o n s ag ai n — f i g h t i n g b an d s o f e n e my d j i n n

t h at B r i t ai n 's m an y e n e mi e s w e r e u s i n g t o s t i r u p t r o u b l e .

Inthepast I'd have had a quiet word with Mandrake, expressing my disapproval with succinct directness. But my

privileged access to him was no more. He'd taken to summoning me along with a host of other slaves, giving orders

en masse and sending us off like a pack of dogs. Such multiple summoning is a difficult business, requiring great

mental strength on the part of the magician, but Mandrake did it daily without apparent effort, talking quietly with his

assistantorevenflickingthroughanewspaperwhilewestoodandsweatedinourcircles.

Ididmybesttogettohim.Insteadofusingamonstrousguiselikemyfellowslaves(Ascobol'scyclopsand

Cormocodran'sboar-headedbehemothweretypical),Itooktowearingthesemblanceof KittyJones,theResistance

girlMandrakehadpersecutedyearsbefore.Herassumeddeathstilweighedonhisconscience:Iknewthisbecause

h e al w ay s r e ac t e d t o m y e c h o o f h e r f ac e w i t h a r e d d e n i n g o f h i s o w n . H e 'd g e t al an g r y an d s h e e p i s h , as s e r t i v e an d

e m b ar r as s e d at t h e s am e t i m e . D i d n 't m ak e h i m t r e at m e an y b e t t e r , m i n d .

W e l , I'd h ad ab o u t as m u c h as I c o u l d s t an d f r o m M an d r ak e . It w as t i m e t o h av e i t o u t w i t h h i m . B y r e f u s i n g t o g o

b ac k w i t h t h e i m p , I o b l i g e d t h e m ag i c i an t o r e c al m e o f f i c i al l y , w h i c h w o u l d d o u b t l e s s h u r t , b u t w as at l e as t l i k e l y t o

meanhegavemethebenefitof hisattentionforfiveminute s.

Theimphadbeengoneforhou rs.Inthepast I'd havegotaswif trespons efrommymaster,bu tthedelaywastypical

ofhisnewdistractednes s.Is moothedbackKittyJones'sl ongdarkhairandcastmyeyear oundthelittlerural town.

Severalcommonershadgathe redaroundtheruinedpostoff iceandwereengagedinpassi onatedebate;theyresisted

theeffortsofalonepolicem
antomakethemreturntotheir
homes.Nodoubtaboutit:the
peoplewereregrowing

restless.

Whichturnedmythoughtsto
Kittyonceagain.Despiteapp
earancestothecontrary,she
hadn'tdiedinbattlewiththe

golemthreeyearsbefore.Ins
tead,afteractingwithunusu
alselflessnessandbraveryto
saveMandrake'sworthless

hide,she'dslippedquietly
away.Ourencounterhadbeen

b r i e f b u t s t i m u l at i n g : h e r p as s i o n at e o p p o s i t i o n t o i n j u s t i c e

r e m i n d e d m e o f s o m e o n e e l s e I'd k n o w n , a l o n g t i m e ag o .

P ar t o f m e hop ed K i t t y h ad b o u g h t a o n e -w ay t i c k e t t o s o m e w h e r e s af e an d d i s t an t an d h ad s e t u p a c af e o n a b e ac h

o r s o m e t h i n g , o u t o f h ar m 's w ay . B u t d e e p d o w n I k n e w s h e w as s t i l c l o s e b y , w o r k i n g ag ai n s t t h e m ag i c i ans . T h at

k n o w l e d g e r at h e r p l e as e d m e , t h o u g h s h e 'd h ad n o l o v e f o r d

j i n n .

W h a t e v e r s h e w as d o i n g , I h o p e d s h e w as k e e p i n g o u t o f t r o u b l e .

4

T h e d e m o n s aw K i t t y t h e m o m e n t s h e m o v e d . A w i d e m o u t h o p e n e d i n t h e s t u b b y , f e at u r e l e s s h e ad ; d o u b l e r o w s o f

t e e t h d e s c e n d e d f r o m ab o v e an d r o s e f r o m t h e l i n i n g o f t h e j aw . It s n i p p e d i t s t e e t h t o g e t h e r c u r i o u s l y , m ak i n g a

n o i s e l i k e a t h o u s an d s c i s s o r

s,slicinginunison.Foldsof
gray-greenfleshshiftedone
itherside of theskul,reveali
ng

twogoldeneyesthatglinted
astheyturnedonher.

Kittydidnotrepeathermist
ake.Shestoodstock-stil,bar
elysixfeetfromthebentands
nufflinghead,andheldher

breath.

Thedemonscrapedafootexp
erimentallyagainstthefloor
,scoringfivethickclawgash
esinthetiles.Itmadea

curiouscrooningnoisedeep initsthroat. Itwassizingheru p, sheknewitwas, appraising herstrength, debating

whethertoattack. Inthefinal momentsofcrisisherbraint ookinmanyirrelevantdetail sofitsguise: theflecksof

grayhairaboutthejoints, the brightmetalscalesuponthet orso, thehandswithtoomany fingersandtoofewbones.

Herownlimbsshook; herhan dstwitchedasiftoencourage hertorun, butshefoughtagai nstherfearandbeatit

d o w n .

T h e n a v o i c e c ame : s w e e t and f e mal e , c u r i o u s l y i n q u i r i n g . " A r e n ' t y o u g o i n g t o r un , my d e ar ? I c an o n l y l o p e al o n g o n

t h e s e c l u b f e e t . A h me , s o s l o w ! T r y i t . Y o u n e v e r k n o w — y o u mi g h t e s c ap e . " S o g e n t l e w as t h e v o i c e i t t o o k K i t t y a

m o me n t t o r e al i z e i t c ame f r o m t h e d r e ad f u l mo u t h . It w as t h e d e mo n t h at s p o k e . N u mb l y s h e s h o o k h e r h e ad .

T h e d e mo n f l e x e d s i x f i n g e r s i n an i n c o mp r e h e n s i b l e g e s t

ure."Thenatleaststeptowardme,"thesweetvoicesaid.

"Itwouldsavemethetortureofhobblingovertoyouonthesepoorclubfeetofmine.Ahme,sosore!Myessence

flinchesfromthepullofyourharsh,cruelearth."

AgainKittyshookherhead,slowerthistime.Thedemonsighed,bowingitsheadasifcrushedanddisappointed."My

dear,youhavenocourtesy.Iwonderwhetheryouressencewoulddisagreewithmeif I

at e y o u . I am a m ar t y r t o

i n d i g e s t i o n . . . ." T h e h e ad r o s e ; t h e e y e s s p ar k l e d , t h e t e e t h s n i p p e d l i k e a t h o u s and s c i s s o r s . " I w i l r i s k i t . " W i t h o u t

p au s e t h e l e g j o i n t s b e n t and s p r ang , t h e j aw s o p e n e d , w i d e , w i d e , w i d e ; t h e f i n g e r s c l as p e d . K i t t y f e l b ac k ,

s c r e am e d .

A w al o f s i l v e r s h ar d s , t h i n as r ap i e r s , r o s e f r o m t h e f l o o r , s p e ar i n g t h e d e m o n as i t l e ap e d ; a f l as h , a s h o w e r o f

sparks—itsbodyburstintolilacflames.Ithoveredinmidairforasplitsecond,twitched,emittedasinglegoutof

smoke,thendriftedsoftlytothefloor,lightasburningpaper.Alittlevoicewhispered,sad,resentful:"Ahme..."

Nowitwasnothingbutahusk,whichfellinuponitselfandpresentlydwindledintoashes.

Kitty'smuscleswerefrozeninarictusofterror;withagrimeffort,shemanagedtoclosehermouthandblink,once,

twice. She ran a trembling hand through her hair.

"Great heavens," her master said from the pentacle on the opposite side of the room. "I didn't expect that. But the

stupidity of these creatures is boundless. Sweep away the mess, dear Lizzie, and we can discuss the procedure. You

must be very proud of your success."

Dumbly, eyes still staring, Kitty managed the faintest of nods. She stepped stiff-legged

fromthecircleandwentto

fetchthebroom.

"Wel,you'reaclevergirland nomistake."Hermasterwassi ttingonthesofanearestthew indow,sippingfroma

chinacup."Andyoumakegoo dteatoo,whichisablessing onadaylikethisone."Rainbat teredthewindowpanes

andgustedhaphazardlyacros sthestreet.Thewindwhined inthepassagesofthehouse.K ittydrewherfeetupoutof

t h e d r a f t s k i r l i n g ac r o s s t h e f l o o r and t o o k a s w i g o f s t r o n g b r o w n t e a f r o m h e r m u g .

T h e o l d man w i p e d h i s m o u t h w i t h t h e b ac k o f h i s h and . " Y e s , a v e r y s at i s f ac t o r y s u m m o n s . N o t b ad at al . A n d m o s t

i n t e r e s t i n g f o r m e — w h o ' d h av e t h o u g h t t h e t r u e f o r m o f a s u c c u b u s l o o k e d l i k e that! G r ac i o u s ! N o w , L iz z ie, d i d y o u

n o t i c e t h at y o u s l i g h t l y m i s p r o n o u n c e d t h e R e s t r ai n i n g S y l ab l e , r i g h t at t h e e n d ? N o t e n o u g h t o b r e ak t h e s af e t y w al l ,

b u t t h e c r e at u r e w as e m b o l d e n e d , t h o u g h t i t w o u l d t r y i t s l u c k . F o r t u n at e l y , e v e r y t h i n g e l s e y o u d i d w as p e r f e c t ."

K i t t y w as s t i l l s h ak i n g . S h e s an k b ac k am o n g t h e c u s h i o n s o f t h e an c i e n t s o f a . " If I ' d ... m ad e an y other m i s t ak e s ,

s i r , " s h e s ai d h al t i n g l y , " w h at w o u l d h av e — ? "

" O h , g r ac i o u s — I w o u l d n ' t w o r r y y o u r h e ad ab o u t t h at . Y o u d i d n ' t , an d t h at ' s w h at c o u n t s . H av e a c h o c o l at e d i g e s t i v e ."

H e i n d i c at e d t h e p l at e b e t w e

enthem."Settlesthestomach,Ifind."

Shetookabiscuit,dunkeditinhertea."Butwhydiditattackme?"shesaid,frowning."Surelyitmusthavebeen

abletotelthatthepentacle'sdefenseswouldcomeintoforce."

Hermasterchuckled."Whocansay?Perhapsithopedyouwouldflinchoutofthecirclesitleaped:thatwouldhave

instantlydestroyeditsprisonandalloweditttodevouryou.

N o t i c e t h at i t h ad al r e ad y t r i e d t w o c h i l d i s h s t r at ag e m s t o

p e r s u ad e y o u t o l e av e t h e p e n t ac l e . H u m , i t w as n o t a s o p h i s t i c at e d d j i n n i . B u t p e r h ap s i t h ad g r o w n t i r e d o f

b o n d ag e ; p e r h ap s i t s i m p l y w i s h e d t o d i e ." H e e y e d t h e d r e g s at t h e b o t t o m o f h i s t e ac u p m u s i n g l y . "W h o c an t e l ?

W e u n d e r s t an d s o little ab o u t d e m o n s , ab o u t w h at m ak e s t h e m t i c k . T h e y ar e h ar d t o f at h o m . Is t h e r e an y m o r e i n

t h e p o t ? "

Kittyinspectedit."Nope.I'll makesomemore.""Ifyouwould,dearLizzie,ifyouwould.Youmightpassmethatcopy

ofTrismegistusonyourway out.Hehassomeinteresting notesonsuccubi,ifIrecal."

Chilairbitintoherassheentered thepassageandstompeddown tothekitchen.There,leaningclosetothebluegas

flamehissingbeneaththekettle,herself-controlfinallyslackened.Shebegantotremble—properheavybody-

shudderingshakesthatmadeh
ergraspthework surfaceforsupport.

Sheclosedherеyes.Thedemon'sopenjawsplummetedtowardher.Sheopenedthemaginatspeed.

Apaperbagoffruitsatbesidethesink.Mechanicalyshetookanappleandateit,gulpingitdowndesperatelyin

greatroughchunks.Shetookanother,andfinishedit more slowly,staringsightlessly atthewal.

Hertremblingsubsided.Thekettlewhistled.Jakobwasright,shethought,rinsingherrmugunderanicystreamof

water.I'manidiot.Nobodybutafoolwoulddothis.Nobodybutafool.

Butafoolcouldstillbelucky.Andsofar,forthreelongyears,herluckhadheld.

Sincethedaywhenherdeathhadbeenreportedandaccepted,andtheauthoritieshadsealedtheirfileonherwitha

blobofhotblackwax,Kittyh

adneveronceleftLondon.N
omatterthathergoodfriendJ
akobHyrnek,safewith

relativesinBrugesandwork
ingasajeweler,sentherimpl
oringepistlesweekly,begg
inghertocomeandlivewith

him.Nomatterthathisfamily
urgedher,duringtheirsecre
tive,irregularmeetings,tol
eavethedangersofthecity

andstartherlifeafresh.Nom
atterthathercommonsensecr
iedouttoherthatshecoulddo
nothingusefulonher

own. Kitty was undeterred. In London she remained.

Stubborn she still might be, but her old recklessness was now swathed with caution. Everything from her appearance

to her daily routine was carefully judged to avoid arousing the suspicions of the authorities. This was essential, since

for Kitty Jones existence was itself a crime. To conceal herself from the eyes of those few who knew her, she had

croppedherdarkhairshortandworeitinabobbeneathhercap. Shekepttightreinonhermobilefeatures, no

matterwhattheprovocation; shedidherbesttobedul-eyed, stone-faced, nothingbutanumeralinacrowd.

Thoughperhapsalittlethinnerinthefacefromoverworkandlackofinessentialfood, thoughperhapsalittlelined

aroundtheeyes, shestillpossessedthesamemercurialenergiesthathadborneherintotheResistanceandout

again, alive. They supported her in pursuit of a certain ambitious project, and in the maintenance of no fewer than

two false identities.

She had taken lodgings on the third floor of a dilapidated West London town house, in a street near the munitions

factories. Above and below her bed sit were several other rooms that had been crammed by the enterprising landlord

into the shell of the old building. Each was occupied, but s

ave for the caretaker, a dimin
utive man who lived in the

basement, Kitty had not spok
en to any of the tenants. She p
assed the month he stairs so met
imes: men and women,

old and young, all living lives
of isolation and anonymity. S
he was satisfied with this: sh
e both liked and needed the

solitude the house afforded h
er.

The contents of her room were
few. A small white cooker, a f
ridge, a cupboard, and, in a co

r n e r , b e h i n d a d an g l i n g

s h e e t , a s i n k and t o i l e t . B e l o w t h e w i n d o w , w h i c h l o o k e d o u t o v e r a t an g l e o f w al l s and u n k e mp t y ar d s t o t h e h o u s e

b ac k s o pp o s i t e , s at a c o n f u s i o n o f j u mb l e d s h e e t s and p i l o w s : K i t t y 's b e d . B e s i d e t h i s w e r e ne at l y s t ac k e d h e r w o r l d l y

p o s s e s s i o n s : c l o t h e s , t i n s o f f o o d , n e w s p ap e r s , r e c e n t p amp h l e t s ab o ut t h e w ar . H e r m o s t p r e c i o u s i t e ms w e r e

v ar i o u s l y h i d d e n b e ne at h t h e

mattress(asilverthrowingdiscwrappedinahandkerchief),inthecisternofhertoilet

(asealedplasticbagcontainingthedocumentsshehneededtomaintainhernewidentities),andatthebottomofher

laundrybag(severalthickbooksboundinleather).

Beingofpracticaldisposition,Kittydidnotregardherroomwithgreataffection.Itwasaplacetosleepandlittle

more.Shedidnotspendmuchtimeinit.Nevertheless,itw

as her home, and she had lived there for three years.

The name she had given the landlord was Clara Bel. This coincided with the documents that she carried around with

her most often—the stamped identity card and the residence, health and education papers that mapped out her

recent past. They had been forged for her with great skill by old Mr. Hyrnek, Jakob's father, who had also created a

separate set for her under the

nameofLizzieTemple.Shedi
dnothaveanypaperswithherr
ealname.Onlyatnight,

whenshelaybackinthebedwi
thcurtaindrawnandthesingl
elightswitchedoff,didshe
becomeKittyJonesonce

more.Itwasanidentityswath
edindarknessanddreams.

ForsomemonthsfollowingJ
akob'sdeparture,ClaraBelh
adworkedattheHyrneks'pri
ntingfactory,deliveringne
wly

boundbooksandearningabas

i c w ag e .T h i s d i d n o t l as t l o n g — K i t t y w as r e l u c t an t t o i m p e r i l h e r f r i e n d s b y t o o c l o s e

an as s o c i at i o n , an d h ad q u i c k l y t ak e n o n an e v e n i n g j o b at a p u b b e s i d e t h e r i v e r . B y t h e n , h o w e v e r , h e r h u m d r u m

e r r an d s h ad p r o v i d e d h e r w i t h a m o s t u n u s u al o p p o r t u n i t y .

O n e m o r n i n g K i t t y h ad b e e n s u m m o n e d t o M r . H y r n e k 's o f f i c e an d h an d e d a p ac k ag e t o d e l i v e r . It w as h e av y , s m e l e d

o f g l u e an d l e at h e r , an d w as m e

t h o d i c al l y w r ap p e d i n s t r i n g . It w as l ab e l e d : M R . H . B U T T O N , M A G IC IA N .

K i t t y i n s p e c t e d t h e ad d r e s s . "E ar l s C o u r t , " s h e s ai d . "N o t m an y m ag i c i an s t h e r e ."

M r . H y r n e k w as at t e n d i n g t o h i s p i p e w i t h a b l ac k e n e d p e n k n i f e an d p i e c e o f c l o t h . "A m o n g o u r b e l o v e d r u l e r s , " h e

s ai d , f l i c k i n g o u t a f r ag m e n t o f b u r n e d s o o t , "t h i s B u t t o n i s r e g ar d e d as an i n c ur ab l e e c c e n t r i c . H e 's s k i l e d e n o u g h , b y

al accounts, but has never attempted to rise through the political ranks. Used to work as a librarian at the London

Library, until he had an accident. Lost a leg. Now just reads, colects books where he can, writes a bit. Told me once

that he was interested in knowledge for its own sake. Hence no money. Hence Earls Court. Take it along, will you?"

Kitty had done so, and found Mr. Button's house in a region of gray-white vilas, tal and heavy, with immense pilars

supportingostentatiouspor
chesabovethedoors.Onceth
eyhadbeenoccupiedbytheri
ch;nowthedistrictcarrieda

melancholyauraofpovertyan
ddecay.Mr.Buttonlivedatth
eendofatree-linedcul-de-s
ac,inahouseshroudedby

darklaurels.Kittyhadrungth
ebellandwaitedonastained
anddirtystep.Nooneanswer
ed;shenoticedthenthat

thedoorwashangingajar.

Shepeeredinside:adilapid
atedhal,madenarrowbystack

sofbooksagainstthewals.Shecoughedduncertainly.

"Hello?"

"Yes,yes,comein!"Amuffledvoiceechoedfaintly."Atspeed,ifyouwil.Iamalittleinconvenienced."

Kittyhastenedforward,andinaneighboringroom,renderedindistinctbydust-cakedcurtainsdrawnacrossthe

windows,discoveredatwitchingbootprotrudingfrombeneathacolossalpileoffallenbooks.Exploringfurther,

s h e

c am e u p o n t h e h e ad an d n e c k o f an e l d e r l y g e n t l e man , v ai n l y s t r u gg l i n g t o w r i gg l e f r e e . W i t h o u t p r e amb l e , K i t t y

m ad e a r ap i d e x c av at i o n ; i n a f e w m i n u t e s M r . B u t t o n w as s e t t l e d i n a n e ar b y c h ai r , a l i t t l e c r u mp l e d an d v e r y o u t o f

b r e at h .

"T h an k y o u , m y d e ar . W o u l d y o u m i n d p as s i n g m e m y s t i c k ? I w as u s i n g i t t o e x t r ac t a b o o k , w h i c h I f e ar c au s e d al

thetrouble."

Kittyrescuedalongashstick fromamongthedebrisandhan ddedittothemagician.Hewasa smalandfragileman,

bright-eyed,thin-faced,wit hadisorderedmopofstraigh tgrayhairhanginglowoverhi sforehead.Heworeachecke d

shirtwithoutatie,apatched greencardigan,andgraytrous ers,scuffedandstained.One trouserlegwasmissing;it

hadbeenfoldedoverandsew

nshutjustbelowthetorso.

Somethingaboutheisappearancediscomfitedher...Ittookheramomenttorealizeshehadneverseenamagicianso informalydressed.

"Iwassimplytryingtogethold ofavolumeofGibbon," Mr. Buttonwassaying,"whichIspiedatthebottomofapile.

Iwascarelessandlostmybalance.Therewassuchalandslide!Youcannotimaginehowtaxingitistofindanything

i n t h i s p l ac e ."

K i t t y l o o k e d ar o u n d . A c r o s s t h e r o o m i n n u m e r ab l e s t ac k s o f b o o k s r o s e l i k e s t al ag m i t e s f r o m t h e an c i e n t c ar p e t . M an y

o f t h e s e c o l u m n s w e r e as t al as h e r ; o t h e r s h ad h al f c ap s i z e d ag ai n s t e ac h o t h e r , f o r m i n g p r e c ar i o u s ar c h e s s w at h e d

i n d u s t . B o o k s r e s t e d h i g h u p o n a t ab l e an d f i l e d t h e c u p b o ar d s o f a d r e s s e r ; t h e y r e c e d e d i n u n g u e s s e d -at n u m b e r s

t h r o u g h an o p e n d o o r an d d e e p

i n t o a s i d e r o o m . A f e w n ar r o w w al k w ay s r e m ai n e d c l e ar , c o n n e c t i n g t h e w i n d o w s

w i t h t w o s o f as s q u e e z e d b e f o r e a f i r e p l ac e an d t h e e x i t t o t h e h al .

"I t h i n k I'v e g o t s o m e i d e a, " s h e s ai d . "A n y w ay , h e r e 's s o m e t h i n g t o ad d t o y o u r p r o b l e m." S h e p i c k e d u p h e r

p ac k ag e . "F r o m H y r n e k 's ."

T h e o l d m an 's e y e s s p ar k l e d . "G o o d ! G o o d ! T h at w o u l d b e m y e d i t i o n o f P t o l e m y 's Ap oc ry p ha, n e w l y b o u n d i n c al f

hide. Karel Hyrnek is a marvel. My dear, you have improved my day twice over! I insist you stay for tea."

Within half an hour Kitty had learned three things: that the old gentleman was garrulous and daffable, that he

possessed a fine supply of tea and spice cake, and that his need for an assistant was greatly pressing.

"My last helper left me a fortnight ago," he said, sighing heavily. "Joined up to fight for Britain. I tried to talk him out

ofit,ofcourse,buthisheart wassetongoing.Hebelieved whathewastold—glory,goo dprospects,promotion,al

that.He'lbedeadsoon,Iexpe ct.Yes,dohavethatlastpiece ofcake,dear.Youneedfeedi ngup.It'salverywelfor

him,goingofftodie,butIfear mystudieshavebeenseverel yrestricted."

"Whatstudiesarethose,sir?" Kittyasked.

"Researches,dear.Historyo fmagicandotherthings.Afas

c i n at i n g ar e a, s ad l y n e g l e c t e d . It 's a c r y i n g s h am e t h at s o

m an y l i b r ar i e s ar e b e i n g c l o s e d —o n c e ag ai n t h e g o v e r n m e n t i s ac t i n g o u t o f f e ar . W e l , I'v e s av e d a g o o d m an y

i m p o r t an t b o o k s o n t h e s u b j e c t , an d I w i s h t o c at al o g an d i n d e x t h e m . It i s m y am b i t i o n t o p r e p ar e a d e f i n i t i v e l i s t o f

al s u r v i v i n g d j i n n — e x i s t i n g r e c o r d s ar e so h ap h az ar d an d c o n t r ad i c t o r y . . . b u t as y o u h av e s e e n , I am n o t e v e n

d e x t r o us e n o u g h t o r e s e ar c h

myowncolection,thankstot
hisimpediment...."Heshoo
kafistathisnonexistent

leg.

"Erm,howdidithappen,sir?
"Kittyventured."Ifyoudon't
mindmyasking."

"Myleg?"Theoldgentlemanl
oweredhisbrows,glancedl
eftandright,andlookedupat
Kitty.Hespokeinasinister

whisper."Marid."

"Amarid?Butaren'ttheythem
ost—?"

"Themostpowerfultypeofcommonlysummoneddemon. Correct." Mr. Button'ssmile wasslightlysmug. "I'mno

slouch, mydear. Notthatanyofmycolleagues"—hespokethewordwithvehementdistaste—"wouldadmitassuch,

blastthem. I'dliketoseeRupertDevereauxorCarlMortensendoaswel." Hesniffed, settledbackintohissofa. "The

ironyofitwasthatIjustwantedtoaskitafewquestions. Wasn'tgoingtoenslaveitatall. Anyway, I'dforgottento

addaTertiaryFettering;thethingbrokeoutandhadmylegoffbeforetheautomaticDismissalsetin."Heshookhis

head."That'sthepenaltyofcuriosity,mydear.Wel,Igetbysomehow.I'lfindanotherassistant,iftheAmericans

don'tkilourentirepopulationofyoungmales."

Hetookatetchybiteofhisspicecake.Evenbeforehehadswalowed,Kittyhadmadeuphermind."I'lhelpyouout,

sir."

Theoldmagicianblinkedather. "You?"

"Yes, sir. I'll be your assistant."

"I'm sorry, my dear, but I thought you worked for Hyrnek's."

"Oh, I do, sir, but only temporarily. I'm looking for other work. I'm very interested in books and magic, sir. Realy I

am. I've always wanted to learn about it."

"Indeed. Do you speak Hebrew?"

"N o , s i r ."

"O r C z e c h ? O r F r e n c h ? O r A r ab i c ? "

"N o , n o n e o f t h o s e , s i r ."

"In d e e d . . ." F o r a m o m e n t M r . B u t t o n 's f ac e b e c ame l e s s ami ab l e , l e s s c o u r t e o u s . H e l o o k e d at h e r s i d e l o n g , o u t o f

h al f - s h u t e y e s . "A n d t h e f ac t o f t h e mat t e r i s , o f c o u r s e , t h at y o u ar e n o t h i n g b u t a c omm on ers g i r l . . . ."

K i t t y n o d d e d b r i g h t l y . "Y e s , s i r . B u t I 'v e al w ay s b e l i e v e d t

hatmisfortunesofbirthshou
ldn'tstandinthewayoftalent.

I'menergeticandquick,andni
mbletoo."Shegesturedarou
ndthemazeofdustypiles."I'l
beabletogetholdofany

bookyoulike,fastasthinkin
g.Fromthebottomofthefarth
eststack."Shegrinned,andto
okasipoftea.

Theoldmanwasrubbinghisc
hinwithsmal,plumpfingers
,mutteringtohimself."Aco
mmoner'schild...

unvetted...itishighlyunorth

odox... infact, theauthoritie sexpresslyforbidit. Butwe l, afteral—whynot?" He

titteredtohimself. "Whysho uldn't I? They'veseenfittone glectmealtheseyears. Itwou ldbeaninteresting

experiment... andthey'dnev erknow, blastthem." Helook edatKittyagain, eyesnarrow ed. "YouknowIcouldn't

payyouanything."

"That'salright, sir. I'm, erm, i nterestedinknowledgefori tsownsake. I'l getotherwork.

I c o u l d h e l p y o u o u t

w h e n e v e r y o u n e e d e d i t , p a r t -t i m e ."

"V e r y w e l , t h e n , v e r y w e l ." M r . B u t t o n e x t e n d e d a s m a l l p i n k h a n d . "W e s h a l l s e e h o w i t w o r k s o u t . N e i t h e r o f u s h a s

a n y c o n t r a c t u a l o b l i g a t i o n t o t h e o t h e r , y o u u n d e r s t a n d , a n d w e a r e f r e e t o t e r m i n a t e t h e r e l a t i o n s h i p a t a n y t i m e .

M i n d — i f y o u a r e l a z y o r d i s h o n e s t I s h a l r a i s e a h o r l a t o s h r i v e l y o u . B u t g o o d n e s s , w h e r e a r e m y m a n n e r s ? I ' v e n o t

yetaskedyourname."

Kittyselectedanidentity."LizzieTemple,sir.""Wel,Lizzie,verygladtohavemetyou.Ihopeweshalgetalong

wel."

Andsotheyhad.FromthebeginningKittymadeherselfindispensabletoMr.Button.Tostartwith,herchoreswere

entirelyconcernedwithnavigatingherwayaboutthisdarkandclutteredhouse,accessingobscurebooksindistant

s t ac k s , an d b r i n g i n g t h e m o u t t o h i m u n s c at h e d . T h i s w as e as i e r s ai d t h an d o n e . S h e f r e q u e n t l y e m e r g e d i n t o t h e

l am p l i g h t o f t h e m ag i c i an's s t u d y w h e e z i n g an d c o v e r e d i n d u s t , o r b r u i s e d b y a n as t y b o o k-f al , o n l y t o b e t o l d s h e

h ad t h e w r o n g v o l u m e , o r an i n c o r r e c t e d i t i o n , an d b e s e n t b ac k t o b e g i n ag ai n . B u t K i t t y s t u ck w i t h i t . G r ad u al y s h e

b e c am e ad e p t at l o c at i n g t h e v o l u m es M r . B u t t o n r e q u i r e d ; s h e b e g an t o r e c o g n i z e t h e n am e s , t h e c o v e r s , t h e

methodsofbindingemployedbydifferentprintersindifferentcitiesacrossthecenturies.Forhispart,themagician

washighlysatisfied:hishelperssparedhimmuchinconvenience.Sothemonthspassed.

Kittytooktoaskingbriefquestionsaboutsomeoftheworksshehelpedlocate.SometimesMr.Buttongavesuccinct

andbreezyanswers;moreoftenhesuggestedshelookupthesolutionherself.Whenthe

bookwaswritteninEnglish,

thisKittywasabletodo.Sheborrowedsomeofthee asier,moregeneralvolumesandtookthemhometoherbedsit.

Hernocturnalreadingsprompted furtherquestionstoMr.Button,whodirectedherto otherte xts.Inthisway,

directedbycapriceandwhimsicalinclination,Kittybegantolearn.

Afteraye arofsuchprogress Kittybegangoingonerrandsforthemagician.Sheprocure

d o f f i c i al p as s e s an d v i s i t e d

l i b r ar i e s ac r o s s t h e c ap i t al ; s h e mad e o c c as i o n al f o r ay s t o h e r b al i s t s an d t o s up p l i e r s o f mag i c al g o o d s . M r . B u t t o n h ad

n o i mp s at h i s s e r v i c e , an d d i d n o t p r ac t i c e mu c h ac t u al mag i c . H i s i n t e r e s t l ay i n t h e c u l t u r e s o f t h e p as t , an d t h e

h i s t o r y o f c o n t ac t w i t h d e mo n s . O c c as i o n al y h e s u mm o n e d a mi n o r e n t i t y t o q u e s t i o n i t o n a p ar t i c u l ar h i s t o r i c al

p o i n t .

"Butit'sadifficultbusinessw i t h o n e l e g , " h e t o l d K i t t y . "Summoning's badenoughwithtwoof'em, butwhenyou're

tryingtodrawthecirclestraightandyourstickssslippingandyoukeepdroppingthechalk, it'shelishtricky. Idon't

riskitoftenanymore."

"Icouldgiveyouahand, sir," Kittysuggested. "You'dhaveto teachmethebasics, ofcourse."

"Oh, thatwouldbeimpossible. Fartoodangerousforusbot

h."

KittyfoundMr.Buttonquite adamantonthis,anditttookher severalmonthsofpesteringt owinhimover.Finally,to

gainamoment'speace,heallo wedhertofilthebowlswithi ncense,holdthepininpositi onwhileheinscribedthe

circles'arcs,andlightthepi gs-fatcandles.Shestoodbeh indhischairwhenthedemon appearedandwasquestioned.

Afterwardshehelpeddouset hescorchmarksleftbehind.

H e r c al m d e m e an o r i m p r e s s e d t h e m ag i c i an ; s o o n s h e w as

ac t i v e l y as s i s t i n g i n al l h i s s u mm o n i n g s . A s i n al l t h i n g s , K i t t y l e ar n e d s w i f t l y . S h e b e g an t o m e m o r i z e s o m e o f t h e

c o m m o n L at i n f o r m u l ae , al t h o u g h s h e r e mai n e d i g n o r an t o f t h e l an g u ag e . M r . B u t t o n , w h o f o u n d ac t i v e w o r k t ax i n g

o n h i s h e al t h , an d w h o w as al s o i n c l i n e d t o l az i n e s s , b e g an t o e n t r u s t h i s as s i s t an t w i t h mo r e an d mo r e p r o c e d u r e s . In

h i s c u r s o r y w ay , h e h e l p e d fi

linsomeofthegapsinherknowledge,althoughherefusedtoinstructherformaly.

"Theactualcraft,"hewouldsay,"issimplicityitself,butithasinfinitevariations.Weshalalwayskeeptobasics:

summonthecreature,keepitconstrained,senditoffagain.Ihaveneitherthetimenortheinclinationtoteachyou

althesubtleties."

"That'sfine,sir,"Kittysaid.Shehadneitherthetimenortheinclinationtolearnthem.A

b as i c p r ac t i c al k n o w l e d g e o f

s u m m o n i n g w as al l t h at s h e r e q u i r e d .

T h e y e ar s p as s e d . T h e w ar d r ag g e d o n . M r . B u t t o n 's b o o k s w e r e n e at l y s o r t e d , c at al o g e d , an d s t ac k e d b y au t h o r . H i s

as s i s t an t w as i n v al u ab l e t o h i m . N o w h e c o ul d d i r e c t h e r t o s u m m o n f o l i o t s an d e v e n m i n o r d j i n n w h i l e h e s at i n

c o m f o r t w at c h i n g . It w as a h i g h l y s at i s f ac t o r y ar r an g e m e n t .

And—barringtheoddfright—Kittyfoundits atisfactoryt oo.

Withthekettleboiledatlast, Kittymadethetea andreturne dtothemagician,whowassitt ingasbeforeinthesofa's

depths,studyinghisbook.M r.Buttongaveagruntofthank sasshesetttheteapotdown.

"Trismegistusnotes,"hesai d,"thatsuccubitendtoreckle ssnesswhensummoned,and areoftenimpeledtoself-

destruction.Theycanbeplac

atedbyplacingcitrusfruits amongtheincense,orbythes oftplayingofpanpipes.Hum,

theyaresensualbeastsevide ntly."Hescratchedhisstump absentlythroughhistrouser s."Oh,Ifoundsomethingels e

too,Lizzie.Whatwasthatdem onyouwereaskingabouttheo therday?"

"Bartimaeus,sir."

"Yes,that'sit.Trismegistus hasareferencetohim,inone ofhistablesofAntiqueDjinn

. S o m e w h e r e i n t h e

ap p e n d i c e s , y o u ' l l f i n d ."

"O h , r e al y , s i r ? T h at ' s g r e at . T h an k y o u ."

"G i v e s a l i t t l e o f h i s s u m m o n i n g h i s t o r y . B r i e f . Y o u w o n ' t f i n d i t t e r r i b l y i n t e r e s t i n g ."

"N o , s i r . I v e r y m u c h d o u b t i t ." S h e h e l d o u t a h an d . "D o y o u m i n d i f I t ak e a l o o k ? "

Part Two

Alexandria: 126 B.C.

In a hot morning in midsummer, a sacred bull broke free of its compound beside the river; it trampaged up among the

fields, biting at flies and swinging its horns at anything that moved. Three men who tried to secure it were badly

injured; the bull plunged on among the reeds and broke out onto a path where children played. As they screamed and

s c att e r e d , i t p au s e d as i f i n d o u b t . B u t t h e s u n u p o n t h e w at e r an d t h e w h i t e n e s s o f t h e c h i l d r e n ' s c l o t h e s e n r ag e d i t .

H e ad d o w n , i t c h ar g e d u p o n t h e n e ar e s t g i r l , an d w o u l d h av e g o r e d o r t r amp l e d h e r t o d e at h h ad n o t P t o l e my an d I

b e e n s t r o l i n g d o w n t h at w ay .

T h e p r i n c e r ai s e d a h an d . I ac t e d . T h e b u l l s t o pp e d , m i d - c h ar g e , as i f i t h ad c o l i d e d w i t h a w al . H e ad r e e l i n g , e y e s

c r o s s e d , i t c ap s i z e d i n t o t h e d u s t , w h e r e i t r e m ai n e d u n t i l

attendantssecureditwithropesandleditbackintoits

field.

Ptolemywaitedwhilehisaidescalmedthechildren,thenresumedhisconstitutional.Hedidnotrefertotheincident

again.Evenso,bythetimewereturnedtothepalaceaflockofrumorshadtakenflightandwasswoopingand

swirlingaboutheadBynightfalleveryoneinthecity,fromthelowestbeggartothesnootiestpriestofRa,had

h e ar d o r m i s h e ar d s o m e t h i n g
o f i t .

A s w as m y w o n t , I h ad w an d e r e
d l at e am o n g t h e e v e n i n g m ar k
e t s , l i s t e n i n g t o t h e r h y t h m s
o f t h e c i t y , t o t h e e b b an d

f l o w o f i n f o r m ati o n c ar r i e d o
n i t s h u m an t i d e . M y m as t e r w
as s i t t i n g c r o s s -l e g g e d o n t h e
r o o f o f h i s q u ar t e r s ,

i n t e r m i t t e n t l y s c r at c h i n g at
h i s p ap y r u s s t r i p an d g az i n g o
u t t o w ar d t h e d ar k e n e d s e a. I l
an d e d o n t h e l e d g e i n

l ap w i n g 's f o r m an d f i x e d h i m

w i t h a b e ad y e y e .

"It 's al o v e r t h e b az aar s , " I s ai d .
"Y o u an d t h e b u l l ." H e d i p p e d
h i s s t y l u s i n t o t h e i n k . "W h at
m at t e r ? " "P e r h ap s n o

m at t e r ; p e r h ap s m u c h . B u t t h e
p e o p l e w h i s -p e r ."

"W h at d o t h e y w h i s p e r ? "

"T h at y o u ar e a s o r c e r e r w h o c
o n s o r t s w i t h d e m o n s ." H e l au
g h e d an d c o mp l e t e d a n e at n u
m e r al . "F ac t u al y , t h e y ar e

c o r r e c t ."

T h e l ap w i n g d r u m m e d i t s c l aw s u p o n t h e s t o n e . "I p r o t e s t ! T h e t e r m 'd e m o n ' i s f al l ac i o u s an d ab u s i v e i n t h e

e x t r e m e ! "1

1. N ote m y restraint here. M y standard of conv ersation was pretty hig h in those days, on

account of conv ersing with P tolem y. S om ething ab out him m ade you disinclined to b e too

v ulg ar, b lasphem ous, or im pudent, and ev en m ade m e rein in m y use of estuary E g yptian

slang . I t wasn' t that he forb ade any of it, m ore that you ended up feeling a b it g uilty, as if

you' d let yourself down. H arsh inv ectiv e was a no-no, too. I t' s surprising I had anything left to

say.

P t o l e m y p u t d o w n h i s s t y l u s . "It i s a m i s t ak e t o b e t o o c o n c e r n e d w i t h n am e s an d t i t l e s , m y d e ar R e k h y t . S u c h t h i n g s

ar e n e v e r m o r e t h an r o u g h ap p r o x i m at i o n s , m at t e r s o f c o n v e n i e n c e . T h e p e o p l e s p e ak t h u s o u t o f i g n o r an c e . It 's

whentheyunderstandyournatureandarestilabusivethatyouwillhavetoworry." Hegrinnedatmesidelong.

"Whichisalwayspossible,let'sfaceit."

Iraisedmywingsalittle,alowingtheseawindtoruffleth roughmyfeathers."Generalyyoucomeoffwelinthe

accountssofar.Butmarkmywords,they'lbesayingyoulett hebulloosesoon."

Hesighed."Inalhonesty,reputation—forgoodorill—do

esn'tmuchbotherme."

"Itmaynotbotheryou" Isaiddarkly,"butthereareth oseintheplaceforwhomtheissueislifeanddeath."

"Onlythosewhodrowninthestewofpolitics,"hesaid."AndIamnothingtothem."

"Mayitbeso," Isaiddarkly."Mayitbeso.Whatareyouwritingnow?"

"Yourdescriptionoftheelementalwallsatthemarginsoftheworld.Sotakethatscowloffyourbeakandtellme

moreofit."

Wel,Iletitgoatthat.Arguing withPtolemyneverdidmuch good.

Fromthebeginninghewasam asterofcuriousenthusiasms .Theaccumulationofwealth, wives,andbijouNile-front

properties—thosetime-hon oredpreoccupationsofmost Egyptianmagicians—didnot enthrallhim.Knowledge,of a

kind,waswhathewasafter,bu titwasnotthesortthatturnsc

i t y w al s t o d u s t and t r amp l e s o n t h e n e c k s o f t h e

d e f e at e d f o e . It h ad a m o r e o t h e r w o r l d l y c as t .

In o u r f i r s t e n c o u n t e r h e t h r e w m e w i t h i t .

I w as a p i l ar o f w h i r l i n g s and , a f as h i o n ab l e g e t u p i n t h o s e d ays . M y v o i c e b o o m e d l i k e r o c k - fal s e c h o i n g u p a g u l y .

"N ame y o u r d e s i r e , m o r t al ."

"D j i n n i , " h e s ai d , "an s w e r me a q u e s t i o n ."

T h e s an d w h i r l e d f as t e r ."! k n o w t h e s e c r e t s o f t h e e ar t h an d t h e m y s t e r i e s o f t h e ai r ; I k n o w t h e k e y t o t h e m i n d s o f

w o m e n .2 W h at d o y o u w i s h ? S p e ak ."

2 . P atently al lies. E special y the last b it.

"W h at i s e s s e n c e ? "

T h e s an d h al t e d i n m i d ai r . "E h ? "

"Y o u r s u b s t an c e . W h at e x ac t l y i s i t ? H o w d o e s i t w o r k ? "

"W e l , u m . . ."

"A n d t h e O t h e r P l ac e . T e l m e o f i t . Is t i m e t h e r e s y n c h r o n o u s w i t h o u r s ? W h at f o r m d o i t s d e n i z e n s t ak e ? H av e t h e y a

k i n g o r l e ad e r ? Is i t a d i m e n s i o n o f s o l i d s u b s t an c e , o r a w h i r l i n g i n f e r n o , o r o t h e r w i s e ? W h at ar e t h e b o und ar i e s

b e t w e e n y o u r r e al m and t h i s E ar t h , and t o w h at d e g r e e ar e t h e y p e r m e ab l e ? "

U m . . .

In s h o r t , P t o l e m y w as i n t e r e s

t e d i n u s . D j i n n . H i s s l a v e s . O u r i n n e r n a t u r e , t h a t i s , n o t t h e u s u a l s u r f a c e g u f f . T h e m o s t

h i d e o u s s h a p e s a n d p r o v o c a t i o n s m a d e h i m y a w n , w h i l e m y a t t e m p t s t o m o c k h i s y o u t h a n d g i r l i s h l o o k s m e r e l y

e l i c i t e d h e a r t y c h u c k l e s . H e w o u l d s i t i n t h e c e n t e r o f h i s p e n t a c l e , s t y l u s o n h i s k n e e , l i s t e n i n g w i t h r a p t a t t e n t i o n ,

t i c k i n g m e o f f w h e n I i n t r o d u c e d a m o r e t h a n u s u a l y o b v i o u s f i b , a n d f r e q u e n t l y i n t e r r u p t i n g t o c l a r i f y s o m e

ambiguity.HeusednoStipples,noLances,nootherinstruments ofcorrection.Hissummoningsrarelylastedmore

thanafewhours.Toahardenedd djinnilikeme,whohadafairlyaccurateideaofthevicious waysofhumans,itwas

alabitdisconcerting.

Iwasoneofanumberofdjinnandlesserspiritsregularlysummoned.Thenormalroutineneverdeviated:summons,

chat,frenziedscribblingbythemagician,dismissal.

Intime,mycuriositywasarou
sed."Whydoyoudothis?"Ias
kedhimcurtly."Whyalthese
questions?Althis

writing?"

"Ihavereadmostofthemanusc
riptsintheGreatLibrary,"th
eboysaid."Theyhavemuchab
outsummoning,

chastisement,andotherpract
icalities,butalmostnothing
aboutthenatureofdemonsthe
mselves.Yourpersonality,

yourowndesires.Itseemsto
methatthisisofthefirstimp

ortance. I intend to write the definitive work on the

subject, a book that will be read and admired forever. To do this, I must ask many questions. Does my ambition

surprise you?"

"Yes, in truth. Since when has any magician cared about ours ufferings? There's no reason why you should. It's not in

your interests."

"Oh, but it is. If we remain ignorant, and continue to enslav

eyouratherthanunderstandyou,troublewilcomefrom

itsoonerorlater.That'smyfeeling."

"Thereisnoalternativetothisslavery.Eachsummonswrapsusinchains."

"Youaretoopessimistic,djinni.Traderstelmeofshamansfaroffamongthenorthernwastesweholeavetheirown

bodiestoconversewithspiritsinanotherworld.Tomymind,thatisamuchmorecourteousproceeding.Perhapswe

tooshouldlearnthistechnique."

Ilaughedharshly."Itwilneverhappen.Thatrouteisfartooperilousforthecorn-fedpriestsofEgypt.Saveyour

energy,boy.Forgetyourfutilequestions.Dismissmeandhavedone."

Despiternyskepticism,hecouldnotbedissuaded.Ayearwentby;littlebylittlemyliesdriedup.Ibegantotelhim

truth.Inturn,hetoldmesomethingofhimself.

Hewasthenephewoftheking.Atbirth,twelveyearsbefore,hehadbeenafrailanddelicateruntling,coughingat

thenipple,squealinglikeakitten.Hisdiscomfortcastapaloverthecereremonyofnaming:theguestsdeparted

hurriedly,thesilentofficialsexchangedsomberlooks.Atmidnighthiswetnursesummonedapriestof Hathor,3 who

pronouncedtheinfantclosetodeath;nevertheless,hecompletedthenecessaryritual

s and gave the child into the

protection of the goddess. The night passed fitfuly. Dawn came; the first rays of sunglimmered through the acacia

trees and fel upon the infant's head. His squaling subsided, his body grew calm. Without noise or hesitation, he

nuzzled at the breast and drank.

3. Hathor: divine mother and protector of the newborn; djinn in her temples wore female

guises with the heads of cattle.

Thenatureofthisreprievedidnotgounnoticed,andthechildwasswiftlydedicatedtothesungod,Ra.Hegrew

steadilyinstrengthandyears.Quick-eyedandinteligent,hewasneverasstrappingashiscousin,theking'sson,4

eightyearsolderandburlywithit.Ptolemyremainedaperipheralfigureinthecourt,happierwiththepriestsand

womenthanwiththesun-browned boysbrawlinginthe yar

d .

4 . H e was a P tolem y, too. A s they al were, these k ing s of E g ypt, for 2 0 0 years and m ore, one

after the other until C leopatra spoiled the run. O rig inality was not the fam ily' s strong suit. E asy

to see, perhaps, why m y P tolem y reg arded nam es so casual y. They m eant little. H e told m e

his the first tim e I ask ed him .

In t h o s e d ay s t h e k i n g w as f r e q u e n t l y o n c am p ai g n , s t r u g g l i n g t o p r o t e c t t h e f r o n t i e r s ag

ainsttheincursionsofthe

Bedouin.Aseriesofadviser
sruledthecity,growingrich
onbribesandporttaxes,andl
isteningeverclosertotheso
ft

wordsofforeignagents—par
ticularlythoseoftheemergi
ngpoweracrossthewater:Ro
me.Swathedinluxuryinhis

marbledpalace,theking'son
felintoprecociousdissipat
ion.Byhislateteenshewasag
rotesque,loose-lipped

youth,alreadypotbeliedwit

hdrink;hiseyesglitteredwi
thparanoiaandthefearofass as
sination. Impatientfor

power,hedawdledinthesshad
owofhisfather,seekingriv
alsinhisblood-kinwhilewai
tingfortheoldmantodie.

Ptolemy,bycontrast,wasasc
holarlyboy,slimandhandso
me,withfeaturesmorenearl
yEgyptianthanGreek.5

Althoughdistantlyinlinefo
rthethrone,hewasclearlyno
tawarriororastatesmanandw
asgeneralyignoredbythe

royalhousehold.Hespentm
ostofhistimeintheLibraryo
fAlexandria,closetothewat
erfront,studyingwithhis

tutor.Thisman,anelderlypr
iestfromLuxor,waslearnedi
nmanylanguagesandinthehis
toryofthekingdom.He

wasalsoamagician.Finding
anexceptionalstudent,heim
partedhisknowledgetothec
hild.Itwasquietlybegunand

quietlycompleted,andonly
muchlater,withtheincident
ofthebul,didrumorofitsee
poutintothewiderworld.

5 . They cam e from his m other' s side, I g uess. S he was a nativ e g irl from upriv er som ewhere, a

concub ine in the royal apartm ents. I nev er saw her. S he and his father died of plag ue b efore

m y tim e.

T w o d ay s af t e r w ar d , w h i l e w e w e r e i n d i s c u s s i o n , a s e r v an t k n o c k e d u p o n m y m as t e r 's d o o r . "P ar d o n m e , H i g h n e s s ,

b u t a w o m an w ai t s w i t h o u t ."

"W i t h o u t w h at ? " I w o r e t h e g u i s e o f a s c h o l ar , i n c as e o f j u s t

suchaninterruption.

Ptolemysilencedmewithagesture."Whatdoesshewant?""Aplagueoflocustsstheratensherhusband'scrops,sir.

Sheseeksyouraid."

Mymasterfrowned."Ridiculous!WhatcanIdo?""Sir,shespeaksof..."Theservantheshitated;hehadbeenwithus

inthefield."Ofyourpowerovertheb ul."

"Thisistoomuch!Iamhardatworkhere.Icannotbedisturbe

d. Send her away."

"As you wish." The servant sighed, made to close the door. My master stirred. "Is she very miserable?" "Mightily, sir.

She has been here since dawn." Ptolemy gave a gasp of impatience. "Oh, this is rank foolishness!" He turned to me.

"Rekhyt—go with him. See what can be done."

Indue course I returned, looking plump. "Locusts gone." "Very wel." He scowled at his tablets. "I have altogether lost

thethread.Wewereretalkingab outtheflu idityoftheOtherP lace,Ibelieve...."

"Yourealize,"Isaid,asIsatde licatelyonthestrawmatting, "thatyou'vedoneitnow.Goty ourselfareputation.

Someonewhocansolvethecommonils.Nowyou'lneverget anypeace.Samethinghappen edtoSolomonwiththe

wisdomthing.Couldn'tstep outdoorswithoutsomeonet hrustingababyinhisface.Mi ndyou,thatwasoftenfora

differentreason."

Theboyshookhishead."Iamascholar,aresearcher,nothingelse.Ishalaidmankindbythefruitsofmywriting,

notbymysuccesswithbulsorlocusts.Besides,it'syouwho'sdoingthework,Rekhyt.Doyoumindremovingthat

wing-casefromthecornerofyourmouth?Thankyou.Now,tobegin..."

Hewaswiseaboutsomethings,Ptolemywas,butnotaboutothers.Thenextdaysawtwom

o r e w o m e n s t an d i n g

o u t s i d e h i s c h am b e r s ; o n e h
ad p r o b l e m s w i t h h i p p o s o n h
e r l an d , t h e o t h e r c ar r i e d a s i c
k c h i l d . O n c e ag ai n I w as s e n t

t o d e al w i t h t h e m as b e s t I c o ul
d . O n t h e m o r n i n g af t e r t h at , a
l i t t l e l i n e o f p e o p l e s t r e t c h e
d o ut i n t o t h e s t r e e t . M y

m as t e r t o r e h i s h ai r an d l am e n t
e d h i s i l f o r t u n e ; n e v e r t h e l e
s s I 'w as d i s p at c h e d ag ai n , al o
n g w i t h A f f a an d

P e n r e n u t e t , t w o o f h i s o t h e r
d j i n n . S o i t w e n t . P r o g r e s s o

n h i s r e s e ar c h s l o w e d t o a s n ai l ' s p ac e , w h i l e h i s r e p u t at i o n

am o n g t h e o r d i n ar y p e o p l e o f A l e x an d r i a g r e w f as t as s u mm e r ' s f l o w e r i n g . P t o l e my s u ff e r e d t h e i n t e r r u p t i o n s w i t h

g o o d , i f e x as p e r at e d , g r ac e . H e c o n t e n t e d h i ms e l f w i t h c o mp l e t i n g a b o o k o n t h e me c h an i c s o f s u mm o n i n g an d p u t h i s

o t h e r i n q u i r i e s as i d e .

T h e y e ar ag e d , an d i n d u e t i me c ame t h e N i l e ' s an n u al i n un d at i o n . T h e f l o o d s w e n t d o w n , t

h e d ar k e ar t h s h o n e f e r t i l e

an d w e t , c r o p s w e r e p l an t e d ,
a n e w s e as o n b e g an . S o m e t i m
e s t h e q u e u e o f s u p p l i c ants at
P t o l e m y 's d o o r w as

l e n g t h y , at o t h e r t i m e s l e s s s
o , b u t i t n e v e r w e n t aw ay e n t i r
e l y . A n d i t w as n o t l o n g b e f o r
e t h i s d ai l y r i t u al b e c ame

k n o w n t o t h e b l ac k -r o b e d p r i
e s t s o f t h e g r e at e r t e m p l e s , an
d t o t h e b l ac k h e ar t e d p r i n c e s
i t t i n g b r o o d i n g o n h i s w i n e -

s o us e d t h r o n e .

5

A disrespectful sound alerted Mandrake to the return of the scrying-glass imp. He put as ide the pen with which he was

scribbling notes for the latest war pamphlets, and stared int o the polished disc. The baby's distorted features pressed

up against the surface of the bronze as if it were frantically trying to push free. Mandrake ignored its writhing. "Wel?"

he asked.

"W e l w h at ? " T h e i m p g r o an e d an d s t r ai n e d .

"W h e r e 's B ar t i m ae u s ? "

"S i t t i n g o n a l u m p o f m as o n r y t w e n t y - s i x m i l e s s o u t h e as t o f h e r e i n t h e s h ap e o f a l o n g - h ai r e d g i r l . V e r y p r e t t y s h e i s ,

an d al . B u t s h e ai n 't c o m i n g ."

"W h at ? S h e — h e r e f u s e d ? "

"Y e p . O o h , i t 's d r e ad f u l t i g h t i n h e r e . S i x y e ar s I 've b e e n i n s i d e t h i s d i s c w i t h n e v e r a g l i m p s e o f h o m e . Y o u m i g h t l e t

m e o u t , y o u r e al l y m i g h t . I'v e s e r v e d y o u h e ar t an d s o u l ."

"Y o u have n o s o u l , " M an d r ak e s ai d . "W h at d i d B ar t i m ae u s s ay ? "

"I c an't t e l y o u , y o u'r e t h at y o u n g . It w as r u d e , m i n d . M ad e m y e ar s w ax u p . W e l , h e ai n't c o mi n g v o l u n t ar i l y an d

t h at's al t h e r e i s t o i t . B u r n h i m an d h av e d o n e , I s ay . C an't t h i n k w h y y o u ai n't s n u f f e d h i m al r e ad y . O h , n o t b ac k i n

t h at d r aw e r ag ain —c an't y o u h av e m e r c y , y o u h at e f u l b o y ? "

W i t h t h e d i s c w r ap p e d an d t h e d r aw e r s h u t f as t , M an d r ak e r u b b e d h i s e y e s . T h e B ar t i m ae u s p r o b l e m w as g r o w i n g

i n t r ac t ab l e . T h e d j i n n i w as w e ak e r an d m o r e c an t an k e r o u s t h an e v e r ; al m o s t u s e l e s s as a s e r v an t . In al l l o g i c h e

s h o u l d l e t h i m g o , b u t —as al w ay s —h e f o u n d t h e t h o u g h t d i s t as t e f u l . Q u i t e why w as h ar d t o s ay , s i n c e al o n e o f al l h i s

s l av e s t h e d j i n n i n e v e r t r e at e d h i m w i t h an y t h i n g ap p r o ac h i n g r e s p e c t . H i s ab u s e w as t i r i n g , e x as p e r at i n g b e y o n d

measure... and also oddly refreshing. Mandrake lived in a world where true emotions skulked forever behind politely

smiling masks. But Bartimaeus made no pretense of his dislike. Where Ascobol and company were reemolient and

fawning, Bartimaeus was as impertinent now as the day he had first met him, back when he was just a child, owner of

an entirely different name...

Mandrake's mind had drifted. He coughed and drew himself up. That was the basic point, of course. The djinni knew

his birth name. A risky thing for a man in his position! If another magician summoned him and learned what the

demon knew....

He sighed; his mind trundled from one well-worn track to another. A dark-haired girl. Pretty. No prizes for guessing

the djinni's guise. Ever since Kitty Jones had died, Barti

maeushadusedhershapetomockhim.Notwithoutsuccess,

either.Eventhreeyearson,visualizingherfacegaveMandrakeasharppanginhisside.Heshookhisheadinweary

self-reproach.Forgether!Shewasatraitor,deadandgone.

Wel,thewretcheddemonwasofnoimportance.Thepressingissuewasthegrowingdisruptioncausedbythewar.

That—andthedangerousnewabilitiesappearingamongthe

commoners.Fritang'staleoftheegg-throwingurchins

wasjustthelatestinalonglineoftroublesomeaccounts.

SinceGladstone,magicianshadobservedabasicrule.Thelesscommonersknewabout magicanditstools,the

better.Thus,everyslave,fromthescrawniestimptothemostarrogantafrit,wasorderedtoavoidunnecessary

exposurewhenoutonhismaster'sbusiness.Someutilizedthepowerofinvisibility;

mostwentindisguise.Soitw
as

thatthemyriaddemonsthron
gingthestreetsofthecapital
orrushingaboveitsrooftops
went,asarule,unnoticed.

Butnowthiswasnolongerthe
case.

Eachweekbroughtnewaccou
ntsofdemonicexposure.Afl
ockofmessengerimpswassp
ottedaboveWhitehalbya

squealinggroupofschoolch
ildren;magiciansreportedt
hattheimpshadbeencorrectl

ydisguisedaspigeons—they

shouldnothavearousedsuspicion.Dayslaterajeweler's apprentice,newlyarrivedin London,ranwild-eyeddown

HorseferryRoadandleapedovertheriverwalintotheThames.Witnessesclaimedhehadscreamedwarningsof

ghostsamongthecrowds.Closeinquiryrevealedthatspydemonswereatworkin HorseferryRoadthatday.

Ifcommonerswerebeingbornwiththepowertoseedemon

s,thedisruptionthathadlatel
yplaguedLondoncould

onlygetworse....Mandrakesh
ookhisheadirritably.Henee
dedtovisitalibrary,lookfo
rhistoricalprecedent.Such

anoutbreakmighthavehappen
edbefore....Buthehadnotime
—thepresentwasdifficulten
ough.Thepastwould

havetowait.

Aknockatthedoor;hisserv
antenteredunobtrusively,k
eepingwellawayfromthepen
tacleson thefloor.

"TheDeputyPoliceChiefisheretoseeyou,sir."

Mandrake'sforeheadrunkledinsurprise."Oh.Realy?Verywel.Showherup."

Ittookthreeminutesfortheservanttodescendtothereceptionroomtwofloorsbelowandreturnwiththevisitor,

givingMr.Mandrakeampletimetodrawoutasmallpocketmirrorandinspecthimselfcareful y.Hesmootheddown

hisshornhairwhereitstuckupinatuft;hebrushedafewmo

t e s o f d u s t f r o m o f f h i s s h o u l d e r s . S a t i s f i e d a t l a s t , h e

i m m e r s e d h i m s e l f i n t h e p a p e r s o n h i s d e s k — a m o d e l o f z e a l o u s , w e l l - k e m p t i n d u s t r y .

H e r e c o g n i z e d t h a t s u c h p r e e n i n g w a s l a u g h a b l e , b u t h e d i d i t a n y w a y . H e w a s a l w a y s s e l f - c o n s c i o u s w h e n t h e D e p u t y

P o l i c e C h i e f c a m e t o s e e h i m .

A b r u s q u e k n o c k ; w i t h l i g h t f e e t a n d d e f t , d e c i s i v e m o v e m e n t s , J a n e F a r r a r e n t e r e d a n d c r o s s e d t h e r o o m , c a r r y i n g a n

orb-case in one hand. Mr. Mandrake half stood courteously, but she waved him back down.

"You don't need to tell me what an honor this is, John. I'll take it as read. I've got something important to show you."

"Please..." He indicated a leather chair beside the desk. She sat, laying the orb-case heavily on the table, and grinned

at him. Mandrake grinned back. They grinned like two cats facing each other over an injured mouse, sleek and strong

andconfidentintheirmutual distrust.

Thegolemaffairthreeyearse arlierhadendedwiththedeat handdisgraceofthePoliceC hief,HenryDuvall,andsince

thenthePrimeMinisterhadn otseenfittoappointasucces sor.Infact,inamarkofhisinc reasingdistrustofthe

magicianscaroundhim,hehad awarded himself the title,andre liedupontheDeputyPolice Chieftodomostofthe

work.Fortwoyears JaneFarr

ar had ful fi l l ed th i s r o l e . H e r
ap t i t u d e w as w e l k n o w n : i t h
ad al l o w e d h e r t o s u r v i v e a

c l o s e as s o c i at i o n w i th M r . D
u v al an d w o r k h e r w ay b ac k i n t
o M r . D e v e r e aux 's f av o r . S h e
an d M an d r ak e w e r e n o w t w o

o f h i s c l o s e s t al i e s . F o r th at r
e as o n , b e t w e e n th e m s e l v e s t
h e y w e r e ac h i n g l y c o r d i al ; n e
v e r th e l e s s , th e i r o l d r i v al r y

b r i s t l e d b e n e ath th e s u r fac e .

M an d r ak e f o u n d h e r d i s c o n c e
r t i n g f o r an o th e r r e as o n . S h e
w as s t i l v e r y b e au t i f u l : h e r h

airlonganddarklygleaming,

hereyeswryandgreenbeneath
hlonglashes.Herlooksdistr
actedhim;ittookaltheconfi
denceofhismaturityto

keeppacewithherinconvers
ation.

Heslouchedcasualyinhisse
at."I'vegotsomethingtotelly
outoo,"hesaid."Who'sfirst?
"

"Oh,goon.Afteryou.Buthur
ryup."

"Okay.WemustgetthePMinte

r e s t e d i n t h e s e n e w a b i l i t i e s
s o m e c o m m o n e r s a r e g e t t i n g .
A n o t h e r o f m y d e m o n s w a s

s p o t t e d y e s t e r d a y . I t w a s k i d s
a g a i n . I d o n ' t n e e d t o t e l y o u t h
e t r o u b l e t h i s b r i n g s ."

M s . F a r r a r ' s e l e g a n t b r o w s f u
r r o w e d . " N o , " s h e s a i d , " y o u d
o n ' t . T h i s m o r n i n g w e ' v e g o t n
e w r e p o r t s o f s t r i k e s b y d o c k

w o r k e r s a n d m a c h i n i s t s . W a l
k o u t s . D e m o n s t r a t i o n s . N o t
j u s t i n L o n d o n , b u t t h e p r o v i
n c e s t o o . I t ' s b e i n g o r g a n i z e d
b y

menandwomenwiththeseun usualpowers.We'regoingto havetoroundthemup."

"Mmm,butthecause,Jane.Wh atisit?"

"WecanfindoutwhentheY're safelyintheTower.We'vesp iesworkingthroughthepubs now,gettinginformation.

We'llcomedownhard.Anythi ngmore?"

"WeneedtodiscussthelatestattackinKenttoo,butthatcan waittilCouncil."

Ms. Farrar reached out two slender fingers and unzipped her case, puling back the cloth to expose a small crystal orb,

blue-white and perfect, with a flattened base. She pushed it toward the center of the desk. "My turn," she said.

The magicians at up a little. "One of your spies?"

"Yes. Now pay attention, John—this is important. You know that Mr. Devereaux has asked me to keep close watch on

our magicians, in case anyone

triestofolowinthefootstep
sofDuvalandLovelace?"

Mr.Mandrakenodded.Moret
hantheAmericanrebels,mor
ethantheirenemiesinEurop
e,morethantheangry

commonersdemonstratingo
nthestreets,thePrimeMini
sterfearedhisministers,the
menandwomenwhosatathis

tableanddrankhiswine.Itwas
ajustifiedanxiety—hiscole
agueshadambitions;neverth
elessitdistractedhimfrom

otherpressingbusiness."W

hathaveyoufound?" heasked.

"Something." Shepassedahand dacrosstheorb, leaningforwardsothatherlongblackhairfelldownaroundherface.

Clearinghisthroat, Mandrakeleanedforwardtoo, enjoying (as always) herscent, hershape, theirsharedproximity.

Dangerousandfelineasshewas, Ms. Farrar'scompanyhaditscharms.

Shespokeafewwords: grainsofbluerananwayacrossthesurfaceoftheorbtocolectinap

o o l n e ar t h e b o t t o m . T h e

u p p e r s u r f ac e w as l e f t c l e ar .
H e r e an i m ag e f o r m e d —a f ac e
o f s h ad o w s . It f l i c k e r e d , m o v
e d , b u l d i d n o t d r aw n e ar .

M s . F ar r ar l o o k e d u p . " T h i s i s
Y o l e , " s h e s ai d . " Y o l e h as b e e
n k e e p i n g w at c h o n a c e r t ai n j
u n i o r m ag i c i an w h o h as

ar o u s e d m y i n t e r e s t . N am e o f
P al m e r , s e c o n d l e v e l , w o r k s
i n t h e H o m e O f f i c e . H e h as b e
e n p as s e d o v e r f o r p r o m o t i o n

s e v e r al t i m e s an d i s a f r u s t r at
e d man . Y e s t e r d ay P al m e r r e p

o r t e d i n s i c k ; h e d i d n o t g o t o w o r k . In s t e ad h e l e f t h i s

ap ar t m e n t o n f o o t an d m ad e h i s w ay t o an i n n n e ar W h i t e c h ap e l . H e w o r e c o mm o n w o r k m an ' s c l o t h e s . Y o l e h e r e

f o l l o w e d h i m an d c an r e l ay w h at o c c u r r e d . I t h i n k i t w i l l i n t e r e s t y o u ."

M an d r ak e m ad e a n o n c o mm i t t al g e s t u r e . " P l e as e p r o c e e d ."

J an e F ar r ar s n ap p e d h e r f i n g e r s an d s p o k e i n t o t h e o r b . " S h o w m e t h e i n n , w i t h s o u n d ."

Theshadowyfaceretreated,vanished.Animageformedinsidetheorb—rafters,whitewashedwals,atrestletable

beneathahangingbrasslight.Smokedriftedagainstgrimypebble-glasswindows.Theviewpointwaslowdown;it

wasasiftheywerelyingonthefloor.Dowdywomenpassedabove,andmeninrough-cutsuits.Faintly,asiffromfar

away,camelaughter,coughing,andthechinkofglasses.

Amansatatthetrestletable,a

burlygentlemaninmiddleage, somewhatpinkaboutthefac e, withgrayflecksinhis

hair. Heworeashabbyovercoatandasoftcap. Hiseyesrangedceaselesslybackandforth, evidentlyscanningthe

peopleintheinn.

Mandrakeleanedcloser, takingnginagentlebreath: Farrar's perfumewasespecialystrongthatday. Therewas

somethingpomegranatyabout it. "That's Palmer, isit?" he asked. "Thisisanoddanglewe

'v e g o t . T o o l o w ."

S h e n o d d e d . " Y o l e w as a m o u s e b y t h e s k i r t i n g b o ar d . H e w i s h e d t o b e u n o b t r u s i v e , b u t i t w as a c o s t l y e r r o r , w as n ' t

i t , Y o l e ? " S h e s t r o k e d t h e s u r fac e o f t h e o r b .

A v o i c e f r o m w i t h i n , w h i m p e r i n g a n d m e e k . " Y e s , m i s t r e s s ."

" M m m . Y e s , t h at ' s P al m e r . O r d i n ar i l y a v e r y d ap p e r f e l o w . N o w — t h i s i s i m p o r t a n t . It ' s h ar d t o s e e f r o m d o w n h e r e ,

b u t h e h as a p i n t o f b e e r i n h i s h an d ."

"R e m ar k ab l e , " M an d r ak e m u r m u r e d . "T h i s b e i n g a p u b an d al l ." D ef in itely p o m e g r an at e s ... an d p o s s i b l y a h i n t o f

l e m o n ...

"J u s t w ai t . H e 's w at c h i n g f o r s o m e o n e ."

M an d r ak e c o n s i d e r e d t h e f i g u r e i n t h e o r b . A s w as t o b e e x p e c t e d i n a m ag i c i an am o n g c o m m o n e r s , M r . P al m e r

s e e m e d i l l at e as e . H i s e y e s m

o v e d c o n s t a n t l y ; s w e a t g l i s t e n e d o n h i s n e c k a n d s h i n y f o r e h e a d . T w i c e h e l i f t e d h i s

g l a s s a s i f t o d r i n k h i s a l e ; t w i c e h e h a l t e d w i t h i t a t h i s l i p s a n d r e p l a c e d i t s l o w l y o n t h e t a b l e o u t o f s i g h t .

"N e r v o u s , " M a n d r a k e s a i d .

"Y e s . P o o r , p o o r P a l m e r ."

S h e s p o k e s o f t l y , b u t s o m e t h i n g i n h e r t o n e c a r r i e d t h e s h a r p n e s s o f a k n i f e . M a n d r a k e b r e a t h e d i n a g a i n . T h a t h i n t o f

t a r t n e s s w a s j u s t r i g h t . S e t o f

f t h e s w e e t e r s c e n t q u i t e n i c e l y .

M s . F ar r ar c o u g h e d . " S o m e t h i n g w r o n g w i t h y o u r c h ai r , M an d r ak e ? " s h e i n q u i r e d . " A n y f ar t h e r f o r w ar d an d y o u ' l b e i n

m y l ap ."

H e l o o k e d u p h u r r i e d l y f r o m t h e o r b , n ar r o w l y av o i d i n g c r as h i n g h i s f o r e h e ad i n t o h e r s ."S o r r y , F ar r ar , s o r r y ." H e

c l e ar e d h i s t h r o at , s p o k e i n a d e e p v o i c e . " It ' s j u s t t h e t e n s i o n — c an ' t p u l l m y s e l f aw ay . I w o n d e r w h at t h i s P al m e r ' s

gameis.Amostsuspiciousch aracter."Hepuledabsentlyat acuff.

Ms.Farrarregardedhimfora moment,thengesturedatthe orb."Wel,observe."

Intoviewfromthesideofthe orbcameanewcomer,carryi ngapintofbeer.Hewentbare headed,hisgingerhair

slickedback,dirtyworker's bootsandtrousersshuffling beneathalongblackraincoat. Withcasualbutdeliberate

steps,hedrewneartoMr.Pal

mer,whohadshuffledoveron hisbenchtomakeroomforhi m.

Thenewcomersat.Heplaced hisbeeruponthetableandpus hedhisglasseshigheronhisl ittlenose.

Mr.Mandrakewastransfixed. "Wait!"hehissed."Iknowhim !"

"Yole,"Farrarordered."Halt thescene."

Thetwomenintheorbwereh alfturningtheirheadstogree toneanother.Athercommand

,theimagefroze.

"That'sgood," Farrarsaid. "Yourecognizehim?"

"Yes. That'sJenkins. CliveJenkins. WorkedinInternalAffairswithme. Stilmaydoforal Iknow. Secretarylevel.

Goingnowhere. Wel,now. Thisisinteresting."

"Youwait." Herfingerssnapped; Mandrakenotedtheirpale pinknailpolish,thesoftcolorofhercuticles. Theimagein

theorbrestarted:theheadso fthetwomenturned,nodded ateachother,lookedaway.Th enewcomer,Clive

Jenkins,tookasipofbeer.H islipsmoved;halfasecondl ater,hisvoice,tinnyanddist orted,wasaudibleintheorb.

"Nowthen,Palmer.Thingsar emovingfastandit'sdecision time.Weneedtoknowifyou'r ein,orifyou'reout."

Mr.Palmertookalongdrinkf romhisglass.Hisfaceglease dwithperspiration,hiseyes wereneverstil.Hemumbled

r a t h e r t h a n s p o k e . " I n e e d m o r e i n f o r m a t i o n . "

J e n k i n s l a u g h e d , a d j u s t e d h i s s p e c t a c l e s . " R e l a x , r e l a x . I ' m n o t g o i n g t o b i t e y o u , P a l m e r . I n f o r m a t i o n y o u ' l l g e t . B u t

f i r s t w e n e e d p r o o f o f y o u r g o o d i n t e n t i o n s . "

T h e o t h e r m a n m a d e a n o d d c h a m p i n g m o t i o n w i t h h i s l i p s a n d t e e t h . " W h e n h a v e I e v e r g i v e n y o u r e a s o n t o d o u b t

m e ? "

" Y o u h a v e n ' t . B u t y o u h a v e n ' t g

i v e n u s m u c h r e as o n t o believe i n y o u e i t h e r . W e n e e d p r o o f."

"H o w ? Y o u m e an a t e s t ? "

"O f s o r t s . M r . H o p k i n s n e e d s t o s e e y o u r c o m m i t m e n t f o r h i m s e l f . Y o u c o u l d b e p o l i c e f o r al w e k n o w . W o r k i n g f o r

D e v e r e au x , o r t h at b i t c h F ar r ar ." H e t o o k an o t h e r s i p o f b e e r . "C an't b e t o o c ar e f u l ."

O u t s i d e t h e o r b , i n an o t h e r t i m e an d an o t h e r p l ac e , J o h n M an d r ak e l o o k e d u p at J an e F ar r ar an d r ai s e d an e y e b r o w .

Shesmiledlazily,showingapointedcanine.

"Hopkins..." hebegan. "Youthinkthat'sthesameone—"

"Thescholarwhoshowed Duvalhowtoworkthegolems," Farrarsaid. "Themissinglinkofthelastconspiracy. Yes, I

do. Butlisten."

Mr. Palmerwasinthemiddleofared-facedexpostulation, workinghimselfupintoanagonyofwoundedreproach.

CliveJenkinssaidnothing. F

i n al l y P al m e r 's t i r ad e f i n i s h e d ; h e s u b s i d e d l i k e a l i m p b al l o o n . " W e l , w h at d o y o u w ant

m e t o d o ? " h e s ai d . " I ' m w ar n i n g y o u , J e n k i n s , y o u ' d b e t t e r n o t b e s e t t i n g m e u p —"

H e r ai s e d h i s g l as s t o r e f r e s h h i m s e l f . A s h e d i d s o , J e n k i n s s e e m e d t o f l i n c h ; h i s p at c h e d e l b o w k n o c k e d t h e o t h e r s

ar m . T h e p i n t g l as s j e r k e d , b e e r d as h e d ag ai n s t t h e t ab l e . P al m e r g av e a l i t t l e m e w o f an g e r . " Y o u c l u m s y f o o l —"

J e n k i n s o f f e r e d n o ap o l o g y .

"If you do what's required," he said, "you'll reap the rewards along with me and the

rest. You're to meet him... here"

"When?"

"Then. That's all. I'm going now."

Without another word, the slight, ginger-haired man slipped out from behind the trestle table and disappeared from

view. For a few minutes Mr. Palmer remained sitting, his red face blank and desperate. T

h e n h e t o o d e p ar t e d .

M s . F ar r ar s n ap p e d h e r f i n g e r s . T h e i m ag e f ad e d ; f ar i n t h e d i s t an c e t h e f ac e o f s h ad o w s r e l u c t an t l y r e t u r n e d . F ar r ar

s at b ac k i n h e r c h ai r . " N e e d l e s s t o s ay , " s h e s ai d , " Y o l e f ai l e d u s . F r o m h i s v an t ag e p o i n t as a m o u s e h e c o u l d n o t s e e

t h e s u r f ac e o f t h e t ab l e . H e d i d n o t t h i n k t h at J e n k i n s h ad s p i l e d t h e b e e r o n p u r p o s e , n o r t h at h e h ad w r i t t e n t h e

h o u r an d p l ac e o f m e e t i n g i n t h e l i q u i d o n t h e t ab l e . W e l , Y o

lefolowedPalmerfortheremainderofthedayandsaw

nothing.Thatnightherereportedbacktome.Whilehewasodoing,Palmerlefthisflatanddidnotcomeback.

Evidentlyhewenttokeephisappointmentwiththemysteriousﬁngerstogethereagerly."Weshallhavetointerrogate Mr.Palmerwhenhereturns."

"Thereinliesaproblem.Atdawnthismorningengineers

w o r k i n g at t h e R o t h e r h i t h e S e w age W o r k s s aw s o m e t h i n g

l y i n g o n a m i d d e n . T h e y t h o u g h t at f i r s t i t w as a p i l e o f r ag s ."

M an d r ak e h e s i t at e d . "N o t ..."

"I f e ar s o . It w as t h e b o d y o f M r . P al m e r . H e h ad b e e n s t ab b e d t h r o u g h t h e h e ar t ."

"O h , " M an d r ak e s ai d . "A h . T h at 's aw k w ar d ."

"It i s i n d e e d . B u t i t i s p r o m i s i n g t o o ." J an e F ar r ar p as s e d a h an d ac r o s s t h e o r b ; i t d ar k e n e

d,becameacold,dullblue.

"Itmeansthatthis CliveJenkinsofyours—andthisHopkins—areplanningsomethingbig.Bigenoughtoinvolvequite

casualmurder.Andwe'reontoit."Hereyesgleamedwithexcitement.Herlongblackhairwasalittledisheveled;

severalwispsfeldownacrossherbrow.Herfacewasflushed,andshewasbreathingquickly.

Mandrakeadjustedhiscolarslightly."Whyareyoutelingm

ethisnow,outsideCouncil?
"

"BecauseItrustyou,John.And
Idon'ttrustanyoftheothers."
Shepushedthewispsawayfr
omhereye."Whitwell

andMortensenarebothintrig
uingagainstus.Youknowthat
.We'venofriendsinCouncil
,apartfromthePM.Ifwecan

flushoutthesetraitorsourse
lves,ourpositionwillbead
mirablystrengthened."

Henodded."True.Wel,it'scl
earwhattodo.Sendademonto

t a i l C l i v e J e n k i n s a n d s e e i f h e c a n l e a d u s t o t h e

t r u t h ."

M s . F a r r a r z i p p e d t h e c r y s t a l o r b i n t o i t s b a g a n d s t o o d . "I'l l e a v e t h a t t o y o u , i f I m a y . Y o l e 's h o p e l e s s a n d m y o t h e r s

a r e a l o n a s s i g n m e n t . It's o b s e r v a t i o n o n l y a t t h i s s t a g e . Y o u w o n 't n e e d a n y t h i n g p o w e r f u l . O r a r e a l y o u r d j i n n t i e d

u p ? "

M a n d r a k e l o o k e d t o w a r d t h e s i l e n t p e n t a c l e s . "N o , n o , " h e

s a i d s l o w l y , "I'm s u r e I'l l b e ab l e t o f i n d s o m e o n e ."

6

I as k y o u . Y o u f l u f f a m i s s i o n , y o u h ar as s a m e s s e n g e r , an d y o u f l at l y r e f u s e an o r d e r t o r e t u r n . T h e n y o u s i t b ac k

w ai t i n g f o r t h e m ag i c i an t o r e s p o n d . A n d n o t h i n g h ap p e n s . F o r h o u r s . N o s u m m o n s , n o at t e m p t e d p u n i s h m e n t ,

n o t h i n g .

W h at k i n d o f m as t e r d o y o u c al t h at ?

Ifthere'sonethingthatreallyannoysme,it'sbeingignored.HarshtreatmentIcanstand,insultinggesturesliklewise.

Atleastttheyshowyou'rehavingsomekindofeffect.Butjustbeingleftttofesterasi fIwerenobetterthanthat

tuppennyimpinthescryinggglass...thatmakesmemorethanalittleannoyed.

Thedaywashalfdonebytheti meIfelttthefirsttweakingin myessence:firm,insistent,likerazorwirepassing

t h r o u g h m y v i t al s . T h e s u m m o n s at l as t ! G o o d —t i m e t o g o ! N o t f o r m e an y f e ar f u l r e l u c t an c e o r h o l d i n g b ac k . I s t o o d

u p f r o m t h e b r o k e n c h i m n e y , s t r e t c h e d , r e m o v e d t h e C o n c e al m e n t u p o n m y s e l f , s c ar e d a p as s i n g d o g , m ad e a r u d e

n o i s e t o an o l d l ad y i n t h e n e x t g ar d e n , an d l o b b e d t h e c h i m n e y as f ar as I c o u l d i n t o t h e s t r e e t .1

1. O wing to m y weak ness it didn' t m ak e it across the pav em ent. B ut, b oy, the g esture was

sav ag e.

N o m o r e m e s s i n g ab o u t . I w as s t i l B ar t i m ae u s o f U r u k , al -A r i s h , an d A l e x an d r i a. T h i s t i m e I m e an t b u s i n e s s .

I al o w e d t h e s u m m o n s t o p u l m y e s s e n c e u p an d aw ay . T h e s t r e e t f as t d i s i n t e g r at e d i n a w e l t e r o f l i g h t s an d c o l o r e d

b an d s . A s e c o n d l at e r t h e s e c o al e s c e d o n c e m o r e i n t o t h e s h ap e o f a t y p i c al s u m m o n i n g h al l : s t r i p l i g h t s o n t h e

c e i l i n g s , m u l t i p l e p e n t ac l e s o n t h e f l o o r . T h e In f o r m at i o

nMinistry,asusual.Ialowed
mybodytoreforminKitty

Jones'sguise.Itwassimplert
hantryingtothinkofsomethi
ngelse.

Right.ThecursedMandrake:
wherewashe?

There!Sittingbehindadesk
,peninhand,staringatawodg
eofpaperslaidbeforehim.H
ewasn'tevenglancingin

mydirection!Iclearedmyth
roat,putdaintyhandsonhips,
preparedtospeak—

"Bartimaeus!" Agentlevoice. Toolowtobe Mandrake's. Iturned, sawadelicateyoungwomanwithvole-brownhair

sittingatanotherdeskinaneighboringpentacle. Itwas Piper, mymaster'sassistant, todaydoingherbesttobe

severe. Herforeheadwaspuckeredinsomethingresemblingafrown; herfingertipswereresteepledsternly. Sheeyed

melikeacrossschoolmistressinakindergarten. "Where haveyoubeen, Bartimaeus?" s

h e b e g an . "Y o u s h o u l d h av e

r e t u r n e d t h i s m o r n i n g w h e n r e q u e s t e d . M r . M an d r ak e h as h ad t o e x e r t h i m s e l f t o d r aw y o u b ac k , w h e n h e i s s o

d e s p e r at e l y b u s y . It i s n 't g o o d e n o u g h , y o u k n o w . Y o u r b e h av i o r i s r e al y b e c o m i n g m o s t t i r e s o m e ."

T h i s w as n 't w h at I'd h ad i n m i n d at al l . I d r e w m y s e l f u p . "T i r e s o m e ? " I c r i e d . "T i r e s o m e ? H av e y o u f o r g o t t e n w h o m

y o u ar e ad d r e s s i n g ? T h i s i s B ar t i m ae u s h e r e —S ak h r al -J i n

ni,N'gorsotheMighty,build
erofwals,destroyerof

empires.Ihavetwentynames
andtitlesinasmanytonguesan
dmyexploitsreverberatein
everysylable!Donot

attemptttodegrademe,woman
!Ifyouwishtolive,Iadviseyou
outopickupyourskirtsandd
epartatspeed.Iintend

tospeaktoMr.Mandrakealon
e."

Sheclickedhertongue."You
simplyarebeingquiteimpos
sibletoday,Bartimaeus.Ithi

nkyoushouldknowbetter.

Now,wehavealittlejobhere foryou—"

"What?Notsofast!"Inthepent acleIgaveahalfstepforward; sparkssnappedfrommyeyes andanimbusofcoral

firetrembledduponmyskin. "I'lhavethingsoutwithMandr akefirst!"

"I'mafraidtheministeriscurr entlyindisposed."

"Indisposed?Baloney!Icans eehimrightthere!"

"H e i s b u s y w o r k i n g o n t o d ay 's n e w s p am p h l e t . A d e ad l i n e ap p r o ac h e s ."

"W e l , h e c an l e av e o f f i n v e n t i n g h i s l i e s f o r a f e w m i n u t e s .2 I w an t a w o r d ."

2 . A s part of his attem pt to appease the com m oners, M andrak e had initiated a series of penny-

dreadful pam phlets, which told heroic tales of B ritish soldiers fig hting in the A m erican

wilderness. A typical title was R ea l W a r S t o n es . They were illustrated b y b ad woodcuts and

purported to b e true accounts of recent ev ents. N eedless to say, the A m erican m ag icians were

sav ag e and cruel, using the b lack est m ag ic and the m ost hideous dem ons. C onv ersely, the

sq uare-j awed B rits always insisted on g ood m anners and fair play and inv ariab ly g ot out of

scrapes b y im prov ising hom em ade weapons from fence posts, tin cans, and pieces of string .

The war was depicted as b eing b oth necessary and v irtuous. I t was the old, old story—I ' v e

seen imps carve similar claims on official stelae up and down the Nile delta, defending

pharaohic wars. The people tended to ignore those too.

Ms. Piperwrinkledhernose. "Youcanhavenothingworthwhiletosaytohim. Nowpleaseattendtoyourmission."

Iturnedawayfromher; addressedthefigureatthedesk. "Hoi, Mandrake!" Noanswer. Irepeatedmyself, only

louder. Thepapersflappedandflutteredonhisdesk.

T h e m ag i c i an r an h i s h an d t h r o u g h h i s s h o r t , c r o p p e d h ai r an d l o o k e d u p w i t h a v ag u e l y p ai n e d e x p r e s s i o n . It w as as

t h o u g h h e w e r e b e i n g c al e d u p o n t o r e m e m b e r an o l d i n j u r y i n a s e n s i t i v e s p o t . H e t u r n e d t o h i s as s i s t an t . "M s . P i p e r ,

p l e as e i n f o r m B ar t i m ae u s t h at I'm n o t r e m o t e l y i n t e r e s t e d i n h i s c o m p l ai n t s . R e m i n d h i m t h at m o s t mas t e r s w o u l d

h av e p u n i s h e d h i m s e v e r e l y f o r h i s i n c o m p e t e n c e i n b att l e an d t h at h e i s l u c k y t o b e al i v e . T h at's al ." H e p i c k e d u p

h i s p e n o n c e m o r e .

M s . P i p e r o p e n e d h e r m o u t h t o s p e ak , b u t I w as f as t e r . " P l e as e i n f o r m t h at s t u b b l e - h e ad e d p i p s q u e ak , " I s n ap p e d ,

" t h at i t i s i m p e r at i v e h e d i s m i s s m e o n t h e i n s t an t . M y p o w e r s , w h i l e s t i l aw e s o m e , ar e s o m e w h at r e d u c e d an d n e e d

r e v i v i n g . If h e d o e s n o t ag r e e t o t h i s r e as o n ab l e an d j u s t d e m an d , I s h al b e f o r c e d t o ac t , i n d e s p e r at i o n , ag ain st m y

in terests an d his own ' . '

Shefrowned."Whatsthatlast bitmean?"

Iraisedaneyebrow."Heknows."Iturnedto Mandrake."You doknow,don'tyou?"

Heglancedatme."Yes,obviously."3 Withportentousdeliberation,hesetdownhispen oncemore."Ms.Piper,"he

said,"pleasepointouttothat perniciousdemonthatshould dacertainthoughtofbetrayal evenflickeracrosshismind,

Iwillrelocatehimtothe Bostonmarshes,whereeverydaya

d o z e n d j i n n ar e s e e n t o p e r i s h ."

3 . Too rig ht he did. H is b irth nam e hung ov er his head lik e a nak ed sword.

"T e l h i m t h at t h i s b r e ak s n o i c e n o w , b u d d y . M y d e f e n s e s ar e s o l o w t h at I'm l i ab l e t o p e r i s h d o i n g h i s s h o p p i n g . W h at

d o I l o s e w h e r e i t h ap p e n s ? "

"T e l h i m t h at h e s u r e l y e x ag g e r at e s h i s w e ak n e s s . T h i s d o e s n't s o u n d l i k e t h e B ar t i m ae u s w h o r u b b e d s h o u l d e r s w i t h

S o l o m o n ."

"And Faustus and Zarbustibal."

"Faustus, Zarbustibal, whoever. I'm not giving a full list. However, tel him, Ms. Piper, that if he successfuly

completes the folowing mission I shall agree to his temporary dismissal for purposes of recuperation, and let him be

satisfied with that."

Isniffed disparagingly. "Tel him that this offer wil only be acceptable if the mission is simple, swift, and utterly

w i t h o u t d an g e r ."

"T e l h i m—o h , f o r h e av e n 's s ak e , j u s t t e l l h i m w h at t h e m i s s i o n i s an d h av e d o n e ! "W i t h a f l u r r y o f p ap e r s an d a

s q u e ak i n g o f h i s l e at h e r c h ai r , t h e mag i c i an r e t u r n e d t o h i s w o r k . M s . P i p e r 's h e ad c am e t o a s t an d s t i l ; i t h ad b e e n

s w i v e l i n g f r o m s i d e t o s i d e l i k e a w o r r i e d o w l 's . S h e r u b b e d h e r n e c k g i n g e r l y .

"S o g e t o n w i t h i t , t h e n , " I s ai d .

S h e l o o k e d a b i t h u r t b y m y c u r t t o n e , b u t I w as i n n o m o o d f o r n i c e t i e s . O n c e ag ai n M an d r ak e h ad t r e at e d m e w i t h

c o n t e m p t an d d e r i s i o n . O n c e ag ai n h e 'd i g n o r e d m y t h r e at s an d e n t r e at i e s . F o r t h e t h o u s an d t h t i m e I v o w e d r e v e n g e .

P e r h ap s I shou ld j u s t r i s k A m e r i c a, g o o u t t h e r e an d c h an c e m y ar m i n b at t l e . I'd s u r v i v e d s u c h t h i n g s b e f o r e . B u t n o t

w h e n I w as an y t h i n g l i k e as w e ak as t h i s . . . N o , I'd h av e t o r e c h ar g e m y s t r e n g t h f i r s t , an d t h at m e an t ag r e e i n g t o

this"final"mission.Iwaited
grimly.Ontheothersideoft
heroomIheardMandrake'spe
ngotravelingacrossthe

paper,scratchingoutmoreli
es.

Ms.Piperwasevidentlyreli
evedthattheconfrontationw
asover."Wel,"shesaid,smil
ingbreezily,"I'msureyou'l

findthisverysimple,Bartim
aeus.Wewishyoutotrailami
normagiciannamedCliveJen
kins,keepingtrackofhis

everyactandmovement.Don

o t al l o w y o u r s e l f t o b e s e e n o r s e n s e d . H e i s e n g a g e d i n s o m e k i n d o f c o n s p i r a c y

a g a i n s t t h e g o v e r n m e n t , a n d h a s b e e n i n v o l v e d i n m u r d e r . F u r t h e r m o r e , w e k n o w h e i s w o r k i n g f o r t h e f u g i t i v e

s c h o l a r H o p k i n s ."

T h a t a r o u s e d m y i n t e r e s t i n a v a g u e s o r t o f w a y . I t h a d b e e n y e a r s s i n c e w e 'd h a d a l e a d o n h i m . B u t I k e p t K i t t y s

f a c e i n s u l e n t e e n a g e m o d e .

"J e n k i n s : i s h e s t r o n g ? "

Shefrowned."Idon'tthinkso."

Mymasterlookedup,snorted."Jenkins?Hardly."

"HeworksinInternalAffairs,"Ms.Pipersaid."Secondlevel.HasanimpnamedTruklet.Weknowthathehasbeen

tryingtocorruptotherlow-levelmagicians;itisnotclearwhy.HeiscertainlyincommunicationwithClemHopkins."

"That'sthepriority,"Mandrakesaid."FindHopkins.Don't

ac t o r at t ac k : w e k n o w y o u ' r e as w e ak as a w e e v i l ,

B ar t i m ae u s . J u s t f i n d o u t w h e r e h e i s . A l s o , d i s c o v e r w h at t h e y ' r e u p t o . If y o u s u c c e e d , I ' l —o h , blast i t ." T h e

t e l e p h o n e o n h i s d e s k h ad r u n g . H e p i c k e d u p t h e r e c e i v e r ."Y es? O h —h e l o , M ak e p e ac e ." H e r o l e d h i s e y e s t o t h e

c e i l i n g . "Y e s , y e s , I ' d l o v e t o d r o p b y , l o v e t o , b u t I c an ' t r i g h t n o w . I ' m o f f t o C o u n c i l s h o r t l y —i n f ac t I ' m l at e

al r e ad y ... .W h at ' s i t ab o u t ? H m

m, hmm, very mysterious. May be later this—Alright, I'll try. See you then." He

thumped the phone down. "Got to go, Piper. I'll finish the Boston siege story over lunch. Send it to you by implater,

alright? We can get it printed for the evening fairs." He was standing up now, stuffing papers into a briefcase.

"Anything else you need to know, Bartimaeus? I don't mean excuses or whinges; haven't time for them."

Myversionof Kittygrittedh erteeth. "Whatabout back-up? IfIgettothisHopkins, there 'll bemorethananimp

guardinghim."

"He'sjustascholar, Bartimaeus. Butevenifhe'sgotdefenses, wedon'twantyoutowadein. I cansend

Cormocodranandtheotherst odealwithhimpresently, and Ms. Farrar'sgotalotofpolice onstandby. Justreportin

tomewhenyou'vegottheinfo rmation. I'l giveyouanopen-d

o o r i n j u n c t i o n : y o u c a n r e t u r n t o m e w h e n e v e r y o u ' r e

r e a d y ."

" W h e r e w i l l y o u b e ? "

" W e s t m i n s t e r H a l l t h i s a f t e r n o o n ; D e v e r e a u x ' s m a n s i o n a t R i c h m o n d t h r o u g h t h e e v e n i n g . T o n i g h t , m y h o u s e . " H i s

b r i e f c a s e c l i p p e d s h u t ; h e w a s e a g e r t o d e p a r t .

" W h e r e i s J e n k i n s t o b e f o u n d n o w ? "

" I n t e r n a l A f f a i r s b u i l d i n g , s i

xteenWhitehal.Officeatthe back.He'sadiminutive,ginger-hairedlittletwerp.Anything

elseonyourmind?"

"Youwouldn'twanttohearit."

"Nodoubt.Onelastpoint,Bartimaeus,"hesaid."I'vegivenyoumyword,butyoumightencouragemetokeepitif

youdropthatparticularguise." Helookedatmethen,head-on—almostforthefirsttime. "Thinkaboutit." Hemadea

complexsign:thebondsthat keptmeimprisonedinthecir clewrappedthemselvesabo utme,spuninopposite

directions,andsentmespir alingoutintotheworld.

7

Bartimaeus: By-name of the demon Sakhr al-Jinni, mentioned in Procopius and Michelot. A middle-ranking djinni of

ancient standing, great ingenuity, and no little power. First recorded in Uruk; later in Jerusalem. Fought at the battle of al-

Arish against the Assyrians. Known masters have included: Gilgamesh, Solomon, Zarbustibal, Heraclius, Hauser.

Bartimaeus's other names of power include: N'gorso, Necho, Rekhyt.

Linnaean ranking: 6, dangerous. Still extant.

K i t t y l o w e r e d t h e b o o k i n t o h e r l ap an d s t ar e d o u t o f t h e b u s w i n d o w . F r o m h e r p l ac e o n t h e u p p e r d e c k s h e c o u l d s e e

t h e s i n e w s an d t e n d o n s o f t h e m ag i c i an s ' r u l e r u n n i n g u p an d d o w n t h e L o n d o n s t r e e t s . N

ightPolicestrolledamong

pedestrians,vigilancesphe
resdriftedoneverycorner,
smalswiftpointsoflightpas
sedfarabovetheafternoon

sky.Ordinarypeoplewentab
outtheirbusiness,keepingt
heireyescarefulyavertedfr
omthewatchersalaround.

Kittysighed.Evenwithitsar
miesinactionfaraway,thego
vernment'spowerwastooco
mplete,tooobvioustoallow

dissent.Commonersalonec
ouldddonothing,thatmuchw

as clear. They needed assistance of a different kind.

She glanced back down at Trismegistus's Manual, screwed up her eyes at the small crabbed typeface and reread the

passage for the umpteenth time. The names Necho and Rekhyt were new to her, but the rest was drearily familiar.

The meager list of masters, for instance. Though nothing much was known about the faces of Gilgamesh or Solomon,

they were certainly adult kin

gs. Heracliuswasamagician-
emperor—awarrior, notachi
ld. AsforZarbustibal, she'd

locatedadescriptionofhim
monthsagoinanoldinventor
yofArabianmasters: hewasre
nownedaboutheRedSea

forhishooknoseandprotrud
ingwarts. Hauserhadbeenyou
thful, rightenough, buthew
asnorthEuropean, fairand

freckled—anengravinginon
eofMr. Button'sbookshadtol
dherso. Notoneofthemcoul
dhavebeenthedark-

haired, dark-skinned boy whose guise Bartimaeus was fond of using.

Kitty shook her head, shut the book, and dropped it into her bag. She was probably just wasting time. She should

forget her hunch and make the summons anyway.

Lunchtime had come and gone, and the bus was crowded with men and women returning to work. Some spoke

together in hushed tones; others, worn-out already, dozed

andnodded.Amansittingacr
osstheaislefromKittywas

readingthelatestinstalment
ofRealWarStories,theInformat
ionMinistry'sregularaccou
ntofthewar'sprogress.The

frontcoverofthepamphletw
asdecoratedbyawoodcut;it
showedaBritishsoldierrun
ningupahilside,bayonetat

thereadY.Hewasnoble,dete
rmined,aclassicalstatueinm
otion.Atthetopofthehilan A
mericanrebelcowered,

hisfacecontortedwithanger

,terror,andotherunpleasant emotions.Heworeanold-style magician'srobe,drawnto

seemludicrous,effeminate. Hisarmswereraiseddefensively;besidehimsathisaly—a minordemoninsimilarpose.

Itsfacewaswizenedandwicked;itwore,inminiature,the sameclothesasthemagician. TheBritishsoldierhadno

demon.Acaptionbelowthewoodcutread:"AnotherBostonTriumph."

Kittycurledherlipcontemp

t u o u s l y at t h e b l at an t p r o p ag
an d a o f t h e w o o d c u t . T h at w as
M an d r ak e 's w o r k : h e w as

h e ad o f In f o r m at i o n n o w . A n d
t o t h i n k s h e 'd l e t h i m l i v e .

B u t i t h ad b e e n t h e d j i n n i B ar t
i m ae u s w h o h ad e n c o u r ag e d h
e r t o d o i t , t o ac t t o s p ar e t h e m
ag i c i an 's l i f e , an d t h r e e

y e ar s l at e r , t h i s s t i l p u z z l e d
an d i n t r i g u e d h e r . N o t h i n g t h
at s h e h ad k n o w n ab o u t d e m o n s
h ad q u i t e p r e p ar e d h e r f o r

B ar t i m ae u s s p e r s o n al i t y . T h
e i r c o n v e r s at i o n s , f r am e d ag

ainstabackdropoffearanddan
ger,remainedfreshinher

mind—fullofvitality,insig
ht,and,aboveal,anunexpecte
drapport.Hehadopenedado
orforher,givinghera

glimpseofahistoricalproce
ssshehadneverguessedat:th
ousandsofyearsofmagicians
enslavingdemons,forcing

themtolendtheirpower.Th
ousandsofyears,duringwhi
chtimeadozenempiresshadri
sentoglory,waned,then

crumbled.Thepatternrecur

redagainandagain.Demonswe
eresummoned,magicianstfou
ghttheirwaytowealthand

fame.Stagnationsetin.Comm
onersdiscoveredinherent
abilitiestheydidn'tknowthe
yhad—magicalresilienceb ui
lt

upthroughthegenerationsth
atallowedthemtorebelagains
ttheirrulers.Themagicianstf
el;newonesappeared

elsewhereandbeganthepro c
essoncemore.Soitwenton:
anendlesscycleofstrife.Th
equestionwas—couldit be

b r o k e n ?

A h o r n b l ar e d ; w i t h a j e r k , t h e b u s c am e t o a s u d d e n s t o p . K i t t y l u r c h e d b ac k i n t o h e r s e at an d c r an e d h e r n e c k

ag ai n s t t h e w i n d o w i n an e f f o r t t o s e e t h e c au s e .

F r o m s o m e w h e r e b e y o n d t h e f r o n t o f t h e b u s a y o u n g m an c am e f l ai l i n g t h r o u g h t h e ai r . H e l an d e d h e av i l y o n t h e

p av e m e n t , l ay t h e r e an i n s t an t , an d b e g an t o r i s e . T w o N i g h t P o l i c e , g r ay - u n i f o r m e d , s h i n y o f b o o t an d c ap , h u r r i e d

intoview.Theyflungthemselvesupontheyouth,buthefoughtandkicked,punchedhiswayfree.Hestruggledtohis

feet.Oneofficerproducedastickfromherbelt:shespokeaword—aglimmeringblue currentcrackledatitsend.The

crowdthathadgatheredddrewbackinalarm.Theyoungmanretreatedslowly.Kittysawthathisheadwasbloodied,

hiseyeswild.

Thepolicewomanadvanced,

w a v i n g h e r j o l t-s t i c k . A s u d d e n l u n g e , a j ab . T h e c u r r e n t c au g h t t h e y o u n g m an i n t h e

c h e s t . H e j e r k e d an d t w i t c h e d a m o m e n t ; s m o k e b i l o w e d f r o m h i s b u r n i n g c l o t h e s . T h e n h e l au g h e d — a h ar s h an d

m i r t h l e s s s o u n d , l i k e t h e c al i n g o f a c r o w . H i s h an d r e ac h e d o u t an d g r as p e d t h e s t i c k at i t s ac t i v e e n d . B l u e e n e r g i e s

j u d d e r e d o n h i s s k i n , b u t h e s e e m e d i m p e r v i o u s : i n t w o q u i c k m o v e m e n t s h e h ad s e i z e d t h e s t i c k , r e v e r s e d i t — an d

s e n t t h e p o l i c e w o m a n j e r k i n g b a c k u p o n t h e p a v e m e n t i n a f l a s h o f l i g h t . H e r l i m b s t w i t c h e d , h e r b o d y a r c h e d ,

s u b s i d e d . S h e l a y q u i t e s t i l l .

T h e y o u n g m a n t h r e w t h e j o l t - s t i c k a s i d e , t u r n e d u p o n h i s h e e l a n d , w i t h o u t a b a c k w a r d g l a n c e , d i s a p p e a r e d d o w n a

s i d e a l e y . T h e s i l e n t c r o w d p a r t e d f o r h i m .

W i t h a g r i n d i n g s h u d d e r a n d a r u m b l e o f g e a r s , t h e b u s s e t o f f . A w o m a n s i t t i n g i n f r o n t o f K i t t y s h o o k h e r h e a d a t

nobodyinparticular."Thewar,"shesaid."It'scausingalthistrouble."

Kittylookedatherwatch.Fifteenminutestothelibrary.Sheclosedhereyes.

Itwashalftrue:thewarwascausingmostofthetrouble,bothathomeandabroad.Butthespreadingresilienceof

thecommonerswashelpingtofanthefflames.

SixmonthspreviouslytheWarMinister,Mr.Mortensen,hadimplementedanewpolic

y. In a bid to bludgeon the

American rebels into submission, he determined to dramatically increase the size of the government force. To this end

he enacted the Mortensen Doctrine—a policy of mobilization across the country. Recruitment offices were reopened, and

commoners were encouraged to sign up to the armed forces. Lured by the prospect of preferential jobs on their

return,manymendidso.Afte
rafewdaysoftrainingtheysai
ledforAmericaonspecialtr
oopships.

Monthspassed;theexpected
returnoftheconqueringher
oesdidnotmaterialize.Ever
ythingwentquiet.Informati
on

fromthecolonieswashardto
comeby;governmentstatem
entsbecameelusive.Atleng
thrumorsbegan,perhaps

spreadbytradersoperating
acrossthe Atlantic:thearmy
wasboggeddowndeepinene

myterritory;twobattalions

hadbeenmassacred;manymen werededead,somehadfledinto thetracklessforestsandhadn everbeenseenagain.

Therewastalkofstarvationan dotherhorrors.Therecruit mentofficequeuesdwindle danddiedaway;asullenness

stoleimperceptiblyacrosst hefacesofpeopleintheLond onstreets.

Induecoursepassiveresent mentturnedtoaction.Itbegan withafewdisjointedepisod

e s , f ar -f l u n g an d b r i e f , e ac h

o f w h i c h c o u l d b e as c r i b e d t o
r an d o m l o c al c au s e s . In o n e t o
w n a m o t h e r c o n d u c t e d a s o l i
t ar y p r o t e s t , h u r l i n g a r o c k

t h r o u g h t h e w i n d o w o f a r e c r
u i t m e n t o f f i c e ; i n an o t h e r , a
g r o u p o f l ab o r e r s s e t d o w n t h
e i r t o o l s an d r e f u s e d t o t o i l f
o r

t h e i r d ai l y p i t t an c e . T h r e e m
e r c h an t s t i p p e d a t r u c k l o ad o
f p r e c i o u s g o o d s — g o l d e n o
at s , f i n e f l o u r , s u n -c u r e d h am
s —

uponthe Whitehal road and, dousingitwithoil, ignitedit, sendingafragileribbonofsmokeintothesky. Aminor

magicianfromtheeasternconlonies, perhaps maddenedbyyearsofforeigndiet, ranscreamingintothe War Ministry

withanelementalsphereinhishand; insecondshehadactivatedthesphere, destroyinghimselfandtwoyoung

receptionistsinamaelstromofragingair.

Whilenoneoftheincidents

w as as d r am at i c as t h e at t ac k s o
n c e c ar r i e d o u t b y t h e t r ai t o r
D u v al , o r e v e n b y t h e

m o r i b u n d R e s i s t an c e , t h e y h
ad g r e at e r s t ay i n g p o w e r i n t h
e p u b l i c m i n d . D e s p i t e t h e b e
s t e f f o r t s o f M r . M an d r ak e at

t h e In f o r m at i o n M i n i s t r y , t h
e y w e r e d i s c u s s e d r e p e at e d l
y i n m ar k e t s , at w o r k p l ac e s , i
n p u b s an d c af e s , u n t i l b y t h e

s t r an g e al c h e m y o f g o s s i p an d
r u m o r t h e y w e r e j o i n e d t o g e t
h e r i n t o o n e b i g s t o r y , b e c o m
i n g t h e s y m p t o m s o f a

colectiveprotestagainstthe magicians'rule.

Butitwasaprotestwithoutteeth,andKitty,whohadtried activerebelioninhertime,wasundernoilusionsabout

howitwasgoingtoend.Eachevening,atworkintheFrogInn,sheheardproposalsofstrikesanddemonstrations,

butnosuggestionofhowtoprevententhemagicians'demonsfromcrackingdown.Yes,afewscatteredindividualshad

resilience,asshehad,butth

at alone was not enough. Al ies were needed too.

The bus set her down in a peac eful, leafy road south of Oxfo rd Street. Shouldering her b ag, she walked the last two

blocks to the London Library .

The guard had seen her often, both singly and in the compan y of Mr. Button. Nevertheles s, he ignored her greeting,

held out his hand for her pass , and scanned it sourly from his perch on a high stool behinda

desk. Without comment,

heushered heron. Kitty smiled sweetly and strolled into the library foyer.

The library filed five labyrinthine floors, extending across the width of three townhouses in the corner of a quiet

square. Although out of bounds to commoners, it was not primarily concerned with magical texts, but instead with

works that the authorities considered dangerous or subversive in the wrong hands. The

seincludedbooksonhistory
,

onmathematics,astronomyan
dotherstagnantsciences,as
welasliteraturethathadbeen
forbiddensince

Gladstone'sday.Fewofthele
adingmagicianshadthetimeo
rinclinationtovisitit,butM
r.Button,fromwhose

attentionsfewhistoricaltex
tsweresafe,sentKittytobro
wsetherefrequently.

Asusual,thelibrarywasalmo
stdeserted.Lookingintothe

al c o v e s s t r e t c h i n g aw ay f r o m
t h e m ar b l e d s t ai r s , K i t t y

m ad e o u t o n e o r t w o e l d e r l y g
e n t l e m e n , s i t t i n g c r u m p l e d
b e l o w t h e w i n d o w s i n t h e ap r
i c o t af t e r n o o n l i g h t . O n e h e l
d a

n e w s p ap e r l o o s e l y i n h i s h an
d s ; an o t h e r d e f i n i t e l y s l e p t .
A l o n g a d i s t an t ai s l e a y o u n g -
w o m an w as s w e e p i n g t h e

f l o o r ; shht, shht, shht w e n t t h e b r
o o m , an d f ai n t c l o u d s o f d u s t s
e e p e d t h r o u g h t h e s h e l v i n g t
o t h e ai s l e s o n e i t h e r

side.

Kittyhadalistoftitlestoborrowon Mr. Button's behalf, butshealsohadanagendaofherown. Aftertwoyears'

regularvisits, sheknewherwayaround; beforelongshewasinasecludedcorridoronthesecondfloor, standingin

frontoftheDemonologysection.

Necho, Rekhyt... Herknowledgeofancientlanguageswasnonexistent: thesenamesmightbelonginalmostany

culture. Babylonian? Assyrian? Onahunch, shetriedEgyptian. Sheconsultedseveralgeneraldemonlistings, al

boundincrackedblackleather, yelowedpagescoveredintight, faintcolumnsofscript. Halfanhourpassed; she

foundnothing. Abriefconsultationwiththelibraryindexledhertoaremotealcovebesideawindow. Awindowseat

withpurplecushionswaitedinvitingly. Shehauleddownseveralspecialist Egyptian almanacs and began to search.

Almostimmediately, inaportlydictionary, shefoundsomething.

Rekhyt: Engl. transl.: *lapwing.* This bird symbolized slavery to the Egyptians; occurs commonly in tomb art and in

hieroglyphs on magicians' papyri. Demons with this byname recur in the Old, New, and Late Periods.

Demonsplural . . . Thatwas frustrating. Butshe'dpinnedtheepochdown, forsure. Bartimaeus had beenemployedin

Egypt; forsomeofthattime, atleast, hehadbeenknownnasR

ekhyt.... Inhermind'seyeKitt
ysawthedjinniasshe

remembereredhim: dark, slight, wearingasimplewraparo
undkilt. Fromwhatsheknewo
ftheappearanceofthe

Egyptians, Kittyfeltshemig
htbeontosomething.

Foranotherhourshesatthere
, flippingcontentedlythrou
ghthedustypages. Someboo
kswereuseless, writtenin

foreigntongues, orinphrase
ssoabstrusethatthesentenc
esseemedtocoiluponthems

elvesbeforehereyes.The

restwereredenseandforbiddi
ng.Theygaveherlistsofphar
aohs,ofcivilservants,ofthe
warrior-priestsofRa;they

providedtablesofknownsu
mmonings,ofsurvivingrec
ords,ofobscuredemonssen
tonmundanetasks.Itwasa

dauntingsearch,andmoreth
anonce,Kitty'sheadnodded.
Shewasstartledbackintolif
ebypolicesirensinthe

distance,byshoutsandchanti
ngfromanearbystreet,once

b y an e l d e r l y m ag i c i an b l o w i n g h i s n o s e l o u d l y as h e

s h u f f l e d d o w n t h e p as s ag e .

T h e au t u m n s u n w as l o w e r i n g l e v e l w i t h t h e l i b r ar y w i n d o w ; i t s r ays w ar m e d t h e s e at w i t h a g o l d e n l i g h t . S h e g l an c e d

at h e r w at c h . F o u r -f i f t e e n ! N o t l o n g b e f o r e t h e l i b r ar y c l o s e d , an d s h e h ad n 't e v e n f o u n d M r . B u t t o n 's b o o k s . In t h r e e

h o u r s s h e m u s t b e at w o r k t o o . It w as an i m p o r t an t n i g h t an d G e o r g e F o x o f t h e F r o g In n w as a s t i c k l e r f o r

punctuality. Wearily she pulled another volume across the windowseat and flipped it open. Just another five minutes,

then—

Kitty blinked. There it was. A list, eight pages long, of selected deamons, tabulated alphabeticaly. Now then... Kitty

scanned down it with practiced speed. Paimose, Pairi, Penrenutet, Ramose... Aha—Rekhyt. Three of them.

Rekhyt (I): Afrit. Slave of Sneferu (4th Dynasty) and others; of legendarily vicious temperament. Killed at Khartoum.

Rekhyt (II): Djinni. By-name of Quishog. Guardian of the Necropolis of Thebes (18th Dynasty). Morbid tendencies.

Rekhyt (III): Djinni. Also named Nectanebo or Necho.Energetic, but unreliable. Slave of Ptolemaeus of Alexandria (fl. 120s

B.C.).

It w as t h e t h i r d o n e , i t had t o b e . . . . T h e e n t r y w as s h o r t n e s s i t s e l f , b u t K i t t y f e l t a s u r g e o f

e x c i t e m e n t i n h e r v e i n s .

A n e w m as t e r , a n e w p o s s i b i l i t y . P t o l e m ae u s . . . t h e n am e w as q u i t e f am i l i ar . S h e w as s u r e s h e 'd h e ar d M r . B u t t o n

m e n t i o n i t ; s u r e e v e n t h at h e o w n e d b o o k s w i t h i t i n t h e t i t l e . . . P tolem aeu s. S h e r ac k e d h e r b r ai n s —w e l , i t w o u l d

b e e as y e n o u g h t o t r ac k d o w n t h e r e f e r e n c e , w h e n s h e g o t b ac k .

W i t h f e v e r e d h as t e , K i t t y n o t e d d o w n h e r f i n d i n g s i n h e r j o t t e r , s n ap p e d t h e e l as t i c b an d

aroundit,andshoveditinto

hertatteredsatchel.Shegath eredthebooksintoanuntidy pile,hoistedthemintoherar ms,andreturnedthemto

theshelves.Asshedidso,th edistantbuzzersoundedinth efoyer.Thelibrarywasclosi ng!Andshe'dstilnotgother

master'sbooks!

Timetomove.Butitwaswith adefinitesenseoftriumphth atKittysprinteddowntheco rridor.Betterlookout,

Bartimaeus, she thought as she ran. Better look out... I'm closing in on you.

8

The afternoon's Council meeting was even less satisfactory than John Mandrake had feared. It took place in the Hall of

Statues at Westminster, a rectangular room built of pink-grey stone, with soaring medieval vaulting high above, and

thickly layered Persian rugs covering the flagstones. In a dozen niches along the walls st

oodlife-sizestatuesofthe

greatmagiciansofthepast.Th
ereattheend,austereandforb
idding,wasGladstone;oppo
sitehim,flamboyantina

frockcoat,hisdeadlyrivalDi
sraeli.AlthesucceedingPri
meMinisterswerefeatured,
togetherwithothernotables
.

Noteveryalcoveyetcontain
edastatue,butMr.Devereau
x,thecurrentpremier,hador
deredtheemptyonestobe

filedwithsumptuousfloral d

isplays. Itwasguessedthevac
antspacesremindedhimofhi
sownmortality.

Globesofimp-lightdrifted
againstthececeiling,iluminati
ng—inthecenterofthero om
—acircularta bleofEnglisho
ak,

broadindiameterandpolishe
dtoperfectionbylaboringi
mps. Aroundthissatthe Coun
cil,thegreatonesofthe

Empire,toyingwiththeirpe
nsandbottlesofmineralwate
r.

Mr. Devereaux had chosen a round table for reasons of diplomacy. Technically no one person took precedence over

another—an admirable policy which had been undermined by his insistence on using a gigantic gold enchair, ornately

carved with swollen cherubs. Mr. Mortensen, the War Minister, had followed suit with a ostentatious seat of

burnished red wood. Not to be outdone, Mr. Colin sof the Home Office had responded with a monumental throne of

emeraldbrocade,complete withperfumedtassels.Soit went.OnlyJohnMandrakeand dhiserstwhilemasterMs.

JessicaWhitwellhadresisted thetemptationtosomehow modifytheirseating.

Theplacingofeachmagician's chairwaslikewisesubtlyfought over,untilthesituationhad stabilizedtoreflectthe

factionsthatwereopeningup inCouncil.Mr.Devereaux'stwo favoritessatbesidehim:John Mandrake,the

InformationMinister,andJane Farrarofthepolice.BeyondFarrars atMs.WhitwelandMr.Colins,whowereknown

tobeskeptical aboutthedirectionofthewar.BeyondMandrakewereMr.MortensenandMs.MalbindioftheForeign

Office:itwastheirpolicies thatthegovernmentwascurrentlyfollowing.

Themeetingbeganinauspiciouslywithanadvertisement.Fromasideroomagiantcrystal orbcamerumblingona

wheeledplatform. Itwaspule
dbyaslave-gangofimplets,l
edbyafoliotoverseerwield
ingahorsehairwhip. Asthey

drewnearthetable,thefoliot
utteredacry,theimpletsspr
angtoattention,andwiththec
rackingofthewhip

vanishedoneaftertheotheri
ncloudsofcoloredsteam. Th
ecrystalorbglowedpink,th
enorange;initscenter

appearedabroadandbeamingf
ace,whichwinkedandspoke.

"Esteemedladiesandgentle

m e n o f t h e C o u n c i l ! L e t m e r e m i n d y o u t h at w e ar e o n l y t w o d ay s f r o m t h e t h e at r i c al

e v e n t o f t h e d e c ad e , t h e s o c i e t y e v e n t o f t h e y e ar ! R e s e r v e y o u r t i c k e t s n o w f o r t h e p r e m i e r e o f m y l at e s t w o r k ,

b as e d o n t h e l i f e o f o u r b e l o v e d f r i e n d an d l e ad e r , M r . R u p e r t D e v e r e au x ! G e t r e ad y t o l au g h , c r y , t ap y o u r f e e t , an d

s i n g al o n g t o t h e c h o r u s e s o f From W ap p in g to W estm in ster: A P olitic al O d y ssey . B r i n g y o u r p ar t n e r s , b r i n g y o u r

f r i e n d s , an d d o n 't f o r g e t y o u r h an d k e r c h i e f s . I, Q u e n t i n M ak e p e ac e , p r o m i s e y o u al a s e n s at i o n al n i g h t ! "

T h e f ac e f ad e d ; t h e o r b w e n t d ar k . T h e as s e m b l e d m i n i s t e r s c o u g h e d an d s h u f f l e d i n th e i r s e at s . "D e ar G o d , "

s o m e o n e w h i s p e r e d . "It 's a m u sic al. "

M r . D e v e r e au x b e am e d ar o u n d at th e m . "Q u e n t i n 's s w e e t g e s t u r e i s a mite u n n e c e s s ar y , " h e s ai d . "I'm s u r e y o u al l

al r e ad y h av e y o u r t i c k e t s ."

Sotheyhad.Therewaslittleo
ption.

Theday'sbusinesscommenc
ed.Mr.Mortensengavearep
ortofthelatestnewsfromAm
erica,broughtbydjinn

acrosstheocean.Itwassourf
are:deadlockinthewilderne
ss,minorskirmishes,nothi
ngdecisivegained.Ithadbee
n

soforweeks.

JohnMandrakebarelylistene
d.Theaccountwaspredictabl
eanddepressing;itonlyincr

e as e d t h e f r u s t r at i o n t h at

b o i l e d w i t h i n h i m . E very thin g
w as o u t o f c o n t r o l —t h e w ar , t
h e c o mm o n e r s , t h e s i t u at i o n
ac r o s s t h e E mp i r e .

S o me t h i n g d e c i s i v e n e e d e d
t o b e d o n e , an d s o o n , i f t h e n at
i o n w as t o b e s av e d . A n d h e k n
e w •w h at t h at s o me t h i n g

w as . T h e S t aff o f G l ad s t o n e —
a w e ap o n o f i n c r e d i b l e p o w e
r —-l ay u s e l e s s i n t h e v au l t s b
e l o w t h at v e r y c h amb e r ,

b e gg i n g t o b e b r o u gh t o u t b y
an y o n e w i t h t h e t al e n t t o u s e i t

. If wielded effectively, it would destroy the rebels, cow

Britain's enemies, send the commoners scampering back to work. But it needed a magician of the strongest level to

command it, and Devereaux was not that man. Hence—out of fear for his own position—he kept it safely locked away.

Would Mandrake have been able to use the Staff, given the opportunity? In all honesty, he didn't know. Perhaps. He

was the strongest magician in

theroom,withthepossiblee
xceptionofWhitwel.Thenag
ain,threeyearsbefore,

whenhehadacquiredtheStaff
onthegovernment'sbehalf,h
ehadtriedtogetitworking,
anhadfailed.

Thatknowledge,thatfrustrat
edambitionmixedwithself-
doubt,contributedtothelis
tlessnesswhichhadlatelyco
me

overhim.Daytoday,hisjobw
asfutile—hewassurrounded
bysquabblingfools,unablet
oimprovethesituation.The

onlyglimmerofhopecamefr
omthehuntfortheTraitorHop
kins.Perhapsthereheculdm
akeabreakthrough,

achievesomethingtangiblef
oronce.Wel,hewouldhavet
oseewhatBartimaeusfound.

Mortensendronedon.Overc
omebyboredom,Mandrakem
adedesultorynotesonhispad
.Hesippedhiswater.He

appraisedhisfellowCounci
lmembers,onebyone.

First:thePrimeMinister,hi
shairstreakedwithgray,hisf

ac e p u f f y an d b l o t c h e d w i t h t h e s t r ai n o f w ar . A h e av i n e s s

h u n g ab o u t h i m ; h e s e e m e d t e n t at i v e an d q u av e r i n g i n s p e e c h . O n l y w h e n d i s c u s s i n g t h e at e r w o u l d a t r ac e o f h i s o l d

an i m at i o n r e t u r n , t h e i n f e c t i o u s c h ar i s m a t h at h ad s o i n s p i r e d M an d r ak e as a b o y . A t o t h e r t i m e s h e w as d an g e r o u s l y

v i n d i c t i v e . N o t l o n g b e f o r e , M r . C o l i n s ' s p r e d e c e s s o r i n t h e H o m e O f f i c e , a w o m an n am e d H ar k n e t t , h ad s p o k e n o u t

againsthispolicies.Sixhorlashadcomeforherthateveningg.SuchheventstroubledMandrake—itdidnotsuggestthe

clearthinkingworthyofaleader.Besides,itwasmoralyunsound.

BeyondDevereauxsatJaneFarrar.Sensinghisappraisal,shelookedupandsmiled;hereyeswereconspiratorial.As

hewatched,shescribbledsomethingonapieceofpaperanddpushediteacrosstohim.Itread:HOPKINS.ANYNEWS?

Heshookhishead,mouthed,"Toosoon,"madearuefulface,andturnedhiseyestoherneighbor.

TheSecurityMinister,JessicaWhitwel,hadenduredseveralyearsoutoffavor;nowshewassteadilyclawingitback.

Thereasonwassimple—shewastoopowerfultobeignored.Shelivedfrugaly,didnotattemptoaccumulategreat

wealth,anddevotedherenergiestoenhancingtheSecurityservices.Anumberofrece

n t r ai d s h ad b e e n an n i h i l at e d

t h an k s t o h e r e f f o r t s . S h e w as s t i l b o n e -t h i n , h e r h ai r g h o s t -w h i t e an d s p i k y . S h e an d M an d r ak e r e g ar d e d e ac h o t h e r

w i t h r e s p e c t f u l l o at h i n g .

T o h e r l e f t : M r . C o l i n s , t h e n e w e s t m e m b e r o f t h e C o u n c i l . H e w as a f i e r y l i t t l e man , s w ar t h y , r o u n d -f ac e d , e y e s

h ab i t u al l y b r i g h t w i t h i n d i g n at i o n . H e h ad r e p e at e d l y e m p h as i z e d t h e d am ag e t h e w ar s w e r e d o i n g t o t h e e c o n o m y ;

prudently,however,hehads
toppedshortofovertlydem
andinganendtohostilities.

OnMandrake'srightwasthew
arfaction:first,HelenMalbi
ndi,ForeignMinster.Shew
asbynaturemeekand

malleable,butthepressureo
fhercurrentposthadmadehe
rpronetooutburstsofshriek
ingrageamongherstaff.

Hernosewasagoodindicator
ofhermood:attimesofstress
itwentwhiteandbloodless.
Mandrakeheldherinlow

esteem.

CarlMortensen,theWarMinister,stoodbeyondMalbindi,roundinguphisreport.Foryearshisstarhadbeeninthe

ascendant;ithadbeenhewhomoststronglyadvocatedwaruponAmerica,hewhosestrategieshadbeenmost

closelyfolowed.Hislankblondhairremainedlong(hehadnotdeignedtocropitintomilitarystyle)andhestilspoke

confidentlyofsuccess.Nev

ertheless,hisnailswerebitt
entothequick,andtheotherC
ouncilmembersw atchedhim

withthesteadyeyesofvultur
es.

"Iremindyouallthatwemustr
emaincommitted,"hesaid."It
isacrucialtime.Therebelsar
erunningragged.By

contrast,wehavebarelytest
edourresources.Wecouldm
aintainourpresencetherefo
ratleastanotheryear."

InhisgoldenchairMr.Dever
eauxranafingeracrossacher

ub'srump;hespokesoftly."A furtheryearwouldnotsee

youinthisroom,Carl."Hesmiledupunderhoodedlids."Unlessyouwereincorporatedintosomekindofornament."

Mr.Colinstittered;Ms.Farrarsmiledicily.Mandrakeinspectedhispentop.

Mr.Mortensenhadblanched,butheldthePrimeMinister'sgaze."Wewillnotneedayear,ofcourse.Iusedtheterm

forilustrationonly."

"Ayear,sixmonths,sixweeks—itisallone."Ms.Whitwelwasspeakingangrily."Inthemeantimeourenemiesacross

theworldaretakingadvantageofus.Thereistalkofrebelionevererywhere!TheEmpireisinferment."

Mortensenmadeaface."Youoverstatethis."

Devereauxsighed."Whatisyourreport,Jessica?"

Shebowedstiffly."Thankyou,Rupert.Onlylastnightthreeseparateattacksoccurredo

nourownsoil!Mymen

destroyedaDutchraidingpartyoffftheNorfolkcoast,whileColins'sdjinnhadtorepelanairattackover

Southampton:weassumetheywereSpanishdemons,dowenot,Bruce?"

Mr.Colinsnodded."Theyworeyellowandorangetabards,decoratedwiththearmsofAragon.TheysentInfernos

rainingdownuponthecityceenter."

"Meanwhileanotherbandofdemonssavagedasectionof Kent," Ms.Whitwellcontinued. "IbelieveMr.Mandrakedealt

withthat." Shesniffed.

"Idid," JohnMandrakesaidblandly. "Theenemyforcewasdestroyed,butwehavenoevidencewheretheycame

from."

"Apity." Whitwel'sthinwhitefingerstappedarhythmonthetable. "Evenso,theproblemisclear:thisisa

European-wide phenomenon, and our main forces are not on hand to crush it."

Mr. Devereaux nodded wearily. "Indeed, indeed. Does any one else fancy a sweetmeat at this moment?" He looked

around. "No? Then I shall venture one alone." He coughed. A tall, gray shadow stepped from nowhere around his

chair, and with spectral fingers laid a golden tray before him; it was piled high with yellow pies and pastries. The

shadowwithdrew.Devereaux selectedaglazeddoughnut."Ah,excelent.Jane—praygiveusthepolice'sperspective

onthedomesticsituation."

Ms.Farraradoptedalanguidposethatneverthelessdisplayedherfiguretofineadvantage."Frankly,itistroubling.

Notonlydowehavetheseraids,whicharehardtodealwith,butthereisthematterofcommonerdisruption.More

andmorepeoplearereseemingl

yresistanttomagicalattacks. Theyseethroughillusions, observeourspies.... Inspired

bytheirexample, strikesand demonstrationshavebeenheld. Iregardthisaspotentialy moreimportantevenththan

thewar."

ThePrimeMinisterwipedfragmentsofsugarfromhismouth. "Jane, Jane, wemustnotgetdistracted. Commoners

canbedealtwithinduetime. Theyarerestlessbecauseofth

e w ar." H e l o o k e d m e an i n g f u l y at M r . M o r t e n s e n .

M s . F ar r ar i n c l i n e d h e r h e ad ; a s t r an d o f h ai r f e l at t r ac t i v e l y ac r o s s h e r f ac e . "It i s y o u r d e c i s i o n , o f c o u r s e , s i r ."

M r . D e v e r e au x s l ap p e d a h an d ag ai n s t h i s t h i g h . "It c e r t ai n l y i s ! A n d I d e c i d e t h at w e s h al n o w h av e a l i t t l e b r e ak .

C o f f e e an d s w e e t m e at s al r o u n d ! "

T h e s h ad o w r e t u r n e d ; w i t h v ar y i n g d e g r e e s o f r e l u c t an c e , t h e m i n i s t e r s ac c e p t e d t h e i

r r e f r e s h m e n t s . M an d r ak e

s l o u c h e d o v e r h i s c u p , l o o k i n g at J an e F ar r ar ag ai n . It w as t r u e th at th e y w e r e al i e s in C o u n c i l : d i s t r u s t e d b y th e

o th e r s , f av o r e d b y D e v e r e au x , th e y h ad l o n g b e e n th r o w n t o g e th e r . B u t th at m e an t l i t t l e . S u c h al e g i an c e s c o u l d

c h an g e at th e d r o p o f a h at . A s al w ays , h e f o u n d i t h ar d t o r e s o l v e h e r s t r o n g p e r s o n al al u r e w i th th e c o o l f l i n t i n e s s o f

h e r p e r s o n al i t y . H e f r o w n e d ; i t w as a c u r i o u s f ac t th at , d e s

pitehisself-control,despit
ehisbeliefinthevirtuesof

magicians'rule,viewingso
meonelikeFarrarcloseupm
adehimfeel,deepdown,unc
ertain,hesitant,cloudedby

unease.Still,shewasverybe
autiful.

Whenitcamedowntoit,ofco
urse,altheCouncilmadehim
feeluneasy.Ithadtakenallhis
innersteeltomaintain

hisstatusintheircompany.T
heyeachradiatedambition,st
rength,cleverness,andguil

e;noneofthemeveracted

againsttheirowninterests.Tosurvive,hehaddonethesame.

Wel,perhapsthiswasthenatural way.Hadheevermetanyonewhohadactedotherwise?Unbidden,thefaceof

KittyJonescameintohismind.Ridiculous!Atraitor,violent,tempestuous,untamed....Hemadeadoodleinhispad:

afacewithlongdarkhair....Ridiculous!Anyway,thegirlwasdead.Hecrosseditouthu

r r i e d l y.

A n d f u r t h e r b ac k—l o n g, l o n g ag o n o w —t h e r e h ad b e e n h i s ar t t u t o r t o o. M s. L u t y e n s. F u n n y, h e c o u l d n o l o n g e r

c l e ar l y r e c al l h e r f ac e —

"D i d n't y o u h e ar m e, J o h n?" T h at w as D e v e r e au x, s p e ak i n g al m o s t i n h i s e ar. H e f e l t l i t t l e fl ak e s o f s u g ar d o u gh n u t

b e i n g b l o w n ag ai n s t h i s c h e e k. "W e ar e d i s c u s s i n g o u r p o s i t i o n i n E u r o p e. I w as r e q u e s t i n g y o u r o p i n i o n."

Mandrakesatup."Sorry,sir.Um,myagentstellmethereisdiscontentasfarafieldasItaly.Therehavebeenriotsin

Rome,Iunderstand.Butitisnotmyarea."

Gaunt,severe,stick-thin,theSecurityMinister,JessicaWhitwelspoke."Butitisminе.Italy,France,Spain,theLow

Countries.Everywhereitisthesame.Ourtroopsareatanal-timelow.Whatistheresult?Dissent,riot,rebellion.Al

Europeiserupting.Everyl
astmalcontentunderthesuni
spreparingtostrikeatus;we
wilbefightinginadozen

countriesbeforethemonthi
sout."

"Thisisnotimeforexaggerat
ion,Jessica."Mr.Mortensen
'seyeswereresteely.

"Exaggeration?"Abonyhandsl
ammedagainstthetable;Ms.
Whitwelstood."Thiswilbet
heworstuprisingsince

1914!Andwhereareourforc
es?Thousandsofmilesaway!

I am telling you, we will lose Europe if we are not careful!"

Now Mortensen was raising his voice too. He half rose from his chair. "Oh, and perhaps you have a solution, do you?"

"Certainly I do. We pull out from America and bring our forces home!"

"What?" Mortensen turned to the Prime Minister, faced dark with fury. "Do you hear that, Rupert? That is nothing but

rank appeasement! It borders on treachery!"

A b l u e -g r ay g l o w e r u p t e d ar o u n d J e s s i c a W h i t w e l l 's c l e n c h e d f i s t ; t h e ai r h u m m e d w i t h a s ur g e o f u n e ar t h l y f o r c e . H e r

v o i c e w as s u d d e n l y q u i e t . "W o u l d y o u b e s o g o o d as t o r e p e at t h at , C ar l ? "

T h e W ar M i n s t e r r e m ai n e d r i g i d , f i n g e r s l o c k e d ar o u n d t h e ar m r e s t s o f h i s r e d w o o d c h ai r , e y e s f l i c k i n g t o and f r o . A t

l as t h e s ank b ac k i n t o a p o s i t i o n o f f u r i o us r e p o s e . T h e g l o w u p o n M s . W h i t w e l 's f i s t f l i c

keredandwentout.She

waitedafewsecondsmore,thensatwithvictoriouscare.

Accordingtotheirallegiance,theotherministerssmirkedorscowled.Mr.Devereauxstudiedhiscuticles;helookeda

littlebored.JohnMandrakestoodup.AffiliatedtoneitherMortensennorWhitwel,hefeltasuddenurgetowrestback

theinitiative,totakeagamble,throwoffhisinertia."I'msu

reneitherofourexcelentministersintendedtogive

offense,norwassochildishastoreceiveit,"hesaid."Clearlybothareintheright:Jessica'sanxietyisprudent,since

thesituationinEuropeisbecomingunfortunate;Carl'srefusaltoadmitdefeatisalsolaudable.Wecannotleave

Americainthehandsofcriminals.Iwouldliketosuggestasolutiontotheproblem."

"Whichis?"Ms.Whitwelwas

unimpressed.

"Withdrawingtroopsisnotthe answer," Mandrakewenton coldly."Thatsendsoutquite thewrongmessagetoour

enemiesworldwide.Butwe mustbringthisconflicttoane nd.Ourdemonsarenotenoug handnor—savingMr.

Mortensen'spardon—arethe commonsoldiers.Weneeda decisiveweaponthattheAme ricansdonothave.

Somethingwithwhichtheyc annotcontend.Simple.Weus

e G l ad s t o n e 's S t af f ."

H e h ad e x p e c t e d t h e b ar r ag e o f n o i s e t h at g r e e t e d h i s p r o p o s al ; h e d i d n o t at t e m p t t o s p e ak f u r t h e r , b u t w i t h a t h i n

s m i l e , s at h i m s e l f d o w n . J an e F ar r ar m e t h i s g az e an d r ai s e d a q u i z z i c al e y e b r o w ; t h e f ac e s o f t h e o t h e r s w e r e

v ar i o u s l y i n d i g n ant .

"Im p o s s i b l e ! "

"A f o o l i s h f an c y ! "

"Q u i t e o u t o f t h e q u e s t i o n ! "

Thenoisesubsided.Mandrakestirred."I'msorry,"hesaid,"butIdon'tquiteunderstandyourobjections."

CarlMortensenmadeadismissivegesture."TheStaffisuntried,untested."

"Itishardtocontrol,"HelenMalbindisaid.

"Ahighlydangerousartefact,"JessicaWhitwelladded.

"Butthat'sthepoint"Mandrakesaid."WiththeStaff,GladstoneconqueredEurope.Itwilldothesametobo

easilyenough.Ourfriendsin Paris and Rome will hear about it and duck down behind their parapets again. Problem

solved. Once it has crossed the ocean, the whole thing would take no more than a week. Why keep the Staff under

lock and key when it's the solution to our difficulties?"

"Because," a cold voice said, "I do not choose to use it. And my word goes."

Mandrake turned to face the Prime Minister, who had swive

l e d i n h i s c h ai r an d d r aw n h i m s e l f u p r i g h t . D e v e r e au x 's

f ac e h ad b e c o m e h ar d an d l i n e d , t h e f l ab b i n e s s l e s s o b v i o u s .T h e e y e s w e r e d u l , o p aq u e . "Y o u m ay p e r h ap s h av e

r e c e i v e d a m e m o t h i s m o r n i n g , M an d r ak e , " h e s ai d . "T h e S t af f , an d o t h e r i t e ms , h av e b e e n r e m o v e d t o t h e R o o m o f

T r e as u r e s i n t h i s v e r y b u i l d i n g . T h e y ar e s u r r o u n d e d b y a r an g e o f h i g h - l e v e l m ag i c al s af e g u ar d s .T h e y w i l n o t b e

u s e d . D o y o u u n d e r s t an d ? "

Mandrakehesitated;hethoug
htofstandinghisground.The
nheremembereredthefateofM
s.Harknett."Ofcourse,

sir,"hebegan."ButImustask
why—"

"Must?Youmustdonothing!"
Thefacewassuddenlytwiste
d,contorted,theeyeswildan
dstaring."Youwilknow

yourplaceandnotseektodest
abilizethisCouncilwithyou
rinanetheories.Nowbesile
ntandthinkbeforeyouspeak

again!Andbecarefullest Isu

spectyouofhavinganagenda ofyourown." ThePrimeMini sterturnedaway.

"Mortensen—bringoutthem aps. Giveusafirmerupdateo nourposition. Iunderstand wehavepinnedtherebelsin

anareaofmarshland...."

"Thatwasalittlerash," JaneF arrarwhispered, asshewalke dwithMandrakeinthecorrid oranhourlater. "Whoever

hastheStaffholdstruepower .Devereauxsfrightenedofw hatthatperson'lldotohim."

Mandrakenoddedsullenly.Thedepressionhehadbriefly shakenoffhadspeedilyreturned."Iknow.Butsomeone's

gottomakethecaseopenlyanddclearly.Thecountry'sfallingintochaos.Iwouldn'tbesurprisedifhalftheCouncil

aren'tplanningsomething."

"Concentrateontheplotwedoknowabout.Anythingyetonjenkins?"

"Notyet.Butitwon'tbelong.Mybestdjinni'sonthecase."

9

S i n c e t h e d ay s o f o l d E g y p t , w h e n I t o o k t h e f o r m o f a s i l v e r h aw k an d s h ad o w e d K u s h i t e r ai d e r s f ar o u t ac r o s s t h e

s an d h i l s , I'v e al w ay s b e e n a d ab h an d at t r ai l i n g u n o b s e r v e d . T ak e t h o s e r ai d e r s , n o w : t h e y l e f t d j i n n i n t h e f o r m o f

j ac k al s an d s c o r p i o n s t o g u ar d t h e d e s e r t i n t h e i r w ak e . B u t t h e h aw k f l e w h i g h ag ai n s t t h e s u n an d e as i l y e v ad e d

t h e m . I f o u n d t h e r ai d e r s ' b as e h i d d e n am o n g t h e b l u e - g r e e

n g u m t r e e s o f t h e K h ar g a o as i s an d d r e w t h e p h ar ao h's

ar m y d o w n u p o n t h e m . S o t h e y p e r i s h e d t o a m an .

I w as e m p l o y i n g s i m i l ar d i s c r e e t b u t d e ad l y s k i l s n o w , al t h o u g h i t h as t o b e s ai d t h at t h e c i r c u ms t an c e s w e r e a m i t e

l e s s g l am o r o u s . In s t e ad o f a f e r o c i o u s h o r d e o f p u m a-p e l t e d r ai d e r s y o u h ad a s c r aw n y , g i n g e r s e c r e t ar y ; i n p l ac e o f

t h e ac h i n g v i s t as o f t h e S ah ar a y o u h ad a s m e l y W h i t e h al l b ac k-s t r e e t . A p ar t f r o m t h at , t h e

p ar al l e l w as e x ac t . O h ,

an d I w as n't a h aw k t h i s t i m e —a w o e b e g o n e s p ar r o w w as m o r e t h e j o b i n L o n d o n .

I w as s i t t i n g o n a s i l w at c h i n g a g r u b b y w i n d o w o pp o s i t e . W h o e v e r o w n e d t h e s i l w as n't v e r y k e e n o n b i r d s : h e 'd

l ac e d i t w i t h b i r d l i m e , m e t al s p i k e s , an d s c r ap s o f p o i s o n e d b r e ad . A t y p i c al E n g l i s h w e l c o m e . I k i c k e d t h e b r e ad i n t o

t h e s t r e e t , u s e d as m al In f e r n o t o i n c i n e r at e t h e l i m e , b e n t

a c o u p l e o f s p i k e s o u t o f t r u e ,
an d w e d g e d m y f r ai l l i t t l e

c ar c as s b e t w e e n t h e m . I w as s
o w e ak b y n o w t h at t h i s H e r c ul
e an e f f o r t p r e t t y m u c h f i n i s h
e d m e o f f . H e ad s p i n n i n g , I

s e t t l e d i n t o w at c h m y q u ar r y .

It w as n't e x ac t l y u n m i s s ab l e v
i e w i n g . T h r o u g h t h e ac c u mul
at e d g r i m e o n t h e w i n d o w p an
e I c o ul d s e e C l i v e J e n k i n s

s i t t i n g at a d e s k . H e w as t h i n ,
s t o o p e d , an d r at h e r p u n y ; i f i t
h ad b e e n a s t r ai g h t f i g h t b e t w
e e n h i m an d t h e s p ar r o w ,

I'd have put my money on the bird. An expensive suit hung uneasily on his frame, as if reluctant to get too close; his

shirt was a disturbing mauve. He was pale-faced and a bit freckly, with small eyes peering myopically from behind

thick glasses and reddish hair plastered back in a kind of oily pelt, reminiscent of a fox who'd been caught out in the

rain. Small bony hands stapped unenthusiastically at a typewriter.

Mandrakehadnotbeenwrong
inhisassessmentofJenkins
'spowers.AssoonasItookup
myperch,Icheckedthe

sevenplanesforsensorwebs
,watchprisms,gimleteyes,s
hadow-stalkers,orbs,matric
es,heattraps,trigger-plume
s,

sprites,weirds,andotherm
eansthemagicianmighthavee
mployedformagicalprotect
ion.Notasausage.Hehada

cupofteaonhisdeskandthat
wasaboutit.Iwatchedclosel
yforanysignofsupernaturalc

ommunicationwith

Hopkinsoranother,butthes
ecretaryspokenowordsand
madenountowardsigns.Pitt
er-patter,pitter-patterwent

hisfingersonthekeys;occas
ionallytheyrubbedhisnose,
adjustedhisglassesorscratc
hedanitchyspotontheend

ofhischin.Sotheafternoonp
assed.Itwassimplyriveting.

AlthoughIdidmybesttokee
pfocusedonthejobinhand,I
didfindmymindwanderingat
intervals,(a)becauseit

w as s o d amn d u l l , an d (b) b e c au s e t h e ac h e i n m y e s s e n c e m ad e m e c l o t h y -h e ad e d an d d i s t r ac t e d . It w as l i k e

s u f f e r i n g c h r o n i c l ac k o f s l e e p : I k e p t d r i f t i n g o f f an d t h i n k i n g o f u n r e l at e d t o p i c s — t h e g i r l , K i t t y J o n e s ; m y o l d e n e m y

F aq u ar l s h ar p e n i n g h i s c l e av e r ; f ar o f f i n t h e d i s t an c e , P t o l e m y — b e f o r e h e c h an g e d . E ac h t i m e I h ad t o f o r c e m y s e l f

b ac k i n t o t h e p r e s e n t w i t h a s t ar t ; b u t J e n k i n s w as al w ay s as b e f o r e , s o n o h ar m d o n e .

Five-thirtycame,andwithit
analmostimperceptiblechan
geinJenkins.Anewandstealt
hylifeseemedtoflickerin

hisveins;hislethargyreced
ed.Withquickmovements,h
edrewacoverovertheтypew
riter,tidiedhisdesk,gather
ed

upafewbundlesofpaper,and
slungacoatoverhisarm.Hed
epartedhisofficeoutofview
.

Thesparrowstretchedapain
fulwing,shookitsheadtorel
ievethenumbingachebehind

i t s e y e s , an d t o o k o f f . I

d r i f t e d d o w n t h e s i d e r o ad an
d o u t ab o v e t h e b u s t l e o f W h i t
e h al , w h e r e b u s e s n u d g e d s l o
w l y t h r o u g h t h e h e av y t r af f i c

an d ar m o r e d v an s d i s g o r g e d N
i g h t P o l i c e at i n t e r v al s am o n
g t h e c r o w d s . T h e w ar h ad b r o
u g h t d i s t u r b an c e t o t h e

s t r e e t s , an d t h e au t h o r i t i e s w
e r e t ak i n g n o c h an c e s i n t h e c e
n t e r o f t h e c ap i t al . Im p s an d f o
l i o t s w at c h e d f r o m

r e c e s s e s i n t h e e av e s o f n e ar b
y b u i l d i n g s .

I alighted in a walnut tree in the little courtyard that separated the Internal Affairs building from the road, and waited.

A policeman stood below me at the gate. Presently the door opened and Jenkins emerged; he wore a long leather coat

and carried a crumpled hat in one hand. At the gate he nodded to the guard, showed a pass, and dexited. He turned

north into Whitehal, set his hat on his head at a jaunty angle, and with suddenly eager steps plunged into the crowd.

It's noteasyfolowinganindiv
idualamidamilingthrong,bu
twhenyou'reanexperttracke
rlikeme,youtakeitin

yourstride.Thesecretisnot
togetdistracted.Ikeptmyey
esfixeduponthecrownofJe
nkins'shatandflutteredhigh

above,keepingalittlebehin
dhim,justincasehelookedar
ound.Therewasn'tmuchchan
cethathewouldguesshe

wasbeingfolowed,butyouk
nowme,Idothingsproperly.
Youhavetogetupprettyearly
tocatchmeoutintheart

o f t r ai l i n g .1

1. O nce, when I was em ployed b y the A lg onq uin sham ans, an enem y afrit cam e to our trib e b y

nig ht and ab ducted a chief' s child. W hen the discov ery was m ade, the afrit was far away; it had

disg uised itself as a b uffalo cow, and spun a G lam our on the child, so it seem ed a lowing calf.

B ut afrits hav e fiery hoov es: I followed the sing ed g rass stalk s for a hundred m iles across the

rol ing prairie and slew the ab ductor

with a silv er spear. The child was returned aliv e, if a little

g reen from eating so m uch g rass.

B e y o n d t h e r o o f s t h e au t u m n s u n w as d r o p p i n g d o w n b e h i n d t h e t r e e s o f H y d e P ar k ; a p r e t t y r e d h az e h u n g i n t h e

s k y . T h e s p ar r o w w at c h e d i t ap p r o v i n g l y . It r e m i n d e d m e o f e v e n i n g at t h e p y r am i d s , w h e n t h e d j i n n f l i t t e d l i k e

s w al l o w s ab o v e t h e t o m b s o f t h e k i n g s , an d —

A b u s h o r n h o n k e d ; t h e s p ar r o

w s n ap p e d b ac k t o t h e p r e s e n t . C aref u l—al m o s t c au g h t d ay d r e am i n g t h e r e . . . . N o w

t h e n : J e n k i n s . . .

A h .

I s c an n e d f r an t i c al y t o an d f r o . W h e r e w as t h e d i s t i n c t i v e h at ? N o w h e r e t o b e s e e n . P e r h ap s h e 'd t ak e n i t o f f . . .

N o p e : n o f o x 's c o i f f u r e i n t h e v i c i n i t y . M e n , w o m e n , c h i l d r e n , y e s . A l t h e f l o t s am an d j e t s am o f h u m an i t y . B u t n o

J e n k i n s .

T h e s p ar r o w s n ap p e d i t s b e ak t o g e t h e r i n i r r i t at i o n . T h i s w as M an d rak es f au l t . If h e 'd g i v e n me a f e w m o n t h s ' r e s t , m y

h e ad w o u l d b e c l e ar e r . I w o u l d n 't k e e p g e t t i n g d i s t r ac t e d . It w as l i k e t h e t i m e w h e n —

C on c en trate. P e r h ap s J e n k i n s w as o n a b u s . I d i d a q u i c k f l y p as t t h e n e ar e s t f e w , b u t t h e s e c r e t ar y w as n o t ab o ar d .

W h i c h me an t h e 'd e i t h e r d e m at e r i al i z e d o r g o n e i n s i d e a b u i l d i n g .... I n o t i c e d a p u b n o w , t h e C h e d d ar C h e e s e ,

s q u e e z e d b e t w e e n t w o g o v e r n m e n t o f f i c e s , r o u g h l y at t h e p o i n t w h e r e J e n k i n s h ad v an i s h e d . S i n c e v o l u n t ar y

d e m at e r i al i z i n g i n h u m an s i s r ar e , 2 I f i g u r e d t h e p u b w as t h e l i k e l y o p t i o n .

2 . I t tends to b e inv oluntary: i.e. when you hit them with a D etonation.

N o t i m e t o w as t e . T h e s p ar r o w d r o p p e d l i k e a s t o n e t o t h e p av e m e n t and c r e p t , u n n o t i c e d b y t h e h u r r y i n g t h r o n g , t o

t h e o p e n d o o r . In t h e ac t o f p as s i n g t h r o u g h , I g r i t t e d my t e e

thandchanged:thesparrowb
ecameafly,abluebottle

withafurryrump.Theflasho
fpainfromthealterationmade
myflightpatternerratic;Ilo
sttrackofwhereIwas,

meanderedforamomentthro
ughthesmokyairandlanded,
withasoftplop,inthewineg
lassofaladywhowasjust

settingittoherlips.

Shelookeddown,sensingm
ovement,andsawmefloating
onmybackaninchbelowhern
ose.Iwavedahairyleg;

s h e e m i t t e d a s c r e am l i k e a b
ab o o n and d as h e d t h e g l as s aw
ay . W i n e s p att e r e d i n t o t h e f
ac e o f a m an s t and i n g att h e

b ar ; h e c ar e e r e d b ac k i n s h o c k
, k n o c k i n g t w o o t h e r l ad i e s fr
o m t h e i r s t o o l s . C r i e s , y e l l s
, m u c h fl ai l i n g o fl i m b s . A l

ar o u n d w as t u m u l t . S o u s e d w i
t h w i n e , t h e b l u e b o tt l e l and e
d o n t h e s u r fac e o f t h e b ar , b u m
p e d , s k i d d e d , r i g h t e d

i t s e l f , and h i d b e h i n d a b o w l
o f p e an u t s .

W e l , i f I h ad n 't b e e n q u ite as u n

o b t r u s i v e as I'd w i s h e d , t h e r e
w as at l e as t e n o u g h d i s t r ac t i o
n f o r m e t o mak e a q u i c k

s u r v e y o f t h e r o o m . I w i p e d a
c o up l e o f e y e - f ac e t s c l e an an
d d i d a q u i c k s t e p o f f t h e b ar an
d up a n e ar b y p i l l ar ,

s as h ay i n g b e t w e e n t h e c r i s p s
an d b ag s o f p o r k s c r at c h i n g s .
F r o m a v an t ag e p o i n t al o f t I l o
o k e d ab o u t .

T h e r e , s t an d i n g i n t h e c e n t e r
o f t h e r o o m , t al k i n g av i d l y w i
t h t w o o t h e r s , w as J e n k i n s .

T h e f l y f l i t t e d c l o s e r am o n g t

heshadows,checkingtheplanes.Noneofthemenhadactivemagicaldefenses,though

thestenchofincenseclungtotheirclothesandtheirskinhadthepaloroftheypicalworkingmagician.Theywerea

shabbytriotobesure—likeJenkins,theothersworesuitstoobigandtoogoodforthem;theirshoeswerepointed,

theirshoulderpadsalittlehigh.Althreewereintheirtwenties,orsoIjudged.Apprentices,secretaries:nonegave

offtheauraofpower.Butthe
yspokeavidly;theireyesgli
ttereedinthedusk oftheChed
darCheesewithfanatics'

fervor.

Upsidedownontheceiling,t
heflycranedits headtolisten
totheirwords.Noluck—the
squawkingatthebarblocked

outthesound.Idroppedinto
midair,circledstealthilydo
wntowardthem,cursingthel
ack ofwalsnearby.Jenkins

wasspeaking;Iflittednearer
,closeenoughnowtosmelth

elacqueronhisscalp,seethe poresinhislittlerednose.

"...thingistomakesureyou're readyforthenight.Haveyoub othchosenyours?"

"Burkehas.I'venot."Itwasthe weediestofthetriowhospo ke:rheumyofeye,concaveof chest—comparedtohim,

JenkinslookedlikeAtlas.3T hethirdman,Burke,wasscarc elybetter,abandy-leggedin dividual,shouldersflecked

withscurf.

3 . A t l a s : a m arid of unusual streng th and m uscular definition, em ployed b y the G reek m ag ician

P hidias to construct the P arthenon, circa 4 4 0 B .C . A tlas shirk ed the work and b odg ed the

foundations. W hen crack s appeared, P hidias confined A tlas b elow g round, charg ing him to hold

the b uilding up indefinitely. H e m ay still b e there, for all I k now.

J e n k i n s g r u n t e d . "G e t o n w i t h i t t h e n . T r y u s i n g T r i s m e g i s t u s o r P o r t e r —t h e y 'v e b o t h g o t a l o t o f c h o i c e ."

T h e w e e d y f e l l o w l e t o u t a m e l an c h o l y b l e at . "It 's n o t c hoic e t h at's t h e p r o b l e m, J e n k i n s . It 's j u s t—h o w p o w e r f u l

s h o u l d I g o f o r ? I w o u l d n't w an t—"

"N o t sc ared , ar e y o u, W i t h e r s ? " J e n k i n s 's s m i l e w as s c at h i n g, h o s t i l e . "P al m e r w as s c ar e d ; an d y o u k n o w w h at

h ap p e n e d t o him . It 's n o t t o o l at e t o f i n d s o m e o n e e l s e ."

"N o, n o, n o ." W i t h e r s w as af l u r r y w i t h r e as s u r an c e . "I'l b e r e ad y . I'l l b e r e ad y . W h e n e v e r y

o u w an t."

"A r e t h e r e m an y o f u s ? " B u r k e as k e d . If W i t h e r s b l e at e d l i k e a s h e e p , B u r k e 's v o i c e w as m o r e b o v i n e , t h at o f a

r u m i n at i v e d u l ar d .

"N o , " J e n k i n s s ai d . "Y o u k n o w n o t . J u s t s e v e n i n t o t al . O n e f o r e ac h c h ai r ."

B u r k e g av e a l o w h i c c u p p i n g l au g h . W i t h e r s s ni g g e r e d i n a h i g h e r k e y . T h e i d e a s e e m e d t o e n t e r t ai n t h e m .

W i t h e r s 's c au t i o n r e s ur f ac e

d."Andyou'resurewe'resafetilthen?"

"Devereaux'sdistractedwiththewar,Farrar andMandrakewiththerestlesscommoners.Fartoomuchgoingonfor

anyonetotakeanynoticeofus"Jenkins'seyesgleamed."Who,afterall,hasevertakenanynoticeofus?"Hepaused

toalowabitofmutualglowering,thenpoppedhishatbackonhishead."Right,Ihavetogo,"hesaid."I'veafew

morevisitstomake.Don'tfor

g e t t h e i m p s , e i t h e r ."

"B u t t h e e x p e r i m e n t "—B u r k e h ad l e an e d i n c l o s e —-"W i t h e r s h ad a p o i n t . W e 'l n e e d t o s e e p roof t h at i t 's b e e n

s u c c e s s f u l , b e f o r e w e . . . y o u u n d e r s t an d ? "

J e n k i n s l au g h e d . "Y o u 'l g e t t h at p r o o f . H o p k i n s h i m s e l f w i l s h o w y o u t h e r e ar e n o s i d e e f f e c t s . B u t I as s u r e y o u i t 's

m o s t i m p r e s s i v e . F o r a s t ar t __"

W hu p . W i th t h at u n u s u al s o u n d

, m y e av e s d r o p p i n g c am e t o an ab r u p t h al t . O n e m o m e n t I w as b u z z i n g d i s c r e e t l y b y

J e n k i n s 's e ar , t h e n e x t a r o l e d -u p n e w s p ap e r d e s c e n d e d l i k e a t h u n d e r b o l t f r o m t h e s k i e s an d w al o p e d m e f r o m

b e h i n d . It w as a t r e ac h e r o u s at t ac k .4 I w as k n o c k e d p l u m b o u t o f t h e ai r an d o n t o t h e f l o o r , h e ad r e e l i n g , s i x l e g s

ak i m b o . J e n k i n s an d c o m p an y l o o k e d d o w n at m e i n v ag u e s u r p r i s e . M y as s ai l an t , a b r aw n y b ar t e n d e r , f l o u r i s h e d t h e

p ap e r c h e e r f u l y at t h e m .

4 . W hat m ade it worse was that it was a copy of R ea l W a r S t o ri es that did the deed.

M andrak e' s paper! A nother inj ury to add to m y list of his endless crim es.

"G o t i t , " h e s m i l e d . "B u z z i n g r i g h t b y y o u r e ar , s i r . H o r r i b l e b i g 'u n t o o , v e r y o u t o f s e as o n ."

"Y e s , " s ai d J e n k i n s . "Is n 't i t ? " H i s e y e s n ar r o w e d , n o d o ub t s t ud y i n g m e t h r o u g h h i s l e n s e s , b u t I w as a f l y o n p l an e s

onetofour,soittoldhimnoth
ing.Hemovedsuddenly,str
etchingoutafoottocrushme
.Withperhapsmore

nimblenessthanawoundedfl
youghttohave,Idodgedanddr
iftedoffunsteadilytowardth
enearestwindow.

OutinthestreetIkeptthepub
doorinview,whileinspecti
ngmytenderessence.It'saso
rrystateofaffairswhena

djinniwho_____
5islaidlowbyarolled-uppie
ceofpaper,butthatwasthesad
factofthematter.Althis

c h an g i n g an d b e i n g b at t e d ab o u t w as n o t d o i n g m e an y g o o d . M an d rak e . . . It w as M an d r ak e 's d o i n g . H e 'd p ay f o r

t h i s , f i r s t c h an c e I g o t .6

5 . I nsert achiev em ent of your choice from the following selection: (a) foug ht the utuk k u sing le-

handed at the b attle of Q adesh, (b) carv ed the g reat wal s of U ruk from the liv ing g round, (c)

destroyed three consecutiv e m asters b y use of the H erm etic Q uib b le, (d) spok e with S olom on,

or (e) other.

6 . N ot that I could do anything ag ainst him in m y current state. A t least, not alone. C ertain

dj inn, F aq uarl am ong them , had long espoused col ectiv e reb el ion ag ainst the m ag icians. I ' d

always dism issed this as so m uch hog wash, im possib le to achiev e, b ut if F aq uarl had com e up

to m e with som e b oneheaded schem e rig ht then, I ' d hav e j oined him with m uch hig h-nv ing and

inane whoops of j oy.

I was worried that Jenkins might have suspected I was noordinary insect, and have taken evasive steps, but to my

relief he appeared at the door a few minutes later and set off back up Whitehall. I knew the fly guise would no longer

wash with him, so—groaning with the pain—I became a sparrow once more, and set off in pursuit.

As dusk settled on the city, the magician Jenkins made his way, on foot, along the lanes of central London. He had

t h r e e f u r t h e r a s s i g n a t i o n s . T h e f i r s t w a s i n a h o s t e l r y n o t f a r f r o m T r a f a l g a r S q u a r e . I d i d n 't a t t e m p t t o e n t e r t h i s

t i m e , b u t w a t c h e d h i m t h r o u g h a w i n d o w , s p e a k i n g t o a n a r r o w - e y e d w o m a n i n d o w d y d r e s s . N e x t h e c r o s s e d C o v e n t

G a r d e n u p t o H o l b o r n , w h e r e h e e n t e r e d a s m a l l c o f f e e s h o p . A g a i n I d e e m e d i t s e n s i b l e t o k e e p m y d i s t a n c e , b u t I

g o t a c l e a r v i e w o f t h e p e r s o n h e s p o k e t o , a m i d d l e - a g e d m a n w i t h a n o d d l y f i s h l i k e f a c e . H i s l i p s l o o k e d a s i f t h e y 'd

beenloanedhimbyacod.Like myessence,mymemorywas fulofholes;evenso,someth ingaboutthimwasabit

familiar....No—Igaveup.Ic ouldn'tplacehim.

Itwasacuriousbusinessallr ound.Fromwhat I'doverheard ,somekindofplotwascertain lyontheboil.Butthese

peopleseemedoddlyunsuit edfordangerousmachination s.Noneofthemwaspowerful ordynamic.Infact,the

reversewastrue.Ifyou'dline

d e v e r y m a g i c i a n i n L o n d o n u p
a g a i n s t a p l a y g r o u n d w a l l a n d
p i c k e d s i d e s f o r s o c c e r ,

t h e y ' d h a v e b e e n t h e o n e s l e f t
s t a n d i n g a t t h e e n d , n e x t t o t h e
f a t k i d a n d t h e o n e w i t h t h e p l
a s t e r c a s t . T h e i r g e n e r a l

r u b b i s h n e s s w a s e v i d e n t l y p
a r t o f a p a t t e r n , b u t I c o u l d n ' t f
o r t h e l i f e o f m e t e l l w h a t i t w
a s .

W e c a m e a t l a s t t o a d i l a p i d a t e
d c a f e i n C l e r k e n w e l a n d h e r e
, f o r t h e f i r s t t i m e , I n o t i c e d a
s l i g h t a l t e r a t i o n i n J e n k i n s .

Hithertohehadbeenbreezy,
abrupt,casualinhisdealings
;now,beforeentering,hep
ausedasiftosteadyhimself.

Heslickedbackhishair,adju
stedhistie,andwentsofarast
oinspectthepimpleonhisch
inwithasmalmirrorhe

hadinhispocket.Thenheent
eredthecafe.

Nowthiswasinteresting.He
wasn'ttalkingtoequalsorinf
eriorsanymore.Perhapsthe
mysteriousMr.Hopkins

himselfwaitedinside.Ineed

e d t o f i n d o u t .

W h i c h m e an t I h ad t o g i r d m y d i m i n u t i v e s p ar r o w 's l o i n s an d m ak e an o t h e r c h an g e .

T h e c af e d o o r w as s h u t , t h e w i n d o w s l i k e w i s e . A s m al g ap b e n e at h t h e d o o r l e t o u t a s l i t o f y e l o w l i g h t . W i t h a g r o an

o f d e s p ai r , I s h i f t e d an d b e c ame a w i s p o f c o i l i n g s m o k e , w h i c h i s s u e d i t s w e ar y w ay t h r o u g h t h e c r ac k .

A w ar m f u g o f c o f f e e , c i g ar e t t e s , an d f r y i n g b ac o n . T h e s m o k e 's t i p p e e p e d un d e r t h e d o o

r, reared up, and looked left

and right. Everything was a little blurred—following my transformation my eyes were misting worse than ever—but I

could make out Jenkins settling himself at a distant table. A dark shape sat there too.

The smoke slithered across the room, keeping low against the floor, winding cautiously around chair legs and the

shoes of customers. An uneasy thought occurred to me; halt

i n g b e n e at h a t ab l e , I s e n t f o r t h a P u l s e t o s e ar c h f o r

h o s t i l e m ag i c .7 W h i l e w ai t i n g , I l o o k e d t o w ar d J e n k i n s 's c o m p an i o n , b u t h i s b ac k w as t o m e : I c o u l d s e e n o d e t ai l s .

7 . The P ulse had the form of a sm al g reen-b lue sphere, ab out the siz e of a m arb le, v isib le only

on the sev enth plane. I t would m eander at speed around the locale b efore returning to its

sender. O n its return its appearance indicated the lev el of m ag ic it had discov ered: g reen-b lue

m eant the area was clear; yel ow that a trace of m ag ic ex isted; orang e sug g ested strong

enchantm ents, while red and indig o were m y cue to m ak e m y ex cuses and head for the ex it.

T h e P u l s e r e t u r n e d —v i r u l e n t o r an g e , s t r e ak e d w i t h r e d . G r i m l y I w at c h e d i t f ad e . S o t h e r e was m ag i c h e r e , an d i t

w as n 't w e ak .

W h at s h o u l d I d o ? L e av i n g t h e c af e i n a f u n k w o u l d n 't h e l p m e l e ar n J e n k i n s 's p l an s , w h i c h w as t h e o n l y w ay I c o u l d

s e c u r e m y d i s m i s s al . B e s i d e s , i f t h e d ar k f i g u r e was H o p k i n s , I c o u l d t h e n t r ai l h i m , r e t u r n t o M an d r ak e , an d b e f r e e

b y d aw n . A l i n al l —w h at e v e r t h e r i s k s —I h ad t o s t ay .

W e l , P r ag u e 's w al s w e r e n 't b u i l t w i t h o u t d an g e r o r e f f o r t .8 W i t h a c o up l e o f s i l e n t un d ul at i o n s , t h e c o i l o f s m o k e

d r i f t e d b e t w e e n t ab l e s , c l o s e r an d c l o s e r t o w h e r e J e n k i n s s at . A t t h e p e n ul t i m at e t ab l e I g at h e r e d m y e n e r g i e s i n t h e

o v e r h an g o f t h e p l as t i c c l o t h ,

t h e n p e e r e d t e n t at i v e l y o u t .

8 . O r indeed b y m e. The b attalions of im ps I ' d foced into m y serv ice had a frig htful tim e, while

I reclined in m y ham m ock at a safe distance, g az ing at the stars.

I c o u l d s e e t h e d ar k f i g u r e m o r e c l e ar l y n o w , t h o u g h h e s t i l l f ac e d aw ay f r o m m e . H e w o r e a h e av y g r e at c o at , an d

al s o a b r o ad -b r i m m e d h at , w h i c h o b s c u r e d h i s f ac e .

J e n k i n s 's s k i n w as w ax y w i t h t e n s i o n : "... an d L i m e ar r i v e d f

r o m F r an c e t h i s m o r n i n g , " h e s ai d .9 "A l o f t h e m ar e

r e ad y . T h e y aw ai t t h e i r m o m e n t e ag e r l y ."

9 . L im e! T ha t ' s the nam e I was searching for. The fish-faced m an in the coffee shop had b een

one of the conspirators in the L ov elace affair fiv e years b efore. I f he was com ing out of hiding

suddenly, thing s were definitely hotting up.

H e c l e ar e d h i s t h r o at u n n e c e s s ar i l y .T h e o t h e r d i d n o t s p e

ak. A faintly familiar magical aura exuded from him. I racked

myblearybrains. Where had I seen it before?

A sudden movement across my table. The smoke recoiled like an anemone—but al was wel. A waiter passed me,

carrying two mugs of coffee. He plonked them down in front of Jenkins and the other. Whistling tunelessly, he

departed.

I w at c h e d t h e n e x t t ab l e . J e n k i n s t o o k a s i p o f c o f f e e . H e d i d n o t s p e ak .

A h an d s t r e t c h e d o u t f o r t h e s e c o n d m u g —a b i g h an d ; i t s b ac k w as l ac e d -w i t h an o d d c r i s s c r o s s i n g o f t h i n w h i t e

s c ar s .

I w at c h e d t h e h an d t ak e t h e m u g , r ai s e i t d e l i c at e l y f r o m t h e t ab l e . T h e h e ad t u r n e d a l i t t l e as i t b e n t t o d r i n k ; I s aw

t h e h e av y b r o w , t h e h o o k e d n o s e , t h e b r i s t l e s o f t h e t r i m b l ac k b e ar d . A n d t h e n , t o o l at e ,

I f e l t t h e s u r g e o f

r e c o g n i t i o n .

T h e m e r c e n ar y d r an k h i s c o ff e e . I s h r an k b ac k i n t o t h e s h ad o w s .

10

T h i n g w as , I k n e w t h i s m e r c e n ar y . B o t h t i m e s w e 'd m e t w e' d h ad a d i ff e r e n c e o f v i e w s , an d w e 'd d o n e o u r b e s t t o

r e s o l v e i t i n a c i v i l i z e d f as h i o n . B u t w h e t h e r I s q u i s h e d h i m u n d e r a s t atu e , b l e w h i m up w i t h a D e t o n ati o n , o r (as i n

ourlastencounter)simplysethimonfireandhurledhimdownamountainside,heneverseemedtosufferthe

slightestinjury.Forhispart,he'dcomeannoyinglyclosetokilingmewithvariousssilverweapons.Andnow,just

whenIwasatmyweakest,herehewasagain.Itgavemepause.Iwasn'tscaredofhim,ofcourse;dearme,no.

Let'scallitjudiciouslynervous.

Asalways,hewaswearingap

air of fan cient leather boots, scratched and worn, which hpositively stank of magic.1

Presumably it was these seth at had triggered my Pulse. Seven-league boots, which can cover great distances in the

blink of an eye, are rare indeed; combined with the fellow's extreme resilience and his assassin's training, he was a

formidable foe. I was rather glad I was well concealed behind the tablecloth.

1. In contrast to most of my master's

shoes, which j ust positiv ely stank .

T h e m e r c e n ar y f i n i s h e d h i s c o f f e e i n a s i n g l e g u l p , 2 an d r e s t e d h i s s c ar r e d h an d o n t h e t ab l e o n c e ag ai n . H e s p o k e .

"S o t h e y h av e al c h o s e n ? " It w as t h e o l d f am i l i ar v o i c e , c al m , d e l i b e r at e , an d o c e an -d e e p .

2 . I t m ust hav e b een piping hot, too. B oy, he was toug h.

J e n k i n s n o d d e d . "Y e s , s i r . A n d t h e i r i m p s t o o . I h o p e i t w i l b e e n o u g h ."

"O u r l e ad e r w i l p r o v i d e t h e r

e s t."

A h a! N o w w e w e r e g e t t i n g d o w n t o b u s i n e s s ! A l e ad e r ! W as t h i s H o p k i n s , o r s o m e o n e e l s e ? T h an k s t o m y p ai n , t h e r e

w as a b u z z i n g i n m y h e ad — I f o u n d i t h ar d t o l i s t e n . B e t t e r g e t c l o s e r . T h e s m o k e w r i g g l e d a l i t t l e w ay o u t f r o m u n d e r

t h e t ab l e .

J e n k i n s s i p p e d h i s d r i n k . "Is t h e r e an y t h i n g f u r t h e r y o u w i s h m e t o d o , s i r ? "

"N o t f o r n o w . I s h all o r g ani z e

t h e v an s ."

"W h at ab o u t t h e c h ai n s an d r o p e s ? "

"I w i l d e al w i t h t h e m t o o . I h av e . . . e x p e r i e n c e i n t h at d e p ar t m e n t ."

C h ai n s ! R o p e s ! V an s ! P u t t h e m t o g e t h e r an d w h at d o y o u g e t ? N o , I h ad n ' t a c l u e e i t h e r . B u t i t s o u n d e d l i k e d i r t y

w o r k t o m e . In m y e x c i t e m e n t I w r i g g l e d a l i t t l e n e ar e r .

"G o h o m e , " t h e m e r c e n ar y s ai d . "Y o u h av e d o n e w e l l . I s h al l

reporttoMr.Hopkinsnow.Thingsgatherpace."

"WhatifIneedtocontacthim?Ishestilatthe Ambassador?"

"Forthemoment,yes.Butdosoonlyasalastresort.Wemustnotattractattention."

Underthenearbytablethecoilofsmokewouldhavebeenhuggingitselfwithglee,haditsessencenotbeenquiteso

stiff.TheAmbassadorwasboundtobeahotelorsomething.WhichmeantIhadHopkins's address,exactlyas

Mandrakehadrequired.Freedomwasalmostmine!LikeIsaid,Imightbealittlebelowpar,butIdon'tmake

mistakeswhenitcomestostealthytrailing.

Jenkinswaslookingalittlepensive."Speakingofthat,sir...Ihaveonlyjustrecalled...well,earlierthisevening

therewasaflyhoveringnearwhileIspoketoBurkeandWithers.Itwasprobablyinnocentenough,but—"

Themercenary'svoicewasli

k e d i s t an t t h u n d e r . "Is t h at s o ? A n d y o u d i d w h at ? "

J e n k i n s p u s h e d h i s l i t t l e r o u n d g l as s e s u p h i s n o s e —an an x i o u s g e s t u r e , w h i c h I c o u l d w e l u n d e r s t and . T h e m e r c e n ar y

w as a f u l f o o t t al e r t h an h e , and al m o s t t w i c e as w i d e . H e c o u l d h av e s nap p e d J e n k i n s 's s p i n e w i t h a s i n g l e b l o w . "I

k e p t c ar e f u l w at c h as I c o n t i n u e d , " h e s t am m e r e d , "b u t I s aw n o t h -i n g ."

N at u r al y . B e n e at h t h e t ab l e t h

ecoilofsmokegrinnedtoitself.

"AlsoIaskedTruklet,myimp,tofollowatadistanceandreportbackhere."

Ah.Notsogood.Iduckedbackoutofsightandtwistedtoandfro,staringbetweenthechairlegs,lookingonalthe

planes.Atfirst—nothing.Thenwhatshouldlseebutalittlespidercomecreeping,creepingalongthefloor.Itwas

lookingundereverytable,eyesbrightlyquestingthisw

ay and that. I rose up out of view, hung undulating in the

shadows. Waiting.

The little spider came creeping, creeping to my table. It passed below ... caught sight of me in an instant, and reared

up on its back legs to sound an alarm. The coil of smoke swept down, engulfed the spider. There was a moment's

struggle, a desperate squeak.

Presently the coil of smoke m

o v e d ag ai n . It w e n t s l o w l y at f i r s t , i n c u m b r o u s r o l l s , l i k e a p y t h o n af t e r a h e av y f e e d ,

b u t s o o n b e g an t o g at h e r p ac e .3

3 . P oor Truk let' s essence was m eag er fare. O rdinarily I ' d hav e turned m y nose up at it. B ut

these were desperate tim es, and I needed all the energ y I could g et. B esides, the little swine

was g oing to snitch m e up.

I l o o k e d b ac k . T h e c o n s p i r at o r s w e r e p ar t i n g c o m p an y ; t h

e m e r c e n ar y s t an d i n g , J e n k i n s s t ay i n g p u t , p r e s u m ab l y u n t i l

h i s i m p t u r n e d u p .4 It w as d e c i s i o n t i m e .

4 . I t was g oing to b e q uite a wait. I should hav e b oug ht him another coffee.

M an d r ak e h ad t o l d m e t o l o c at e H o p k i n s an d u n c o v e r h i s p l o t , an d I'd g o n e a f ai r w ay t o w ar d f u l f i l l i n g t h e f i r s t

r e q u e s t . I c ou ld h av e s i m p l y h e ad e d b ac k t o m y m as t e r t h e r e an d t h e n , s i n c e b y r i g h t s I'd d o n e e n o u g h t o j u s t i f y m y

d i s m i s s al . B u t "r i g h t s , " p ar t i c u l ar l y m i n e , w e r e n 't t h i n g s M an d r ak e u n d e r s t o o d v e r y w e l . H e 'd d i s ap p o i n t e d m e b e f o r e .

S o i t w as b e t t e r t o m ak e ab s o l u t e l y c e r t ai n ; t o h i t h i m w i t h s o m u c h i n f o r m at i o n t h at al h e c o u l d d o w as t h an k m e

h u m b l y an d s h o w m e t o a p e n t ac l e .

A n d r i g h t n o w t h e m e r c e n ar y w as g o i n g t o H o p k i n s .

T h e c o i l o f s m o k e c u r l e d u p l i k e as p r i n g b e n e at h t h e t ab l e .

I w at c h e d t h e f l o o r n e ar b y . N o t h i n g . . . n o t h i n g . . . T w o

b o o t s c am e i n t o v i e w ; o l d b r o w n l e at h e r , s c r at c h e d an d w o r n .

J u s t as t h e y p as s e d , I u n c o i l e d , s p r an g — an d i n s o d o i n g , m ad e an o t h e r c h an g e .

T h e m e r c e n ar y c r o s s e d t o t h e d o o r w i t h s t at e l y s t e p s . H i s c o at r u s t l e d , w e ap o n s c l i n k e d ab o u t h i s p e r s o n . A s m al

l o n g - c l aw e d l i z ar d c l u n g t o t h e l e at h e r o f h i s r i g h t b o o t .

Outside, night had fallen. A few cars droned on a distant road. Passers by were few and far between. The mercenary let

the cafe door bang shut behind him, walked a couple of paces, then stopped. The lizard dug its claws in deeper. I

knew what was coming.

A throb of magic, a vibration that shook my essence to its core. The boot I was on rose, tipped, fell to earth again—it

was a single step, but all around me the street, the night and

t h e l i g h t s o f t h e c af e h ad b l u r r
e d i n t o a l i q u i d s t r e am.

A n o t h e r s t e p , an d y e t an o t h e r
. T h e s t r e am o f l i g h t f l i c k e r e
d ; d i m l y I s e n s e d b u i l d i n g s ,
p e o p l e , an d b r o k e n s h ar d s o f

n o i s e , b u t I w as t o o b u s y h an g i
n g o n f o r d e ar l i f e as t h e s e v e n
-l e ag u e b o o t s m o v e d w i t h o u t
r e g ar d f o r n o r m al s p ac e

an d t i m e . It w as l i k e b e i n g b ac
k i n t h e O t h e r P l ac e ag ai n ; I w o
u l d h av e q u i t e e n j o y e d t h e r i
d e h ad I n o t f e l t l i t t l e

g r ai n s o f e s s e n c e b r e ak i n g l o

osefrommyextremities,flicking away behind us like dembers from a fire. Even

warmed as I was by my recent feed, it was beginning to be hard to maintain a viable form.

At the third step the boot rested. Instantly the blurring lights congealed, became a new set of surroundings, another

part of London, some miles from the cafe. I waited for my eyes to stop revolving, then took a bleary look around.

We were in one of the parks, cl

o s e t o T r a f a l g a r S q u a r e . W i t h
t h e o n s e t o f e v e n i n g t h e c i t y
's c o m m o n e r s h a d s t r a g g l e d

h e r e t o l o s e t h e m s e l v e s i n r e
l a x a t i o n . I n t h i s a i m t h e y w e r e
a i d e d b y t h e k i n d a u t h o r i t i e s ,
w h o —i n t h e m o n t h s s i n c e

t h e w a r t u r n e d s o u r —p r o v i d
e d d a i l y f e s t i v i t i e s o f t h e m o
s t g a u d y k i n d , d e s i g n e d t o s t i
m u l a t e t h e s e n s e s a n d

d i s c o u r a g e c o n t e m p l a t i o n .

A w a y o v e r i n t h e c e n t e r o f t h e
p a r k g l e a m e d t h e g r e a t G l a s s P
a l a c e , a m a r v e l o u s c o n f u s i o n

o f d o m e s an d m i n ar e t s , al

s h i m m e r i n g w i t h l i g h t . M ad e
o f t w e n t y t h o u s an d c u r v e d g l
as s s h e e t s s e t u p o n an i r o n f r
am e , i t h ad b e e n b u i l t i n t h e

f i r s t y e ar o f t h e w ar , an d af t e r
w ar d s t u f f e d f u l o f s n ac k b ar s
an d c ar o u s e l s , b e ar p i t s an d f r
e ak s h o w s . It w as p o p u l ar

am o n g c o mm o n e r s ; l e s s s o am
o n g d j i n n .W e d i d n't l i k e al t h
at i r o n .

O t h e r p av i l i o n s w e r e d o t t e d
ab o u t t h e p ar k , w h i c h w as s p o
r ad i c al y i l u mi n at e d b y c o l o r

e d i m p -l an t e r n s h an g i n g

am o n g t h e t r e e s . H e r e , t r ai n c
ar s l o o p e d an d p l u m m e t e d , w
h i r l i g i g s b u c k e d an d s p u n ; o
v e r at t h e S u l t an 's C as t l e

s u l t r y b e au t i e s d an c e d b e f o r
e a h o r d e o f d r u n k e n c o m m o n
e r s .5 A l o n g t h e c e n t r al p at h w
ay v at s o f w i n e an d al e w e r e

b r o ac h e d , an d m e l an c h o l y o x
e n t u r n e d o n s p i t s . T h e m e r c e
n ar y s e t o f f am o n g t h e m n o w , g
o i n g at a h u m an p ac e .

5 . S om e of the b eauties were real
people, thoug h on the hig her planes I

spotted two who

weren' t all they should hav e b een: one an em pty shell, solid at the front, hol ow at the b ack ;

another a g rinning foliot with spiny lim b s concealed b eneath its G lam our.

W e p as s e d T r ai t o r s ' C o r n e r , w h e r e s e v e r al c ap t i v e r e b e l s d an g l e d ab o v e t h e b ay i n g c r o w d i n a c ag e o f g l as s .

A l o n g s i d e , i n an o t h e r p r i s m , a h i d e o u s b l ac k d e m o n w as v i s i b l e o n t h e f i r s t p l an e . It g r o w l e d an d p r an c e d , s h ak i n g i t s

f i s t at t h e aw e s t r u c k t h r o n g .
B e y o n d t h i s , a s t ag e h ad b e e n
s e t u p . A b an n e r p r o c l ai m e d t
h e t i t l e o f t h e p i e c e : C olon ial

T reac hery O verc om e; ac t o r s r an
ab o u t , t e l l i n g t h e o f f i c i al s t o
r y o f t h e w ar w i t h t h e ai d o f r u b
b e r s w o r d s an d p ap i e r -

m ac h e d e m o n s . E v e r y w h e r e
y o u l o o k e d s m i l i n g l ad i e s t h
r u s t f r e e s u pp l e m e n t s o f R eal
W ar S ton es i n t o o u t s t r e t c h e d

h an d s . S u c h w as t h e c e as e l e s s
n o i s e an d c o l o r an d c o n f u s i o
n t h at i t w as i m p o s s i b l e f o r an
y o n e p r e s e n t t o t h i n k

s t r ai g h t , l e t al o n e f r am e a c o h e r e n t ar g u m e n t ag ai n s t t h e w ar .6

I saw M andrak e' s hand b ehind m uch of this—it had all his attention to detail, tog ether with the

theatricality he had learned off his m ate, the playwrig ht M ak epeace. A perfect com b ination of

the crude and the sub tle. The captiv e " A m erican" dem on was particularly g ood, I thoug ht,

doub tless sum m oned b y som eone in the g ov ernm ent specially for the occasion.

I had seen it al before, many times. I concentrated now on cling ing to the mercenary, who had left the central path

and was striding off across the darkened lawns toward an ornamental lake among the trees .

This lake was scarcely a large affair—during the day water fowl no doubts at drably upon it, while children splashed

about in little hired boats—but by night it held a certain quiet mystery. Its margins were lost in shadows and a maze

ofreedbeds;Oriental-style bridgesspannedit,linkings ilentislands.AChinesepago darosefromonesuch.Infron t

ofthepagodawasawoodenve randa,extendingabovethew ater.

Themercenarymadeforthisi nhaste.Hesetoffacrossanor namentalbridge,bootspatte ringontheplanking.

Beyond,onthedarknessofth everanda,Iglimpsedafigure waiting.Aboutheshead,onth ehigherplanes,sinister

shapesdriftedwatchfully.

Timeforcaution.Attachedto theboot,Iwouldsoonbespot tedbyeventhemosthalf-witt edimp.ButIcouldstilget

closeenoughtowatchandlist en.Belowthewalkwayareed bedstretched,thickandblac k.Aperfectplacefor

lurking.Thelizarddisengag editself,gavealeap,fellin amongthereeds.Secondslat er,afteryetanotherpainful

transformation,asmalgreen snakewasswimmingtowardt

heislandbetweenthedecaying stalks.

Iheardthemercenary'svoice upabove,quiet,respectful. "Mr.Hopkins."

Agapinthereeds.Thesnakewo undit selfaboutarottenbr anchprotrudingfromthewat erandrearedup,gazing

towardtheveranda.Theresto odthemercenary,andwithhi manotherman,slight,stoop-shouldered,whoclappeda

handtohisarminagestureofc omradelysupport.Istrained

mywearyeyes.Forabriefins
tantIcaughtsightofhis

face:bland,even-featured,u
tterlyunmemorable.Sowhy
wasitthatsomethinginitarou
sedadeepsenseof

recognitionandmademeshud
der?

Themenmovedawayfromthe
veranda,outofview.Cursin
gfluently,thesnakeplowed
onward,loopingthroughthe

reedswithelegantundulatio
ns.Alittlefarther...ifIcould
justhearHopkinsspeak,gett

heslightestclue—

Tenreedstalksmoved;fivetal grayshadowsisolatedthemselvesfromthemassofreeds.Tensticklegsbentand

sprang.Italhappenedwithoutasound:onemomentIwasaloneuponthelake;thenextfiveheronsplungedupon

melikegray-whiteghosts,sword-beakssnapping,redeyesblazing.Flailingwingscrackeduponthewater,blocking

avenuesofescape,clawsslas

h e d at t h e d e s p e r at e s n ak e , b e
ak s s t ab b e d . I c o i l e d m y s e l f u
p an d , f as t as t h i n k i n g ,

d i v e d b e l o w t h e s u r f ac e . B u t
t h e h e r o n s w e r e s w i f t e r s t i l :
o n e b e ak s n ar e d m y t ai l ; an o t h
e r s n ap p e d f as t u p o n m y

b o d y , j u s t b e l o w t h e h e ad . T h
e y f l ap p e d t h e i r w i n g s an d r o
s e i n t o t h e ai r , t ak i n g m e b e t w
e e n t h e m , d an g l i n g l i k e a

w o r m .

I s c an n e d m y ad v e r s ar i e s o n t h
e s e v e n p l an e s : t h e y w e r e f o l
i o t s , al f i v e o f t h e m . In n o r m al

c i r c u m s t an c e s I'd h av e

d e c o r at e d t h e c i t y w i t h t h e i r f e at h e r s , b u t i n m y c u r r e n t s t at e t o f i g h t a s i n g l e o n e w as p u s h i n g i t . I f e l t m y e s s e n c e

b e g i n n i n g t o t e ar .

I s t r u g g l e d , t h r as h e d , an d t w i s t e d . I s p at v e n o m l e f t an d r i g h t . A n g e r f i l e d me , s u p p l i e d a l i t t l e s t r e n g t h . I c h an g e d ,

d o w n s i z i n g f u r t h e r i n t o a s m al an d s l i m y e e l , w h i c h s l i p p e d f r e e o f t h e i r h o l d an d f e l l t o w ar d t h e w e l c o m i n g w at e r .

A b e ak l u n g e d .

S n ap ! B l ac k n e s s al ar o u n d .

N o w t h i s was d e e p l y e m b ar r as s i n g . A f t e r m y r e c e n t t r e at m e n t o f t h e i m p , I' d b e e n s w al o w e d t o o . A l i e n e s s e n c e

s w i r l e d ar o u n d m e . I c o u l d f e e l i t b e g i n n i n g t o c o r r o d e m y o w n .7

7 . I n such circum stances you hav e to act q uick ly b efore you are sim ply ab sorb ed b y the other.

W eak entities hav e no chance if swal owed b y a g reater power, and this was

g oing to b e a

close-run thing .

I h ad n o c h o i c e . I s u m m o n e d al m y e n e r g i e s an d u s e d a D e t o n at i o n .

W e l , i t w as l o u d an d i t w as m e s s y , b u t i t h ad t h e d e s i r e d e f f e c t . S m al p i e c e s o f f o l i o t r ai n e d d o w n t h r o u g h t h e ai r ,

an d I r ai n e d d o w n w i t h t h e m , i n t h e s e m b l an c e o f a s m al l , b l ac k p e ar l .

T h e p e ar l d r o p p e d i n t o t h e w at e r . In s t an t l y t h e f o u r r e m ai n

i n g h e r o n s w e r e a t t h e s p o t , h o t e y e s g l i n t i n g , s p e a r i n g

t h e i r b e a k s i n a n d o u t i n f e v e r i s h p u r s u i t .

I a l o w e d m y s e l f t o s i n k s w i f t l y i n t o t h e m u r k , d e e p d o w n o u t o f r a n g e , t o w h e r e t h e m u d a n d o o / e a n d r o t t e n t a n g l e

o f d e a d r e e d s c o n c e a l e d m e o n e v e r y p l a n e .

M y m i n d f l i c k e r e d ; I n e a r l y l o s t c o n s c i o u s n e s s . N o , t h e y w o u l d f i n d m e i f I s l e p t . I m u s t e s c a p e , r e t u r n t o m y m a s t e r .

I n e e d e d t o m a k e o n e f i n a l e f f o r t a n d g e t a w a y .

G i a n t l e g s s t a l k e d t h e g l o o m a r o u n d m e ; s p e a r - b e a k s f i z z e d , c u t t i n g t h e w a t e r l i k e b u l e t s . M u f f l e d e c h o e s o f t h e

h e r o n s ' s w e a r i n g b o o m e d a m o n g t h e w e e d s . A s m a l l , i n j u r e d t a d p o l e w o r m e d i t s w a y t o w a r d t h e s h o r e , l e a v i n g

s p e c k s o f d y i n g e s s e n c e d r i f t i n g i n i t s w a k e . R e a c h i n g t h e l a k e s i d e , i t b r o k e a l a g i n g r e c o r d s a n d b e c a m e a n i l -

f a v o r e d f r o g , w i t h a c l u b f o o t

and a downcast mouth. The frogs kittered away into the grass as fast as it could go.

I was halfway to the roadbefore the foliots saw me. One of them must have flown high, glimpsed my limping

progress; with raucous cries they erupted from the lake, came hurtling over the dark grass.

One dived; the frog gave a frantic leap. The beak plunged into the ground.

Out onto the path, among the cr

owds.Thefroghoppedhithe
r,thither,betweenlegs,und
erawnings,leapingfrom

headstoshoulders,basketst
oprams,allthewhileemittin
gcroaksandgargles,staring
withitsmadpop-eyes.Men

shouted,womenscreamed,c
hildrengaspedinwonder.Be
hindcametheherons,feather
sflashing,wingsbuffeting,

blindwithbloodlust.Theyc
rashedthroughstals,upturn
edwinevats,sentdogshowli
ngintothedark.Peoplewere

t o s s e d as i d e l i k e n i n e p i n s ; p i l e s o f R eal W ar S tories w e n t f l y i n g — s o m e l an d i n g i n t h e w i n e , o t h e r s i n t h e r o as t i n g p i t s .

U p o n t o t h e o u t d o o r s t ag e h o p p e d t h e f u g i t i v e am p h i b i an , u n d e r t h e b r i g h t i m p - l i g h t s , s e n d i n g o n e ac t o r l e ap i n g i n t o

t h e ar m s o f a s e c o n d , c au s i n g a t h i r d t o s w an d i v e i n t o t h e c r o w d . It s p r an g d o w n a t r ap d o o r , c l o s e l y f o l o w e d b y a

h e r o n ; r e ap p e ar e d an i n s t an t l at e r t h r o u g h an o t h e r , r i d i n g t h e h e ad o f a c ar d b o ar d g o b l i n . It l e ap e d o n t o t h e b an n e r

abovе,clungtherewithtwo webbedfeet.Aheronreared upfrombelow,snappeditsbeak,andtoretheb anner

asunder—thestripoffabricfell,swunglikeajunglevine,andcatapultedthefrogovertheпathtolandbesidethe

crystalprismwherethecaptivedemonsat.

BythispointIwaslosingtrackofwhereIwasandwhatIwasdoing.Infact,myessencewasfastdisintegrating:I

couldscarcelysee;theworl

d w as aw as h w i t h d i s c o r d ant s
o u n d . I h o p p e d u n t h i n k i n g l y
, c h an g i n g d i r e c t i o n w i t h e v e
r y

h o p , s e e k i n g t o av o i d t h e at t ac
k I k n e w w o u l d c o me .

S u r e e n o u g h , o n e o f m y p u r s u
e r s l o s t p at i e n c e w i t h t h e c h
as e . It m u s t h av e t r i e d a C o n v u
l s i o n , I t h i n k ; I'd l e ap e d

as i d e an y w ay — I d i d n't s e e i t h
i t t h e p r i s m , d i d n't h e ar t h e c r
y s t al c r ac k . N o t m y f au l t . N o t
h i n g t o d o w i t h me . I d i d n't

s e e t h e b i g b l ac k d e m o n g i v e a

grimaceofsurpriseandsetit
slongcurvedfingernailstot
hebreak.Ididn'thearthe

ominousshatteringwhenthe
entireglobegaveway,northe
screamsandwailingofthepe
opleasthedemonleaped

intotheirmidst.

Iknewnothingofit.Iknewon
lytheendlesspoundingrhyt
hmsofthechase,feltonlymy
essencesofteningand

seepingintoliquidwitheve
rydesperatehopandspring.I
wasdyingnow,butIcouldnot

rest.Aswifterdeathflew

closebehind.

11

Ktty'smasterlookedupfrom hissofa—alonelyislandamid aseaofscatteredpaper,alscr awledduponwithhistight,

closescript.Hewaschewing theendofaballpointpen,wh ichhadleftlittleblueinkstai nsonhislips.Heblinkedin

mildsurprise.

"Didn'tthinktoseeyoubackt

hisevening,Lizzie.Thought youhadtogetofftoyourwork."

"Ido,sir.Veryshortly.Now,sir—"

"Telme,didyougetholdofthatoriginalcopyofPeck's Desid erata Curiosa? And what about The Anatomy of

Melancholy? Iwantedvolumefour,mind."

Kitty'sliewassmoothlypracticed."Sir,I'msorry,Ididn't,eitherofthem.Thelibrarycl osedearlytoday.Therewasa

disturbanceoutside—acommoners'protest—andtheyshutthegatesforsafety.Iwasaskedtoleavebeforel found

yourbooks."

Mr.Buttongaveapetulantexclamationandbitharderathispen."Suchinconvenience!Commonersprotesting,you

say?Whatnext?Horsesthrowingofffthebridle?Cowsrefusingtobemilked?Thosewretchedpeopleneedtoknow

their place."Heemphasizedthisstatementwithneatlittlest

abbingmotionsofhispen,then looked up guiltily. "No

offense meant, Lizzie."

"None taken, sir. Sir, who was Ptolemaeus?"

The old man stretched his arm swearily behind his head. "Ptolemaeus is Ptolemy. A most remarkable magician." He

flashed her a plaintive look. "Do you have time to put the kettle on, Lizzie, before you go?"

Kitty persisted: "Was he Egy

p t i an ? "

"In d e e d h e w as , t h o u g h t h e n am e i s G r e e k , o f c o u r s e . H e c am e o f M ac e d o ni an s t o c k o r i g i n al y . W e l d o n e , L iz z ie. N o t

m an y p r o t e s t i n g c o m m o n e r s w o u l d k n o w that!"

"I w as h o p i n g t o r e ad s o m e t h i n g b y h i m , s i r ."

"Y o u'd f i n d t h at t r i c k y , s i n c e h e w r o t e i n G r e e k . I h av e h i s m ai n w o r k i n m y c o l e c t i o n : T he E y e of P tolem y . It i s

r e q u i r e d r e ad i n g f o r al m ag i c

i a n s , s i n c e i t i s v e r y p e r c e p t i v e o n t h e m e c h a n i c s o f d r a w i n g d e m o n s f r o m t h e O t h e r

P l a c e . M i n d y o u , t h e s t y l e i s t e p i d . H i s o t h e r w r i t i n g s a r e k n o w n a s t h e A p o c r y p h a . I s e e m t o r e m e m b e r y o u b r o u g h t

m e t h e m f r o m H y r n e k ' s , o n y o u r f i r s t v i s i t h e r e . . . . T h e y a r e a n o d d c o l e c t i o n , f u l l o f w h i m s i c a l n o t i o n s . A b o u t t h a t

t e a . . ."

"I'l p u t t h e k e t t l e o n , " K i t t y s a i d . "Is t h e r e s o m e t h i n g I c o u l d r e a d a b o u t P t o l e m y , s i r , w h i l

e I d o t h at ? "

"G o o d n e s s , y o u d o h av e y o u r l i t t l e f an c i e s . Y e s , T he B ook of N am es w i l l h av e an e n t r y . D o u b t l e s s y o u k n o w w h i c h

s t ac k i t 's i n ."

K i t t y r e ad t h e p as s ag e s w i f t l y w i t h t h e k e t t l e p o p p i n g an d b u b b l i n g b e h i n d h e r .

Ptolemaeus of Alexandria (fl. c.120 B.C.)

The circumstances of his death are unknown, but it is certain he did not live to a great age. He may have died by

violence, or

succumbed to bodily frailty. Mention is made in an Alexandrine manuscript of a sudden deterioration in his health following

a "difficult journey," though this is at odds with other records that state he never left the precincts of the city. He is definitely

recorded as dead by the time of his uncle's funeral and his cousin's accession to the throne (116 B.C.), so is unlikely to have

reached his twenties.

His papers remained at the Library for over three hundred years, during which time they were studied by Tertullian and other

Roman magicians. Part of his writing was published, in Rome, as the famous *Eye of Ptolemy*. The original archive was

destroyed in the great earthquake and fire of the third century; surviving fragments have been collected as his *Apocrypha*.

Ptolemy is a figure of historical interest, since he is credited with the invention of several techniques, including the Stoic

Incision and the Mouler Shield (both used during summonings until the days of Loew) as well as unusual speculative

fantasies, such as the "Gate of Ptolemy." All this despite his extreme youth; if he had survived to maturity, he would surely

have ranked among the great. His demons, with whom he is said to have had an unusual bond, included: Afia,† Rekhyt or

Necho,‡ Methys,† Penrenutet.†

† demise recorded

‡ fate unknown

Mr. Buttons smiled absently when Kitty brought in the tea. "Did you find what you wanted?"

"I don't really know, sir, but I do have a question. Is it common for demons to take on the appearance of their

masters?"

The magician put down his pen. "You mean to taunt, or befuddle them? Certainly! It is an ancient trick, one of the

oldest in the book, and one guaranteed to unman the inexper

i e n c e d . N o t h i n g i s m o r e u n s e t t l i n g t h an f ac i n g a

p h an t o m o f o n e s e l f , p ar t i c u l ar l y w h e n t h e c r e at u r e u s e s i t t o p e r f o r m p r o v o c at i v e c o n t o r t i o n s . R o s e n b au e r o f M u n i c h

w as s o d i s t r e s s e d , I b e l i e v e , b y an ac c u r at e d e p i c t i o n o f h i s m an y af f e c t at i o n s t h at h e t h r e w d o w n h i s p o m ad e an d

r u s h e d s o b b i n g f r o m h i s c i r c l e , w i t h m e l an c h o l y r e s u l t s . I m y s e l f h av e b e e n f o r c e d t o w i t n e s s m y o w n b o d y d e c ay i n g

slowlytoarottingcorpse,complete withhideoussoundeffects,whileItriedtoquestionitontheprinciplesofCretan

architecture.Itistomycreditthatmynotesmadeanysenseatal.Isthatwhatyoumean?"

"Wel,actualy...no,sir."Kittytookadeepbreath."Iwantedtoknowwhetheradjinnievertookonitsmaster's

appearanceoutof...respect,orevenaffection.Becausetheywerecomfortablewithit."Shemadeafface;onhearing

i t , t h e i d e a s o u n d e d q u i t e r i d i c u l o u s .

T h e o l d m a n w r i n k l e d h i s n o s e . " I h a r d l y t h i n k s o . "

" I m e a n , a f t e r t h e m a g i c i a n w a s d e a d . "

" M y d e a r L i z z i e ! P e r h a p s , i f t h e m a g i c i a n i n q u e s t i o n w a s u n u s u a l y h i d e o u s o r d e f o r m e d , t h e d e m o n m i g h t e m p l o y h i s

s h a p e t o s t a r t l e o t h e r s . I b e l i e v e Z a r b u s t i b a l o f Y e m e n d i d r e a p p e a r f o r a t i m e f o l o w i n g h i s d e m i s e . B u t o u t o f

respect?Goodness!Thenotionpresupposesarelationshipbetweenmasterandslavethatwouldbequite

unprecedented.Onlyacomm—forgiveme—onlysomeoneasinexperiencedasyouwouldcomeupwithsuchaquaint

conceit!Dearme,dearme..."Hetitteredtohimselfashestretchedahandtowardtheteatray.

Kittyhadsetofffforthedoor."Thankyou,sir;you'vebeenveryhelpful.Bytheway,"sheadded,"whatwasthe Gate

ofPtolemy?"

Fromthemiddleofhissofa, amonghismessofpapers,the oldmagiciangroaned."Whatis it?Aridiculousnotion!A

myth,afigment,abarrelofm oonshine!Saveyourquestio nsforsubjectsofvalue.Now Imustwork.Ihavenoneed

forthewitteringsoffoolish assistants.Beoffwithyou!T heGateofPtolemy,indeed.. ."Hewinced,wavedher

pettishlyaway.

"But—"

"Don'tyouhaveajobtogoto,Lizzie?"

FortyminuteslaterKittyalighted fromabusupontheEmbankmentroad.Sheworeathickblackduffelcoatand

chewedintentlyatasandwich.Inherpocketwerethedocumentsconfirminghersecondfalseidentity—ClaraBell.

Theskywasblackening,thoughafewlowcloudsstillglimmeredadirtyyellowwiththecity'sreflectedglow.Belo

w

t h e t i d e w al t h e T h am e s l ay d i s t an t , s h r u n k an d w i t h e r e d . K i t t y p as s e d ab o v e a g r e at g r ay m u d -b an k , w h e r e h e r o n s

s t al k e d am i d t h e s t o n e s an d f l o t s am . T h e ai r w as c o l d ; a s t r o n g b r e e z e b l e w t o w ar d t h e s e a.

A t a b e n d i n t h e r i v e r t h e p av e m e n t t o o k a s u d d e n n i n e t y -d e g r e e t u r n aw ay f r o m t h e T h am e s , i t s r o u t e b l o c k e d b y an

e x t e n s i v e b u i l d i n g w i t h s t e e p r o o f s an d s h ar p l y p o i n t e d

dormers. Heavyblackbeamslaceditswals;litwindows

gleamedatrandomheights,castingarichlightuponthestreetandthedarkwatersoftheriver. Theupperstory

projectedoutabovetheloweronallsides,herevigorously,heresaggingasifabouttofall. Afadedgreensignswung

fromapoleabovethepath,soweather-beatenthatitswordscouldnotberead. Thiswasofsmallaccount,sinceThe

Frogwasanotablelocalland

mark. It was famous for its beer, its beef and for its weekly dominotournaments. It was

also Kitty's workplace in the evenings.

She ducked under a low arch and walked down the pitch-black side alley into the pub's yard. As she entered it, she

glanced up. A faint red light hovered by the gables. If you looked directly at it, its shape was blurred and indistinct; if

you looked away, you saw its outline clearly—a small, neat vi

g i l an c e s p h e r e , w a t c h i n g .

K i t t y i g n o r e d t h e s p y . S h e c r o s s e d t h e y ar d t o t h e m ai n d o o r , w h i c h w as s h e l t e r e d f r o m t h e w e a t h e r b y an an c i e n t

b l ac k e n e d p o r c h , an d e n t e r e d t h e F r o g In n .

T h e b r i g h t l i g h t s o f t h e t ap r o o m m ad e h e r b l i n k . T h e c u r t ai n s h ad b e e n d r aw n ag ai n s t t h e n i g h t an d a f i r e l i t i n t h e

g r at e . It s c o l o r s f l i c k e r e d i n r o w s o f g l as s e s as s e m b l e d o n t h e b ar ; G e o r g e F o x , t h e man ag e r , w as i n d u s t r i o u s l y

polishingthemonebyone.He noddedatKittyasshepassed tohangherssatchelonthecoat-rail.

"Inyourowntime,Clara.Inyou rowntime."

Sheglancedatherwatch."Stil ltwentyminutesbeforethey gethere,George."

"Notlongenoughforwhat I'vegotplannedforyou."

Kittyflippedherhatontoape g."Noproblem."Shemotione dwithherheadbacktowardth edoor."Howlong'sitbeen

t h e r e ? "

"C o u p l e o f h o u r s . U s u a l s o r t . J u s t t r y i n g t o s p o o k u s . C a n ' t h e a r . W o n ' t i n t e r f e r e ."

"O k a y . C h u c k m e a c l o t h ."

In f i f t e e n b r i s k a n d e f f i c i e n t m i n u t e s t h e t a p r o o m w a s c l e a n a n d r e a d y , t h e g l a s s e s p o l i s h e d , t h e t a b l e t o p s s p i c a n d

s p a n . K i t t y h a d p l a c e d t e n p i t c h e r s o n t h e c o u n t e r a b o v e t h e t a p , a n d S a m , T h e F r o g ' s b a r m a n , b e g a n f i l i n g t h e m

w i t h l i g h t - b r o w n f r o t h i n g d r

aftsofbeer.Kittydistributed thelastofthedominoboxes,wipedherhandsonher

trousers,pluckedanapronfromahook,andtookuppositionbehindthebar.GeorgeFox openedthemaindoorand

alowedthecustomersin.

Asusual,TheFrog'sreputationensuredanever-changingclientele,andtonightKittynoticedseveralpeopleshe

hadn'tseenbefore:atallmilitarygentleman,anoldladysmilingandshufflingtoaseat,a

youngblondmanwith

beardandmustache.Thefamil iarclickofthedominoesbeg an;convivialityfiledtheair. Smoothingdownherapron,

Kittyhastenedbetweentable sandtookordersfortheeven ingmeal.

Anhourpassed;theremainso fthick-slabbedhotbeefsand wicheslayonplatesattheplay ers'elbows.Withthefood

finished,interestindomino esquicklypaled.Thepieces werekeptinpositiononever

ytable,incasethepolicesho
uld

raid,butthepl ayersnowsatu
pintheirseats,suddenlyaler
tandsober.Kittyfiledalastf
ewemptyglasses,then

returnedtostandbehindthec
ounterasamansittingnearthe
fireplaceslowlygottohisfe
et.

Hewasoldandfrail,bentwith
years.Thewholeroomquiete
nedtoahush.

"Friends,"hebegan,"littleo
fnotehashappenedsincelast

w e e k , s o I s h al l s h o r t l y o p e n
o u r m e e t i n g t o t h e f l o o r . A s

al w ay s , I w o u l d l i k e t o t h an k o
u r p at r o n , M r . F o x , f o r h i s h o s
p i t al i t y . P e r h ap s w e c o u l d h e
ar f r o m M ar y f i r s t , f o r n e w s

o f t h e A m e r i c an s i t u at i o n ? "

H e s at . A t an ad j ac e n t t ab l e a w
o m an s t o o d , t h i n - fac e d an d w e
ar y . K i t t y j u d g e d h e r t o b e n o t
y e t f o r t y , t h o u g h h e r

h ai r w as f l e c k e d w i t h g r ay . " A
m e r c h an t s h i p c am e i n l at e l as t
n i g h t , " s h e b e g an . " It s l as t b e r
t h w as B o s t o n , i n t h e w ar

zone.Thecrewbreakfastedat ourcafethismorning.Theyt oldusthatthemostrecentBri tishoffensivehasfailed—

BostonisstilinAmericanhan ds.Ourarmywithdrewtothef ields,searchingforsupplie s,andhassincebeen

attacked.Lossesarehigh."

Alowmutteringfilledthero om.Theoldgentlemanhalfst ood."Thankyou,Mary.Whoc arestospeaknext?"

"IfImay?"Theyoungbearded manspokeup;hewasstocky,s

elf-confident;hecarriedan
assertiveair."Irepresent

anewworganization,theCommo
ners'Alliance.Perhapsyou
'veheardofit."

Therewasageneralshuffling
,asenseofunease.Frombehi
ndthebarKittyfrowned.Som
ethingaboutthespeaker's

voice...itbotheredher.

"We'retryingtogathersuppo
rt,"themanwenton,"forane
wroundofstrikesandpublic
demonstrations.We'vegot

t o s h o w t h e m a g i c i a n s w h a t ' s w h a t . T h e o n l y w a y t o m a k e t h e m s i t u p i s c o n c e r t e d a c t i o n b y u s a l . I ' m t a l k i n g m a s s

p r o t e s t s h e r e ."

"M a y I s p e a k ? " T h e e l d e r l y l a d y , i m m a c u l a t e l y p r e s e n t e d i n a d a r k b l u e d r e s s a n d c r i m s o n s h a w l , s o u g h t t o r i s e ; a

c h o r u s o f a m i a b l e p r o t e s t e n s u e d , a n d s h e r e m a i n e d s e a t e d . "I a m f e a r f u l o f w h a t i s h a p p e n i n g i n L o n d o n , " s h e s a i d .

"T h e s e s t r i k e s , t h i s u n r e s t . . . S u r e l y i t i s n o t t h e a n s w e r . W

hatwiltheyachieve?Onlysti
ngourleaderstoharsh

reprisals.TheTowerwilech
owiththelamentsofhonestm
en."

Theyoungmanthumpedthet
ablewithathickpinkfist."W
hatisthealternative,madam?
Sitquiet?Themagicians

won'tthankusifwedo!They'l
grindusfurtherintothedirt.
Wemustactnow!Remember
—theycan'timprison

everyone!"

Therewasaroundofraggedclapping.Theoldladystubbornlyshookherhead."You'requitewrong,"shesaid."Your

argumentonlyworksifthemagicianscanbedestroyed.Theycannot!"

Anothermanspokeout."Steadyon,Grandma.That'sdefeatisttalk."

Shejuttedherchin."Well?Canthey?How?"

"They'reobviouslylosingcontrol,orthey'dhavebeatentherebelseasily."

"W e c an g e t h e l p f r o m t h e E u r o p e an s t o o ," t h e y o u n g b l o n d m an ad d e d . "D o n't f o r g e t t h at . T h e C z e c h s w i l l f u n d u s .

A n d t h e F r e n c h ."

G e o r g e F o x n o d d e d . "F r e n c h s p i e s h av e g i v e n m e a c o u p l e o f m ag i c al i t e m s ," h e s ai d . "J u s t i n c as e o f t r o u b l e . N e v e r

h ad t o u s e t h e m , m i n d ."

"E x c u s e m e ," t h e o l d l ad y s ai d ," b u t y o u 'v e n o t e x p l ai n e d h o w a f e w s t r i k e s w i l ac t u al y b r i n g t h e m ag i c i an s d o w n ."

Sheraisedherbonychinandlookeddefiantlyaroundatthecompany."Well?"Severalofthemenmadenoisesof

disapproval,butweretoobusysippingdrinkstovoiceanexactreply.

FrombehindthebarKittyspoke."Youarerright,madam,thatdefeatingthemwilbedifficult,"shesaidinaquiet-

voice,"butitisnotimpossible.Revolutionshavesucceeddeddozensoftimes.Whathappenedto Egypt,Rome,or

Prague? All were invincible — for a time. Alfel when the people stirred themselves."

"But my dear," the old lady said, "in each case there were reene my armies...."

"In each case," Kitty went on determinedly, "foreign leaders took advantage of the kingdom's internal weaknesses.

The people were already rebeling. They didn't have strong magic or vast armies — they were recommoners just like us."

The old lady pursed her lips i

ntoahumorlesssmile."Perh
aps.Buthowmanyofuswantan
invasionbyforeigners'?

Ourrulersmaynotbeperfect
,butatleastthey'reBritish."

Theyoungbeardedmansnort
ed."Let'sgetbacktonow.Toni
ghttheBatterseasteelworke
rsaregoingonstrike—-just

downtheriverfromhere.Co
meandjoinus!Sowhatifthem
agicianssendtheirdemons?
Theywilgetnomore

cannonfromus!"

"Andwherewilyoursteelworkersbe?" theoldladysaidharshly."SomeintheTower,someatthebottomofthe

Thames.Andotherswilltaketheirplace."

"Thedemonswon'tgetitaltheirownway," theyoungmansaid."Somepeoplehaveresilience.Youmusthaveheard

ofit.Theycanwithstandattacks,seethroughilusions—"

Ashespoke,Kitty'seyessuddenlyclearedShesawbeyondhisthickmustache,hisscru

f f y b l o n d b e ar d : s h e k n e w

h i m , c l e ar as d ay . N i c k D r e w , l as t s u r v i v i n g c o m p an i o n i n th e R e s i s t an c e . N i c k D r e w , w h o h ad f l e d W e s t m i n s t e r A b b e y

i n t h e i r d ar k e s t h o u r , l e av i n g h i s f r i e n d s b e h i n d . H e w as o l d e r , s t o u t e r , b u t f u l o f th e s am e o l d b l u s t e r . Y o u s t i l l talk a

g o o d f i g h t , s h e th o u g h t v i c i o u s l y . Y o u al w ays w e r e g o o d at talk in g . I b e t y o u 'l k e e p w e l aw ay w h e n th e s t r i k e g e t s

nasty.... A suddenfeartookho ldofher;shesteppedbackou tofhislineofsight.Uselesst houghNickwas,ifhe

recognizedher,hercoverw ouldbeblown.

Thegroupwasbusydiscussi ngthephenomenonofresilie nce."Theycanseemagic.Cle arasday,"amiddle-aged

womansaid."That'swhatI'veh eard."

Theoldladyshookherheadag ain."Rumors,cruelrumors," shesaidsadly."Thisisallsec

o n d h an d t i t t l e -t at t l e . It

w o u l d n o t s u r p r i s e m e i f i t w as n't s t ar t e d b y t h e m ag i c i an s t h em s e l v e s , t o t e m p t y o u i n t o r as h n e s s .T e l m e , " s h e w e n t

o n , "h as an y o n e h e r e e v e r ac t u al y seen an y o f t h i s r e s i l i e n c e i n ac t i o n ? "

A s i l e n c e i n T h e F r o g . K i t t y s h i f t e d i m p at i e n t l y f r o m o n e f o o t t o an o t h e r , l o n g i n g t o s p e ak . B u t C l ar a B e l w as n o o n e

s p e c i al — s h e 'd d e c i d e d t h at l o n g ag o . B e s i d e s , w ar i n e s s o f N i c k p r e v e n t e d h e r . S h e l o o

k e d ar o u n d t h e t ap r o o m. T h e

c o mp an y, m o s t o f w h i c h h ad m e t t h e r e i n s e c r e t f o r m an y y e ar s, w as g e n e r al y m i d d l e-ag e d o r o l d e r. R e s i l i e n c e w as

n o t s o m e t h i n g t h e y k n e w mu c h o f, f i r s t h an d. E x c e p t N i c k D r e w, w h o p o s s e s s e d as l e as t as mu c h r e s i l i e n c e as K i t t y.

B u t h e s at q u i e t, s ay i n g n o t h i n g.

T h e mo o d i n t h e r o o m h ad b e e n s o u r e d b y t h e ar g u m e n t. A f t e r a f e w mi n u t e s' g l u m r e f l e c t i o n t h e o l d g e n t l e man g o t

slowlytohisfeetagain."Friends,"hebegan,"letusnotbedowncast!Perhapsthemagicians aretoodangerousto

fight,butwecanatleastresistttheirpropaganda.Anewissueof Real War Stones is outtoday.Spurnit!Telyour

friendsaboutitslies!"

AtthisGeorgeFoxspokeup."Ithinkyou'rebeingabitharshthere."Heraisedhisvoiceagainstthegeneralmurmur

ofdisbelief."Yes.I'vemadeitmybusinesstocolectasman

yeditionsofReal War Stories as Ican."

"Oh, shameonyou, Mr. Fox," saidtheelderlylady, inaquiveryvoice.

"No, I'mproudtoadmitit," hewenton."Andifanyofyouchoosetopayavisittotherestroomslateron, youshal

findampleproofofthosepamphlets'worth. Theyaremostabsorbent."Therewasageneralllaugh. Keepingherback

totheyoungblondman, Kittysteppedforwardwithapitch

ertorefillafewglasses.

"Wel,timeismovingon," the oldgentlemansaid,"andwem ustpart.Butfirst,asistraditi onal,wewiltakeourusual

oath." Hesatdown.

GeorgeFoxreachedunderth ebaranddrewoutalargecup, agedandbattered,withapair ofcrossedddominoes

rampantonthelid.Itwasmade ofsolidsilver.Hetookadark bottlefromashelfand,remo vingthelid,poureda

generousmeasureofportint othecup.Kittytookthecupi nbothhandsandcarriedittoth eoldgentleman.

"Weshalalldrinkinturn,"hes aid."Maywelivetoseetheday whenaCommoners'Parliame ntisestablishedonce

again.Mayitupholdtheancie ntrightsofeverymanandwom an—todiscuss,debate,anddi ssentfromthepoliciesof

ourleaders,andholdthemacc ountableforthetheiractions."W ithduereverence,heliftedt hecupandtookasip,before

passingitclockwisetohisneighbor.

ThisritualwasahighpointofsuchmeetingsatTheFrog:afterthedebates,whichneverreachedanyconclusion,it

offeredthesolaceofsomethingfixedandfamiliar.Thesilvercupwasslowlypassedfrompersontoperson,fromtable

totable.Everyoneawaiteditsarrival,oldhandsandnewcomersalike,exceptfortheelderlylady,whowasreadying

herselfforderparture.Georg
emovedaroundtothefrontof
thebarand—togetherwithS
am,thebartender—began

clearingglassesfromtables
nearthedoor.Kittyaccompan
iedthecup,movingitbetwee
ntableswhenrequired.She

keptherfaceturnedfromNic
kDrewasbestshecould.

"Doweneedmoreport,Clara?
"Georgecaled."Marythereh
adagreatbiggulp,Isawher."

Kittytookthecup,inspecte
dit."No.We'veplentyleft."

"Goodenough. Mydearlady, surelyyou'renotleavingus?"

Theoldwomansmiled. "Imustgo, dear. Withallthesedisturbancesonthestreet, I'llnotstayouttoolate."

"Yes, ofcourse. Clara, bringthisladythecupsosheandrinkbeforeshegoes."

"Rightyouare, George."

"Oh, it'snotnecessary, dear. I'll takeadoubledrinknexttime." Thisrousedlaughteranda fewcheers; oneortwo

mengotuptoalowtheoldwomantosqueezeby.

Kittyfolowedher."Hereyouare,madam,there'splentyleft."

"No,no,Ireallymustbegoing,thankyou.It'sso late."

"Madam,you'vedroppedyourshawl."

"No,no.Ican'twait.Excuseme,please..."

"Steadyon,love!Watchwhereyou'repushing—"

"Excuseme,excuseme..."

Stony-faced,hereyesdarkand dblanklikethecutoutholeso nanemptymask,theoldwom anmovedrapidlyacross

theroom,turningherheadre peatedlytolookbackatKitty, whowasadvancingfastbehin dher.Kittyheldthesilver

cupoutstretched—firstrev erently,asifofferingupagif t;thensuddenlyjerkingitb ackandforthlikeafeintingbl ade.

Theproximityofthesilvers

eemedtogivetheladydisco
mfort—shefl inchedaway. Ge
orgeplacedhisstackofglass
es

carefulyonasidetableandpu
tahandintoapocket. Samope
nedacupboardonthewal, re
achedin. Therestofthe

companyremainedseated, ex
pressionscaughtbetweenam
usementanduncertainty.

"Thedoor, Sam," GeorgeFox
said.

Theoldwomandartedforwar
d. Samturnedtofaceher, bloc

kingthedoor;heheldashort,darkrodinhishand.

"Holdon,lady,"hesaidreasonably."Rulesarerules.You'vegottotakeadrinkfromthecupbeforeyougo.It'sasort

oftest."Hemadeanembarrassedgestureandlookedruefullyather."I'msorry."

Theoldladystopped,shrugged."Don'tbe."Sheraisedahand.Abluelightstabbedfromherpalm,engulfingSamin

acracklingnetworkofbrightblueforce.Heleaped,shudd

ered,dancedoddlylikeapup
pet,thenfelsmokingtothe

floor.Someoneinthetaproo
msscreamed.

Awhistlesounded,shrillan
dimpertinent.Theoldwom
anturned,hercuppedhandrai
sedandsteaming."Nowthen,

mydear—"

Kittythrewthesilvercupint
otheoldwoman'sface.

Aflashofbrightgreenlight,
ahissofscalding.Theoldlad
ysnarledlikeadog,clutched

atherfacewithclawing

fingers.Kittyturnedherhead:"George—!"

Fromhispocketthelandlord drewasmalbox,delicateand oblong.HethrewittoKitty, hardandfast,overthe

shouting,risingheadsofthe nearestmenandwomen.Shec aughtitinonehand,spuninas inglemovementtotoss

itatthewrithingfigure—

Theoldladyremovedherfin gersfromherface,whichhad

l ar g e l y d i s ap p e ar e d . B e t w e e n t h e n e at w h i t e h ai r an d t h e

n e c k l ac e o f p e ar l s at h e r t h r o at a m i s s h ap e n m as s w as g l i s t e n i n g . It h ad n o r e g u l ar s h ap e , n o f e at u r e s . K i t t y w as

t ak e n ab ac k ; s h e h e s i t at e d . T h e f ac e l e s s w o m an l i f t e d h e r h an d an d an o t h e r b r i g h t s t r e am o f s ap p h i r e d l i g h t s h o t o u t ,

s t r i k i n g K i t t y h e ad - o n , e n g u l f i n g h e r i n a v o r t e x o f s h i m m e r i n g e n e r g y . S h e g r o an e d . H e r t e e t h r at t l e d i n h e r s k u l ;

e v e r y b o n e s e e m e d t o b e s h ak

ingfreeofitsneighbors;dazzlinglightsblindedher.Shesensedherclothessingeingon

herbody.

Theattackceased;thelinesofblueenergyvanished;fromwhereshehadbeensuspended,aboutameterup,Kitty

fellimplytotheground.

Theoldladyflexedherfingers,gruntedinsatisfaction,andlookedaroundthetaproom.Inalldirectionspeoplewere

fleeing, knocking over tables, sending chairs flying, colliding with each other, squealing in mortal fear; the young

blond-haired

man had hidden behind a barrel. Across the room she spied George Foxed ging toward a chest beside the bar.

Another blast—but he had launched himself desperately to the side: a section of the counter disintegrated in a heap of

glass and match wood; George

F o x r o l e d aw ay b e h i n d a t ab l e o u t o f v i e w .

Ig n o r i n g t h e l am e n t s an d s c u r r y i n g s ar o u n d h e r , t h e o l d l ad y t u r n e d t o l e av e o n c e m o r e . S h e ad j u s t e d h e r t w i n s e t ,

b r u s h e d a s t r ay c o i l o f g r ay h ai r f r o m h e r r u i n e d f ac e , s t e p p e d ac r o s s S am 's b o d y , an d r e ac h e d f o r t h e d o o r .

A n o t h e r w h i s t l e , s h r i l an d i m p e r t i n e n t , s o u n d e d ab o v e t h e c l am o r . T h e o l d l ad y f r o z e w i t h h e r f i n g e r s o n t h e h an d l e .

Shecockedherheadandturned.

ThenKitty,whoseeyeswereslightlycrossed,whoseclothesweretornandstreaked,whosehairfrizzedaboutherlikeamaneoffcottonwool,butwhohadstruggledtoherfeetagainregardless,tossedoverthesmalbox.Asitlanded

attheoldlady'sfeet,Kittyspokeasingleword.

Aburstoflight,searinginitsintensity;acolumnofflame,

twometersindiameter,rose fromfloortoceiling.Itwas

utterlysmooth-sided,morel ikeapillarthanamovingthin g.Itsurroundedtheoldladyo nalsides—shecouldbe

seentransfixedwithinit,lik eaninsectwithinamber:gray hair,pearlnecklace,bluedre ss,al.Thepillarbecamesolid ,

suddenlyopaque,andtheold womanwashiddenwithinit.

Thelightfaded,thepilarbec amefaintandnebulous.Itvani

shed, leaving a perfectly circular burn mark on the floor.

The old lady with the molten face was gone.

At first the taproom of The Frog was very still: a wasteland of upturned tables, smashed chairs, wood fragments,

prone bodies, and scattered dominoes. Only Kitty stood, arms poised, breathing hard, staring at the space before the

door.

Then, one by one, the member

sbegantoexpresstheirshock andfear;theymovedupontheflo or,theystirred,they

slowlyrose,theybegantomoa nandbabble.Kittyremained silent;shelookedtowardthe ruinedbar.Fromadistant

pointalongitGeorge'sfacee merged.HestaredatKittywo rdlessly.

Sheraisedaneyebrow."Wel?"

"Letthemgettheirbreathback.Thentheycango.Thespher emustn'tnoticeanything."

Withslow,stiffmoments,Kittyclamberedoverthenearestpileofshatteredwoodandsteppedaroundthebodyofthe

bartender.Pushingasideatearygentlemanwhowasblundering towardtheexit,shelockedthedoor.Shestoodthere

forfiveminuteswhilethefrightenedcustomersrecovered,thenshelettthemout,onebyone.

Lasttoleavewas Nicholas Drew,whohademergedfrombehindhisbarrel.Theireyesmet;hepausedatthedoor.

"Hello,Kitty,"hesaid."Stil asenergeticasever,Isee."

Kitty'sexpressiondidnotch ange."Nick."

Theyoungmansmoothedback hishairandbeganbuttoningh iscoat."Don'tworry,"hesaid ."I'llforgetI'veseen

you.Newlife,andalthat."Hel ookedaroundthedebrisofth eroom."Unlessyouwanttojo inupwiththe

Commoners'Alliance,ofco urse.Wecoulddowithsome onelikeyou."

Sheshookherhead."No,thanks.I'mhappyasIam."

Henoddedd."Right.Wel,then.Good-bye.And...goodluck."

"Good-bye,Nick."Sheclosedthedoorbehindhim.

GeorgeFoxwashunchedoverSam'sbody;white,terrifiedfacespeepedinfromthekitchen.Kittyleanedbackagainst

thedoorandclosedhereyes.Justonedemon—onespy—haddonethis.InLondonthere

werehundredsofthem. At

thesametime, nextweekthep eoplewouldreturntoTheFr ogtotalk, debate, anddonothi ng. Meanwhile, everyday,

acrossLondon, voicesofpro testwerebrieflyheard—and swiftly, ruthlessly, cutoff. Demonstrationswereuseles s. Talk

wasuseless. Therehadtobean otherway.

Perhapstherewas. Itwastime tocarryoutherplan.

12

Nighthadfallenuponthe Prime Minister's mansionatRichmond. Uponthewesternlawns anumberoftalcolumns

hadbeenbuilt; fromtheirtops burnedcoloredimp-fires, illuminatingthescenewithweirdradiance. Servantsinthe

vibrantgarboffirebirdsandsalamandersdriftedhereandthere, offeringrefreshment. Fromtheblackwalloftrees

beyondthelake, invisiblemusicians playedasweetpavan

e;thesoundscarriedgently abovethevoicesoftheguests.

Thegreatonesoftheempire meanderedaboutthegarden,talkingquietly,listlessly,looki ngattheirwatches.They

woreformalgownsanddress suits;theirfeatureswereconcealedbehindornatemasks depictinganimals,birds,and

demons.Suchpartieswere amongMr.Devereaux's manyextravagances,andhadbecome quitecommonduringthe

p e r i o d o f t h e w ar .

J o h n M an d r ak e l e an e d ag ai n s t a p i l l ar , w at c h i n g t h e g u e s t s d r i f t b y . H i s m as k w as m ad e o f f l ak e s o f m o o n s t o n e , s e w n

c l e v e r l y t o g e t h e r t o r e s e m b l e an al b i n o l i z ar d 's h e ad . D o u b t l e s s i t w as s k i l f ul , an o b j e c t o f w o n d e r , b u t i t s t i l d i d n 't

f i t . H e f o un d i t d i f f i c ul t t o s e e an d h ad t w i c e s t e p p e d i n t o t h e f l o w e r b e d s . H e s i gh e d . N o w o r d y e t f r o m B ar t i m ae u s . .

. H e w o u l d h av e e x p e c t e d som ethin g b y n o w .

A small group passed him, a peacock surrounded by two attentive she-lynxes and a fawning dryad. In the peacock's

paunch and self-important strut there recognized Mr. Colins; the women were probably lower-magicians from his

department, eager for advancement. Mandrake scowled. Colins and there rest had not been slow to criticize him when

he'd brought up the Staff in Council. He'd spent the rest of the meeting enduring a dozen slyinsinuations, as well as

Devereaux's frosty glances. No question about it, his proposal had been enil advised, a foolish blunder for a politician.

To hell with politics! Its conventions smothered him—he felt like a fly caught up in a choking web. His whole life was

spent appeasing Devereaux, fighting off his rivals. An utter waste of time. Someone was needed to steady the Empire

before it was too late. Someone had to defy the others, and use the Staff.

Beforehe'dleftWhitehal,Mandrakehaddescendedtothevaultsbelowthe Hall of Statues. He had not been there for

years; now, as he stood at the footofthestairs, he was surprisedtoseealineofredtilesembeddedinthefloorat

the far end of the chamber. A portlyclerk, who had leaped up from a desk, approached.

Mandrake nodded to him. "I wishtoinspectthetreasurevaults, if possible."

"Certainly, Mr. Mandrake. W

o u l d y o u f o l o w m e ? "

T h e y c r o s s e d t h e c h a m b e r . B e s i d e t h e r e d t i l e s t h e c l e r k h a l t e d . " A t t h i s j u n c t u r e , s i r , I m u s t a s k y o u t o r e m o v e a n y

m a g i c a l o b j e c t s a b o u t y o u r p e r s o n , a n d t o d i s m i s s a n y i n v i s i b l e p r e s e n c e . T h e l i n e m a r k s a b o u n d a r y . B e y o n d t h e t i l e s

n o t h i n g m a g i c a l i s p e r m i t t e d , n o t e v e n a C h a r m . T h e m e r e s t t r a c e w i l i n v o k e a t e r r i b l e s a n c t i o n . "

M a n d r a k e s c a n n e d t h e d i m , b

ar e c o r r i d o r ah e ad . "R e al y ? O f w h at k i n d ? "

"I am n o t p e r m i t t e d t o s ay , s i r . Y o u h av e n o t h i n g e e r i e t o d e c l ar e ? T h e n w e c an p r o c e e d ."

T h e y e n t e r e d a m az e o f b l an k s t o n e p as s ag e s , m o r e an c i e n t t h an t h e P ar l i am e n t b u i l d i n g s ab o v e . H e r e an d t h e r e

w e r e w o o d e n d o o r s , d ar k o p e n i n g s . E l e c t r i c b u l b s l i t t h e c e n t r al c o r r i d o r . M an d r ak e l o o k e d h ar d , b u t s aw n o c l u e t o

t h e h i d d e n t r ap . T h e c l e r k l o o k e d o n l y s t r ai g h t ah e ad ; as h e

walked,hehummedquietlyt
ohimself.

Atlengththeyarrivedatagre
atsteeldoor.Theclerkpoint
ed."TheRoomofTreasures."

"Maywegoin?"

"Thatwouldnotbeadvisable,
sir.Thereisaviewinggrille
,ifyoudesire."

Mandrakesteppedforward,f
lippedbackatinyhatchinthe
centerofthedoor.Hesquint
edthrough.Beyondwasa

brightlylitroomofconsider

ablesize.Faroff,initscenter,stoodaplinthofpink-whitemarble.Ontheplinth,inopen

view,werethemostpreciousstreasuresofthegovernment—alittlepileoforaments,glintingwithadozencolors.

Mandrake'seyesinstantlypickedoutthelongwoodenStaff,roughandunadorned,withaplainlycarvedknobbleatits

head.Besideitheglimpsedashortgoldnecklace,withasmalgoldoval suspendedfrom

i t ; i n t h e c e n t e r o f t h at o v al

c am e t h e d e e p , d ar k f l as h o f j ad e .

G l ad s t o n e 's S t af f an d t h e A m u l e t o f S am ar k an d . . . M an d r ak e f e l t t h e s h ar p i n t e r n al p ai n o f d i s p o s s e s s i o n . H e

s c an n e d t h e f i r s t t h r e e p l an e s : t h e r e w as n o e v i d e n c e o f h e x e s , w i r e s , w e b s , o r o t h e r gu ar d s . E v e n s o , t h e t i l e s

ar o u n d t h e p l i n t h w e r e an o d d g r e e n c o l o r ; t h e y h ad an u n h e al t h y l o o k .

Hesteppedfromthegrile."Whatguardstheroom,ifIampermittedtobetold?"

"APestilence,sir.Particularlyvoraciousone.Wouldstripyoutothebone insecondss,sir,shouldyoudecidetoenter

unadvisedly."

Mandrakelookedattheclerk."Quite.Verywel.Let'sgo."

Agustoflaughterdriftedfromthehouse.Mandrakestareddownatthebluecocktailinhisglass.Ifhisvisittothe

v a u l t s h ad p r o v e d o n e t h i n g , i t w as t h at D e v e r e au x f u l l y i n t e n d e d t o c l i n g t o p o w e r . T h e S t af f w as o u t o f r e ac h . N o t

t h at h e ac t u al y i n t e n d e d t o ... w e l , h e d i d n't k n o w wh at h e i n t e n d e d . A s o u r m o o d w as o n h i m ; t h e p ar t y an d al i t s

f r i p p e r i e s l e f t h i m c o l d . H e l i f t e d t h e g l as s an d g u l p e d t h e l i q u i d d o w n . H e t r i e d t o r e m e m b e r w h e n h e h ad l as t b e e n

h ap p y .

"J o h n , y o u o l d l i z ar d ! I s e e y o u s k u l k i n g o n t h at w al ! " A c r o s

s t h e l aw n s c ame a s h o r t , r o u n d g e n t l e man , s p l e n d i d l y

at t i r e d i n t u r q u o i s e e v e n i n g d r e s s . H i s mas k d e p i c t e d a f e r o c i o u s l y l au g h i n g i mp . O n h i s ar m w as a t al l , s l e n d e r y o u t h

w e ar i n g a mas k l i k e a d y i n g s w an . T h e y o u t h g i g g l e d u n c o n t r o l ab l y .

"J o h n , J o h n , " t h e i mp s ai d . "A r e y o u o r ar e y o u n o t h av i n g t h e d e v i l o f a t i me ? " H e s l ap p e d M an d r ak e p l ay f u l y o n t h e

s h o u l d e r . T h e y o u t h g u f f aw e

d.

"Hello, Quentin," Mandrake murmured. "Having fun?"

"Almost as much as dear Rupert." The imp pointed toward the house, where a capering figure with a bul's head was

illuminated against the windows. "It does take his mind off things, you know. Poor dear."

Mandrake adjusted his lizard mask. "And who is this young gentleman?"

"This," the imp said, hugging

t h e s w an's h e ad t o h i m, "i s y o u n g B o b b y W at t s , s t ar o f m y n e x t e x t r av ag an z a! A b o y o f

m e t e o r i c t al e n t ! D o n o t f o r g e t , d o n o t f o r g e t "—t h e i m p s e e m e d a l i t t l e u n s t e ad y o n h i s f e e t —"t h at t h e p r e m i e r e o f

From W ap p in g to W estm in ster i s al m o s t u p o n u s . I am r e m i n d i n g e v e r y o n e . T w o d ays , M an d r ak e , t w o d ays ! It i s

g u ar an t e e d t o c h an g e t h e l i v e s o f al w h o s e e i t ! E h , B o b b y ? " H e p u s h e d t h e y o u t h aw ay f r o m h i m r o u g h l y . "N o w , g o

andgetusanotherdrink!Ihav
esomethingtosaytomyscaly
friendhere."

Theswan'sheaddeparted,stu
mblingacrossthegrass.Man
drakewatchedhimsilently.

"Now,John."Theimpdrewcl
ose."I'vebeensendingyoume
ssagesfordays.Ibelieveyou
'vebeenignoringme.I

wantyoutocomevisitme.To
morrow.Youwon'tforget,w
ilyou?It'simportant."

BeneathhismaskMandrakewr
inkledhisnoseatthesmelofd

r i n k w a f t i n g f r o m t h e o t h e r m an. "I'm s o r r y, Q u e n t i n,

C o u n c i l d r a g g e d o n a n d o n. I c o u l d n't g e t a w a y. T o m o r r o w i t s h a l b e."

"G o o d, g o o d. Y o u a l w a y s w e r e t h e b r i g h t e s t o n e, M a n d r a k e. K e e p i t t h a t w a y. G o o d e v e n i n g, S h o l t o! I b e l i e v e I

r e c o g n i z e y o u i n t h e r e!" A h u l k i n g f i g u r e w i t h t h e i n c o n g r u o u s m a s k o f a b a b y l a m b w a s p a s s i n g; t h e i m p d e t a c h e d

i t s e l f f r o m M a n d r a k e, p l a y f u l y j a b b e d t h e n e w c o m e r i n t h e

belywithafinger,andwaltzed away.

Thelizardandthelambregarded eadeachother.

"ThatQuentinMakepeace," thelambsaidindeep,heartfelttones."Idonotlikehim.Heisimpudent,andIbelieve

mentallyunsound."

"Hehashighspirits,certainly." PrivatelyMandrakeshared thesentiments."Well,wel. Ihavenotseenyouforsome

time,Sholto."

"N o i n d e e d . I h av e b e e n i n A s i a." T h e b i g m an s i g h e d , l e an e d h e av i l y u p o n h i s s t i c k . "I am r e d u c e d t o s c o u t i n g f o r m y

o w n g o o d s n o w . T i m e s ar e h ar d ."

M an d r ak e n o d d e d . T h e f o r t un e s o f S h o l t o F i n n h ad n e v e r f u l y r e c o v e r e d af t e r t h e d e s t r u c t i o n o f h i s f l ag s h i p s t o r e

d u r i n g t h e g o l e m 's r e i g n o f t e r r o r . A l t h o u g h h e h ad l ab o r i o u s l y r e b u i l t h i s s h o p , h i s f i n an c e s b e c ame p ar l o u s . T h i s

c o i n c i d e d w i t h t h e w ar an d t h

edisruptionoftrade;fewer artifactswerefindingtheir wayto London,andfewer

magicianswerewillingtobu ythem.Likemanyinthelastfe w years,Finnhadagednotice ably.Hismassiveframe

seemedslightlyshrunken;h iswhitesuithunglistlessly abouthisshoulders.Mandrak efeltacertainpityforhim.

"Whatnewsfrom Asia?" he ask ed."How goestheEmpire?" "Thesefoolishcostumes—Isw earthey haveg ivenmethe

mostridiculousoneofal." Finnliftedthelamb'smaskanddabbedahandkerchiefathissweatingface. "TheEmpire,

Mandrake,isfloundering.Thereistalkofrebellioninhil-magicianfromthenortharebusilysummoning

demonsfortheattack,orsowordhasit.Ourgarrisonsin Delhihaveaskedourallies forassistance

defendingthetown.Imaginethat!Ifearforus,Irealydo." Theoldmansighed,replacedhismask."Howdolook,

Mandrake? Likeasprightlyl amb?"

InsidehismaskMandrakegrin ned."Ihaveseennimbler.""Ig uessedasmuch.Well,ifI'mto makeanidiotofmyself,

I'lldoitonafulbelly.You,gi rl!"Heraisedhisstickinanir onicsaluteanddepartedinth edirectionofaservingmaid.

Mandrakewatchedhimgo,his momentarygoodhumorevapo ratingrapidlyonthechilnigh tair.Helookedupatthe

blanknightsky.

S ittin g in a g ard en lon g ag o, a p en c il in his han d . H e t o s s e d h i s g l as s b e h i n d t h e c o l u m n an d s e t o f f i n t h e d i r e c t i o n o f

t h e h o u s e .

In t h e h al l w ay o f t h e m an s i o n , a l i t t l e ap ar t fr o m t h e n e ar e s t k n o t o f r e v e l e r s , M an d r ak e s aw J an e F ar r ar . H e r m as k —

a b i r d -o f -p ar ad i s e w i t h s l e n d e r ap r i c o t p l u m e s —d an g l e d f r o m h e r w r i s t . S h e w as s t e p p i n g i n t o h e r t r av e l i n g c o at , h e l d

o u t f o r h e r b y an i m p as s i v e s e r

v a n t . A t M a n d r a k e 's a p p r o a c h h e d r i f t e d a w a y .

"G o i n g s o s o o n ? "

"Y e s . I'm t i r e d . A n d i f Q u e n t i n M a k e p e a c e b u t t o n h o l e s m e a b o u t t h a t w r e t c h e d p l a y o f h i s o n c e m o r e , I s h a l s t r i k e

h i m." S h e p o u t e d p r e t t i l y .

M a n d r a k e c a m e c l o s e . "I'l l e s c o r t y o u b a c k , i f y o u l i k e . I'm j u s t a b o u t f i n i s h e d h e r e t o o ." W i t h a c a r e l e s s m o t i o n , h e

r e m o v e d h i s m a s k .

S h e s m i l e d . " I h a v e t h r e e d j i n n a n d f i v e f o l i o t s t o e s c o r t m e , s h o u l d I r e q u i r e t h e m . W h a t c a n y o u o f f e r m e t h a t t h e y

c a n n o t ? "

T h e m e l a n c h o l y d e t a c h m e n t t h a t h a d b e e n g r o w i n g i n M a n d r a k e a l e v e n i n g n o w i g n i t e d i n t o s u d d e n r e c k l e s s n e s s . H e

c a r e d n o t h i n g f o r i m p l i c a t i o n s o r c o n s e q u e n c e s ; J a n e F a r r a r ' s p r o x i m i t y e m b o l d e n e d h i m . H e l i g h t l y t o u c h e d h e r h a n d .

" L e t u s t a k e m y c a r b a c k t o L o n d

o n . I w i l ad d r e s s y o u r q u e s t i o n as w e g o ."

S h e l au g h e d . "It i s a l o n g j o u r n e y , M r . M an d r ak e ."

"P e r h ap s I h av e m an y an s w e r s ."

J an e F ar r ar s l i p p e d h e r ar m th r o u g h h i s ; t o g e t h e r t h e y p r o g r e s s e d al o n g t h e h al . S e v e r al p ai r s o f e y e s w at c h e d t h e m

as t h e y w e n t .

T h e m an s i o n 's v e s t i b u l e w as u n o c c u p i e d , s av e f o r t w o m e n s e r v an t s s t an d i n g r e ad y at t h

e d o o r . A l o g f i r e c r ac k l e d

b e n e at h a w al l o f s t ag s ' h e ad s
an d f ad e d c o at s o f ar m s , s t o l e
n l o n g ag o f r o m f o r e i g n h e ar t h
s . A g r e at s t ai n e d - g l as s

w i n d o w o n t h e o p p o s i t e w al l
d e p i c t e d i n f l at p e r s p e c t i v e
t h e b u i l d i n g s o f c e n t r al L o n d
o n : t h e ab b e y , t h e p al ac e o f

W e s t m i n s t e r , t h e m ai n g o v e r
n m e n t o f f i c e s s t an d i n g b e s i d
e t h e T h am e s . T h e s t r e e t s w e r
e f i l e d w i t h ad o r i n g c r o w d s ;

at t h e c e n t e r o f t h e p al ac e c o u r
t y ar d s at t h e r ad i an t f i g u r e o f t

hePrimeMinister,handsraised inagestureof

benediction.Theglassglinted dduly inthehallights;behind rosethedarkslabofnight.

Belowthewindowsatalowgreen couch,ladenwithsilken cushions.

Mandrakestopped."Itiswarm here.Waitwhile Ifindmych auffeur."

JaneFarrardidnotdisengage herarm,butlookedtowardth ecouch."Orwecouldbothstay hereawhile..."

"True."

Heturnedtofaceher,hisbodytingling.Shegavealittleshudder.

"Didyoufeelthattoo?"sheasked.

"Yes,"hesaidsoftly,"butdon'ttalk."

Shepushedhimaway."Itwasoursensorwebs,youfool.Something'striggeredthem."

"Oh.Yes."Theystoodlisteningtothewoodsnappinginthefire,tothenoiseofmutedrev

elryfromthegarden

beyondthepassage.Distantlyabovevitalcameahigh,shrillwhine.

"That'sDevereaux'snexusalarm," Mandrakesaid."Something'sbrokenintothegardensfromoutside."

Shefrowned."Hisdemonswillinterceptit."

"Soundslikethey'reattackingtheintruder..." Fromsomewherebeyondthestained-glasswindowstrangecries

echoedininhumanthroats,to
getherwithgreatnoises,lik
erolsofthunderreboundingo
ffdistantmountains.Thetwo

magiciansstoodquitestil.F
aintlytheyheardshoutingint
hegarden.

Thesoundsgrewinvolume.
Amanwithdarkglassesandad
innerjacketranpast,mutteri
nganincantationashedid

so.Darkorangeplasmsflared
inhiscuppedhand;withhiso
therhandheflungopenthem
aindoorandddisappeared

outside.

Mandrake made as if to follow. "We should go and see—"

"Wait, John!" Jane Farrar's eyes were fixed upward, on the window. "It's coming this way...."

He looked up, transfixed, at the panes of glass, which were suddenly illuminated into brief glories of varied color by a

flash of light beyond. The noise escalated further. Now it was as if a hurricane bored down upon them—a screaming,

w h i s t l i n g b l as t o f m ad n e s s an d f e r o c i t y . L o u d e r an d l o u d e r i t g r e w . T h e y s h r an k b ac k . E x p l o s i o n s s o u n d e d , an d

h i d e o u s y e l s . A n o t h e r f l as h : an d f o r an i n s t an t t h e y s aw o u t l i n e d t h e s i l h o u e t t e o f a g i an t , m o n s t r o u s s h ap e , al

t e n t ac l e s , w i n g s , an d s c y t h i n g c l aw s , h u r l i n g i t s e l f t o w ar d t h e w i n d o w .

M an d r ak e g as p e d . F ar r ar s c r e am e d . T h e y f e l b ac k , p aw i n g at e ac h o t h e r .

A f l as h : t h e b l ac k s h ap e f i l e d t

h e w i n d o w . It c o l i d e d w i t h t h e g l as s —

P lin k ! A s m al p an e i n t h e m i d d l e o f t h e w i n d o w , t h e o n e d e p i c t i n g t h e P r i m e M i n i s t e r , b u r s t i n t o a t h o u s an d p i e c e s .

T h r o u g h i t c am e a t i n y o b j e c t , f l as h i n g e m e r al d i n t h e h al l i g h t , ar c i n g t h r o u g h t h e ai r . It f e l l o n t h e t i l e s b e f o r e t h e m

w i t h a s o f t , s ad s o u n d , b o u n c e d o n c e l i m p l y an d l ay s t i l .

T h e t w o m ag i c i an s s t o o d d u m b l y l o o k i n g at i t . A l i f e l e s s fr o g .

Outsidethewindow,noises continuedtobeheard,butmore faintlynow,receedingwith eachsecond.Oneortwo

flashesbrieflylitthewindow,thenthenightwasdarkonceemore.

Mandrakebentdowntothecrumpledfrog.Itslegswerebentandsplayed,itsmouthhalfopen,itseyestightshut.An

oddcolorlessfluidspreadslowlyoutuponthetilesaroundit.Heartpounding,heusedhislenses:onalthreeplanes

t h e f r o g l o o k e d e x ac t l y t h e s ame . N e v e r t h e l e s s . ..

"W h at is t h i s h i d e o u s c r e at u r e ? " J an e F ar r ar 's p al e f ac e w as c o n t o r t e d w i t h d i s t as t e . "I s h al l s u m m o n m y d j i n n i t o

v i e w i t o n t h e h i g h e r p l an e s , t h e n w e c an d i s p o s e —"

M an d r ak e h e l d u p a h an d . "W ai t ." H e b e n t c l o s e r , ad d r e s s e d t h e f r o g : "B ar t i m ae u s ? "

M s . F ar r ar f r o w n e d . "Y o u me an t h i s t h i n g i s —? "

"I d o n 't k n o w . B e s i l e n t ." H e s

p o k e ag ai n , l o u d e r t h i s t i m e ,
n e ar e r t h e p o o r b e n t h e ad . "B
ar t i m ae u s —i s t h at y o u ? It i s

I . . ." H e p au s e d , m o i s t e n e d h i
s l i p s . "Y o u r m as t e r ."

O n e o f t h e f o r e l e g s t w i t c h e d
. M an d r ak e s at b ac k o n h i s h au n
c h e s an d l o o k e d up e x c i t e d l y
at h i s c o mp an i o n . "H e 's s t i l

al i v e ! D i d y o u s e e —? "

M s . F ar r ar 's l i p s w e r e a h ar d l i
n e . S h e s t o o d a l i t t l e ap ar t , as
i f s ub t l y d e t ac h i ng h e r s e l f f r
o m t h e s c e n e . O n e o r t w o

wide-eyedfootmenappeared atthemarginsofthehal;with angrymotions,shewavedthe maway."Itwilnotbe

alivefforlong.Lookattheess encedrainingoff.Didyoure questittocomehere?"

Mandrakewasnotlookingath er;heanxiouslysurveyedthe bodyonthefloor."Yes,yes,I gavehimanopen-door

injunction.Hewastoreturn whenhehadinformationonH opkins."Hetriedagain."Bart imaeus!"

Suddeninterestflaredin Farrar's voice. "Really? And from the sounds we heard, it seems she was pursued.

Interesting! John, we have little time for the interrogation. Somewhere near by Devereaux will have his pentacle

chamber. It will be a close-run thing, but if we use sufficient force before the creature loses sal its essence, we can—"

"Silence! He is waking!"

The back of the frog's head had become blurred and indistin

c t . T h e f o r e l e g h ad n o t m o v e d
ag ai n . N e v e r t h e l e s s , o n e o f

t h e e y e l i d s s u d d e n l y f l i c k e r
e d ; b y m i n u t e i n c r e m e n t s i t o
p e n e d . A b u l g i n g e y e l o o k e d
f o r t h , m i s t y an d u n f o c u s e d .

"B ar t i m ae u s .. ."

A t i n y v o i c e , as i f f r o m f ar aw
ay : "W h o 's as k i n g ? "

"M an d r ak e ."

"O h . T h o u g h t i t w as . . . w o r t h
w ak i n g u p f o r a m i n u t e t h e r e ."
T h e h e ad s ag g e d , t h e e y e l i d d
r o o p e d .

Ms. Farrar steppedcloseand nudgedthefrog'slegwiththe toeofapointedshoe."Fulfil yourmission!"shesaid."Tel

usaboutHopkins!"

Thefrog'seyeopenedalittle. ItswiveledpainfulyandfocusedforaninstantonMs. Farrar. Thetinyvoicesoundedd

again."Isthisyourbird?Telmeshe'snot.Ohdear."

Theeyeclosed,anddespiteal Mandrake'spleasandFarrar'scommands,didnotreopen. Mandrakesatbackonhis

heelsandranahanddistractedlythroughhishair.

Farrarlaidanimpatienthandonhisshoulder."Pulyourselftogether,John.It'sonlyademon.Lookatthespiled

essence!Ifwedon'ttakestepsrightnow,we'lllosetheinformation!"

Hestoodthen,andlookedatherwearily."Youthinkwecanwakeit?"

"Yes,withtherighttechniques.TheShimmeringCoilortheEssenceRackperhaps.But

I'd say we've got less than five

minutes. It can no longer main tain its form."

"Those techniques would de stroy it."

"Yes. But we'd have the infor mation. Come on, John. You!"

She snapped her fingers at a man servant hovering at the fring es of a small knot of watching guests. "Over here! Bring

a dust pan or some kind of sho vel—we need to scrape this mess up fast."

"No...thereisanotherway." Mandrakespokequietly,too quietlyforMs.Farrartohear. Assheissuedorderstothe

menaroundher,hecrouched oncemorebesidethefrogand utteredalongandcomplexin cantationunderhisbreath.

Thefrog'slimbsshivered;af aintgraymistdribbledoffits body,asofcoldairmeetingw arm.Withgreatspeed,the

bodyofthefrogmeltedintot hemist;themistcoiledabout Mandrake'sshoesandebbed away.

Ms. Farrar turned around inti metoseeMandrakerising. The frogwasgone.

Forafewsecondsshegazedat himdumbfounded. "Whathav eyoudone?"

"Dismissedmyservant." His eyeswerefixedelsewhere. Thefingersofonehandfiddl edwithhiscollar.

"But—theinformation! AboutHopkins!" Shewasgenuinel ybewildered.

"Canbeacquiredfrommyserv antinacoupleofdays. Bywhi

chtimehisessencewilhaveh
ealedsufficientlyinthe

OtherPlaceforhimtobeablet
otalktome."

"Twodays!" Ms. Farraruttere
dalittlesquealofanger. "Th
atmightbefartoolate! Wehav
enoideawhatHopkins—"

"Hewasavaluableservant," M
andrakesaid. Helookedather
, andhiseyesweredullanddi
stant, thoughhisface had

flushedatherwords. "Itwiln
otbetoolate. Iwiltalktohim
whenhisessencehashealed."

Ms. Farrar's eyes flashed darkly. She stepped close, and Mandrake caught a sudden wave of pomegranates, with a

hint of lemon."! would have thought," she said, "that you valued my regard rather higher than the spiled slime of a

fading demon. That creature failed you! It was charged to bring you information, and it could not do so. Important

intelligence was therefor us to take . . . and you are released it!"

"Only temporarily." Mandrak

e h ad w av e d a h an d , s p o k e n a b r e at h l e s s s y l l ab l e : a B u l b o f S i l e n c e s u r r o u n d e d t h e m ,

b l o c k i n g t h e i r w o r d s f r o m t h e s i z ab l e c r o w d n o w j o s t l i n g at t h e g ar d e n e n t r an c e o f t h e h al l . T h e y al s t i l l w o r e t h e i r

mas k s : h e g l i mp s e d t h e s p ar k l i n g , v i b r an t c o l o r s , t h e s t r an g e , e x o t i c s h ap e s , t h e b l an k e y e - s l i t s . H e an d F ar r ar w e r e

t h e o n l y mag i c i an s w h o w e r e mas k l e s s — i t mad e h i m f e e l e x p o s e d an d n ak e d . F u r t h e r mo r e h e k n e w t h at h e h ad n o

realanswertoheranger,forhisactionshadtakenevenhimselfbysurprise.Thismadehimfuriousinhisturn.

"Pleasecontrolyourself,"hesaidcoldly."Idealwithmyslavesinthemannerofmychoosing."

Ms.Farrargaveashort,wildlaugh."Indeedyoudo.Yourslaves...orperhapsyoumeanyourlittlefriends'?"

"Oh,comenow—"

"Enough!"Sheturnedfromhim."Peoplehavebeenhunting

foryourweaknessforsometimenow,Mr.Mandrake,"

shesaidoverhershoulder,"andI,inadvertently,havefoundit.Extraordinary!Inevermwouldhaveguessedthatyou

weresuchasentimentalfool."Hercoatswirledaroundher;withimperioussstepsshepassedthroughthemembrane

oftheBulb;withoutanyfurtherbackwardglance,shestalkedfromthehal.

Mandrakewatchedhergo.Hetookadeepbreath.Then,with

asingleword,hedismissedt
heBulbofSilenceandwas

receivedeagerlybyanoceanan
ofnoise,kerfuffle,andexcit
edspeculation.

Part Three

Alexandria: 125 B.C.

T h at m o r n i n g , as o n e v e r y m o r n i n g , a l i t t l e g r o u p o f s u p p l i c an t s g at h e r e d o u t s i d e t h e ap ar t m e n t s o f m y m as t e r

P t o l e m y . T h e y w e r e t h e r e l o n g b e f o r e d aw n , w r ap p e d i n t h e i r s h aw l s , b l u e - l e g g e d an d s h i v e r i n g , w ai t i n g p at i e n t l y f o r

t h e s u n . A s l i g h t s p i l e d o v e r t h e r i v e r , t h e m ag i c i an 's s e r v an t s o p e n e d t h e d o o r s an d l e t t

hemin,onebyone.

Thatmorning,asoneverymorning,thelistofcomplaints,wrongs,andoutrightwoeswasrecitedandconsidered.To

some,advicewasgiven.Toafew(themoreobviouslycovetousorderluded),helpwasrefused.Totherest,actionof

onesortoranotherwaspromisedanddelivered.Impsandfoliotsdepartedthroughthewindowsandflittedoutacross

thecityonavarietyoferrand

s. A certain nobled jinni was seen to leave and, in due course, return. For several hours

a steady stream of spirits came and went. It was a very busy household.

At half-past eleven the doors were shut and locked for the day. Thereafter, by a back route (to avoid lingering

petitioners, who would have delayed him), the magician Ptolemy departed for the Library of Alexandria to resume his

studies.

W e w e r e w al k i n g ac r o s s t h e c o u r t y ar d o u t s i d e t h e l i b r ar y b u i l d i n g . It w as l u n c h t i m e an d P t o l e m y w i s h e d t o g e t

an c h o v y b r e ad i n t h e m ar k e t s o n t h e q u ay . I s t r o l e d b e s i d e h i m as an E g y p t i an s c r i b e , b al d -h e ad e d , h ai r y o f l e g ,

b u s i l y ar g u i n g w i t h h i m o n t h e p h i l o s o p h y o f w o r l d s .1 O n e o r t w o s c h o l ar s p as s e d u s as w e w e n t : d i s p u t at i o u s G r e e k s ;

l e an R o m an s , h o t o f e y e an d s c r u b b e d o f s k i n ; d ar k N ab at ae an s an d c o u r t e o u s d i p l o m at s f

r o m M e r o e an d f ar P ar t h i a,

al h e r e t o d r i n k k n o w l e d g e fr
o m th e d e e p E g y p t i an w e l l s .
A s w e w e r e ab o u t t o l e av e th e l
i b r ar y c o m p o u n d , a c l as h o f

h o r n s s o u n d e d i n th e s t r e e t b
e l o w . U p c am e a l i t t l e k n o t o f
s o l d i e r s , th e P t o l e m ai c c o l o
r s af l u tt e r o n th e i r p i k e s . Th e
y

d r e w ap ar t t o r e v e al P t o l e m y
's c o u s i n , th e k i n g 's s o n an d h e
i r t o th e th r o n e o f E g y p t , s l o
w l y s w ag g e r i n g u p th e s t e p s .

In h i s t r ai n c am e an ad o r i n g c l u

s t e r o f f av o r i t e s — t o ad i e s an d f aw n e r s t o a m an .2 M y m as t e r an d I s t o p p e d ; w e

i n c l i n e d o u r h e ad s i n t h e t r ad i t i o n al m an n e r o f r e s p e c t .

1. H e claim ed that any connection b etween the two m ust b e for a purpose: it was the j ob of

m ag icians and spirits to work toward a closer understanding of what this purpose was. I

reg arded this (politely) as utter b alderdash. W hat little interaction there was b etween our

worlds was nothing b ut a cruel ab erration (the enslav em ent of us dj inn) , which should b e

term inated as soon as possib le. O ur arg um ent had b ecom e heated, and earthy v ulg arities were

av oided only b y m y concern for rhetorical purity.

2 . They included senior priests, nob les of the realm , flophouse drink ing partners, professional

wrestlers, a b earded lady, and a m idg et. The k ing ' s son had a j aded appetite and b road tastes;

his social circle was wide.

"C o u s i n ! " T h e k i n g ' s s o n l o l e d t o a s t o p ; h i s t u n i c w as t i g h t ab o u t h i s s t o m ac h , w e t w h e r e t h e b r i e f w al k h ad d r aw n

s w e at f r o m h i s f l e s h . H i s f ac e w as b l u r r y w i t h w i n e , h i s au r a s ag g e d w i t h i t . H i s e y e s w e r e d u l l c o i n s u n d e r t h e i r h e av y

l i d s . " C o u s i n , " h e s ai d ag ai n . " T h o u g h t I ' d p ay y o u a l i t t l e v i s i t . "

P t o l e m y b o w e d ag ai n . " M y l o r d . It i s an h o n o r , o f c o u r s e . "

"Thought I'd see where you skulk away your days instead of staying at my side"—he took a breath—"like a loyal

cousin should." The toad iest ittered. "Philip and Alexander and all my other cousins are accounted for," he went on,

tumbling over the words. "They fight for us in the desert, they work as ambassadors in principalities east and west.

They prove their loyalty to our dynasty. But you..." A pause; he picked at the wet cloth of his tunic. "Well. Can we

r e l y o n y o u ? "

"In w h at e v e r w ay y o u w i s h me t o s e r v e ."

"B u t c an w e , P t o l e m ae u s ? Y o u c an n o t h o l d a s w o r d o r d r aw a b o w w i t h t h o s e g i r l i s h ar m s o f y o u r s ; s o w h e r e 's y o u r

s t r e n g t h , e h ? U p here"—h e t ap p e d h i s h e ad w i t h an u n s t e ad y f i n g e r —"t h at 's w h at I'v e h e ar d . U p h e r e . W h at d o y o u

d o i n t h i s d i s m al p l ac e t h e n , o u t o f t h e s u n ? "

P t o l e my b o w e d h i s h e ad m o d

estly."Istudy,mylord.Thepapyriandbooksofrecordthattheworthypriestshave

compiled,timeoutofmind.Worksofhistoryandreligion—"

"Andmagictoo,byalaccounts.Forbiddenworks."Thatwasatallpriest,black-robed,headshaven,andwithwhite

claydaubedfaintlyaroundhiseyes.Hespatthewordsoutsoftlylikeacobrashootingvenom.Hewasprobablya

magicianhimself.

"Ha! Yes. A l m a n n e r o f w i c k e d n e s s e s." T h e k i n g's s o n l u r c h e d a l i t t l e c l o s e r; s o u r f u m e s h u n g a b o u t h i s c l o t h e s a n d

i s s u e d f r o m h i s m o u t h. "T h e p e o p l e c e l e b r a t e y o u f o r i t, c o u s i n. Y o u u s e y o u r m a g i c t o b e g u i l e t h e m, t o w i n t h e m o v e r

t o y o u. I h e a r t h e y c o m e d a i l y t o y o u r h o u s e t o w i t n e s s y o u r d e v i l r y. I h e a r a l k i n d s o f s t o r i e s."

P t o l e m y p u r s e d h i s l i p s. "D o y o u, m y l o r d? T h a t i s b e y o n d m y u n d e r s t a n d i n g. It i s t r u e t h a t I a m p e s t e r e d b y s o m e o f

thosewhohavefalenlowinfortune.Iofferthemadvice,nothingmore.Iamjustaboy—weak,asyousay,and

unworldly.Iprefertoremainalone,seekingnothingbutalittleknowledge."

Theaffectationofhumility(foritwasaffectation—Ptolemy'shungerforknowledgewasjustasravenousastheking's

son'slustforpower,andfarmorevirile)seemedtoenragetheprinceintoapassion.Hisfacegrewdarkasuncooked

meat;littlesnakesofspittle swayedatthecornerofhismouth."Knowledge,eh?"hecried."Yes,butofwhatkind?

Andtowhatend?Scrolsandstylusesarenothingtoaproperman,butinthehandsofwhite-skinnednecromancers

theycanbedeadlierthanthestrongestiron.InoldEgypt,theysay,eunuchsmusteredarmieswiththestampofa

footandsweptttherightfulpharaohsintothesea!Idon'tintendthattohappentome.Whatareyousmirkingabout,

s l av e ? "

I h ad n't m e an t t o s m i l e . It's j u s t I e n j o y e d h i s ac c o u n t , h av i n g b e e n i n t h e v an g u ar d o f t h e ar m y t h at d i d t h e

s w e e p i n g , a t h o u s an d y e ar s b e f o r e . It's g o o d w h e n y o u mak e an i m p r e s s i o n . I b o w e d and s c r ap e d . "N o t h i n g , m as t e r .

N o t h i n g ."

"Y o u s m i r k e d , I s aw y o u ! Y o u d are l au g h at m e —t h e k i n g - i n - w ai t i n g ! "

H i s v o i c e q u i v e r e d ; t h e s o l d

iersknewthesigns.Theirpikesmadesmaladjustments.Ptolemyutteredplacatory

noises:"Hedidnotintendoffense,mylord.Myscribewasbornwithanunfortunatefacialtic,agrimacethatinharsh

lightcanseemabalefulsmirk.Itisasadaffliction—"

"Iwillhaveheadstuckabovethe CrocodileGate!Guards—"

Thesoldierslowereredtheirpikes,eachkeenerthantherestodrenchthestoneswithmy

b l o o d . I w ai t e d m e e k l y f o r

t h e i n e v i t ab l e .3

3 . i.e. a whirlwind of slaug hter. C arried out b y m e.

P t o l e m y s t e p p e d f o r w ar d . "P l e as e , c o u s i n . T h i s i s r i d i c u l o u s . I b e g y o u —"

"N o ! I w i l h e ar n o ar g u m e n t . T h e s l av e w i l d i e ."

"T h e n I m u s t tel y o u ." M y m as t e r w as s u d d e n l y v e r y c l o s e t o h i s b r u t i s h c o u s i n ; h e s e e m e d s o m e h o w t al e r , h i s

equivalentinheight.Hisdar
keyesgazeddirectlyintothe
other'swateryones,whichsq
uirmedintheirsocketslikea

fishuponaspear.Theking'ss
onquailedandshrankfromhi
m;hissoldiersandattendants
shiftedduneasily.Thesun's

warmthdimmed;thecourtyar
dgrewcloudy.Oneortwooft
hesoldiershadgoosepimple
sontheirlegs."Youwil

leavehimalone,"Ptolemysai
d,hisvoiceslowandclear."H
eismyslave,andIsayhedeser
vesnopunishment.

L e av e w i t h y o u r l ac k e y s an d r e t u r n t o y o u r w i n e v at s . Y o u r p r e s e n c e h e r e d i s t u r b s t h e s c h o l ar s an d b r i n g s n o c r e d i t o n

o u r f am i l y . Y o u r i n s i n u at i o n s l i k e w i s e . D o y ou u n d erstan d ? ' "

T h e k i n g 's s o n h ad b e n t s o f ar b ac k t o av o i d t h e p i e r c i n g s t ar e t h at h al f h i s c ap e d r ag g e d o n t h e g r o u n d . H e m ad e a

n o i s e l i k e a m ar s h t o ad m at i n g . " Y e s , " h e c r o ak e d . " Y e s . "

P t o l e m y s t e p p e d aw ay . In s t an

tlyheseemedtodwindle;the darknessthathadgatheredaro undthelittlegrouplikea

wintercloudliftedandwasg one.Theonlookersrelaxed. Priestsrubbedthebacksofth eirnecks;noblesexhaled

noisily.Amidgetpeepedout frombehindawrestler.

"Come,Rekhyt."Ptolemyrep ositionedthescrolsunderhi sarmandglancedatthekin g'sson withstudious

disinterest."Good-bye,cou sin.Iamlateforlunch."

He made to step past. The king's son, white-faced and tottering, uttered an incoherent word. He lurched forward;

from beneath his cloak a knife was drawn. With a snarl, he lunged at Ptolemy's side. I raised a hand and gestured:

there was a muffled impact, as of a mason ry block landing on a bag of suet pudding. The king's son doubled over,

clutching his solar plexus, mouth bubbling, eyes popping. He sank to his knees. The knife dropped impotently on the

stones.

Ptolemykeptwalking.Fouro
fthesoldiersspr angtouncer
tainlife;theirpikeswentlo
w,theymadeaggressive

sounds.Isweptmyhandsinas
emicircle;awaytheyflew,o
neaftertheother—headfirst,
toeslast,outacrossthe

courtyardcobbles.Onehita
Roman,anotheraGreek;athi
rdskiddedayarduponhisnos
e.Thefourthcrashedintoa

trader's stand and was half buri
ed by an avalanche of sweetme

ats.Theylayoutstretchedlik
epointsuponasundial.

Theothersinthegroupwere
chicken.Theycoweredtoge
therandmadenomove.Ikeptc
losewatchupontheold

baldpriest,though—Icould
seehewastemptedtodosome
thing.Buthemetmyeyesandd
ecidededitwasbesttolive.

Ptolemykeptwalking.Ifolo
wedafter.Wewentinsearcho
fanchovybread.Whenweret
urned,ourquestfulfilled,

thelibraryprecinctwasquie

tandstil.

Mymasterknewtheincident wasinauspicious,buthisstu dieswerehisconsuminginte rest,andhechosetoignore

theimplications.ButIdidno t,andnordidthepeopleofAl exandria.Rumorsofthematte rcirculatedswiftly,some

morecreativethanaccurate.4 Theking'sonwasunpopular; hishumiliationwasregarded withgeneralhilarityand

Ptolemy'scelebritygrew.

4 . O ne account, daub ed upon the harb or wal s and il ustrated b y a liv ely sk etch, describ ed the

k ing ' s son b eing b ent b are-b ottom ed ov er a lib rary tab le and spank ed with a royal flail b y

dem on or dem ons unk nown.

B y n i g h t I f l o at e d o n t h e w i n d s ab o v e t h e p al ac e , c o n v e r s i n g w i t h t h e d j i n n .

"W h at n e w s ? "

"N e w s , B ar t i m ae u s , o f t h e k i n g's s o n . H i s b r o w i s h e av y w i t h w r at h an d f e ar . H e m u t t e r s d

ai l y t h at P t o l e m y m i g h t

s e n d a d e m o n t o d e s t r o y h i m
an d s e i z e t h e t h r o n e . T h e d an g
e r p u l s e s i n h i s t e m p l e l i k e a
b e at i n g d r u m ."

"B u t m y m as t e r l i v e s o n l y f o r
h i s w r i t i n g . H e h as n o i n t e r e s
t i n t h e c r o w n ."

"E v e n s o . T h e k i n g 's s o n c h e w
s o n t h e p r o b l e m l at e at n i g h t
an d o v e r w i n e . H e s e n d s e mi s
s ar i e s o u t i n s e ar c h o f m e n

t h at m i g h t ai d h i m q u as h t h i s t h
r e at ."

"A f f a, I t h an k y o u . F l y w e l ."

"F l y w e l , B ar t i m ae u s ."

P t o l e m y 's c o u s i n w as a f o o l an d a s o t , b u t I u n d e r s t o o d h i s f e ar s . H e h i m s e l f w as n o t a m ag i c i an . T h e m ag i c i ans o f

A l e x an d r i a w e r e i n e ff e c t u al s h ad o w s o f t h e g r e at o n e s o f t h e p as t , u n d e r w h o m I'd t o i l e d .5 T h e ar m y w as w e ak e r t h an

f o r g e n e r at i o n s , an d m o s t l y f ar aw ay . In c o mp ar i s o n , P t o l e m y w as p o w e r f u l i n d e e d . N o q u e s t i o n , t h e k i n g 's s o n w o u l d

b e v u l n e r ab l e s h o u l d m y m as t e r d e c i d e t o o v e r t h r o w h i m .

5 . The ancient pharaohs had traditionally relied upon their priests for such serv ices, and the

G reek dynasty had seen no reason to alter this policy. B ut whereas in the past talented

indiv iduals had m ade their way to E g ypt to ply their trade, al owing the E m pire to g row strong

on the b ack s of weeping dj inn, that tim e had long since g one.

T i m e p as s e d . I w at c h e d an d w

aited.

Theking'sson foundhismen. Moneywaspaid. Onemoonlit nightfourassassinsstoleinto thepalace gardens and

paidacalupon mymaster. As I mayhavementioned, theirvisitwasofshortduration.

Theking'sonhadtakenthepre cautionofbeingaway fromAlexandriathatnight; hewasoutinthedesertthunting.

Whenhereturned, hewasgreetedfirstbyaflockofcarrion birdswheelingintheskies

aboutttheCrocodileGate,the
n

bythehangingcorpsesofthr
eeassassins.Theirfeetbrus
hedagainstttheplumesofhisc
hariotashepassedintothe

city.Facemottledwhiteandc
rimson,theprinceretiredto
hischambersandwasnotseen
fordays.

"Master,"Isaid."Yourlifere
mainsatrisk.Youmustleave
Alexandria."

"Quiteimpossible,Rekhyt,
asyouknow.TheLibraryishe

r e ."

"Y o u r c o u s i n i s y o u r i m p l ac ab l e f o e . H e w i l t r y ag ai n ."

"A n d y o u w i l l b e h e r e t o f o i l h i m , R e k h y t . I h av e e v e r y c o n f i d e n c e i n y o u ."

"T h e as s as s i n s w e r e b u t m e n . T h e n e x t w h o c o m e w i l n o t b e h u m an ."

"I am s u r e y o u w i l l c o p e . D o y o u h av e t o s q u at s o ? It d i s t r e s s e s m e ."

"I'm an i m p t o d ay . Im p s s q u at . L i s t e n , " I s ai d , "y o u r c o n f i d e n

ceinmeisgratifying,butfrankly Icandowithoutit.

JustasIcandowithoutbeingin thefiringlinewhenamarid comesknockingonyourdoor."

Hechuckledintohisgoblet. "Amarid!Ithinkyouoverestimatetheabilityofourcourtmagicians.Aone-legged

moulerIcanbelieve."

"Yourcousincastshisnetwider.Hedrinkslongwithambassadorsfrom Rome—and Rome, fromwhatIhear, iswhere

theactionisrightnow.Everyhedge-magicianfromheretotheTigrisishasteningtherein searchofglory."

Ptolemyshrugged."Somycousinputshimselfin Rome'spocket.Whyshouldtheyattackme?"

"Sothathewilbeforeverintheirdebt.Andmeanwhile I'llbedead."Iletoffagustofsulphurinannoyance—my

master'sblitheabsorptioninhisstudiescouldberatherg alling."It'sallrightforyou"Icried."Youcansummonup

anynumberofustoprotectyo
urskin.Whatwesufferdoesn
't matterafig." Ifoldedmywin
gsovermysnoutinthe

mannerofahuffybatandhungf
romthebedroomrafter.

"Rekhyt—youhavesavedmylif
etwiceover.Youknowhowg
rateful Iamtoyou."

"Words,words,words.Don't
meannowt."6

6. Bit of Egyptian street argot crept in here. Wel, I was riled.

"That'shardlyfair.Youknowt

hedirectionofmywork.Iwishtounderstandthemechanismsthatdivideus,human

anddjinni;Iseektoredressthebalance,buildtrustbetweenus..."

"Yeah,yeah.Andwhileyoudo,I'mguardingyourbackandemptyingoutyourprivypot."

"Nowyou'remakingitup.Anhotepdoesthat.I'veneverr—"

"I'mspeakingfiguratively.Mypointis—whenever I'minyourworld,I'mtrapped.Youcalltheshots.Trustdoesn't

enterintoit."Theimpglared outthroughthemembraneofi tswingandletoutanothersul phurouseruption.

"Wilyoustopdoingthat?I'veg ottosleepinthisroomtonig ht.Soyoudoubtmysincerity ,doyou?"

"Ifyouwantmyopinion,maste r,allyourtalkofreconciliati onbetweenourpeoplesisno thingbuthotair."

"Isthatso?"Mymaster'stoneo fvoicehardened."Verywel, Rekhyt,Itakethatasachallen ge.Ibelievemystudies

ar e c o m i n g t o t h e p o i n t w h e n I c an p e r h ap s ac t as w e l as t al k . A s y o u k n o w , I h av e s t u d i e d ac c o u n t s o f t h e n o r t h e r n

t r i b e s . T h e p r ac t i c e t h e r e i s f o r m ag i c i an s an d s p i r i t s t o m e e t h al f w ay . F r o m w h at y o u an d t h e o t h e r s h av e t o l d m e , I

t h i n k I c an g o o n e b e t t e r t h an t h at ." H e t h r e w h i s g o b l e t as i d e , g o t u p , an d b e g an p ac i n g ar o u n d t h e c h am b e r .

T h e i m p l o w e r e d i t s w i n g s un e as i l y . "W h at d o y o u m e an ? I d o n't f o l l o w y o u ."

"Oh, you won't have to follow me," the boy said. "Quite the reverse. When I'm ready, I'll be following you"

13

The untoward incidents that took place during the Prime Minister's party at Richmond were swift and confusing, and it

took some time to discover what had happened. Witnesses among the party guests were few, since when the carnage

had erupted in the skies above

,mosthadtakenshelterheadfirstintherosebedsandornamentalponds.However,

afterMr.Devereauxhadgatheredthemagicianstresponsibleforestatesecurity,andtheyintheirturnhadsummoned

thedemonsguardingtheperimeter,apictureofsortsemerged.

Itappearedthatthealarmhadbeensetoffwhenadjinniinthefformofalimpingfrogbrokethroughtheestate

nexus.Itwascloselypursued

b y a l ar g e p ac k o f d e m o n s , w h i
c h h ar r i e d t h e i r p r e y r e m o r s
e l e s s l y as i t f l e d ac r o s s t h e

l aw n s . T h e e s t at e d e m o n s h ad
q u i c k l y j o i n e d t h e m e l e e , v al
i an t l y at t ac k i n g an y t h i n g t h at
m o v e d , s o t h at o n e o r t w o

o f t h e i n v ad e r s w e r e s o o n d e s
t r o y e d , t o g e t h e r w i t h t h r e e g
u e s t s , an u n d e r -b u t l e r , an d m
u c h o f t h e an t i q u e s t at u ar y

o n t h e s o u t h l aw n s , b e h i n d w h
i c h t h e f r o g t o o k s h e l t e r f o r a
t i m e . In t h e c h ao s , t h e f r o g e s c
ap e d b y b r e ak i n g i n t o t h e

houseitself,atwhichtheotherinvadersturnedaboutandfledthescene.Theiridentity,andthatoftheirmasters,

remainedobscure.

Bycontrast,theidentityofthefrog'smasterwassoonestablished.Toomanypeoplehadobservedtheeventsinthe

mansion'svestibuleforJohnMandraketoescapedetection.Shortlyaftermidnighthewashauleduptbeforemr.

Devereaux,Mr.Mortensen,andMr.Colins(thethreemos

tseniorministersremaining atthehouse), anddadmitted

havinggiventhedjinniinquestionthefreedomtoreturnto himatanytime. Underharshquestioning, Mr. Mandrake

wasthenforcedtogivesome detailsoftheoperationinwhichhisdemonhadbeenengaged. ThenameofMr. Clive

Jenkinswasmentioned, andfivehorlaswerepromptlydispatchedtohisLondonflat. Induecoursetheyreturned. Mr.

Jenkinswasnotathome.Hiswhereaboutswasunknown.

SinceMandrakeknewnothingaboutwhathisdjinnihaddiscovered,andsincesummoningtheinjuredBartimaeus

immediatelymightweldestroyitsessence—withoutanyanswerbeingforthcoming—thematterwasabandonedfor

thepresent.Mandrakewasorderedtoappearbeforethe Councilthreedayslater,tosummonhisslavefor

interrogation.

Inthemeantimetheyoungmag
icianborethe weightofgene
raldispleasure.ThePrimeM
inisterwasbesidehimself

withfuryatthelossofhisGre
cianstatuary,whileMr.Coll
ins—whoattheoutsetofthe al
armhadbeenthefirstto

leapintothe duckpond,onlyt
obehalfdrownedbeneathone
oftheheavierladyguests—re
gardedhimbalefulyfrom

beneathhiswadoftoweling.
Thethirdminister,Mr.Mort
ensen,hadsufferednopartic
ularinjury,buthaddisliked

Mandrakeforyears.Togetherthey condemnedhimforhisirresponsibleandsecretivecconduct,andhintedatabroad

rangeofpunishments,thoughthedetailswereleftuntilthe forthcomingCouncilmeeting.

Mr.Mandrakemadenoresponsetotheaccusations.Pale-faced,hedepartedthemansionandwasdrivenbacktoo

London.

ThefolowingdayMr.Mandrakebreakfastedalone.Ms.Pi

per, reporting as usual for the early morning briefing, found

the door barred by a man servant. The minister was indisposed; he would see her in the office later. Disconcerted, she

took her leave.

With leaden steps the magician proceeded to his study. The doorguard, attempting a mild jocularity, found itself

blasted by a Spasm. Mandrake sat for a long while at his desk

, s t ar i n g at t h e w al .

P r e s e n t l y h e p i c k e d u p h i s t e l e p h o n e an d d i al e d a n u m b e r .

"H e l l o . J an e F ar r ar 's o f f i c e ? C o u l d I s p e ak w i t h h e r , p l e as e ? Y e s , i t 's M an d r ak e . . . O h ... I s e e . V e r y w e l ." T h e

r e c e i v e r w as s l o w l y r e t u r n e d t o i t s c r ad l e .

W e l , h e h ad t r i e d t o w ar n h e r .T h at s h e h ad r e f u s e d t o s p e ak t o h i m w as h ar d l y h i s f au l t . T h e n i g h t b e f o r e , h e h ad

d o n e h i s b e s t t o k e e p h e r n ame

outofit,buttonoavail.Their altercationhadbeenseen.No doubtshewouldnow be

reprimandedtoo.Hefeltonly mildregretatthis;allthough tofthebeautifulMs.Farrar filedhimwithastrange

repulsion.

Therealstupidityofitwasth atthistroublemighthavebee nprevented if he'd just done what Farrar said. Almost

certainly Bartimaeus would have had information on the Jenkins plot that would have help

e d p l ac at e D e v e r e au x . H e

s h o u l d h av e s q u e e z e d i t o u t o f h i s s l av e w i t h o u t a s e c o n d t h o u g h t . B u t i n s t e ad ... h e h ad l e t h i m g o . It w as ab s u r d !

T h e d j i n n i w as n o t h i n g b u t a t h o r n i n h i s f l e s h — ab u s i v e , ar g u m e n t at i v e , f e e b l e . .. an d , b e c au s e o f h i s b i r t h n ame ,

p o t e n t i al y a f at al t h r e at . H e s h o u l d h av e d e s t r o y e d h i m w h i l e h e w as u n ab l e t o f i g h t b ac k . H o w s i m p l e i t s h o u l d h av e

b e e n !

Blank-eyed, he stared at the paper on his desk. Sentimental and weak... Perhaps Farrar was right. John Mandrake,

minister of the government, had acted against his own interests. Now he was vulnerable to his enemies. Even so, no

matter how much cold fury he tried to muster—against Bartimaeus, against Farrar, and most to fall against himself—

he knew he could not have done e otherwise. The sight of the djinni's small, broken body had shocked him too much: it

h a d p r o m p t e d a n i m p u l s i v e d e c i s i o n .

A n d this w as t h e s h at t e r i n g e v e n t , f ar m o r e s i g n i f i c an t t h an t h e t h r e at s an d s p i t e o f h i s c o l e ag u e s . F o r y e ar s h i s l i f e

h a d b e e n a f ab r i c o f c al c u l at i o n s . It w as b y r e m o r s e l e s s d e d i c at i o n t o w o r k t h at M an d r ak e d e r i v e d h i s i d e n t i t y ;

s p o n t an e i t y h a d b e c o m e al i e n t o h i m . B u t n o w , i n t h e s h a d o w o f h i s s i n g l e u n c o n s i d e r e d ac t i o n , t h e p r o s p e c t o f w o r k

s u d d e n l y d i d n o t ap p e al . E l s e

wherethismorning,armies wereclashing,theministrie swerehumming:therewas

muchtobedone.JohnMandr akefeltlistless,floating,su ddenlydetachedfromthede mandsofhisnameandoffice.

Atrainofthoughtfromthepre viousnightrecurredinhism ind.Animage:sittingwithhi stutor,Ms.Lutyens,long

ago,happilysketchinginthe gardenonasummer'sday...sh esatbesidehim,laughing,hai rgleaminginthelight.

Thevisionflickeredlikeamirage. Itvanished. Theroomwasbareandcold.

Induecoursethemagicianleftthisstudy. Initscirclеofblackenedwood, thedoorguardflinchedfromhimashe

passed.

Thedaydidnotgowelfor Mandrake. AttheInformationMinistryatartlyworded memofromMs. Farrar'soffice

awaitedhim. Shehaddecidedtoraiseanofficialcomplaintregardinghisrefusaltointer

r o g at e h i s d e m o n , an ac t

w h i c h w as l i k e l y t o p r o v e d e t r i m e n t al t o t h e p o l i c e i n v e s t i g at i o n . N o s o o n e r h ad M an d r ak e f i n i s h e d r e ad i n g t h i s th an a

s o m b e r d e p u t at i o n f r o m t h e H o m e O f f i c e ar r i v e d , b e ar i n g an e n v e l o p e w i t h a b l ac k r i b b o n . M r . C o l i n s w i s h e d t o

q u e s t i o n h i m ab o u t a s e r i o u s d i s t ur b an c e i n S t . J am e s 's P ar k t h e p r e v i o u s e v e n i n g . T h e d e t ai l s w e r e o m i n o u s f o r

M an d r ak e : a f l e e i n g f r o g , a s

avagedemonsetfreefromits prism,anumberoffatalitiesi nthecrowd.Aminorriothad

ensued,withcommonersdes troyingaportionofthefair. Tensiononthestreetswassti lhigh.Mandrakewasasked to

prepareadefenseintimefort heCouncilmeetingintwod ays'time.Heagreedwithout discussion;heknewthe

threadsupportinghiscareer wasfrayingfast.

Duringmeetings,theeyesof hisdeputieswereamused and

scathing. One or two words of
ar as to suggest he

summon his djinni immediat
ely to limit the political dam
age. Mandrake, stony-faced an
d stubborn, refused. All day
he

was irritable and distracted;
even Ms. Piper gave him a wid
e berth.

By late afternoon, when Mr. M
ake peace rang to remind him o
f their appointment, Mandrak
e had had enough. He

departed his office for the d

ay.

For some years, ever since the affair of Gladstone's Staff, Mandrake had been a close associate of the playwright Mr. Quentin Make peace. There was good reason to be so—above all things, the Prime Minister loved theater, and Mr. Make peace consequently exerted great influence upon him. By pretending to share his leader's joy, Mandrake had

managed to maintain a bond with the Devereaux that other, more

intolerant, members of the Council could only envy. But

it came at a price: more than once Mandrake had found himself cajoled into appearing in dreadful amateur

productions at Richmond, prancing about the stage in chiffon leggings or bulbous pantaloons, and—on one terrible

never-to-be-forgotten occasion—swinging from a harness swearing wings of sparkly gauze. Mandrake had borne his

colleagues' merriments stoic

al y : D e v e r e au x 's g o o d w i l m at t e r e d m o r e .

In r e t u r n f o r h i s s u p p o r t , Q u e n t i n M ak e p e ac e h ad f r e q u e n t l y o f f e r e d M an d r ak e c o u n s e l , an d M an d r ak e h ad f o u n d h i m

s u r p r i s i n g l y as t u t e , q u i c k t o p i c k u p o n i n t e r e s t i n g r u m o r s , ac c u r at e i n h i s p r e d i c t i o n s o f t h e P r i m e M i n i s t e r 's

f l u c t u at i n g m o o d s . M an y t i m e s h e h ad g ai n e d ad v an t ag e b y f o l l o w i n g t h e p l ay w r i g h t 's ad v i c e .

B u t i n r e c e n t m o n t h s , as h i s w

o r k c o m m i t m e n t s e s c al at e d , M an d r ak e h ad b e c o m e w e ar y o f h i s c o m p an i o n and

r e s e n t f u l o f t h e t i m e w as t e d n u r t u r i n g D e v e r e aux's e n t h u s i as m s . H e h ad n o t i m e f o r t r i v i al i t i e s . F o r w e e k s h e h ad

av o i d e d ac c e p t i n g M ak e p e ac e's i n v i t at i o n t o c al . N o w , d e ad -e y e d and r u d d e r l e s s , h e r e s i s t e d n o l o n g e r .

A s e r v ant l e t h i m i n t o t h e q u i e t h ouse . M an d r ak e c r o s s e d th e h al l , p as s i n g b e n e ath p i n k - t i n g e d c h and e l i e r s and a

monumentaloilofthepl aywr ightleaninginhissatindress inggownagainstapileofself -pennedworks.Keepinghis

eyesaverted(healwayscons idereredthegownalittleshort) ,Mandrakedescendedthecen tralstaircase.Hisshoes

paddedsoundlesslyontheth ickpilecarpet.Thewalswer ehungwithframedpostersfr omtheatersacrossthe world.

FIRSTNIGHT!WORLDPRE MIERE!MR.MAKEPEACE'S PLEASURETOPRESENT!S ilentlyadozenadvertsscre

amedtheir

messagedown.

Atthefootofthestairsastuddedirondoorledtotheplaywright'sworkroom.

Evenasheknocked,thedoorwasflungopen.Abroadandbeamingfacelookedout."John,myboy!Excelent!Iam

sopleased.Lockthedoorbehindyou.Weshalhavetea,withatwistofpeppermint.Youlookasthoughyouneed

reviving."

Mr. Makepeace was a whirl of little movements, precise, defined, baletic. His diminutive frame spun and bobbed,

pouring the tea, sprinkling the peppermint, restless as a little bird. His face sparkled with vigor, his red hair shone; his

smile twitched repeatedly as if reflecting on a secreted delight.

As usual, his clothes expressed his buoyant personality: tan shoes, a pair of pea-green trousers with maroon check, a

brightyellowwaistcoat,apinkcravat,aloose-fittinglinenshirtwithpleatsuponthesleeves.Today,however,the

sleeveswererroledupabovetheelbows,andcravatandwaistcoatwereconcealedbehindastainedwhiteapron.

EvidentlyMr.Makepeacewashardatwork.

Withatinyspoonhestirredthetea,tappedittwiceuponthegglass,andhandedtheresulttoMandrake."There!"he

cried."Getthatdownyou.No

w,John"—hissmilewastender,solicitous—"littlebirdstellmealisnotwel."

Briefly,withoutelaboration,Mandrakementionedtheeventsofthepastfewhours.Thesmalermantuttedandcooed

withsympathy."Disgraceful!"hecriedatlast."Andyouwereonlydoingyourduty!Butfoolslike Farrar are al too

readytotearyoutopieces,firstchancetheyget.Youknowwhattheirproblemis,John?"Hegaveasignificantpause.

"Envy. We are surrounded by enviousminnows, who resent ourtalents. I getthisreactional lthetimeinthetheater,

criticscarpingatmyefforts- Mandrake grunted. "Wel, you 'l putthemintheirplaceagaint omorrow," hesaid. "With

thepremiere."

"IndeedIshal, John, indeedIshall. Butyouknow, sometimes governmentisso, sofriendless. Iexpectyoufeelthat,

don'tyou? Youfeelasifyou're onyourown. ButIamyourfri

end, John, I respect you, even if no one else does."

"Thanks, Quentin. I'm not sure it's quite as bad as —"

"You see, you've got something they haven't. Know what it is? Vision. I've always seen that in you. You're clear-

sighted. And ambitious too. I read that in you, yes I do."

Mandrake looked down at his tea, which he disliked. "Well, I don't know —"

"I want to show you something

,John.Alittlemagicalexper iment.Iwanttogetyouropini on.Seeifyoucansee—

wel,comeon.Notimeliketh epresent.Couldyoutakealon gthatironimp-spikebesidey ou?Thanks.Yes,youcan

bringyourtea."

Withshort,swiftsteps,Mr. Makepeaceledthewaytoward aninnerarch.Insomeperplex ity,Mandraketrailedafter.

Amagicalexperiment?Hehad neverobservedMakepeaced omorethanthemostbasicspe

l s ; h e h ad al w ay s

as s u m e d h i m t o b e a f ai r l y m i n o r c o n j u r o r .... T h i s w as every on e' s o p i n i o n .W h at t h e n w as h e —?

H e t u r n e d t h e c o r n e r an d h al t e d . W i t h d i ff i c u l t y , h e p r e v e n t e d h i s t e a g l as s t u m b l i n g fr o m h i s f i n g e r s . H i s e y e s

w i d e n e d i n t h e h al f l i g h t . H i s m o u t h h u n g o p e n .

"W h at d o y o u t h i n k ? W h at d o y o u t h i n k , m y b o y ? " M r . M ak e p e ac e w as g r i n n i n g at h i s s h o ul d e r .

Foralongmomentmandrakecouldnotspeak,butsimplycastheseyesaroundthechamber.Previouslyithadbeen

hometotheplaywright'shomagetohimself:acolectionoftrophies,awards,newspapercuttings,photographs,and

curios.Nowthisshrinehadgone.Asingleelectricbulbcastdimradiance.Theroomcontainedtwopentacles,carefuly

drawnonthecconcretefloor.Thefirst,themagician's,wasofstandardsize,buttheother

w as m u c h l ar g e r . A n d i t w as

o c c u p i e d .

A m e t al c h ai r s at i n t h e c e n t e r o f t h e s u m m o n i n g p e n t ac l e , f i x e d t o t h e f l o o r w i t h f o u r g r e at b o l t s . T h e c h ai r w as m ad e

o f i r o n , i t s l i m b s t h i c k an d h e av i l y s o l d e r e d ; i t g l e am e d f ai n t l y i n t h e h al f l i g h t . S i t t i n g u p o n i t , w i t h c an v as s t r ap s

c o n s t r ai n i n g w r i s t s an d an k l e s , w as a m an .

"Q u i t e a p i c t u r e , i s i t n o t ? " M r . M ak e p e ac e c o u l d s c ar c e l y

c o n t ai n h i s e x c i t e m e n t . H e p
r ac t i c al y s k i p p e d an d d an c e d
at

M an d r ak e 's s i d e .

T h e p r i s o n e r w as c o n s c i o u s ;
p an i c k e d e y e s g az e d at t h e m .
A r o u g h g ag c o v e r e d h i s m o u t
h an d p ar t o f a m u s t ac h e

an d b e ar d ; h i s b l o n d h ai r w as d
i s o r d e r e d , a f ai n t b r u i s e g l i s
t e n e d o n o n e c h e e k . H e w o r e c
o m m o n e r 's c l o t h e s , r i p p e d

ab o u t t h e c o l ar .

"W h o —w h o i s h e ? " M an d r ak e

c o u l d s c ar c e l y s p e ak .

"T h i s b e au t y ? " M r . M ak e p e ac e c h u c k l e d . H e p r an c e d t o t h e s m al l p e n t ac l e an d b e g an l i g h t i n g t h e c an d l e s . "O f c o u r s e

y o u k n o w t h e r e 's b e e n t r o u b l e w i t h t h e B a t t e r s e a s t e e l w o r k e r s ? T h e y 've 'g o n e o n s t r i k e , ' ap p ar e n t l y , s p e n d t h e i r t i m e

h av i n g p ar t i e s i n t h e s t r e e t o u t s i d e t h e f ac t o r y . W e l , l at e l as t n i g h t m y ag e n t s f o u n d t h i s f i n e f e l o w h o l d i n g f o r t h t o

t h e p r o t e s t o r s f r o m t h e b ac k

o f a t r u c k . In g o o d v o i c e , h e w as . A r e al o r at o r . H ar an g u e d t h e c r o w d f o r t w e n t y m i n u t e s

ab o u t h o w t h e y 've g o t t o r e v o l t , h o w t h e t i m e w as f as t ap p r o ac h i n g w h e n t h e m ag i c i an s w o u l d p ac k t h e i r b ag s . G o t a

n i c e r o u n d o f ap p l au s e at t h e e n d . W e l , d e s p i t e h i s p r e t t y w o r d s h e w o u l d n't s t ay o u t al n i g h t w i t h t h e w o r k e r s i n t h e

c o l d , an d p r e s e n t l y h e s e t o f f h o m e . S o m y b o y s f o l o w e d h i m an d k n o c k e d h i m o n t h e h e ad w h e n n o o n e w as l o o k i n g .

Broughthimdownhere. I'mgoingtoneedthatimp-spike, if youdon'tmind. No, onsecond thoughts, youhaveit. I'll

havemyhandsfullwiththesummoning."

Mandrake'sheadspun. "Whatsummoning? What—?" Astonishmentgavewaytoagitation. "Quentin—doyoumind

telingmeexactlywhatyou'redoing?"

"I'll dobetterthanthat. I'll showyou." Mr. Makepeacefinishedlightingthecandles, scann

e d t h e r u n e s an d i n c e n s e

b o w l s , an d h o p p e d ac r o s s t o t h e c ap t i v e 's c h ai r . W i t h d e l i c at e f i n g e r s , h e man i p u l at e d t h e g ag . " D o n 't l i k e t o u s e t h i s ,

b u t I h ad t o k e e p h i m q u i e t . T h e c h ap b e c am e q u ite h y s t e r i c al . N o w , y ou "—t h e s m i l e v an i s h e d f r o m h i s f ac e —" an s w e r

m y q u e s t i o n s p r e c i s e l y , o r y o u k n o w w h at 'l h ap p e n ." T h e g ag w as w h i s k e d aw ay ; c o l o r r e t u r n e d t o c o n s t r i c t e d l i p s .

" W h at 's y o u r n am e ? "

Acough,agasp."Nic—Nicho
lasDrew,sir."

"Occupation?"

"Sh-shopworker."

"Soyou'reacommoner?"

"Yes."

"Andyou'reapoliticalactivi
stinyoursparetime."

"Y-yes,sir."

"VerywelWhatistheShrive
lingFireandwhenisitapplie
d?"

Thequestioncamearrow-quick;theprisonerflinched,incomprehensionfiledhisface."I—I—don'tknow...."

"Comeon,comeon.Answerme!Ormyfriendherewilgoadyouwithhisstick!"

Mandrakefrownedinanger."Makepeace!Stopthisnon—"

"Amoment,myboy."Themagicianloomedclosetohiscaptive."So,evenwiththethreatofpain,youpersistwith

yourlie?"

"It is not a lie! I swear it! I have never heard of that fire! Please —"

A broad grin. "Good. That'l do." With swift motions, the gag was replaced. Make peace hopped back to the other

penta-cle."You u hear d al t hat, John?"

Mandrake's face was white with shock and rising disgust. "Make peace—what is the purpose of this exhibition? We

cannot pluck men off the streets and subject them to tortur

e —"

Theplaywrightsnorted."Torture?He'salright.He'sbarelybeentouched.Besides,youheardhim—he'sanagitator,a

threattothenation.ButIintendhimnomalice.He'sjusthelpingmewithalittleexperiment.Observe...."He

adoptedadramaticpose;hisfingerstwitched,asifabouttoconductanorchestra.

Mandrakestartedforward."Iinsistthat—"

"C a r e f u l , J o h n . Y o u k n o w b e t t e r t h a n t o f o o l a b o u t w h e n a s u m m o n i n g ' s i n p r o g r e s s . " W i t h t h i s , t h e p l a y w r i g h t b e g a n a

r a p i d i n c a n t a t i o n . T h e l i g h t d i m m e d ; f r o m n o w h e r e a g e n t l e b r e e z e s t i r r e d t h e c a n d l e f l a m e s . T w o r o o m s a w a y t h e

i r o n d o o r j o l t e d i n i t s s o c k e t s . M a n d r a k e s t e p p e d b a c k , i n s t i n c t i v e l y r a i s i n g t h e s p i k e h e c a r r i e d . S u b c o n s c i o u s l y h e

l i s t e n e d t o t h e w o r d s : L a t i n ... a f a i r l y t y p i c a l s u m m o n s , t h e u s u a l c l a u s e s . . . t h e d e m o n ' s

n am e —B o r e l l o . . . b u t

w ai t , w h at w as t h at b i t —? "In c orp u s viri" . . ."i n t o t h e v e s s e l t h at y o u f i n d t h e r e . . .""o b e d i e n t t o t h e v e s s e l 's w i l l " . .

.T h i s w as o d d an d u n f am i l i ar . ...

T h e i n c an t at i o n f i n i s h e d . M an d r ak e 's g az e s w i v e l e d t o t h e c h ai r , w h e r e a d ar k s h ad o w f l i c k e r e d . N o w i t w as g o n e . T h e

m an 's b o d y j e r k e d , as i f al l i t s m u s c l e s h ad t e n s e d , t h e n r e l ax e d . M an d r ak e w ai t e d . T h e b

reezesubsided,thelightbulb

flaredoncemore.Theyoungmansatinertandpassive.Hiseyeswereclosed.

Mr.Makepeacelowereredhishands.Hewinkedat Mandrake."Nowthen..."

Hetookastepforward.Mandrakegasped,criedoutawarning."Wait,youfool!Thedemon'sthere!It'ssuicideto—"

Calmandslowasanoondaycat,Makepeacesteppedoutofhiscircleandintotheother.No

thinghappened.Grinning,

heoncemorereremovedthegag
andpattedthecaptivegently
ononecheek."Mr.Drew!Wak
eup!Thisisnotimefor

sleeping!"

Languorouslytheyoungmans
tirred.Handsandfeetstretch
edagainsttheirbonds.Hisey
esopenedandstaredabout

themdreamily.Heseemedto
havedifficultyrecollecting
hissituation.Fascinateddes
pitehimself,Mandrakemove
da

l i t t l e c l o s e r .

"H o l d t h at s t i c k r e ad y , " M ak e p e ac e s ai d . "T h i n g s m ay g o w r o n g ." H e b e n t n e ar , s p o k e s w e e t l y . "W h at i s y o u r n ame ,

f r i e n d ? "

"N i c h o l as D r e w ."

"Is t h at y o u r on ly n ame ? T h i n k d e e p l y . D o y o u h av e an o t h e r ? "

A p au s e . T h e man 's f ac e f u r r o w e d . "Y e s ... I d o ."

"A n d w h at i s i t ? "

"B o r e l o . . ."

"A h , g o o d . T e l l m e , N i c h o l as , w h at i s y o u r o c c u p at i o n ? "

"S h o p w o r k e r ."

"A n d w h at i s t h e S h r i v e l i n g F i r e ? W h e n i s i t ap p l i e d ? "

A b r i e f f r o w n o f p u z z l e m e n t g av e w ay t o b l an d as s u r an c e . "It i s t h e p e n al t y f o r d i s o b e d i e n c e , s h o u l d w e p u r p o s e f u l y

f ai l i n o u r c h ar g e . O u r m as t e r p u t s o u r e s s e n c e t o t h e t o r c h . A h , w e f e ar i t ! "

"V e r y g o o d . T h an k y o u." M r . M ak e p e ac e t u r n e d aw ay , l e ap e d c ar e f u l l y o v e r t h e n e ar e s t c h al k m ar k s , an d ap p r o ac h e d

J o h n M an d r ak e , w h o s e f ac e h ad b e e n r o b b e d o f e x p r e s s i o n . "W h at d o y o u t h i n k , m y b o y ? Is i t n o t a f as c i n at i n g

s i t u at i o n ? "

"I d o n 't k n o w . ... It i s a c l e v e r t r i c k —"

"It i s m o r e t h an a t r i c k ! T h e d e m o n h as l o d g e d i t s e l f w i t h i n t h e man . It i s t r ap p e d i n s i d e as i f h e w e r e t h e p e n t ac l e !

Didyounothear?Andthedemon'sknowledgeisattheman'scommand.Suddenlyheknewthemeaningofthe

ShrivelingFire.Hehadknowledge,wherebeforehadjustbeenblankness!Now,considertheimplications...."

Mandrakefrowned."Thefeatismoralydubious.Thisfelowisanunwillingvictim.Besides,heisacommoner.He

cannotproperlyusethedemon'sinformation."

"Aha!Perceptiveasever!For

getthemoraldimensionfora moment. Imagineif—"

"Whatishedoing?" Mandrake wasstudyingthecaptive, whoseemedtohavenewlyrecognizedhissurroundings.

Agitationhadreturnedtothe face; hestruggledwithhisbonds. Onceortwiceheturned hisheadviolentlyfromside

toside, likeadogworryingat aflea.

Makepeaceshrugged. "Perhapshesensesthedemoninside. Perhapsittalkswithinhim

.Hardtotel.Ihavenottried

itwithacommonerbefore."

"Youhaveusedothers?"

"Asingleoneonly.Avolunteer.Thatunionhasworkedextremelywell."

Mandrakerubbedhischin.Thesightofthewrithingcaptiveunsettledhim,disruptinghisintelectualinterest.Hecould

notthinkwhattosay.

Mr.Makepeacehadnosuchpr

o b l e m s . "T h e i m p l i c at i o n s , as I s ay , ar e i m m e n s e . N o t i c e h o w I e n t e r e d t h e p e n t ac l e

u n h ar m e d ? T h e d e m o n w as p o w e r l e s s t o s t o p m e , s i n c e i t w as w i t h i n an al t o g e t h e r d iff erent p r i s o n ! N o w , I w an t e d

y o u t o s e e t h i s , J o h n , w i t h t h e u t m o s t ur g e n c y , b e c aus e I t r u s t y o u , j u s t as y o u , I h o p e , t r u s t m e . A n d i f —"

"P l e as e ! "A p l ai n t i v e c r y fr o m t h e fi g ur e i n t h e c h ai r ."! c an 't b e ar i t ! O h , i t w h i s p e r s ! It d r i v e s m e m ad ! "

Mandrakeflinched."Heissuffering.Thedemonmustbedismissed."

"Shortly,shortly.Probablyhelacksthementalabilitytoconstrainitsvoice—"

Thecaptivewriggledanew."I'lteloualIknow!Aboutthecommoners,aboutourplans!Icangiveyou

information...."

Makepeacemadeaface."Tush,youcangiveusnothingthatourspiesdon'talreadyknow.Ceaseyourholering.I

h av e a h e ad ac h e ."

"N o ! I c an t e l y o u o f t h e C o mm o n e r s ' A l l i anc e ! O f t h e i r r i n g l e ad e r s ! "

"W e k n o w t h e m al —t h e i r n ame s , t h e i r w i v e s , t h e i r f am i l i e s . T h e y ar e an t s t o b e s t e pp e d o n w h e n w e c h o o s e . N o w —I

h av e v i t al m att e r s t o d i s c u s s h e r e —"

"B u t —b u t y o u d o n o t k n o w this: a f i g h t e r f r o m t h e o l d R e s i s t anc e l i v e s ! S h e h i d e s i n L o n d o n ! I h av e s e e n h e r , h o u r s

ag o ! I c an t ak e y o u t o t h e p l ac e —"

"T h at i s al l an c i e n t h i s t o r y." M r . M ak e p e ac e t o o k t h e i r o n s p i k e f r o m M an d r ak e 's f i n g e r s an d w e i g h e d i t c as u al y i n h i s

p al m . "I am a p at i e n t m an , M r . D r e w , b u t y o u b e g i n t o i r k me . If y o u d o n o t c e as e —"

"W ai t a m o m e n t ." J o h n M an d r ak e 's v o i c e h ad al t e r e d ; i t s t o n e h al t e d t h e p l ay w r i g h t i n h i s t r ac k s . "W h at R e s i s t an c e

f i g h t e r i s t h i s ? A w o man ? "

"Yes! Yes, a girl! Her name is Kitty Jones, although she goes snow by another name—Ah, will you stop your

whispering!" He groaned and thrashed beneath his bonds.

A faint rushing sound ed in Mandrake's head. For a moment, he felt dizzy, as if he were about to fal. His mouth was

dry. "Kitty Jones? You lie."

"No! I swear it! Release me and I will take you to her."

"Is this line of questioning

really n e c e s s ar y ? " M r . M ak e p e ac e w o r e a p e t u l an t f r o w n . " T h e R e s i s t an c e i s l o n g d e f u n c t .

P l e as e c o n c e n t r at e o n w h at I s ay , J o h n . It i s e x t r e m e l y i m p o r t an t , e s p e c i al y i n y o u r c u r r e n t s i t u at i o n . J o h n ? J ohn ? "

M an d r ak e d i d n o t h e ar h i m . H e s aw B ar t i m ae u s , w e ar i n g t h e ap p ar e l o f a d ar k - s k i n n e d b o y . H e s aw h i m s t an d i n g i n a

c o b b l e d c o u r t y ar d y e ar s b e f o r e . H e h e ar d t h e b o y s p e ak . " T he g olem seiz ed her . . . in c in erated her in sec on d s ' K i t t y

Joneswasdead.Thedjinnihadtoldhimso.Mandrakehadbelievedhim.Andnow,outofthepast,theboy'ssober

expressionsuddenlyshiftedhorriblyintoaleerofcontempt.

Mandrakeleanedovertheceptive."Wheredidyouseeher?Telme,andyoushallgofree."

"TheFrogInn,Chiswick!Sheworksthere!Shehasthenameof ClaraBel.Nowplease—"

"Quentin,besogoodastodismissthedemonandreleaseth

ismanimmediately. Imustde
part."

Theplaywrighthadbecomequ
iet, suddenlywithdrawn.
"Certainly, John... ifyouwis
hit. Butwillyounotwait? I

strongly advise you to listen
to what I have to say. Forgetth
e girl. There are more import
ant things. I want to discuss

this experiment—"

"Later, Quentin, later." Mand
rake was white-faced; he was
already at the arch.

"Butwhereareyougoing?Not backtowork?"

Mandrakespokethroughgritted teeth."Hardly.Ihaveasummoningofmyownthat Ihave toperform."

14

Time,as Imayhavementioned onceortwice,doesnotrealy existintheOtherPlace.Even so,youknowfulwel

whenyou'rebeingshortchanged.AndIhadscarcelybeenreabsorbedbythenourishing energiesofthemaelstrom

whenIfeltthecrueltugofasummonsonceagain,suckingmeoutlikeyolkdrawnfromanegg,plungingmeback

uponthehardandbitterearth.

Already.Andmyessencehadhardlybeguntoheal.

Mylastactivitiesuponthematerialworldhadbeensopainful,soperiloustomyessence,thatIcouldbarely

remembertherm.Butonethingwasclearenough:mynumbing,cursedweakness!HowI—whosepowerscatteredthe

magicians of Nimrud, whose t he Barbary Coast aflame, who s ent cruel Ammet, Koh, and J ab or spinning to their

doom—how I, that same Bartim ae us, had been reduced to flee ing as a miserable, no-good fr o g, unable to trade the

smallest Detonation with a gan g of hireling herons.

During the whole debacle I'd b e en to one ar death to truly fee l the righteous anger that was my due. But I felt it now.

My very being frothed with it

.

I c o u l d d i m l y r e c al m y m as t e r d i s m i s s i n g m e . P r o b ab l y h e d i s l i k e d t h e m e s s I w as m ak i n g o n h i s f l o o r . P e r h ap s m y

d e c r e p i t u d e h ad e m b ar r as s e d h i m at l as t . W e l , w h at e v e r t h e r e as o n , i t h ad n 't t ak e n h i m l o n g t o c h an g e h i s m i n d .

F i n e . I w as t h r o u g h w i t h h i m . W e w o u l d b o t h g o t o o u r d e at h s . I'd u s e h i s n am e ag ai n s t h i m n o w , c o m e w h at m ay . M y

l as t d e s i r e w as t o s e e h i m s q u i r m .

AndIwasn'tgoingtogooutasa paltryamphibian,either.

Inthefewshorthoursl'dbeen awayfromEarth,theOtherPlac ehadworkeditsmagic.I'dm anagedtoabsorbalittle

energy.Itwouldn'tlastlong, butIwasgoingtoputittogoo duse.

AsImaterialized,Idrewwhat wasleftofmyessenceintoaf ormthatreflectedmyemotio nswithsimplepurity,e.g.a

big-hornedddemonwithmusc leslikemelonsandlotsoftee

th. Itwasthefulworks.Youn
ameit, I'dgotit. Brimstone,

spear-tail, wings, hooves, cl
aw's, evenacoupleofwhipst
hrownin. Myeyeswereburni
ngfishhooks, myskinglowe
d

likecoolinglava. Notparticu
larlyoriginal, butasastateme
ntofintentitdidthejobnicel
y. Ieruptedintotheroom

witharolofthunderfittosen
dthelivingdeadscuttlingtot
heircoffins. Thiswasfolow
edbyahowloffamished

r a g e , t h e k i n d u t t e r e d b y A n u b i s 's j a c k a l s a s t h e y p r o w l e d a b o u t t h e M e m p h i s t o m b s — o n l y a b i t l o u d e r a n d l o n g e r , a

v i l e n o i s e u n n a t u r a l l y p r o l o n g e d .

I n f a c t I w a s s t i l i n t h e m i d d l e o f m y u l u l a t i o n w h e n I c a u g h t s i g h t o f t h e f i g u r e i n t h e p e n t a c l e o p p o s i t e , a n d w a s

c o m p l e t e l y p u t o f f m y s t r o k e . T h e b a r n s t o r m i n g r o a r c o n t r a c t e d i n t o a w o b b l i n g g a r g l e t h a t s h o t u p a c o u p l e o f

o c t a v e s a n d e n d e d i n a f a l s e t t

osqueakwithaquestionmark
ontheend.Thedemon—whic
hhadbeenbusilyrearing

up,leatherwingsakimbo,wh
ipsa-cracking—frozeinanun
stableposturewithitsbacks
ideprotruding.Thewings

slumped;thewhipsdrooped
limply.Thebilowingbrimst
onecloudpeteredawayintoa
timorousdribblethatdrifte
d

discreetlyoutofviewbehin
dmyhooves.

Istoppedandstared.

"Allright,"thegirlsaidtartly."Quitthesillyfaces.Haveyouneverbeensummonedbyawomanbefore?"

Thedemonliftedabrawnyfingerandpushededitsjawbackintoposition."Yes,but—"

"Butnothing.Stopmakingsuchafuss."

Aforkedtongueidenticaltothetailbelowissuedfromthedemon'smouthandmoistenedditsdrylips."But—but—hold

onaminute—"

"A n d w h at h o r r i b l e k i n d o f m an i f e s t ati o n d o y o u c al t h i s , an y h o w ? " s h e w e n t o n ."T h at n o i s e ! T h ats t e n c h ! A l l t h o s e

f o l d s an d k n o b b l y w ar t s an d t h i n g s ! W h at ar e y o u t r y i n g t o p r o v e ? " H e r e y e s n ar r o w e d . "I t h i n k y o u 'r e c o m p e n s at i n g

f o r s o m e t h i n g ."

"L i s t e n , " I b e g an , "t h i s i s an e s t ab l i s h e d , t r ad i t i o n al f o r m t h at —"

"T r ad i t i o n al n o t h i n g .W h e r e ar e y o ur c l o t h e s ? "

"Clothes?" Isaidweakly. "Idon'tnormalybotherwiththeminthisguise."

"Wel,youcouldputonapairofshorts,atleast.You'renotdecent."

"I'mnotsurethey'dgowiththewings...." Thedemonfrowned,blinked."Holdon,enoughofthis!"

"Lederhosenwould.They'dcomplimenttheleather."

Withdifficulty,Igatheredmythoughts."Stop!Forgettheclothes!Thepointis...thepo

i n t i s —w h at ar e y ou d o i n g

h e r e ? S u mm o n i n g me ! I d o n't
u n d e r s t and ! T h i s i s al w r o n g !
" In my p e r p l e x i t y , al at t e mp t s
at e s t ab l i s h e d , t r ad i t i o n al

t e r r o r s c e as e d . M u c h t o t h e r
e l i e f o f my w o u n d e d e s s e n c e
, t h e t o w e r i n g d e mo n s h r ank
an d s h i mm e r e d and ad j u s t e d

i t s e l f d o w n t o f i t t h e p e n t ac l
e mo r e s nu g l y . M y l e at h e r w i
n g s b e c ame t w o s h o u l d e r nu b
s and my t ai l r e t r ac t e d o u t o f

s i g h t .

"Whyisitwrong?"thegirlasked."It'sjustanotheroneofthosemaster/servantthingsyouweretelingmeabout

whenlastwemet.Youknow:I'mthemaster,you'retheslave.Igivetheorders,youobeywithoutquestion.

Rememberhowitworksnow?"

"Sarcasmdoesn'tgowithaprettyface,"Isaid."Sofeelfreetomakelotsmorecommentsalongthoselines.Youknow

perfectlywelwhatImean.Y

ou ' re n ot a m ag ic ian "

S h e s m i l e d s w e e t l y an d g e s t u r e d ab o u t u s . "R e al l y ? In w h at w ay d o I n o t f i t t h e b i l l ? "

T h e s n u g - f i t d e m o n l o o k e d l e f t . T h e s n u g - f i t d e m o n l o o k e d r i g h t . U n n e r v i n g l y , s h e h ad a p o i n t . T h e r e w as I,

i m p r i s o n e d i n a p e n t ac l e . T h e r e w as s h e , s t an d i n g i n an o t h e r . A n d al ar o u n d s at t h e u s u al p ar ap h e r n al i a: c an d e l ab r a,

i n c e n s e b o w l s , c h al k s t i c k s , b i g b o o k l y i n g o n a t ab l e . It w as an o t h e r w i s e e m p t y r o o m ,

w i t h o u t c u r t ai n s o n t h e

w i n d o w . A b i g r o u n d m o o n s h o n e h i g h ab o v e , s p l as h i n g a s i l v e r l i g h t ac r o s s o u r f ac e s . E x c e p t f o r t h e s m o o t h , r ai s e d

s e c t i o n i n t h e m i d d l e w h e r e t h e r u n e s an d c i r c l e h ad b e e n p ai n t e d , t h e f l o o r w as o f w ar p e d , i r r e g u l ar b o ar d s . B e h i n d

t h e t ai n t o f r o s e m ar y t h e w h o l e p l ac e s m e l e d o f d amp , d i s u s e , an d as s o r t e d r o d e n t s . S o f ar , s o ord in aire. I'd s e e n

t h i s d i s m al v i e w a t h o u s an d t i m e s —al t h at e v e r c h an g e d w as

t h e v i e w o u t o f t h e w i n d o w .

N o , w h at w as p r e o c c u p y i n g m e w as t h e s u m m o n e r h e r s e l f , t h e s o -c al e d m ag i c i an .

K i t t y J o n e s .

T h e r e s h e w as . L ar g e as l i f e an d t w i c e as c o n f i d e n t , s t an d i n g h an d s o n h i p s w i t h a g r i n as w i d e as t h e N i l e e s t u ar y .

E x ac t l y as I'd p o r t r ay e d h e r al t h o s e t i m e s w h i l e an n o y i n g M an d r ak e .1 H e r l o n g d ar k h ai r h ad b e e n c h o p p e d b ac k

l e v e l w i t h h e r e ar s ; p e r h ap s h

e r f ac e w as a l i t t l e t h i n n e r t h an I r e m e m b e r e d . B u t s h e l o o k e d i n f ar b e t t e r s h ap e t h an

w h e n I'd l as t s e e n h e r , h o b b l i n g d o w n t h e s t r e e t af t e r h e r t r i u m p h w i t h t h e g o l e m . H o w l o n g h ad i t b e e n s i n c e t h e n ?

T h r e e y e ar s —n o m o r e . B u t t i m e s e e m e d t o h av e p as s e d d i f f e r e n t l y f o r h e r , s o m e h o w : h e r e y e s h e l d t h e c al m n e s s o f

e ar n e d k n o w l e d g e .2

1. O r alm ost so. I som etim es ex ag g erated the curv es.

2 . H er outfit wasn' t the issue for m e rig ht then, b ut for the com pletists am ong you this was her

attire: she wore a b lack tunic and trouser com b o, v ery fetching , if you were that way inclined.

H er tunic was open at the throat; she wore no j ewelry. H er feet were encased in b ig white

trainers. H ow old was she now? A round eig hteen, at a g uess. I nev er thoug ht to ask her, and

now it' s too late.

A l v e r y w e l . B u t s t i l l , s h e c o

uldn'thavesummonedme.Iknewthis.

Thepocketdemonshookitshead."It'satrick,"Isaidslowly.Iglancedabout,mygazeprobingthecornersofthe

roomwithrapier-keenprecision."Therealmagician'sheresomewhere...hiding...."

Shegrinned."What,youthinkI'mconcealinghimupmysleeve?"Sheshookherarmsomewhatunnecessarily."Nope.

Notthere.Perhapsinyourgreatageyou'regrowingforget

ful, Bartimaeus. You'retheonewhodoesthemagic."

Irewardedherwithasuitablydemonicscowl. "Saywhatyoulike, there'sanotherpentacleclosebyy... mustbe... I've

seenthiskindofstuntpuledbefore...Yes, behindthatdoor, forinstance." Ipointedattheonlyexit.

"Thereisn't."

Ifoldedmyarms. Alfourofthem. "That'swherehe is."

Sheshookherhead, almostlau

g h i n g ."I a s s u r e y o u h e 's n o t ! "

"P r o v e i t ! G o o p e n i t a n d s h o w m e ."

S h e l au g h e d al o u d . "S t e p o u t o f m y p e n t ac l e ? S o y o u c an t e ar m e l i m b f r o m l i m b ? G e t r e al , B ar t i m ae u s ! "

I m as k e d m y d i s ap p o i n t m e n t w i t h a h u f f y f ac e . "T s k . T h at 's a p o o r e x c u s e . H e 's b e h i n d t h e r e f o r s u r e . C an 't f o o l m e ."

H e r e x p r e s s i o n s h ad al w ay s b e e n m e r c u r i al . N o w t h e y s w i t c h e d t o o n e o f b o r e d o m . "W e 'r e w as t i n g t i m e . M ay b e this

w i l l c o n v i n c e y o u." S h e u t t e r e d a q u i c k f i v e - s y l l ab l e w o r d . A l i l ac - c o l o r e d f l am e r o s e f r o m t h e c e n t e r o f m y p e n t ac l e

an d ad m i n i s t e r e d a s w i f t j ab i n a p r i v at e ar e a. M y c e i l i n g - h i g h l e ap d i s t r ac t e d h e r f r o m m y w h o o p o f p ai n — at l e as t ,

t h at w as m y i n t e n t i o n . B y t h e t i m e I l an d e d ag ai n , t h e f l am e h ad v an i s h e d .

S h e r ai s e d an e y e b r o w . "N ow d o n't y o u t h i n k y o u s h o u l d h av e w o r n a p ai r o f t r o u s e r s ? "

I looked at her long and deeply. "You're lucky," I said, with as much dignity as I could muster, "that I decided not to

reverse that Punitive Jab against you. I know your name, Ms. Jones. That gives me protection, or have your studies

not taken you that far?"

She shrugged. "I've heard something about that. I'm not interested in the details."

"Again I say it: you're not a magician. Magicians are obsessed with details. That's what keep

psthemalive.Ireally

don'tknowhowyou'vesurviv
edalyourothersummonings
."

"Whatothers?Thisismyfirst
onesolo."

Despiteitssingedbottom,fr
omwhichtheodorofburnedt
oastwasgentlywafting,thed
emonhadbeendoingitsbest

toappearinbelatedcommand
ofthesituation.Butthisnew
informationfeleditonceagai
n.3Yetanotherplaintive

q u e s t i o n f o r m e d o n m y l i p s , b u t I l e t i t d r i f t aw ay u n s p o k e n . T h e r e w as l i t t l e p o i n t . W h i c h e v e r w ay I l o o k e d at i t ,

n o t h i n g h e r e m ad e s e n s e . S o I t r i e d a n e w an d u n f am i l i ar s t r at e g y , an d s t ay e d s i l e n t .

3 . W e fourth-lev el dj inn are not the easiest of spirits to sum m on correctly, since we are

fastidious and proper and k eep a sharp ear out for any sm al errors in the incantations. F or this

reason, and b ecause of our form idab le intel ect and ov erpowering presence (g

enerally n o t

inv olv ing the sm el of b urned toast) , m ag icians av oid us until they hav e had a g ood deal of

practice.

T h e g i r l s e e m e d t ak e n ab ac k b y t h i s c u n n i n g ap p r o ac h . A f t e r a f e w s e c o n d s o f w ai t i n g s h e r e al i z e d t h at c o n t i n u i n g o u r

c o n v e r s at i o n w as u p t o h e r . S h e d r e w a d e e p b r e at h t o s e t t l e h e r n e r v e s an d b e g an t o s p e ak . "W e l , y o u 'r e q u i t e

r i g h t , B ar t i m ae u s , " s h e s ai d .

"I am not a magician, thankgoodness. Andthisistheoneandonlysummoningthat I

everintendtodo. I'vebeenplanningitforthelastthreeyears."

Shetookanotherbreathandwaited.... Adozenmorequestionsoccurredtome.4 ButIsaidnothing.

4. Not to mention twenty-two possible solutions to each one, sixteen resulting hypotheses and

counter-theorems, eight abstract speculations, a quadrilateral equation,

two axioms, and a

limerick. That's raw intelligence for you.

"This is just a means to an end," she went on. "I'm not interested in the things that the magicians want. You don't

have to worry about that."

Another pause. Did I speak? No. I just kept shtoom.

"I don't want any of that," the girl said. "I don't want to acquire vast power or wealth. I think that's aldespicable."

Mystrategywasworking,albeitwiththepaceofatortoiseinleadboots.Iwasgettinganexplanation.

"AndIcertainlydon'twanttosubjugateenslavedspirits,"sheaddedbrightly."If that'swhatyou'rethinking."

"Notinterestedinsubjugation?!"Bangwentmystrategy—buthey,I'dmanagedmorethanaminute'ssilence,which

wasitselfsomekindofrecord.Thediminishedddemonfingereditsburnedregiongingerly,lettingoffflittleoohs

and

aah s o f d i s c o m f o r t . "Y o u 'v e g o t a f u n n y w ay o f g o i n g ab o u t i t t h e n . I'm i n p ai n h e r e , y o u k n o w ."

"I w as j u s t p r o v i n g a p o i n t , t h at's al ," s h e s ai d . "L o o k , w o u l d y o u m i n d n ot d o i n g t h at ? Y o u 'r e p u t t i n g m e o f f m y

s t r i d e ."

"D o i n g w h at ? I w as o n l y f e e l i n g —"

"I s aw q u i t e w e l w h at y o u w e r e f e e l i n g . J u s t s t o p i t . A n d w h i

leyou're-aboutit,can'tyouch
angeintosomethingelse?

Thatrealyisthemosthideous
incarnation.Ithoughtyouhad
morecclass."

"This—hideous?"Iwhistled
."Yourealyhaven'tdonemanys
ummonings,haveyou?Alrig
htthen,seeingasyou'reso

sensitive.Ishalcovermymo
desty."Ichangedintomyfavo
riteguise.Ptolemysuitedm
e,asIfeltcomfortableinhis

form,andhesuitedthegirlto
o,ashisburnedbitswerehid

denunderhisloincloth.

AssoonasIaltered,hereyeslitup."Yes,"shewhisperedunderherbreath."That'sit!"

Ilookedather,eyesnarrowed."Sorry,canIhelpyouwithsomething?"

"No,it'snothing.Um,that's...that'samuchbettershape."Butshewasalbreathlessandexcitedandittookhera

fewmomentstoregainherpoise.Isatdowncross-leggedonthefloorandwaited.

T h e g i r l s at t o o . F o r s o m e r e as o n s h e w as s u d d e n l y m o r e r e l ax e d .. W h e r e a m i n u t e e ar l i e r h e r w o r d s h ad b e e n s l o w

an d c u m b e r s o m e , n o w t h e y b u r s t fr o m h e r i n a v e r i t ab l e fl o o d .

"W e l , I w an t y o u t o l i s t e n t o m e v e r y c ar e fu l y , B ar t i m ae u s , " s h e s ai d , l e an i n g fo r w ar d w i t h h e r f i n g e r s j ab b i n g

ag ai n s t t h e fl o o r . I w at c h e d t h e m c l o s e l y , j u s t i n c as e t h e y c h an c e d t o j ab a c h al k l i n e , m ay b e s mu d g in g i t a l i t t l e . I

w as i n t e r e s t e d i n w h at s h e h ad t o s ay , f o r s u r e , b u t I w as n 't g o i n g t o m i s s an o p p o r t u n i t y o f e s c ap e .

P t o l e m y r e s t e d h i s c h i n u p o n t h e b ac k o n o n e h an d . "G o ah e ad . I'm l i s t e n i n g ."

"G o o d . O h , I'm s o p leased i t 's w o r k e d o u t s o w e l ." S h e r o c k e d b ac k an d f o r t h o n h e r h au n c h e s , al m o s t h u g g i n g

h e r s e l f w i t h d e l i g h t . "I h ar d l y d ar e d t o h o p e t h at I'd s u c c e e d . I h ad s o m u c h t o l e ar n — y o u h av e n o i d e a. W e l . . .

maybeyoudo,"sheconceded,"butfromastandingstartIcantelyouitwasnotmuchfun."

Mydarkeyesfrownedather."You'velearnedalthisinthreeyears?"Iwasimpressed,anandmorethanalittle

doubtful.

"IstartednotlongafterIsawyou.WhenIgotmynewidentitypapersthrough.Iwasableto visitlibraries,getbooks

ofmagicout—"

"Butyouhatemagicians!"Ibur

s t o u t . " Y o u h at e w h at t h e y d o . A n d y o u h at e u s s p i r i t s t o o ! Y o u t o l d m e s o t o m y

f ac e —-w h i c h , I m i g h t ad d , r at h e r h u r t m y f e e l i n g s . W h at ' s c h an g e d t h at m ak e s y o u w an t t o c al o n e u p ? "

" O h , I w as n ' t af t e r an y o l d d e m o n , " s h e s ai d . " T h e w h o l e p ur p o s e o f m y s t u d y i n g al l t h i s t i m e , o f m y m as t e r i n g

t h e s e . . . t h e s e w i c k e d s k i l l s , w as t o s u m m o n y ou "

" M e ? "

"Youseemsurprised."

Idrewmyselfup."Notatal,notatal.Whatwasitthatdrewyoubac k?Mymarvelouspersonality,Isuppose?Ormy

sparklingconversation?"

Shechuckled."Wel,notthepersonality,ofcourse.Butyes—theconversationwaswhatdiditforme,whatcaughtmy

imaginationwhenwespokebefore."

Intruth,Iremembereredthisconversationtoo.Threeyearsh

ad p as s e d , b u t i t s e e m e d l o n g
e r n o w , b ac k i n t h e d ay s

w h e n m y p e r e n n i al m as t e r N at
h an i e l w as s t i l a g l u m o u t s i d e
r , p an t i n g f o r r e c o g n i t i o n . It
h ad b e e n d u r i n g t h e m i d d l e

o f t h e g o l e m c r i s i s , w h e n L o n
d o n w as b e i n g b e s e t b y t h e c l
ay m o n s t e r an d H o n o r i u s t h e
af r i t , t h at m y p at h c r o s s e d

K i t t y J o n e s 's f o r t h e s e c o n d t
i m e . S h e h ad i m p r e s s e d m e t h
e n b o t h w i t h t h e f o r c e o f h e r .p
e r s o n al i t y an d w i t h h e r

f i e r c e i d e al i s m , q u al i t i e s r

ar e l y m i n g l e d i n m ag i c i an s . S h e w as a c o mm o n e r —s c ar c e l y e d u c at e d , i g n o r an t o f e v e r y t h i n g

t h at h ad c o n s p i r e d t o c r e at e h e r w o r l d , b u t n o n e t h e l e s s d e f i an t an d h o p e f u l o f c h an g e . A n d m o r e t h an t h at t o o : s h e

h ad r i s k e d h e r l i f e t o s av e t h at o f h e r e n e m y , a d e s p i c ab l e l o w l i f e , s o m e o n e u n f i t t o s o mu c h as l i c k h e r b o o t s .5

5 . M y m aster, this was. D id you g uess?

Y e p , s h e 'd m ad e an i m p r e s s i o

nonme.Andonmymastertoo,
cometothinkofit.

Igrinned."Soyoulikedwhat
youheard,eh?"

"Yousetmethinking,Bartim
aeus,withalyourtalkofcivil
izationscomeandgone.Abov
eall,yousaidtherewere

patternstolookoutfor,andIkn
ewIhadtofindthem."Onefin
gerjabbeddownasshemadeth
epoint,almost

touchingtheredchalkline.It
wasclose,veryclose."So,"s
hesaidsimply,"Iwentlookin

g."

Ptolemyadjustedthecornerofhisloincloth."Alverywel,butthat'sadifferentthingfromcruellyrippinganinnocent

djinnifromhisplaceofrest.Myessenceisinsoreneedofrespite.Mandrake'skeptmeinservice"—Imadearapid

finger-and-toecalculation—"forsixhundredandeighty-threedaysoutofthelastseven hundred.Andthathasits

effects.I'mlikeanappleatthe

b o t t o m o f a b ar r e l —s w e e t and f ai r t o l o o k at , b u t b r u i s e d t o a p u l p b e n e at h t h e s k i n .

A n d y o u 'v e t ak e n m e f r o m m y p l ac e o f h e al i n g ."

H e r h e ad w as t i l t e d ; s h e l o o k e d up at m e f r o m und e r h e r b r o w s . "T h e O t h e r P l ac e , y o u m e an ."

"T h at i s o n e o f i t s n am e s ."

"W e l , I'm s o r r y t o h av e d i s t ur b e d y o u ." S h e s p o k e as i f al s h e 'd d o n e w as r o u s e m e f r o m a l i t t l e nap . "B u t I d i d n't

knowIcouldevendoit.Ifear edmytechniquemightbefaul ty."

"Yourtechnique'sfine,"Isai d."Infactit'sgood.Andthatle adsmetomybiggestquestion .Howhaveyoulearnedto

summonme?"

Sheshruggedmodestly."Oh, itwasn'tsohard.Youknowwh atIthink?Themagicianshave beenexaggeratingthe

difficultyforyears,justtop utthecommonersoff.Whatd oesittake,afterall?Afewcar

efullinesdrawnwithrulers,

string,andcompass.Afewrunes,somespokenwords.Poppingdownthemarkettogetsomeherbs...abitoffpeace

andquiet,alittlememorizing...doalthatandyou'resorted."

"No," Isaid."Acommoner'sneverdonethisbefore,asfarasIknow.It'sunheardof.Youmusthavehadhelp.With

thelanguages,therunesandcircles,thatnoxiousplantmix—alofit.Amagician.Who?"

Thegirltwizzledastrandofhairbesidehereear."Well,I'mhardlygoingtogiveyouhisname.Butyou'reright.Ihave

beenhelped.Nottodothis,exactly—thatgoeswithoutsaying.Hethinks I'mmoreofanamateurenthusiast.Ifhe

knewwhatIwasdoinghe'dblowhistop."Shesmiled."Right nowhe'sfastasleeptwofloorsdown.He'srathersweet,

really.Anyway,it'stakentime,butit'snotbeentoobad.I'msurprisedmorepeoplehaven't givenitago."

Ptolemygazedatherfromunderhoodedlids."Mostpeople,"Isaidmeaningfuly,"arealittlenervousofwhatthey

mightsummon."

Thegirlnodded."True.Butit'snotsobadifyou'renotscaredofthedemoninquestion."

Istarted."What?"

"Wel,Iknowthatterriblethingscanhappenifyougetthecantationwrong,ormisdrawthepentacleorsomething,

butthoseterriblethingsare

moreorlessuptothedemon—sorry, Imeantdjinni, ofcourse—thedjinniinquestion.

Aren'tthey? Ifitwassomeoldafritthat I'dnevermet, I'dobviouslybeabitworried, incasewegotoffonthewrong

foot. Butweknoweachotheralready, don'twe, youandI?" Shegavemeawinningsmile. "AndIknewyouwouldn't

harmmeifImadeanylittlemistake."

Iwaswatchingherhands, whichonceagainweregesticulat

inginthevicinityoftheredc
halkline...."Isthatso?"

"Yes.Imean,wemoreorlesst
eamedduplasttime,didn'twe?
Youknow,withthatgolem.Y
outoldmewhattodo.I

didit.Goodpartnership,that
was."

Ptolemyrubbedthecorners
ofhiseyes."Therewasasmal
differencethen,"Isighed,
"whichitseemsthatImust

speloutforyou.Threeyears
agowewerebothunderthehe
elofMandrake'sboot.Iwashi

s s l av e , y o u w e r e h i s

q u ar r y . W e h ad a s h ar e d i n t e r e s t i n f o i l i n g h i m an d e n s u r i n g o u r o w n s u r v i v al ."

"E x ac t l y ! " s h e c r i e d , "an d w e __"

"W e h ad n o t h i n g m o r e i n c o mm o n t h an t h at , " I w e n t o n i m p e r t u r b ab l y . "T r u e , w e h ad a b i t o f a c h i n - w ag . T r u e , I d i d

g i v e y o u a f e w c l u e s ab o u t t h e g o l e m ' s w e ak n e s s e s — b u t t h at w as m e r e l y i n a s c i e n t i f i c s p i r i t , t o s e e h o w p e r v e r s e l y

yourodd littleconsciencew ouldbehave. Andmightyper verseitwastoo."

"Idon'tacc ept—"

"IfImightbealowedtogetaw ordinedgeways," Isaid, "I

willjustpointoutthesalient differencebetweenthenand now. Then, wewerebothvict imsofthemagicians. Agreed ?

Right. Butnow, oneofus—i.e. moi"—Itappedmybarebrownc hest—"isstilavictim, stilas lave. Asfortheother

o n e . . . s h e 's c h an g e d s i d e s ."

S h e s h o o k h e r h e ad . "N o ."

"S h e 's a t u r n c o at—"

"I'm n o t—"

"A t w o -t i m i n g b ac k s t ab b e r —"

"B ar t i m—"

"A c o nn i v i n g , t r e ac h e r o u s , o p p o r t u n i s t i c , f al s e -f ac e d t r ai t o r , w h o 's t ak e n i t u p o n h e r s e l f t o ad d t o m y e n d l e s s y e ar s o f

s l av e r y ! W h o 's s e t o u t t o l e ar
n t h e c u r s e d ar t s , w i t h o u t p r o
m p t i n g an d w i t h o u t c o e r c i o n
! Y o u c an s ay t h i s m u c h f o r

N at h an i e l an d t h e r e s t — t h e y d
i d n 't h av e an y c h o i c e i n t h e m at
t e r . M o s t o f t h e m w e r e m o l d e
d i n t o m ag i c i an s b e f o r e

t h e y w e r e o l d e n o u g h t o k n o w
b e t t e r ! B u t y ou — y o u c o u l d h
av e t ak e n a d o z e n d i f f e r e n t p
at h s . A n d i n s t e ad y o u

d e c i d e d t o e n s l av e B ar t i m ae
u s , S ak h r -al -J i n n i , t h e S e r p e
n t o f S i l v e r P l u m e s , t h e w o l f
-j aw e d g u ar d i an o f t h e Ir o q u o i

s .

A n d i n y o u r ar r o g anc e y o u c o n s i d e r I'l d o y o u n o h ar m ! W e l l , l e t m e t e l l y o u , y o u n g m ad am , y o u u n d e r e s t i m at e m e

at y o u r p e r i l ! I am m as t e r o f a t h o u s an d t r i c k s , a h u n d r e d w e ap o n s ! I c an —o u c h ! ! "

In r at h e r h e at e d f as h i o n I h ad b e e n o r n am e n t i n g m y ar g u m e n t w i t h a s e r i e s o f b r i s k f i n g e r - j ab s , o n e o f w h i c h

o v e r s h o t t h e m ar k and t o u c h e d t h e r e d c h al k o f m y p e n t ac l e . W i t h a s m al e x p l o s i o n o f y e l l

o w s p ar k s , m y e s s e n c e

w as r e b u f f e d : I w as t o s s e d u p
an d b ac k w ar d , h e ad o v e r h e e l
s , f r an t i c al l y p e d al i n g i n m i d
ai r t o av o i d c r o s s i n g t h e l i n e

o n t h e o t h e r s i d e . W i t h t h e ag i
l i t y b o r n o f d e s p e r at i o n , I m
an ag e d i t , an d s an k d o w n t o e ar t
h w i t h b l ac k e n e d f ac e an d

m y l o i n c l o t h t o r n as u n d e r .

T h e g i r l c o n s i d e r e d t h e l att e
r w i t h a d i s ap p r o v i n g t w i s t o
f t h e m o u t h . " T s k , " s h e s ai d .
" W e ' r e b ac k t o s q u ar e o n e ."

Idelicatelyrearrangedthefragmentsofcloth."Thepointremains.Bysummoningme,you'veredefinedourroles.

Therecanbenothingbuthatredbetweenus."

"Oh,rubbish,"shesaid."HowwelsewasItogetholdofyou?I'mnotenslavingyou,youidiot.Iwantedtodiscuss

somethingwithyou,asequals."

Iraisedwhatremainedofmyeyebrows."Hardlyfeasible.Dodustmitesconferwithlion

s ? "

"O h , s t o p b e i n g s o s n i f f y . W h o 's N at h an i e l , an y w ay ? "

I b l i n k e d at h e r u n c e r t ai n l y . "W h o ? N e v e r h e ar d o f h i m ."

"Y o u j u s t r e f e r r e d t o s o m e o n e c al l e d N at h an i e l ."

"N o , n o , y o u m u s t h av e m i s h e ar d ." I c h an g e d t h e s u b j e c t s w i f t l y : "T h e w h o l e i d e a i s r i d i c u l o u s , an y w ay . E q u al i t y i s

i m p o s s i b l e b e t w e e n h u m an s an d d j i n n . Y o u ar e y o u n g an d f o o l i s h , s o p e r h ap s I s h o u l d n 't

b e t o o h ar d o n y o u , b u t t h e

n o t i o n i s m i s g u i d e d . I h av e k
n o w n a h u n d r e d m as t e r s o v e r
f i v e t h o u s an d y e ar s , an d w h e t
h e r t h e i r p e n t ac l e s h av e

b e e n d r aw n o n t h e d e s e r t s an d
o r o n t h e t u r f - m o s s o f t h e s t e p
p e , t h e e n m i t y b e t w e e n m e an
d m y s u m m o n e r s h as

b e e n g r e at an d e v e r l as t i n g . S
o i t h as al w ay s b e e n . S o i t s h al
al w ay s b e ."

I f i n i s h e d i n r e s o u n d i n g , p l
an g e n t t o n e s t h at b r o o k e d n o
ar g u m e n t . T h e y e c h o e d d r am

at i c al y b ac k an d f o r t h ac r o s s

t h e e m p t y r o o m . T h e g i r l s m o o t h e d b ac k h e r h ai r .

"A b s o l u t e t r i p e , " s h e s ai d . "W h at ab o u t y o u an d P t o l e m y ? "

15

K t t y k n e w i m m e d i at e l y th at h e r th e o r y h ad b e e n c o r r e c t . T h e d j i n n i 's r e s p o n s e t o l d h e r s o . S i n c e h i s ac c i d e n t at th e

m ar g i n s o f th e p e n t ac l e , th e y o u n g E g y p t i an b o y h ad b e e n f ac i n g h e r , c h e s t an d c h i n th r u

s t o u t , h a n d s s w e e p i n g t h i s

w a y a n d t h a t t o i l u s t r a t e h i s e x p a n s i v e s t a t e m e n t s a n d o c c a s i o n a l y r e t u r n h i s l o i n c l o t h t o p o s i t i o n . A s s o o n a s s h e

s p o k e , h o w e v e r , a l h i s b l u s t e r i n g a n d b r a v a d o i n s t a n t l y c e a s e d . A g r e a t s t i l n e s s c a m e o v e r h i m : t h e f a c e b e c a m e

q u i t e f r o z e n , t h e b o d y u t t e r l y t r a n s f i x e d , a s i f s o m e h o w c a u g h t i n t i m e . O n l y t h e e y e s m o v e d : s l o w l y , v e r y s l o w l y , t h e

p u p i l s s h i f t e d t o f i x t h e i r g a z

eonher.Theboy'seyeshadal
waysseemeddark—butnowth
eyhadbecomequiteblack.

Withoutwishingit,Kittyfo
undherselfstaringintothem
:itwaslikelookingataclearn
ightsky—albl ackandcoldand

infinite,withtinylightsgli
nting,unreachablean dfaraw
ay.... Itwasterrible,yetbeaut
iful;shewasdrawntoitasa

childtoawindow.Shehadbe
ensittingsafelyinthecenter
ofherpentacle.Nowshehalf
uncrossedherlegsand

leanedforward,supportingh
erselfononearm,stretching
outtheother,reachingupslo
wlytowardtheeyes,toward

theirsolitudeandemptiness
.Herfingertipstrembledab
ovethefringesofhercircle;
shesighed,hesitated,reach
ed

out....

Theboyblinked,hiseyelids
flickinglikealizard's.Thes
pellwasbroken.Kitty'sskin
crawled;herhandjerkedbac
k.

Sheshrankintothecenteroftheircircle,freshsweatbeadingonherbrow.Stiltheboydidnotmove.

"Whatdoyoupresume,"avoicesaid,"toknowaboutme?"

Ithadsoundedalaroundher—notloudly,butverynearatand—avoicedifferentfromanythatshehadheard

before.ItspokeinEnglish,buttheinflectionwasodd,asifthetonguefoundthelanguagealienandstrange;it

soundedclose,butalsonots

o,asifdredgedupfromsomei
ncalculabledistance.

"Whatdoyouknow?"thevoic
esaidagain,quieterthanbefo
re.Thedjinni'slipswerresti
l,theblackeyeslockedon

her.Kittyhunchedherselfag
ainstthefloor,trembling,te
ethclenchedtogether.Some
thinginthevoiceunmanned

her,butwhat?Itdidnotspeak
violentlyorwithanger,quit
e.Butitwasavoiceofpowerf
romafar-offplace,avoice

ofterriblecommand,anditw

as a child's voice too.

She lowered her head and shook it dumbly, gazing at the floor.

"TELL ME!" Now there was anger in the voice; as it spoke, a great noise sounded in the room—a thunderclap that

shook the window and rippled out across the floorboards, sending chips of rotten plaster dropping from the walls. The

door slammed shut (but she had not open edit, nor seen it op

e n) ; t h e w i n d o w s h at t e r e d an
d f e l aw ay . A t t h e s ame

t i m e a g r e at w i n d r o s e u p ar o u
n d t h e c h amb e r , w h i r l i n g al ab
o u t h e r , f as t e r an d f as t e r , s e n
d i n g t h e b o w l s o f

r o s e mar y an d r o w an w o o d f l y i
n g , s l amm i n g t h e m o u t ag ai n s t
t h e w al s , s e i z i n g t h e b o o k an d
t h e c an d l e s t i c k s , h e r

s at c h e l an d h e r c o at , c ar r y i n g
t h e m h i g h an d l o w ar o u n d t h e r
o o m , w h i s t l i n g an d w ai l i n g ,
ar o u n d an d ar o u n d an d

ar o u n d u n t i l t h e y b l u r r e d . A n

d n o w t h e v e r y w al s w e r e m o v
i n g t o o , t e ar i n g f r o m t h e i r s o
c k e t s i n t h e f l o o r an d j o i n i n g

i n t h e f r e n z i e d d an c e , s p i t t i n
g b r i c k s l o o s e as t h e y s p un , s
p i r al i n g ar o u n d an d ar o u n d b e
n e at h t h e c e i l i n g . A n d f i n al y

t h e c e i l i n g w as g o n e , an d t h e
aw f u l i mm e n s i t y o f t h e n i g h t
s k y s t r e t c h e d ab o v e , w i t h s t
ar s an d m o o n s p i n n i n g an d t h e

c l o u d s b e i n g d r aw n o u t i n t o p
al e w h i t e t h r e ad s t h at s h o t i n
al l d i r e c t i o n s , u n t i l t h e o n l y
s t i l l p o i n t s i n al t h e u n i v e r s e

w e r e K i t t y a n d t h e b o y i n s i d e t h e i r c i r c l e s .

K i t t y c l a p p e d h e r f i n g e r s a c r o s s h e r e y e s a n d b u r i e d h e r h e a d b e t w e e n h e r k n e e s .

" P l e a s e s t o p , " s h e c r i e d . " P l e a s e ! "

A n d t h e t u m u l t c e a s e d .

S h e o p e n e d h e r e y e s ; s a w n o t h i n g . H e r h a n d s w e r e s t i l l c l a m p e d t o h e r f a c e .

W i t h s t i f f a n d p a i n f u l c a r e , s h e r a i s e d h e r h e a d a n d l o w e r e d h e r h a n d s . T h e r o o m w a s e x a c t

l y as b e f o r e , as i t h ad

al w ay s b e e n : d o o r , b o o k , c an d l e s t i c k s an d w i n d o w , w al l s , c e i l i n g , f l o o r ; b e y o n d t h e w i n d o w , a p l ac i d s k y . A l w as

q u i e t , e x c e p t . . . t h e b o y i n t h e o p p o s i n g p e n t ac l e w as m o v i n g n o w , b e n d i n g h i s l e g s s l o w l y , s l o w l y — t h e n s i t t i n g w i t h

ab r u p t f i n al i t y , as i f al t h e e n e r g y h ad g o n e o u t o f h i m . H i s e y e s w e r e c l o s e d . H e p as s e d a h an d w e ar i l y i n f r o n t o f h i s

f ac e .

He looked at her then, and the eyes, though dark, had nothing of their former emptiness. When he spoke, his voice

was back to normal, but it sounded tired and sad. "If you're going to summon djinn," he said, "you summon their

history with them. It's wise to keep matters firmly in the present, for fear of what you might awaken."

With great difficulty, Kitty forced herself to situpright and face him. Her hair was wet with perspiration; she ran a

handthroughitandwipedher forehead."Therewasnoneed forthat.Imerelymentioned __"

"Aname.Yououghttoknowwh atnamescando."

Kittyclearedherthroat.The firstsurgeoffrightwaswear ingoff,tobefastreplacedwit hatearyfeeling.Shefoughti t

down."Ifyou'resokeentokee pmattersinthepresent,"she gulpedfuriously,"whydoyo upersistinwearing...his

f o r m ? "

T h e b o y f r o w n e d . " Y o u ' r e a l i t t l e t o o c l e v e r t o d a y , K i t t y .W h a t m a k e s y o u t h i n k I ' m w e a r i n g a n y o n e ' s g u i s e ? E v e n i n

m y w e a k e n e d s t a t e I c a n l o o k h o w I p l e a s e . " W i t h o u t s t i r r i n g , h e c h a n g e d s h a p e o n c e , t w i c e , h a l f a d o z e n t i m e s , e a c h

f o r m m o r e s t a r t l i n g t h a n t h e l a s t , e a c h o n e s i t t i n g i n e x a c t l y t h e s a m e p o s i t i o n i n t h e c i r c l e . H e f i n i s h e d a s a g i a n t

r o d e n t o f s o m e k i n d , p l u m p a n d f l u f f y , w i t h h i n d l e g s c r o s s

e d an d f o r e l e g s f o l d e d i r r i t ab l y .

K i t t y d i d n o t b l i n k . " Y e s , b u t y o u d o n ' t g e n e r al y g o ar o u n d as a k i n g - s i z e h am s t e r , " s h e s n ap p e d . " Y o u al w ay s r e v e r t

t o t h e s am e d ar k k i d i n a l o i n c l o t h . W h y ? B e c au s e i t m e an s s o m e t h i n g t o y o u . T h at ' s o b v i o u s . It ' s s o m e o n e i m p o r t an t

f r o m y o u r p as t . A l I h ad t o d o w as w o r k o u t w h o . "

T h e h am s t e r l i c k e d a p i n k p aw an d s m o o t h e d a t u f t o f f u r b e h i n d o n e e ar . " I d o n ' t ac k n o w l e

d g e t h e r e 's an y t r u t h i n

t h o s e f ar -f e t c h e d s t at e m e n t s ," i t s ai d . "B u t I'm c u r i o u s . W h e r e d i d y o u g o f r o m t h e r e ? T h e b o y c o u l d h av e b e e n

an y o n e ."

K i t t y n o d d e d . "T r u e . It h ap p e n e d t h i s w ay . A f t e r o u r l as t m e e t i n g I w as k e e n t o s p e ak w i t h y o u ag ai n . A l I k n e w

ab o u t y o u w as y o u r n am e —o r o n e o f t h e m—B ar t i m ae u s . W h i c h w as t o u g h e n o u g h , s i n c e I d i d n't e v e n k n o w h o w t o

spelit.ButIknewthatifIlookedhard,you'dturnupintheh istoricalrecordssomewhere.SowhenIbegantostudy,

Ikeptmyeyespeeledformentionofyou."

Thehamsternoddedmodestly."Iimaginethatitdidn'ttakelong.Theremustbecountlessreferencestomyexploits."

"Infactittookalmostayearoffindtheslightestmention.Igotthenamesofplentyofotherdemonsofalsortshere

andthereamongthelibrarybo

o k s . N o u d a t h e T e r r i b l e k e p t
c o m i n g u p , as d i d an af r i t n ame
d T c h u e , an d s o me t h i n g

c al e d F aq u ar l w as n o t ab l e t o o
i n a d o z e n c u l t u r e s . A n d t h e n
at l as t y o u ap p e ar e d — a f l e e t i
n g m e n t i o n i n a f o o t n o t e ."

T h e h am s t e r b r i s t l e d ." W hat?
W h i c h b o o k s d i d y o u l o o k i n ?
A l l t h e b e s t o n e s mu s t h av e b e
e n t ak e n o u t . A f o o t n o t e

i n d e e d ! " It c o n t i n u e d mu t t e r
i n g i n d i g n an t l y i n t o i t s fu r .

"M y p r o b l e m , " K i t t y s ai d h as t
i l y , "w as t h at y o u w e r e n 't al w

aysknownasBartimaeus,soe
venwhenyouhadlong,

long,veryimportantmention
s,Icouldn'tpickuponit.Butt
hefootnotehelpedmeout,yo
usee,becauseitlinkedthe

nameIknew—BartimaeusofU
ruk—totwoothers—Sakhral-
Jinni(wasn'tthatyourPersi
anone?)andWakondaofthe

Algonquin.AfterthatIwasab
letogetmorereferencestoy
ouhereandth—Imean,every
whereIlooked.AndsoI

proceeded.Ilearnedabitabo

utsomeofyourtasksandventures,anddiscoveredthenamesofseveralofyour

masters,whichwasinterestingtoo."

"Wel,Ihopeyouwereimpressed,"thehamstersaid.Itstilsoundedratherputout.

"Ofcourse,"Kittywenton."Very.Didyoureallyspeakwith Solomon?"

Thehamstergrunted."Yeah,yeah,onlyabriefchat."Allthesame,itseemedalittlemolified.

"Allthewhile," Kittysaid, "I waslearningtheartofsummoning. Mymasterwasratherslow, andIwasslower, I'm

afraid, butIwasgradualygettingtothestagewhenIfeltImightcalyou. ButIstilhadnoclueetotheidentityof

thisboy, whichwasapity, becauseIknewhewasimportanttoyou. AndthenIsuddenlyfoundthevitalclue! I

discoveredyourEgyptiannname—Rekhyt—andlinkedthatto themagicianPtolemaeus." Shebrokeoff, grinningwith

t r i u m p h .

"E v e n s o , " t h e h am s t e r s ai d , "w h at d i d t h at t e l y o u ? I h av e h ad a h u n d r e d m as t e r s , an d w h e t h e r t h e i r p e n t ac l e s h av e

b e e n d r aw n o n t h e s an d o r t h e s t e p p e , t h e e n m i t y —"

"Y e s , y e s ." K i t t y w av e d t h e h am s t e r i n t o s i l e n c e . "T h at w as e x ac t l y t h e p o i n t . O n e ac c o un t m e n t i o n e d a c l o s e b o n d

b e t w e e n t h i s P t o l e m ae u s an d h i s s l av e s . It al s o m e n t i o n e d t h at h e w as o n l y a b o y w h e n h e d i e d . T h at 's w h e n i t

b e c am e c l e ar t o m e . T h at's w h e n I r e al i z e d t h e i d e n t i t y o f y o u r f av o r i t e g u i s e ."

T h e h am s t e r w as b u s y c l e an i n g o n e o f i t s t o e n ai l s . "A n d w h at d e t ai l s , " i t as k e d l i g h t l y , "m i g h t t h e ac c o u n t h av e g i v e n

ab o u t t h e r e l at i o n s h i p b e t w e e n t h e d j i n n i an d t h e b o y ? J u s t o u t o f i n t e r e s t , y o u u n d e r s t an d ."

"N o t a l o t , " K i t t y ad m i t t e d . "In f ac t , n o t h i n g . I d o n't t h i n k an y t h i n g m u c h i s k n o w n ab o u t P t o l e m ae u s as a p e r s o n an y

more.Someofhiswriting'ssurvived,Ibelieve.Theymentionedathingcaled'Ptolemy's Gate,'whateverthatis—"

Shebrokeoff.Thehamsterwasstaringoutofthewindowatthemidnightmoon.Atlastitturneditsheadtoher,and

asitdidsorevertedbacktothefamiliarshapeoftheboy-magician,PtolemyofAlexandria.

"Enough,"theboysaid."Whatisityouwantfromme?"

Nowthatherguesshadbeenc

onfirmed, Kitty found her perception of the djinni's guise had completely changed. It

was a curious and disconcerting thing to realize that she was looking into the face of a real boy, two thousand years

dead. Previously she had viewed the guise merely as a mask, a costume, one illusion among many. Now, while

acknowledging that still to be true, she could not help but sense the ancient presence. That the demon was

reproducingtheboyaccurately shehadnodoubt: forthefirsttimeshenoticedtwomoleson thethinbrownneck, a

littlepalescarrunningbeneathethechin, aparticularboninessoftheelbowsontheslenderarms. Therewas a

devotiontodetailherethatcouldonlycomewithgenuineaffection, orperhapsevenwithlove.

Thisknowledgegaveherconfidencetoproceed.

"Okay," shesaid, "I'lltellyou.

ButfirstIwanttorepeat—Iam notgoingtoenslaveyou.Whatevveryourresponse,I'll

setyoufree."

"That'smightybigofyou,"the boysaid.

"AllIwantisforyoutolistenfairlytowhatIhavetosay."

"Wel,ifyouactualygetonwithit,Imightgiveitatry."Thedjinnifoldeditsarms."I'lltellyouonethingthat'sin

yourfavor,though,"itwentonruminatively."Inallthecent

u r i e s o f m y b u r d e n , n o t o n e sin
g le m ag i c i an h as b e e n

i n t e r e s t e d e n o u g h e v e n t o ask
ab o u t t h i s g u i s e . W h y s h o u l d
t h e y ? I'm a 'd e m o n , ' an d t h e r e f
o r e w i l l f u l y p e r v e r s e . I

h av e n o m o t i v e s b u t w i c k e d n
e s s an d t e m p t at i o n . T h r o u g h
g e n e r al f e ar an d a d e s i r e f o r s
e l f - p r e s e r v at i o n , t h e y n e v e r

as k m e an y t h i n g ab o u t m y s e l f .
B u t y ou h av e d o n e s o . Y o u ' v e f
o u n d t h i n g s o u t . I w o u l d n ' t s
ay i t w as c l e v e r , b e c aus e

y o u ' r e h u m an , b u t i t w as n ' t a b

adeffort,allinal.So,then"—itwavedaregalhand—"fireaway."

"Right."Kittysettledherselfcomfortably."Idon'tknowwhetheryou'venoticed,butthingshavebeengoingfrombad

toworseinLondon.Themagicianstartingtolosecontrol.Commonersarebeingsentofftofight,trade'sbeing

disrupted.There'salotmorepovertyandthat'sledtodisruption—thereVeevenbeenriotsinsometowns.And

there's a lot of resentment about...demons."

"It's as I predicted when we last spoke," the djinni said. "People are starting to notice spirits and uncover their own

resilience too. They'll explore the possibilities, then begin fighting back."

Kitty nodded. "But the magicians are responding—the police are cracking down, there's violence, people being

arrested and spirited away, worse things seven than that."

"Ithappens," theboysaid.

"Ithinkthatthemagicianswil bepreparedtocarryoutterri bledeeds," Kittywenton, "in ordertoremaininpower.

Therearemanysecretcommo ners' groups, butthey arewe ak, divided. Nooneh as thestr engthtoopposethe

government."

"Thatwilcome," thedjinnis aid. "Intime."

"Buthowmuchtime? That's th eissue."

"Youwantaroughguess?"Theboytiltedhisshead,thinking."!reckonanothercoupleofgenerationswildoit.Say

fiftyyears.That'llallowresilienceto buildupto therequiredlevelsforasuccessfulrevolt.Fiftyyearsisn'ttoobad.

Withluckyoumightseeithappenwhenyou'reasweet,oldgranny,dandlingbigfatbabieson yourknee.Actually"—

heheldupahand,interruptingKitty'scryofprotest—"no,that'swrong.Myprojectionis incorrect."

"G o o d."

"Y o u'l l n e v e r b e a s w e e t o l d g r an n y. L e t's s ay, 's ad, l o n e l y o l d b i d d y' i n s t e ad."

K i t t y b an g e d h e r f i s t ag ai n s t t h e f l o o r. "F i f t y y e ar s i s n't g o o d e n o u g h! W h o k n o w s w h at t h e mag i c i ans w i l h av e d o n e

b y t h e n? M y w h o l e l i f e w i l h av e g o n e b y! I'l p r o b ab l y b e d e ad w h e n t h e r e v o l u t i o n c o me s."

"T r u e," t h e b o y s ai d. "B u t I' ll s t i l b e h e r e t o w at c h i t. I'l l b e e x ac t l y t h e s ame."

"Yes," Kittysnarled."Aren't youlucky?"

"Youthinkso?" Theboylooked downathiscross-leggedform. Hewassittingstraight-backed,legsfoldedneatlyin

themannerofanEgyptianscribe."It'stwothousand,onehundredandtwenty-nineyearssincePtolemydied," he

said."Hewasfourteen.Eightworldempireshaverisenupandfalenawaysincethatday, andIstilcarryhisface.

Whodoyouthinkisthelucky

ne?"

Kittymadenoanswer.Atlengthsheasked,"Whydoyoudoit?Takeonhisshape,Imean."

"BecauseIpromisedmyself,"thedjinnisaid."I'mshowinghimhowhewas.Beforehechanged."

"ButIthoughthenevergrewup,"Kittysaid.

"No.That'sright.Hedidn't."

Kittyopenedhermouthtoaskaquestion,butshookherheadinstead."We'regettingoff

thepoint,"shesaidfirmly.

"Ican'taffordtowaitandwatch whilethemagiciansdomore wickedthings;life'stooshort.Actionisneedednow.

Butwe—thepeople,thecommoners—can'tunseatthegovernmentonourown.Weneedhelp."

Theboyshrugged."Thatmaywelbe."

"So,myidea,ormyproposal,really,"Kittysaid,"isthatthedjinnandotherspiritsgiveusthathelp."Shesatback.

Theboylookedather. "Sayagain."

"Youhelpusout. Afteral, likeyousaidjustnow—we'realvictimshere, bothdjinnandcommoners. Themagicians

subjugateusthesamewhetherwe'rehumanorspirit. So. Wecanteamupanddefeatthem."

Theboy'sfacewasexpressionless. "Justlikethat?"

"Wel, it'snotgoingtobeeasy, ofcourse. Butthere'sboundtobeaway. Forinstance, ifcommonerslikemecan

summonimportantdjinnlike you,whycan'twetakeonthegovernmenttogether?Itneedsabitofthought,andalot

moredemonspiritstogetinvolved,butwe'dhavetheadvantageofsurprise,wouldn'twe?Anditwouldbesomuch

moreeffectiveforustofightasanequalforce:noslaves,nomasters.Noscrappingamongourselvesorundermining

eachother.Juststmoothcooperation.We'dbeunstoppable!"

Shewasleaningforwardinth
epentaclenow;eyesbrightan
dshiningwithhervision.Th
eboyseemedtransfixedtoo;

foralongwhilehedidnotans
wer.Atlasthespoke."Insane,
"hesaid."Nicehair,niceoutf
it,butquite,quitemad."

Kittysquirmedwithfrustrat
ion."Youjusthavetolisten—"

"Quiteafewofmymastersove
rtheyearshavebeenmad,"the
boycontinued."I'vehadrelig
iouszealotsbeating

theirbottomswithbrambles

, d e ad -e y e d e m p e r o r s j o y l e s
s l y c o m m i t t i n g m as s m u r d e r ,
m i s e r s l u s t i n g af t e r h o ar d s o
f

g o l d . I'v e h ad c o u n t l e s s ab u s e
r s o f t h e m s e l v e s an d o t h e r s ...
.Y o u ar e a p e r v e r s e an d u n ap p
e t i z i n g s p e c i e s . I'l g o as

f ar as t o s ay t h at y ou r p ar t i c u l ar
m ad n e s s , K i t t y , i s l e s s h ar m f
u l t h an m o s t , b u t i t w i l l l e ad t o
y o u r d e at h , an d t o m i n e

al s o i f I'm n o t c ar e f u l , s o I'l b e f
r an k w i t h y o u . W h at y o u h av e j
u s t s u g g e s t e d i s r i d i c u l o u s i
n a t h o u s an d w ay s , an d i f

I went through the mall, we'd still be here when the British Empire finaly does fal. So let me single out two reasons.

No djinni, no afrit, no city-tramplingmaridor skin-tickling mite, will ever, ever team up (as you put it) with any kind

of human. Team up... I ask you! Do you see us always wearing the same jerseyor something, going into battle hand in

hand?" The boy laughed—a harsh, unpleasant sound. "No! We've suffered too much pain for us ever to view a human

as an al y."

"T h at's a l i e!" K i t t y s h o u t e d. "I s ay ag ai n—w h at ab o u t P t o l e m y?"

"H e w as u n i q u e!" T h e b o y c l e n c h e d h i s f i s t s. "H e w as t h e e x c e p t i o n. D o n't b r i n g h i m i n t o t h i s!"

"H e d i s p r o v e s e v e r y t h i n g y o u've s ai d!" K i t t y s h o u t e d. "S u r e, i t w o u l d b e d i f f i c u l t t o p e r s u ad e m o s t d e m o n s, b u t—"

"D i f f i c u l t? It c o u l d n e v e r b e d o n e!"

"That's what you said about me learning enough to summon you. But I did it!"

"Utterly irrelevant. Let me tell you something. I've been sitting here, talking nicely, keeping pretty manners as a

djinni will, but all the time I've been watching you like a hawk, waiting to see if you stuck so much as a toe outside

the circle. If you had, I'd have been on to you faster than blinking, and you'd have learned something about humans

anddemonsthen,Icantelyou
."

"Yeah?"Kittysneered."Instead ofwhichyoustuckyourownstupidtoeoutandblewyourskirtoff.Whichmoreor

lesssumsupyourlastfewthousandyears.You'regoingnowhereonyourown,pal."

"Isthatso?"Theboy'sfacewaslividwithfury."Wel,letmegetontothesecondreasonwhyyourplan'sadud,shall

I?EvenifIwantedtohelpyou,evenifahundredotherdjinn

al m o s t as p o t e n t as m e s h ar e d t h at s e n t i m e n t and

w an t e d n o t h i n g b e t t e r t h an t o c as t t h e i r l o t i n w i t h s o m e o at -b r ai n e d h u m an s , w e c o u l d n ' t . B e c au s e t h e o n l y w ay w e

c an c o m e t o E ar t h i s t h r o u g h s u m m o n i n g . A n d t h at m e an s l o s i n g f r e e w i l . It m e an s p ai n . It m e an s o b e y i n g y o u r

m as t e r . A n d t h e r e ' s n o e q u al i t y i n t h at e q u at i o n ."

" R u b b i s h , " K i t t y s ai d . " It d o e s n ' t h av e t o b e t h at w ay ."

"Ofcourseitdoes.What'sthe alternative?Everysummons bindsus.That'swhattheydo. Wouldyouseeksomeway

toletusoffthelesh?Withou rpower?Wouldyoubehappy togiveuscontrol?"

"Ofcourse,"Kittysaidstoutl y."Ifthatwaswhatittook."

"Youwouldn't!Notinamilli onyears."

"Iwould.Ifthetrustwasthere ,I'ddoit."

"Isthatso?Wel,whynotprove

itrightnow?Stepoutofyour pentacle."

"What?"

"Youheardmewelenough.Stepout,acrossthoselines.Yes,thoseonesrightthere.Let'sseethistrustofyoursin

action,shalwe?Givemepowerforamoment.Let'sseeyouputyourmoneywhereyourmouthis."

Ashespokethis,theboysprangup,andafteramomentKittydidsotoo.Theystoodinthe opposingpentacles,

staringateachother.Kittybit herlip.Shefelthotandcoldat thesametime.Thiswasn'tho wshe'dintendeditto

go—rejectionofherpropos al followedbyanimmediatec hallenge;shehadn'timagined itthisway atal.Whattodo

now?Ifshebrokethesummon sbysteppingfromthepentac le,Bartimaeuswouldbeablet odestroyherbefore

vanishing.Herresiliencew ouldnotpreventhimfromte aringherapart.Theideaofthi ssetherfleshtrembling

beneathherclothes.

Shelookedintothefaceofthe long-deadboy.Hesmiledath erinwhatwasevidentlyinten dedtobeanamiable

fashion,buttheeyeswerehar dandmocking.

"Wel?"hesaid."Howaboutit ?"

"You'vejusttoldme,"shesai dhuskily,"aboutwhatyouwo ulddotomeifIbroketheprot ections.Yousaidyou'dfal

uponmefasterthanblinking

."

Thesmileflickered."Oh,don't payanyattentiontothat. Iwas onlybluffing.Youdon'tneed tobelieveeeverythingold

Bartimaeussays,nowdoyou? I'malwaysjoking,youknowth at." Kittysaidnothing."Goon ," theboycontinued,"I

won'tdoanythingtoyou.Puty ourselfinmypowerforamo ment.Youmightbesurprise d.Putyourtrustinme."

Kittyranthetipofadrytongu eagainstherlowerlip.Thebo

ysmiledharderthanever;heputsucheffortintoitthat

thesurfaceofhisfacewastautandstraining.Shelookeddownatthechalkmarksontheflor,thenatherfoot,then

atthechalkagain.

"That'stheticket,"theboysaid.

Kittysuddenlyrealizedthatshehadforgottentobreathe.Sheexhaledviolently."No,"shegasped."No.Thatwon't

achieveanything."

Thedarkeyeswatchedher,themouthasuddenline."Well,"thedjinnisaidsourly,"Iadmitmyhopesweren'thigh."

"It'snotaboutthetrust,"shesaid,lying."It'sthatyou'dsimplydematerialize.Youcan'tstayonEarthwithoutthe

powerofthesummons,andIhaven'tgottheenergytosummonyouagainrightnow.Thepointis,"shewenton

desperately,"thatifyouandotherdjinnjoinedforceswithme,wecoulddefeatthemagiciansandstopthem

summoningyou. Afterwe'd defeatedthem, you'dneverbecaledonagain."

Thedjinnisnorted. "I'venotimeforfantasies, Kitty. Listentoyourself—evenyoudon'tbelieveawordyou'resaying.

Wel, ifthat'sal, youmightaswel dismissme." Theboyturnedhisbackonher.

Atthis, agreatragesurgedthroughKitty. Memoriesofthelastthreeyearsswambeforehereyes; shefeltagainthe

enormouseffortithadtakent

o g e t t h i s f a r . A n d n o w t h i s p r o u d a n d b l i n k e r e d s p i r i t w a s r e j e c t i n g h e r i d e a s o u t o f

h a n d . I t h a d n ' t e v e n g i v e n t h e m a m o m e n t ' s f a i r a n d c o n s i d e r e d t h o u g h t . T r u e , t h e d e t a i l s h a d t o b e w o r k e d o u t ;

t h e r e w e r e m a n y i s s u e s t o b e r e s o l v e d , b u t c l e a r l y s o m e k i n d o f c o o p e r a t i o n w a s b o t h p o s s i b l e a n d n e c e s s a r y . S h e

f e l t c l o s e t o t e a r s , b u t f u r i o u s l y d r o v e t h e s e n s a t i o n a w a y . S h e s t a m p e d h e r f o o t , m a k i n g t h e f l o o r r e v e r b e r a t e . " S o , "

s h e s n ar l e d , "t h at s t u p i d E g y p t i an b o y w as g o o d e n o u g h f o r y o u , w as h e ? Y o u p u t y o u r f ai t h i n him h ap p i l y e n o u g h .

T h e n w h y n o t me ? W h at d i d he d o f o r y o u t h at I c o u l d n't ? W e l ? O r am I t o o l o w l y t o h e ar ab o u t h i s g r e at d e e d s ? " S h e

s p o k e b i t t e r l y , s av ag e l y , c o n t e mp t f o r t h e d e mo n r i s i n g l i k e g al i n s i d e h e r .

H e d i d n o t t u r n t o l o o k at h e r . M o o n l i g h t s p i l l e d o v e r h i s b ar e b ac k an d s t i c k - t h i n l i mb s . "F o r o n e t h i n g , h e f o l o w e d

metotheOtherPlace."

Kittyfoundhervoiceatlast. "Butthat's—"

"It'snotimpossible.It'sjustnotdone."

"Idon'tbelieveit."

"Youdon'thaveto.ButPtolemaeusdid.Ichallengedhimtoprovehistrustinmetoo.Andthatwasthewayhedidit:

bydevisingtheGateofPtolemy.Hewentthroughthefourelementstofindme.Andhepaidtheprice,asheguessed

hewould.Afterthat—wel,if he'dproposedaharebrainedunionofcommonersanddjinn, perhapsthenI'dhavegone

alongwithit.Therewasnolimittoourbond.Butforyou,wel-intentionedasyouare...? Sorry,Kitty.Ithinknot."

Shestaredathisback,sayingnothing.Finalytheboyturned,hisfacehiddenineinshadow. "WhatPtolemydidwas

unique,"hesaidsoftly."Iwouldn'taskitofanyoneelse,notevenyou."

"D i d i t k i l h i m ? " s h e as k e d .

H e s i g h e d . "N o . .."

"T h e n w h at p r i c e —? "

"M y e s s e n c e i s a little v u l n e r ab l e t o d ay , " B ar t i m ae u s s ai d . "I'd b e g r at e f u l i f y o u w o u l d k e e p y o u r w o r d an d l e t m e

g o ."

"I'm g o i n g t o . B u t I d o t h i n k y o u m i g h t s t ay an d t al k a l i t t l e m o r e . W h at P t o l e m y d i d d o e s n't h av e t o b e u n i q u e .

M ay b e i t's j u s t t h at n o o n e s i n c

eknowsmuchaboutthisGatething."

Theboylaughedshortly."Oh,theyknow,allright.Ptolemywroteabouthisjourney;someofhisnotessurvived.Like

you,hetalkedalotofnonsenseaboutatrucebetweenmagicians anddjinn.Hehopedotherswouldfolowhis

example,takethesameriskhedid.Andovertheyearsafewdidtry,moreoutofgreedandthelustforpowerthan

withhisidealism.Itdidn'tgo welforthem."

"Whynot?"

Noanswercame;theboylooked away.

"Allright,saynothing,"shecried."Idon'tcare.I'llreadPtolemy'snotesformyself."

"Oh,youunderstandancient Greek,doyou?"Helaughedat theexpressiononherface."Justdon'tworryaboutit,

Kitty.Ptolemy'slonggone, andthemodernworldisdark

andcomplicated.Youcan'tmakeadifference.Lookafter

yourselfandsurvive.That'swhatIdo."Heprodded athisflesh."Ortryto.Mandrakeverynearlyhadmekiledjust

now."

Kittytookadeepbreath.Downstairs,insomebook-filedcornerofhisdecayingvila,Mr.Buttonslept;nextmorning

hewouldexpectherbrightandearlytobeginthecolationofnewpapers.Intheeveningshewouldbeat TheFrog

oncemore,helpingtorepairt
hebar,servingoutdrinkstop
assivecommoners....Witho
uthersecretplantodrive

her,theseprospectsseemed
wearisomeindeed.

"Idon'tneedyouradvice,"sh
esaidharshly."Idon'tneedan
ythingfromyou."

Theboylookedup."Wel,I'ms
orryifI'vedeflatedyouabit,
"hesaid,"butthosethingsne
ededsaying.Isuggest—"

Kittyclosedhereyesandspo
kethecommand.Itwastentati

veatfirst,thenveryquick—shefeltasuddenviolencein

her:shewantedtogetridofhim,bedonewithit.

Airmovedaroundherface,candlesmokefiledhernostrils,thedemon'svoicerecededintonothing.Shedidnotneed

tolooktoknowthathehadvanished,andwithhimthreewholeyearsofherhopesanddreams.

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H al f w ay h o m e f r o m t h e h o u s e o f Q u e n t i n M ak e p e ac e J o h n M an d r ak e g av e an ab r u p t c o m m an d . H i s c h au f f e u r l i s t e n e d ,

s al u t e d , an d d i d a U - t u r n i n h e av y t r af f i c . T h e y d r o v e t o C h i s w i c k at t o p s p e e d .

N i g h t h ad f al l e n . T h e w i n d o w s o f t h e F r o g In n w e r e d ar k an d s h u t t e r e d , t h e d o o r w as b ar r e d . A r o u g h , h an d w r i t t e n

s i g n h ad b e e n p o s t e d i n t h e p o r c h .

SAM WEBBER'S FUNERAL TAKES PLACE TODAY

WE ARE CLOSED

REOPENING TOMORROW

M an d r ak e k n o c k e d r e p e at e d l y , b u t d r e w n o r e s p o n s e . T h e w i n d g u s t e d al o n g t h e d r ab , g r ay T h ame s ; o n t h e s h i n g l e

s e ag u l s f o u g h t o v e r s c r ap s d e p o s i t e d b y t h e t i d e . A r e d v i g i l an c e s p h e r e i n t h e c o u r t y ar d p u l s e d as h e d e p ar t e d .

M an d r ak e s c o w l e d at i t , an d r e t u r n e d t o c e n t r al L o n d o n .

T h e mat t e r o f K i t t y J o n e s c o u l d w ai t . T h at o f B ar t i mae u s , h

owever,couldnot.

Aldemonslied:thiswasanin controvertiblefact.So,intr uth,Mandrakeshouldnothav ebeenparticularlystartled

thathisslaveconformedtoty pe.Butwhenhelearnedthat Bartimaeushadconcealedthes urvivalofKittyJones,the

shockaffectedhimprofound ly.

Why?Inpartbecauseoftheim agehehadbuiltupofthelong- deadKitty.Foryearsherface haddriftedinhis

memory, spotlit by a guilty fascination. She had been his mortal enemy, yet she had sacrificed herself for him; it was

a gesture that Mandrake could scarcely comprehend, but it's strangeness, together with her youth, her vigor, and the

fierce defiance in her eyes, had taken on a bittersweet allure that never failed to pierce him. The dangerous

Resistance fighter he had hunted down so long before had, in the quiet, secret places of his mind, become something

pureandpersonal,abeautifu
lrebuke,asymbol,aregret
.... Manythings,infact—alfarr
emovedfromtheoriginal

living,breathinggirl.

Butifshelived...? Mandrake
feltasurgeofpain. Itwasthes
ensationcausedbythedestru
ctionofthispeaceful

innershrine,byasuddenrus
hofconfusionandrenewedm
emoriesofthe actual,messyp
ast;bywavesofangerand

disbelief. KittyJoneswasn
olongeraprivateimageinhis

h e ad —t h e w o r l d h ad r e c l ai m e d h e r . H e f e l t al m o s t

b e r e av e d .

A n d B ar t i m ae u s h ad l i e d t o h i m . W hy h ad h e d o n e s o ? T o s p i t e h i m , c e r t ai n l y —b u t t h i s d i d n o t s e e m q u i t e e n o u g h .

W e l t h e n —t o p r o t e c t K i t t y . B u t t h at p r e s up p o s e d a c l o s e n e s s b e t w e e n g i r l an d d j i n n i , s o m e k i n d o f b o n d . C o u l d t h i s

b e s o ? M an d r ak e f e l t a j e al o u s k n o w l e d g e i n t h e p i t o f h i s s t o m ac h t h at i t w as s o ; t h e n o t i o n c o i l e d an d s l i t h e r e d d e e p

i n s i d e h i m .

If t h e m o t i v e f o r t h e d j i n n i ' s l i e w as h ar d t o f at h o m , t h e t i m i n g o f t h e r e v e l at i o n c o u l d n o t h av e b e e n m o r e b i t t e r ,

c o m i n g s o s o o n af t e r M an d r ak e h ad j e o p ar d i z e d h i s c ar e e r t o s av e h i s s e r v ant ' s l i f e . H i s e y e s b u r n e d as h e r e c al e d

t h e ac t ; h i s f o l l y r o s e u p t o c h o k e h i m .

In t h e m i d n i g h t s o l i t u d e o f h i s s t u d y h e m ad e t h e s u m m o n s . T w e n t y - f o u r h o u r s h ad p as s e d s i n c e h e h ad d i s m i s s e d

thefrog;whetherBartimaeus'sessencewouldhaveheal edbynowhedidnotknow.Heno longercared.Hestood

ramrod-stiff,handsdrummin gincessantlyonthedeskbef orehim.Andwaited.

Thepentacleremainedcold andquiet.Theincantationec hoedinhishead.

Mandrakemoistenedhislips .Hetriedagain.

Hedidnotmakeathirdattemp t,butsatdownheavilyinhisl eatherchair,seekingtosupp

ressthepanicthatrose

withinhim.Therecouldbeno doubt:thedemonwasalreadyinthe world.Someoneelsehadsummonedhim.

Mandrake'seyesburnedhotintothedarkness.Heshouldhavepredictedthis.Oneofthe othermagicianshad

disregardedtheriskto thedjinni'sessenceandhadsought tofindoutwhatheknewabout theJenkinsplot.Ithardly

matteredwhoitwas.Whether Farrar,Mortensen,Colins,o

r a n o t h e r , t h e o u t l o o k f o r M a n d r a k e w a s g r i m i n d e e d . I f

B a r t i m a e u s s u r v i v e d , h e w o u l d d o u b t l e s s t e l l t h e m M a n d r a k e 's b i r t h n a m e . O f c o u r s e h e w o u l d ! H e h a d a l r e a d y

b e t r a y e d h i s m a s t e r o n c e . T h e n h i s e n e m i e s w o u l d s e n d t h e i r d e m o n s , a n d h e w o u l d d i e , a l o n e .

H e h a d n o a l i e s . H e h a d n o f r i e n d s . H e h a d l o s t t h e s u p p o r t o f t h e P r i m e M i n i s t e r . I n t w o d a y s , i f h e s u r v i v e d , h e

w o u l d b e o n t r i a l b e f o r e t h e C

ouncil.Hewasonhisown.True,QuentinMakepeacehadofferedhissupport,but

Makepeacewasquiteprobablyderanged.Thatexperimentofhis,thatwrithingcaptive...thememoryofitrepelled

JohnMandrake.Ifhemanagedtosalvagehiscareer,hewouldtakestepstostopsuchgrotesqueactivities.Butthat

washardlytheprioritynow.

Thenightprogressed.Mandrakesatathisdesk,thinking.Hedidnotsleep.

Withtimeandweariness,thetroublesthatbesethimbegantolosetheirclarity.Bartimaeus,Farrar,Devereaux,and

KittyJones,theCouncil,thetrial,thewar,hisendlessresposibilities—everythingmergedandflickeredbeforehis

eyes.Agreatyearningrosein himtocastitaloff,removeitlikeawetandfetidsetofclothes,andstepaway,ifonly

foramoment.

Athoughtoccurredtohim,w

ild,impulsive.Hebroughto
uthisscryingglass,andorde
redtheimptolocateacertain

person.Itdidsoswiftly.

Mandrakerosefromhischair,
consciousofthestrangestfe
eling.Somethingdredgedfr
omthepast—almostasorrow.

Itdiscomfortedhim,butwas
pleasanttoo.Hewelcomedit
,thoughitmadehimuneasy.A
boveal,itwasnotofhis

currentlife—ithadnothingt
odowithefficiencyoreffec
tiveness,withreputationor

w i t h p o w e r . H e c o u l d n o t r i d

h i m s e l f o f t h e d e s i r e t o s e e h e r f ac e ag ai n .

F i r s t l i g h t : t h e s k i e s w e r e l e ad e n g r ay an d t h e p av e m e n t s d ar k an d s l o u g h e d w i t h l e av e s . T h e w i n d s k i t t e r e d t h r o u g h

t h e b r anc h e s o f t h e t r e e s and ar o u nd t h e s t ar k s p i r e o f t h e w ar m e m o r i al i n t h e c e nt e r o f t h e p ar k . T h e w o man 's c o at

w as t u r n e d u p ag ai n s t h e r f ac e . A s s h e ap p r o ac h e d , s t r i d i n g s w i f t l y al o n g b e s i d e t h e r o ad , h e ad d o w n , h and u p

against her scarf, Mandrake failed to recognize her at first. She was smaller than her recalled, her hair longer and a

little flecked with gray. But then from nowhere, a familiar detail: the bag she carried her pens in—old, battered,

recognizably the same. The same bag! He shook his head in wonder. He could buy her a new one—a dozen of them—

should she wish it.

He waited in the car until she drew almost level, uncertain u

ntilthelastmomentwhether hewouldactualystepout.

Herbootsscatteredtheleaves,trippedcarefulyaroundthedeeperpuddles,walkingspeedilythankstothecoldand

themoistureintheair.Soonshewouldbepasthim....

Hedespisedhimselfforhisheesitation.Heopenedtheroadsidedoor,gotout,andsteppedacrosstointercepther.

"Ms.Lutyens."

Hesawhergiveasuddenstart

and her eyes dart around to appraise him and the sleek, black car parked behind. She

walked another two hesitant steps, came to an uncertain halt. She stood looking at him, one ear manginglimply at

herside, the other clutching atherthroat. Hervoice, when itcame, wassmal—and, henoted, ratherscared. "Yes?"

"MightIhavea word?" Hehad chosentowearamoreofficial suitthanwashiswont. Hehadn't needed todothis

e x ac t l y , b u t h e 'd f o u n d h e w an t e d t o m ak e t h e b e s t i m p r e s s i o n . L as t t i m e s h e 'd s e e n h i m , h e 'd b e e n n o t h i n g b u t a

h u m i l i at e d b o y .

"W h at d o y o u w an t ? "

H e s m i l e d . S h e w as very d e f e n s i v e . G o o d n e s s k n o w s w h at s h e t h o u g h t h e w as . S o m e o f f i c i al , c o m e t o i n q u i r e ab o u t

h e r t ax e s .. ."J u s t a c h at , " h e s ai d ."I r e c o g n i z e d y o u ... an d I w o n d e r e d i f ... i f y o u r e c o g n i z e d m e ."

Herfacewaspale,stiletchedwithworry;frowning,hereyesscannedhis."I'msorry,"shebegan,"Idon't—Oh.Yes,

Ido.Nathaniel..."Shehesitated."ButIdon'tsupposeIcanusethatname."

Hemadeanelegantgesture."Itisbestforgotten,yes."

"Yes..."Shestoodlookingathim—athissuit,hisshoes,hissilverring,butmostlyathisface.Herscrutinywas

deeperthanhehadexpected,seriousandintense.Rather t

ohissurprise,shedidnotsmile,ordisplayanyimmediate

elation.Butofcoursehisappearancehadbeensudden.

Heclearedhisthroat."Iwaspassing.Isawyouand—well,it'sbeenalongtime."

Shenoddedslowly."Yes."

"Ithoughtitwould...Sohowareyou,Ms.Lutyens?Howareyoukeeping?"

"I'mwell,"shesaid,andthen,almostsharply:"Doyouhaveanameiamallowedtouse?"

Headjustedacuff,smiledvaguely."JohnMandrakeismynamenow.Youmayperhapshaveheardofme."

Shenoddedagain,expressionless."Yes.Ofcourse.So,you'redoing...wel."

"Yes.I'mInformationMinisternow.Havebeenforthelasttwoyears.Itwasquiteasurprise,asIwasratheryoung.

ButMr.Devereauxdecidedtotakeagambleonmeand"—hegavealittleshrug—"hereIam."

Hehadexpectedthistoelicit

morethanyetanotherbriefnod,butMs.Lutyensremainedun effusive.Withslight

annoyanceinhisvoice,hesaid,"Ithoughtyou'dbepleasedtoseehowwellit'salturnedout,after—afterthelast

timewesaweachother.Thatwasallvery...unfortunate."

Hewasusingthewrongwords,thatmuchhecouldtel—slippingintothestudiedunderstatementofhisministerial

liferatherthansayingexactlywhatwasinhismind.Perhaps

t h at w as w h y s h e s e e m e d s o s t i f f an d u n r e s p o n s i v e . H e

t r i e d ag ai n : "I w as g r at e f u l t o y o u , t h at 's w h at I w an t e d t o t e l y o u . G r at e f u l t h e n . A n d I s t i l am n o w ."

S h e s h o o k h e r h e ad , f r o w n i n g . "G r at e f u l f o r w h at ? I d i d n 't d o an y t h i n g ."

"Y o u k n o w —w h e n L o v e l ac e at t ac k e d m e . T h at t i m e h e b e at m e , an d y o u t r i e d t o s t o p h i m ... I n e v e r g o t a c h anc e t o —

"

"As you say, it was unfortunate. But it was also a long time ago." She flicked a wisp of hair from her face. "So, you're

the Information Minister? You're the one responsible for those pamphlet things they're giving out at the stations?"

He smiled modestly. "Yes. That's me."

"The ones that tell us what a fine war we're waging and how only the best young men are signing up for it, that it's a

man's job to sail off to Americ

aandfightforfreedomandsecurity?Theonesthatsaythatdeathisafitpricetopay

forthesurvivalofthe Empire?"

"Atrifletoosuccinct,butthat'sthethrustofit,Isuppose."

"Wel,wel.You'vecomealongway,Mr.Mandrake." Shewaslookingathimalmostsadly.

Theairwascold;themagicianstuffedhishandsinhistrouserpocketsandglancedupanddownthe road,searching

forsomethingtosay."Idon'tsupposeyouusualyseeyourpupilsagain,"hesaid."Whentheyv'egrownup,Imean.

Seehowthey'vegoton..."

"No,"sheagreed."Myjobiswiththechildren.Notwiththeadultstheybecome."

"Indeed,"Helookedatherbatteredoldbag,rememberingitsdulsatininterior,withthelittlecasesofpencils,chalks,

inkpens,andChinesebrushes."Areyouhappyinyourjob,

Ms. Lutyens?" he asked suddenly. "I mean, happy with

your money, and your status and all that? I ask you because I could, you know, find you other employment if you

chose. I have influence, and could find you something better than this. There are strategists in the War Ministry, for

example, who need people with your expertise to design mass-produced pentacles for the American campaign. Or

even in my ministry—we've c

r e at e d an ad v e r t i s i n g d e p ar t m e n t t o b e t t e r p u t ac r o s s o u r m e s s ag e t o t h e p e o p l e .

T e c h n i c i an s l i k e y o u w o u l d b e w e l c o m e d . It's g o o d w o r k , d e al i n g w i t h c o n f i d e n t i al i n f o r m at i o n . Y o u'd g e t a r i s e i n

s t at u s ."

"B y't h e p e o p l e , ' I t ak e i t y o u m e an'c o m m o n e r s'? " s h e as k e d .

"T h at's w h at w e'r e c al l i n g t h e m n o w i n p u b l i c , " h e ag r e e d . "T h e y s e e m t o p r e f e r i t . D o e s n't m e an an y t h i n g , o f c o u r s e ."

"I s e e , " s h e s ai d c r i s p l y . "W e l l , n o —t h an k y o u , b u t I am q u i t e al r i g h t as I am . I'm s u r e n o n e o f t h e d e p ar t m e n t s

w o u l d w an t an o l d c o m m o n e r l i k e m e t h r u s t i n t o t h e i r m i d s t , an d an y w ay , I s t i l r at h e r e n j o y m y j o b . B u t i t i s v e r y

k i n d o f y o u , al t h e s ame ." S h e p u s h e d up h e r c o at s l e e v e an d g l an c e d at h e r w at c h .

T h e mag i c i an c l ap p e d h i s h an d s to g e t h e r . "Y o u h av e t o g e t o n ! " h e s ai d . "L i s t e n , w h y d o n't I g i v e y o u a l i f t ? M y

chauffeurcantakeyouanywhere.Saveyoubeingcrammedinlikeasardineonabusortrain__"

"No,thankyou.Youareverykind."Herfacewasstony.

"Verywel,ifthat'sthewayyoufeelaboutit."Despitethechillyair,hefelthotandirritable.Ferventlyhewishedhe

hadremainedwithinthecar."Well,ithasbeenapleasureseeingyouagain.Ofcourse,Imustaskyoutotreatwhat

youknowinthestrictestcon

fidence.... NotthatIneedtom entionthat, I'msure, " headde d, somewhatfoolishly.

Atthis, Ms. Lutyenslooked athiminsuchawaythathewass uddenlytransportedbackhal fhislifetime, tothedays

whenherraredispleasurecas thisschoolroomintodesper ateshadow. Hefoundhimself lookingathisshoes. "Doyou

reallythink, " shesaidtartly, "thatI'lwanttotelthewor ldthatIoncesawyou, thegreatJoh nMandrake, our

b e l o v e d In f o r m at i o n M i n i s t e r , h an g i n g u p s i d e d o w n w i t h y o u r b o t t o m i n t h e ai r ? T h at I h e ar d y o u r y e l p s an d w ai l s o f

p ai n as c r u e l m e n b e at y o u ? Y o u t h i n k I'd t e l l t h i s ? T h at's r e al y w h at y o u t h i n k ? "

"N o ! N o t t h at . I m e an t ab o u t m y n am e —"

"O h , that " S h e g av e a s h o r t , d r y l au g h . "It m ay s u r p r i s e y o u t o k n o w , " s h e w e n t o n , "t h at I'v e g o t b e t t e r t h i n g s t o d o

w i t h m y t i m e . Y e s , e v e n I, w i t h m y s i l y l i t t l e u n i m p o r t an t j

ob,don'thaveagreatdesiretobetraythechildrenIonce

workedwith,nomatterwhatthey'vebecome.Yourbirthname,Mr.Mandrake,issafewithme.NowImustgo.I'm

lateformywork."

Sheturned,begantostrideoffalongthepavement.Hebithislip,hisangermixedwithdistress."You're

misinterpretingwhatI'msaying,"hecried."Ididn'tcomeheretocrowoveryou.Ijustdidn'tgetachance,backthen,

t o t h an k y o u . . . ."

M s . L u t y e n s p au s e d , an d l o o k e d b ac k o v e r h e r s h o u l d e r . H e r f ac e h ad l o s t i t s an g e r . "N o , I t h i nk I d o u n d e r s t an d , " s h e

s ai d . "A n d I am p l e as e d t o k n o w i t . B u t y o u m i s t ak e y o u r s e l f . It w as t h e b o y w h o w as g r at e f u l t o m e , an d y o u ar e n o

l o n g e r t h at b o y . Y o u d o n o t s p e ak f o r h i m . W e h av e n o t h i n g i n c o mm o n , y o u an d I."

"I w an t e d t o s ay t h at I k n o w y o u w e r e t r y i n g t o s av e m e , an d —"

"Yes," she said, "and I'm sorry I didn't. Good-bye, Mr. Mandrake." Then she was off, walking swiftly away from him

among the damp leaves.

17

Another few hours, another summons—hey, that's the way I like it. A day without enslavement is a day that's wasted,

as far as I'm concerned.

Let me see... I'd had Mandrake. I'd had the girl. Who would it be this time? After Kitty's surpr

i s e ap p e ar an c e i n t h e

p e n t ac l e I h al f e x p e c t e d t h i s
o n e t o b e t h e p o s t m an .

N o s u c h l u c k . It w as m y d e ar o l
d m as t e r ag ai n , f ac e l i k e t h u n d
e r . W i t h a s i l v e r -t i p p e d s p e
ar h e l d r e ad y i n h i s h and .

H i s e v i d e n t i n t e n t s t i m u l at e
d a s w i f t r e s p o n s e . I f o r c e d m
y p o o r o l d e s s e n c e i n t o an i m p
o s i n g s h ap e : a l i o n -h e ad e d

w ar r i o r , o f t h e k i n d t h at f o u g
h t i n E g y p t 's w ar s .l L e at h e r b r
e as t p l at e , l o o p e d b r o n z e s k i
r t , e y e s t h at s h o n e l i k e c r y s t

al ,

f an g e d t e e t h g l ar i n g f r o m b l ac k g u m s . N i c e . I h e l d o u t a w ar n i n g p aw .

1. Technically, I suppose I was l i o n es s -hea d ed , since I lack ed a m ane. M anes are v ery

ov errated; ok ay, they' re g ood for posing , b ut they b lock out al your side v ision in b attle, and

g et terrib ly clag g y with accum ulated b lood.

"D o n 't e v e n thin k ab o u t i t , s q u i r t ."

"I want answers, Bartimaeus! Answers! And if not—see this spear? I'll make you eat it before I'm done." The words

came tumbling from his twisted mouth. His eyes were wide and staring like a fish. He seemed a little upset.

"You? You'd only recognize the sharpend if you sat on it." My voice was velvet-smooth. "Be careful, though. I'm not

exactly defenseless myself." From my paddy-paw a talon popped, curved like a sickle moon. I turned it idly, so it

c au g h t t h e l i g h t .

H e g r i n n e d n as t i l y . "A h , b u t t h at 's al s h o w , i s n 't i t ? T w o d ay s ag o y o u w e r e n 't e v e n ab l e t o talk , l e t al o n e r e s i s t

at t ac k . I'm b e t t i n g i f I p r o d y o u w i t h t h i s s i l v e r h e r e , y o u 'l k n o w ab o u t i t . A n d y o u w o n 't b e ab l e t o r e v e r s e i t o n m e

e i t h e r ."2

2 . H e was rig ht, unfortunately. I f he' d z apped m e with a punishm ent spel , I could hav e turned

it b ack on him (a m aj or b enefit of k

nowing his b irth nam e) , b ut I had no such defense ag ainst

an actual spear-thrust, especial y in m y current deb ilitated state.

"Y o u r e c k o n ? " T h e l i o n e s s d r e w h e r s e l f u p t o h e r f u l l h e i g h t . H e r t u f t y e ar s s c r ap e d t h e c e i l i n g . "T h e m's m i g h t y b i g

w o r d s , s t r an g e r . G o ah e ad an d p r o v e 'e m ."

H e s n ar l e d , l u n g e d w e ak l y w i t h t h e s p e ar . T h e l i o n e s s f l i n c h e d s i d e w ay s an d s l i c e d d o w n at t h e s p e ar s h af t w i t h h e r

c l aw . It w as a p at h e t i c d i s p l ay
al r o u n d : w e b o t h m i s s e d b y m
i l e s .

"W h at s o r t o f t h r u s t d 'y o u c al l
t h at ? " t h e l i o n s c o f f e d , h o p p
i n g f r o m o n e f o o t t o an o t h e r .
"Y o u 'r e l i k e a b l i n d s p ar r o w

p e c k i n g f o r a w o r m ."

"Y o u w e r e n o b e t t e r ."T h e m ag
i c i an w as s h u f f l i n g f r o m s i d e
t o s i d e w i t h i n h i s p e n t ac l e , d
u c k i n g d o w n , j e r k i n g up ,

f e i n t i n g w i t h h i s s p e ar i n e v e
r y d i r e c t i o n k n o w n t o man . H
e w h e e z e d , h e g as p e d ; h e d i s p

l ay e d al l t h e s k i l l o f s o m e o n e

w h o s e s e r v an t s n o r m al y l i f t h i s k n i f e an d f o r k .

"H e y , " I s ai d . "I'm t h i s w ay . T o t h e f r o n t ."

"An swers, B ar t i m ae u s ! " h e c r i e d ag ai n . "T e l l m e t h e t r u t h ! N o d e l ays , n o e v as i o n s . W h o s u m m o n e d y o u ? "

I'd e x p e c t e d t h i s . B u t I c o u l d n't t e l l h i m t h at K i t t y w as s t i l al i v e , o f c o u r s e . H o w e v e r mi s g u i d e d s h e w as , s h e'd t r e at e d

m e w i t h h o n o r . T h e l i o n e s s l o o k e d s h e e p i s h .3 "W h o s ay s an y on e s u m m o n e d m e ? "

3 . A confusing analog y, b ut you g et the idea.

"I d o an d d o n't d e n y i t ! I t r i e d l as t n i g h t an d y o u w e r e g o n e . W h o w as i t ? W h i c h m ag i c i an w e r e y o u s e e i n g ? "

"D o n't g e t s o w o r k e d u p . It w as a b r i e f e n c o u n t e r . N o t h i n g s e r i o u s . It's o v e r ."

"N othin g seriou s? " A n o t h e r j ab w i t h t h e s p e ar , t h i s t i m e p r o n g i n g t h e f l o o r b o ar d s . "T h i n k

I'm going to believe that?"

"Calm down, Mr. Jealous. You're making a scene."

"Who was it? Man or woman?"

I tried to be reassuring. "Look, I know what you're thinking, and I didn't. Is that good enough for you?"

"No! You expect me to trust a word you say?"

So much for reassurance. The lioness reverted to bare faced cheek.4 "Alright, then—trust this: Get lost. It's none of

yourbusiness.Iowe youno thing."

4. Confusing again. Sorry.

Theboywas soangryIthought hewasgoingtoburstoutofhis suit. Itwasthefearinhim,of course;thefearofme

passingonhisname.

"Listen,sonny,"Isaid."Inev erpassinformationfromone mastertoanotherunlessit'sf irmlyinmyinterests,so

don'texpectmetosayanythin gtoyouaboutlastnight.Byth

e s ame t o k e n I'v e n o t t o l d an y o
n e y o u r p a th e t i c l i t t l e

b i r t h n ame .W h y s h o u l d I? It m e
an s n o t h i n g t o me . B u t i f y o u 'r
e s o w o r r i e d ab o u t m e r e v e al i
n g y o u r c h i l d h o o d s e c r e t s ,

t h e r e 's a s i m p l e s o l u t i o n . D i
s m i s s me f o r g o o d ! B u t n o —y
o u c an 't b r i n g y o u r s e l f t o d o t
h at , c an y o u ? In f ac t , I d o n 't

t h i n k y o u ac t u al l y wan t t o b r e
ak aw ay f r o m y o u r p as t . T h at 's
w h y y o u k e e p me ar o u n d , n o m
at t e r h o w w e ak I g e t .

It 's s o y o u c an h an g o n t o t h e N at

haniel youoncewere, aswel asthebig, bad JohnMandrakey ou'vebecome."

Themagicians aidnothing, butlookedatmeblanklywithhis hotandhollowe yes. Icouldn'tblameh im. Iwas a bit

surprisedmyselfinac tual fac t. Don'tknowwherethosepie rcinginsightscamefrom. Al lthesame, Iwonderedifthey

ratherwentoverhishead. He wasn'tlookingwel.

Wewereinhisstudy; itwas, Ig uessed, lateafternoon. Paper

swerestrewnaboutthepl ace ;therew as anuneaten

plateoffoodu ponhisdesk. T heairhad a sour, stalesmelth atsuggestedprolongedoccu pationby anunw ashed

youth. Andsureenough, they outhinquestionw asnothisus ualdapperself. His facew as p uffy, hiseyesreddand

wild; hisshirt(distressingl yunbuttoned) hungoverhist rousersinsloppyfashion. Al veryoutofcharacter: Mandr ake

w as n o r mal y d e f i n e d b y h i s r i g i d s e l f-c o n t r o l . S o m e t h i n g s e e m e d t o h av e s t r i p p e d al l t h at aw ay .

W e l , t h e p o o r l ad w as e m o t i o n al l y b r i t t l e . H e n e e d e d s y m p at h e t i c h and l i n g .

"Y o u'r e a m ess," I s n e e r e d . "Y o u'v e l o s t i t b i g-t i m e . W h at's h ap p e n e d ? A l l y o u r g u i l t and s e l f-l o at h i n g s ud d e n l y g e t t o

y o u ? It c an't j ust b e t h at s o m e o n e e l s e c al e d m e , s u r e l y ? "

T h e b o y l o o k e d up i n t o t h e l i o n ess's c r y st al e y e s . "N o . . ." h e

s a i d s l o w l y ."I'v e o t h e r c au s e f o r c o mp l ai n t t o o . A n d

y ou ' re at t h e h e ar t o f i t al ."

"M e .? " A n d t h e r e w as I, l am e n t i n g m y d e c l i n e ! L o o k e d l i k e t h e r e w as l i f e i n t h e o l d d j i n n i y e t . I p e r k e d up . "H o w s o ? "

"W e l "—h e s e t t h e s p e ar ag ai n s t t h e g r o u n d , n ar r o w l y av o i d i n g i mp al i n g h i s t o e —"I'l l j u s t r u n t h r o u g h i t f o r y o u , s h al

I? F i r s t l y —i n t h e l as t t w e n t y - f o u r h o u r s t h e r e h av e b e e n an u mb e r o f s e r i o u s r i o t s i n L o n d o n . T h e c o mm o n e r s h av e

caused much damage. There has been fighting and some casualties. Even now there is disorder on the streets. This

morning Devereaux declared a state of emergency. Troops have blockaded White hal. The machinery of Empire has

been seriously disrupted."

"Sounds like a bad day at the office for you," I said. "But nothing to do with me."

He coughed. "A certain frog," he said, "began ital two nights ago by causing chaos in St. J

ames's Park. Thanks to his

actions, a dangerous djinni was set loose among the crowd. It was this incident that triggered the riots."

The lioness uttered a roar of protest. "That was hardly my fault! I was trying to carry out your orders in a thoroughly

weakened state. I succeeded in difficult circumstances. Stop — don't laugh like that. It's creepy."

The youth had thrown his head back and uttered a hollow, bark

inglaughnotdissimilartoah
yena's."Succeeded?"he

cried."Isthatwhatyoucallit?
Nearlyexpiringatmyfeet,un
ableto give me one word of th
ereportI'dasked for,

makingmelookafoolinpubli
c?Ifthat'ssuccess,giveme fai
lureanytime."

"Imadeafoolofyou?"Thelio
nesscouldbarelycontainher
mirth."Getreal.Youdon'tnee
danyhelponthatscore,

chum. What did I do? Draw attention to your cruelty, perhaps, on account of being nearly dead. What magician keeps

adjinni in this world til it's too weak to survive? I'm surprised you didn't finish me off."

Mandrake's eyes blazed. "They wanted to!" he cried. "They wanted to wrest the information from you and let you die!

Fool that I am, I saved you. I let you go. Which left me with no defense against al the destruction you caused. As a

result, mycareer'salmostcer
tainlyfinished. Maybeeven
mylifetoo. Myenemiesareg
athering. I'mduefortrial

tomorrow, thankstoyou."

Hisvoicequavered, hiseyes
weremoist; youcouldpracti
calyhearthesoundofwistful
violins. Thewarriorlioness

stuckouthertongueandmade
adisrespectfulnoise. "That
couldalhavebeenavoided," I
saidsavagely, "ifyou'd

trustedmeenoughtodismiss
memore. I'dhavebeeninbette

r n i c k t h e n and c o u l d h av e e as i l y av o i d e d H o p k i n s 's

d e m o n s ."

H e l o o k e d u p q u i c k l y . " A h . S o y o u f o u n d H o p k i n s ? "

" D o n 't c h an g e t h e s u b j e c t . I w as s ay i n g : i t 's al y ou r f au l t . Y o u s h o u l d h av e h ad f ai t h i n m e . B u t e v e n af t e r al l t h e s e

y e ar s , af t e r w h at I d i d f o r y o u w i t h L o v e l ac e , w i t h D u v al , w i t h t h e A n ar c h i s t and t h e O y s t e r —"

H e w i n c e d . " D o n 't m e n t i o n t h

at l as t o n e ."

"—e v e n af t e r al that," I c o n t i n u e d r e m o r s e l e s s l y , "y o u r e v e r t e d t o t y p e , b e c ame a t y p i c al m ag i c i an , t r e at e d m e l i k e

an e n e m y . I'm a n as t y d e m o n , t h e r e f o r e I c an't b e t r u s t e d t o —" I b r o k e o f f ." W hat? L i s t e n , t h at l au g h o f y o u r s i s

really g e t t i n g t o m e ."

"B u t t h at's j u s t i t !" h e c r i e d . "Y o u c an' t b e t r u s t e d .Y o u d o l i e t o m e ."

"N ame o n e o c c as i o n ."

H i s e y e s g l i t t e r e d . " K i t t y J o n e s ."

" I d o n ' t k n o w w h at y o u m e an ."

" Y o u t o l d m e s h e w as d e ad . I k n o w s h e ' s al i v e ."

" A h ." M y w h i s k e r s d r o o p e d a t ad . " H av e y o u s e e n h e r ? "

" N o ."

" T h e n y o u ' r e m i s t ak e n ." I r al l i e d as b e s t I c o u l d . " S h e ' s as d e ad as t h e y c o m e . I ' v e n e v e r s e e n d e ad e r . T h at g o l e m

s w al l o w e d h e r d o w n w h o l e .

Gulp!Smackofthelips!Gone.Sad,butstil,nothingtobe worryingyourselfaboutal

theseyearslater...."Ipetered outhere.Ididn'tlikethelook inhiseyes.

Mandrakenoddedslowly.Redswathesofangercompeted withwhiteblotchesforpossessionofhisface.Itwasatie,

afifty/fiftysplit."Swalowedwhole,wasit?"hesaid."Funny,Iseemtoremeberyousaidthegolemburnedhertoa

crisp."

"Oh, did I? Yes, well, he did that too. First. Before the swallowing bit—ouch!"

Without warning, the magician had raised the spear and jabbed. I was too slow, too weak to react—the spear caught

me firmly in my midriff. I gasped in shock, looked down... and relaxed again.

"Wrong end," I said. "That's the blunt bit."

Mandrake had noticed this too. With a curse of frustration, he hurled the spear away from

him, out of the circle. He

stood staring at me, breathing hard, attempting to master his emotions. A minute or so passed. His heart rate slowed.

"Do you know where she is?" I asked.

He said nothing.

I spoke quietly. "Leave her alone. She's doing you no harm. And she saved your life, remember—I didn't lie about

that."

Heseemedabouttospeak,then gavehisheadalittleshake, asifforciblyflingingthesubjectfromhismind.

"Bartimaeus," hesaid,"Istatedtoyoutheotherdaythat Iwouldddismissyouifyoucompletedyourmission,and—

despitetheendlessprovocation—Istandbymyword.Tellmewhathappenedwhenyou folowedJenkins,andIwil

letyougo."

Thelioness'sbrawnyarmswerefolded.Shelookeddowno

nhimfromagreatheight."Permanently?"

Hiseyesflickedtotheside."Ineversaidthat."

"ButIam.UnlessI'mmuchmistaken,myinformation'stheonlythingthatmightpreventyoufromgoingtothe

Tower.Correct?"

Hegrittedhisteeth."IbelievethatHopkinsisengagedinsomeconspiracy.IfIcanfoilit,mypositionwilprobablybe

safe,yes."

"Sothen,howaboutit? It'sgood infoI'vegothere.Youwon't bedisappointed."

Hisvoicewaspracticallyin audible."Alright... Ifit'sgood enough."

"Itis.Good,that'smorelikeit .Asensibleagreement,justl iketheolddays.Youknow,M andrake,"thelionesssaid

musingly."Thingswerebett erwhenyouwerelittle.You hadmoresensethen."

Heglowereredathisfeet."So I'mtold.Wel,getonwithit."

"Allright."Thelionesslinked herpawstogether,cracked herknucklesandbegan."Ifol lowedJenkinsallacross

London.He'sgotanetworkof magiciansinvolvedinhissch emes;sevenintotal,alabitli kehim:low-level,

embittered,weakinstrength —nothingtobeafraidof,onth efaceofit,forsomeonetough likeyou."

"Anynames?"Themagicianw aslisteningintently,absorb ingitall.

"WithersandBurke.Nope,didn'tmeananythingtomeeither.Butyou'llknowthisone:Lime."

Mandrake'seyesopenedwide."RufusLime?Lovelace'sfriend?That'smorelikeit.Ishestil—?"

"Yep.Asfish-facedaseverJustgotinfromParis,apparently."

"Andtheirplans—whatdetailsdidyouget?"

"Nothingconcrete,tobefrank.They'realbusychoosingde

monsforit,whateveritis.Bu
tthey'remagicians—that's

whatyou'dexpectthemtodo.
Therewasmuchtalkaboutrop
esandchains.Oh,andvans."

Hewrinkledhisnose."Vans?
"

"Gofigure.Theymentionedsomethingaboutanexperimentto o.Theywantedproofithad beensuccessful.Noidea

whatthough."Iscratchedane ar."Whatelse...?Oh,Jenkins saidtherewereseveneofthem becauseitwas'onefor

e ac h c h ai r .'"

M an d r ak e g r u n t e d . "T h e C o u n c i l . T h e r e ar e s e v e n o f u s . T h e y p l an r e b e l i o n ."

"A s u s u al ."

"W e l , i t's i n t e r e s t i n g , b u t r at h e r s h o r t o n s p e c i f i c s ." M an d r ak e l o o k e d q u i z z i c al y at m e . "F o r this y o u e x p e c t

d i s m i s s al ? "

"T h e r e's m o r e . J e n k i n s d i d n't j u s t v i s i t s o m e d o w n b e at f r i e n d s ; h e m e t s o m e o n e e l s e . I'l g i v e y o u th r e e g u e s s e s ."

"W h o ? "

"G o o n , g u e s s . O h , y o u ' r e n o f u n . I ' l g i v e y o u a c l u e . B e a r d . O h , w e l d o n e ."

"I d i d n ' t g i v e a n a n s w e r ."

"N o , b u t I c a n t e l l y o u ' v e g o t i t r i g h t f r o m t h e c o l o r y o u ' v e g o n e .5 Y e p , t h e m e r c e n a r y ' s b a c k i n t o w n , a n d h i s b r o w s

a r e e v e n m o r e b e e t l i n g t h a n y o u r e m e m b e r . W i t h u t m o s t b r a v e r y a n d c u n n i n g , I a t t a c h e d m y s e l f t o h i s s e v e n - l e a g u e

b o o t s a n d f o l o w e d h i m t o t h e

p ar k , w h e r e h e m e t a m an I c an o n l y as s u m e t o b e t h e e l u s i v e H o p k i n s . N o , I d i d n't

h e ar a w o r d t h e y s ai d . T h at's w h e n t h e i r d j i n n s p o t t e d m e . Y o u k n o w t h e r e s t . I l e f t h al f m y e s s e n c e b e t w e e n t h e r e

an d R i c h m o n d ."

5 . F or the record, it was an interesting yel ow-white. S ort of custardy.

"A l l v e r y w e l , " M an d r ak e s n ap p e d , "b u t w h at g o o d i s t h i s t o m e ? I c an't ac t o n an y o f i t ! I n e e d s o m e t h i n g i f I'm t o

s u r v i v e t h e t r i al t o m o r r o w . . . H o p k i n s : h e ' s t h e k e y . C an y o u d e s c r i b e h i m ? "

T h e l i o n e s s s c r at c h e d h e r n o s e . " F u n n y . It ' s h ar d .... H e ' s s o r t o f u n d i s t i n g u i s h e d l o o k i n g . A b i t s t o o p - s h o u l d e r e d ,

m ay b e ; p l ai n f ac e , u n s h av e n . . . m o u s y h ai r , I t h i n k . . . u m . . . W h y ar e y o u h o l d i n g y o u r h e ad i n y o u r h and s ? "

H e c as t h i s f ac e t o t h e c e i l i n g . " A h h ! It ' s h o p e l e s s ! I m i g h t av e k n o w n n o t t o g i v e t h i s t as k t o y o u . Asc obol c o u l d

h a v e d o n e a b e t t e r j o b ."

T h a t n e e d l e d m e . " O h , r e a l y ? S o h e ' d h a v e f o u n d o u t w h e r e H o p k i n s l i v e d , w o u l d h e ? "

" W h a t ? "

" H e ' d h a v e g o t t h e e x a c t a d d r e s s , w o u l d h e ? I c a n s e e i t n o w , a b i g f a t c y c l o p s i n a r a i n c o a t a n d t r i l b y , s i d l i n g u p t o

J e n k i n s a n d t h e m e r c e n a r y i n t h e c a f e , o r d e r i n g a c o f f e e , t r y i n g t o l i s t e n i n . . . O h y e s , v e r y i n c o n s p i c u o u s ."

" N e v e r m i n d a l l t h a t . Y o u k n o

wwhereHopkinsis?Telme!
"

"He'sstayingattheAmbassadorHotel,"Isaid."There.Justalittlesomethi ngIpickedup,whenIwasn'tbeingchased

towithinaspoonful6ofmylife.Now,I—Wait,whatareyoudoing?"

6. Technical term: a measurement of essence.

Themagicianhadsprungintosuddenaction.Turningtofacetheotherpentaclesl aidoutonthefloor,hecleared his

throatandrubbedathistired, redeyes."I'vegotonechance, Bartimaeus," hesaid."Onechanceand I'mgoingto

takeit.Tomorrow,myenemieswilstrikemedown,unlessI'vesomethingtangibletoshowthem.Andtherewilbe

fewthingsmoretangiblethanMr.Hopkins,trussedandtied."

Heflexedhisfingers,begananinc antation.Acoldwindwhippedaroundmyankles.Amelancholyhowlingfiledthe

air. Honestly, effectsliketh iswerefrownedduponinUruk forbeinghackneyedandouto fdate.7 Youwouldn'tseeany

modernmagicianleavethepe ntacleonaccountofthatracke t, unlessthey'dcolapsedlaugh ing. Ishookmyhead

grimly. Noprizesforguessi ngwhowascoming.

7. The last time I used that strong wind/ disembodied howling gag was to distract the giant

Humbaba up in the pine forests so that mymaster Gilgamesh could creep up

from b ehind and

slay him . W e' re talk ing 2 6 0 0 B .C . here. A nd it only work ed t hen b ecause H um b ab a was a few

pinecones short of a fir tree.

S u r e e n o u g h , w i t h a n o i s e l i k e a c r ac k e d d i n n e r g o n g , t h e b l o n d -h ai r e d g i an t m at e r i al i z e d i n t h e n e x t p e n t ac l e al o n g .

In s t an t l y h e s e t up a f e e b l e t o r r e n t o f p l e ad i n g an d c o m p l ai n t , w h i c h h i s m as t e r s e n s i b l y i g n o r e d . H e h ad n 't s e e n m e .

I w ai t e d t i l h e w as o n h i s k n e e s

, w r i n g i n g h i s h an d s an d b e g g i n g f o r d i s m i s s al , t h e n k i n d o f c o u g h e d s u av e l y . " N e e d a

h an d k e r c h i e f , A s c o b o l ? M y f e e t ar e g e t t i n g w e t . "

T h e c y c l o p s s t o o d h u r r i e d l y , h i s f ac e a f l am i n g m as k o f s h am e an d d i s ap p r o v al . " W h at ' s he d o i n g h e r e , s i r ? " h e

b l e at e d . " I r e al l y d o n ' t t h i n k I c an w o r k w i t h him . "

" D o n ' t w o r r y , " I s ai d . " I ' m j u s t w at c h i n g y o u g e t y o u r o r d e r s . A f t e r t h at I ' m o u t o f h e r e . A r e n ' t I , ' s i r ' ? "

Mandrakeignoredusboth.Hehadcontinuedwithhisincantations,directinghisenergyattheremainingpentaclesin

theroom.Furthercheapeffectsensued—popsandbursting,squeaksandsoundsofrunningfeet,smelsofegg,

gunpowder,andmethane.Itwaslikeakids'birthdayparty.Allwelackedwerethesilyhats.

Withinsecondstheusualsuspectshadjoinedus,therestofMandrake'scrowd.Itwasamixedbag.First,andleast,

w e h ad A s c o b o l , g l o w e r i n g at
m e b e t w e e n h i s b r ai d s ; n e x t u
p G o r m o c o d r an , a h u m o r l e s s
c o v e , t h i r d l e v e l , w h o 'd d o n
e

t i m e i n Ir e l an d d u r i n g t h e C e l
t i c t w i l i g h t — h e f av o r e d t h e g
u i s e o f a man - b o ar , w i t h t u s k s
an d t r o t t e r s d au b e d w i t h

b r i g h t b l u e w o ad . B e y o n d h i
m w as M w am b a, a d j i n n i w h o 'd
w o r k e d w i t h t h e A b al u y i a t r i
b e s o f e as t e r n A f r i c a. I h ad a

b i t o f t i m e f o r h e r ; s h e d i d n 't i
n d u l g e i n t h e t e d i o u s c o mme
n ts o f t h e o t h e r s . T o d ay , f o r r

easonsbestknowntoherself
,

sheappearedasagiantspinylizardwearingleatherthighboots.Atthefarend,barelysqueezinghimselfintohis

pentacle,wasHodge,alprickles,odors,andbadpersonality.Thefiveofushadworkedtogetherfrequentlyovertheprecedingmonths,butsadlynoneoftheotherssharedmyupbeattemperament.8We'dhadfriction,harshwords.Our

relationshipnowcouldbest

b e d e s c r i b e d as s t r ai n e d .

8 . M wam b a was as flig hty as a b utterfly, C orm ocodran taciturn and b rutish, while A scob ol and

H odg e were j ust insufferab le, b eing reg rettab ly prone to sarcasm .

M an d r ak e w i p e d s w e at f r o m h i s f o r e h e ad . "I h av e s u m m o n e d y o u , " h e s ai d , "f o r w h at I h o p e w i l b e t h e f i n al t i m e ."

T h i s s t i r r e d a b i t o f i n t e r e s t ; t h e r e w as s h u f f l i n g , c o u g h i n g , r as p i n g o f s p i n e s . "If y o u c o m p l e t e t o d ay 's m i s s i o n , " h e

continued,"Iwilnotcalonan yofyouagain.Ihopethisvow wilbesufficientforyoutoc arryoutthischargetothe

letter."

Cormocodranspoke;hisvoi cerumbledbetweenhistusk s."Whatisthecharge?"

"StayingattheAmbassadorHo telisahumannamedHopkins. Iwishyoutoarresthimandbri nghimheretothis

room.IfIamabsent,waitwithi nthepentaclesuntilIreturn. Hopkinsisprobablyamagici

an—certainlyhehasalies

whocanraiselow-leveldjinn, althoughfromwhatwehaves eentheyareunlikelytobepo werfulenoughtotrouble

you.Moredangerousthan Hopkinsisatal, black-beardedman—notamagician, thoughhe possessestheabilityto

withstandmagicalattack.This individualmayormaynotbe presentatthehotel.Ifheis, and dyoucancaptureorkil

him, allweland good.Butitis HopkinsthatIneed."

"We shal want a description," Mwamba hissed. "And a good one. Al you uhumans look al ike to me."

Asco bol nodded. "Don't they just? They're all the same basic shape, got the same number of limbs and heads . . .

Mind you, there's a few bits that vary. If you look at—"

Mandrake held up his hand shurriedly. "Indeed. Fortunately, Bartimaeus has encountered Hopkins and wil be able to

guide you."

I gave a start. "Wait a minute! That's not on. You said I was to go free when I told you what happened."

"Agreed. But your description of Hopkins was rudimentary, incomplete. I cannot act on it. Go with the others, point

out Hopkins. That's all. I don't expect you to tackle him in your condition. When you get back, you will be dismissed."

He turned to the others and began giving additional instructions, but the lioness heard nothing. My tufted ears were

buzzingwithrage;Iwassofur
iousIcouldbarelystand.The
arroganceofit!Hewashappyt
orenegeonavowso

recentitsechoeswerestilre
soundingthroughtheroom!
Verywel,I'dgo.Ihadlittlech
oice.Butifheevergotwithi
n

mypower,Mandrakewouldr
uethetimeshe'dcheatedme.

Themagicianfinished."Anyf
urtherquestions?"

"Areyounotcomingwithus?"
Hodgeinquired.Hewasshift

ingandadjustinghisgreatsticklebac k-skincoat.

"No." Mandrakescowled. "Regrettably, Imustattendtheth eater. Whatremainsofmycare erdependsuponit. Also"—

heglancedatme; Icouldn'tread themeaninginhiseyes—"p erhaps Ihave another appointm enttoo."

Thelionessregardedhimimp lacably. "You'llbemakinga bigmistake:" Ilookedaway. "Comeonthen," Isaidtothe

others. "Folowme."

Throughouttheday Kittyhad beenoutofhumor. Shewassu rly, withdrawn, andprickly, evenshort-tempered, when

challengedbyhermaster. She completedhertasksdutiful ybutwithoutenthusiasm, sl ammingdoors, stompingabo ut

thevila'srooms, andonce, th anksto a hastymaneuverinati ghtspace, knockingovertwo highcolumnsofcareful y

orderedbooks. Hermastergr

ewquiteirritableinhisturn.

"Haveacare,Lizzie,"hecried."Mypatienceiswearingthin!"

Kittyhaltedoppositethesofa.Herforeheadwascreasedwiththeblackestfrown."AmInotgivingsatisfaction,Mr.

Button?"

"Indeednot!Aldayyouhavebeenoutofsorts,galumphinglikearogueelephantaroundmyhouse,faceasuglyas

anafrit!WhenIaddressyou,y

ouanswerrudely,withoutrespect.Iamshockedbyyourinsolentvulgarity!Andthat

teayoubrewedmewasasinsipidasgnat'spiss.Thiscannotgoon.Whatisthematterwithyou,girl?"

"Nothing."

"Sulenagain!Iwarnyou,ifitcontinues,youshalbeoutonyourear."

"Yes,sir."Kittysighed.Itwas,afteral,notMr.Button'sfaultthatBartimaeushadfailedher."I'msorry,sir.I've

had ... a spot of trouble."

"Trouble?" The lines of vexation on the old man's face softened. "My dear, you should have said. Tell me. Perhaps I

can help."

A flicker of anxiety crossed his brow. "It is nothing financial?"

"No, sir. Nothing like that." Kitty hesitated. She could hardly tell him the truth, that her whole purpose in assisting

him had, in the early hours of

hemorning,beenrenderedf utile.Afteralmostthreeyear sMr.Buttonreliedduponher;

despitehisbriskmanner,she knewhevaluedherhighly.Bu thewasstillamagician."It'sm yeveningjob,sir,"she

said."Youknow Iworkatanin n.Wehadademonraidtwodays ago.Oneofmycoleagueswask iled."

"Araid?"Mr.Buttonfrowned ."Whatfor?"

"Theusualstuff,sir—tryingt ouncoverdissent,peoplepr

epared to act against our leaders." She took a spice cake

from the plate in front of him and bit into it listlessly.

"Well, Lizzie, you must understand that it is the right of any government to protect itself. I am not sure you should be

frequenting that inn, if it is such a hotbed of subversion."

"But it isn't really, sir. That's the point. All the commoners ever do is talk—about the war, the police, restrictions on

theirfreedom.Justtalk.They'repowerlesstodoanythingaboutit,asyoumustknow."

"Mmm." Mr. Buttongazedoutofthegrimywindowatthebl ankOctobersky."Icanhardly blamethecommonersfor

theirunhappiness.Thewarh asgoneonfartoolong.IfearMr.Devereauxisnotactingas,h eshould.Butwhatcanwe

do?EvenI,amagicianmyself, amhelpless!Powerisconce ntratedwiththeCouncil,Liz zie.Therestofusmustwatch

andhopeforbettertimes.Well,wel,Icanunderstandyour distemperifafriendofyours waskiled.Iamsorryfor

yourloss.Haveanothercake ."

"That'sverykind.Thankyou,sir." Kittysatonthesofaarmanddid.

"Perhapsyoushouldtakethe afternoonoff,Lizzie" Mr.Buttonsaid."Ishalbeworkingon mydemonicindexandthat

willkeepmebusy.Somanydemons!You'dthinktheOtherP

l ac e c o u l d s c ar c e l y c r amt h e m i n ! "

K i t t y 's m o u t h w as f u l o f c ak e c r umb s . S h e s w al o w e d t h e m . "P ar d o n me , s i r , b u t w h at e x ac t l y is t h e O t h e r P l ac e ? I

m e an , w h at 's i t l i k e ? "

T h e o l d man g r u n t e d . "A r e g i o n o f c h ao s , a w h i r l o f e n d l e s s ab o mi n at i o n s . D u l ac , i f I r e m e mb e r r i g h t l y , c al e d i t 'a

s u mp o f mad n e s s .' W e c an n o t b e g i n t o i mag i n e t h e h o r r o r o f s u c h ar e al m ." H e s h u d d e r e d . "It 's e n o u g h t o mak e a

manwantathirdspicedbun."

"Somagicianshavevisitedit?" Kittyasked."Imean,they'dhavetohavedone,toknowwhatitwaslike."

"Ah.Well."Mr.Buttonshrugged."Notexactly.Ingeneral,theauthoritiesusedreportsfromreliableslaves.Toventure

thereinpersonisanothermatter.Itrisksbothbodyandsoul."

"Soithasn'tbeendone?"

"Oh, it's been tried. Dulac's master Ficino, for example. He hoped to gain demonic power. Instead he lost his mind—

literally so: it did not come back. As for his body... No. The details are too revolting."

"Oh, go on, sir."

"Certainly not. There has been nas matters of fothers, but all were left insane or worse. The only magician who

claimed to have succeeded in the journey was Ptolemaeus. He left details in his Apocryp

ha, b u t t h e y ar e o f d u b i o u s

v al u e . In e f f e c t , h e i m p l i e s t h
at t h e p r o c e d u r e c an o n l y b e ac
h i e v e d w i t h t h e h e l p o f a b e n i
g n d e m o n , w h o s e n ame i s

i n v o k e d t o c r e at e t h e G at e ." H
e s n o r t e d . "P al p ab l y , t h e n o t i
o n i s r i d i c u l o u s —w h o w o u l d
s e r i o u s l y t r u s t a d e m o n w i t h

t h e i r l i f e ? A n d i t i s l i k e l y t h
at P t o l e m ae u s h i m s e l f s u f f e r
e d as a r e s u l t o f h i s e x p e r i m e
n t . B y m o s t ac c o u n t s h e d i d n't

l i v e l o n g af t e r w ar d ."

Trust. Bartimaeus had emphasized exactly that. Ptolemy had been willing to put his trust in him. As a result, there

was no limit to their bond. Kitty gazed up at the ceiling, remembering the djinni's challenge to step out of the circle.

She hadn't done it, for the obvious reason that she'd have probably torn her limb from limb. No trust there. On either

side.

A great anger flared inside her once again: anger for was tin

gsomanyyearsinpursuitofah
opelessdream.She

slippedoffthesofaarm."Doy
oumindifIdotakethe afterno
onoff,sir?"shesaid."Ithink
Ineedalittleair."

Assheretrievedhercoatfro
mthehallway,shepassedapil
eofbooksthatshehadlatelys
orted,readyforstacking

onsomenewlypurchasedshe
lves.Amongthemwereworks
fromtheancientNearEast,w
ithinwhich...Shehalted,

checked.Yes.Thereitwas,t

h r e e f r o m t h e t o p : a s l i m v o l u m e . P t o l e m ae u s 's Ap oc ry p ha.

K i t t y c u r l e d h e r l i p . W h at w as t h e p o i n t ? B ar t i m ae u s h ad s ai d i t w as w r i t t e n i n G r e e k , c l ai m e d i t w o u l d b e u s e l e s s t o

h e r . S h e m o v e d aw ay , o n l y t o s t o p ag ai n h al f w ay d o w n t h e h al . S h e l o o k e d b ac k . W e l , w h y n o t ? It c o u l d n 't d o an y

h ar m .

O l d i n v e s t i g at i v e h ab i t s d i e d h ar d . S h e d e p ar t e d t h e h o u s e w i t h t h e b o o k i n h e r p o c k e t .

Thatevening,withtimeonher hands,Kittywalkedtothe Frog Inn. She had hoped the exercise would burn off a little

of the frustrations welin gun controlably inside her, but it fanything it only made it worse. The faces of the people she

passed were pinched and sulen, their shoulders hunched; they gazed at their boots as they trudged along the

road. Vigilance spheres whirled above the streets; Night Police loitered arrogantly at major intersections. One or tw

o

r o ad s w e r e b ar r i c ad e d o f f . T h e r e h ad b e e n d i s o r d e r i n c e n t r al L o n d o n ; n o w t h e au t h o r i t i e s w e r e c r ac k i n g d o w n . W h i t e

p o l i c e v an s p as s e d h e r m o r e t h an o n c e . F ai n t l y s h e h e ar d s i r e n s i n t h e d i s t anc e .

H e r p ac e g r e w s l o w e r , h e r g az e d u l e d an d un s e e i n g . S h e f e l t w e i gh e d d o w n b y t h e u t t e r f u t i l i t y o f t h i n g s . T h r e e y e ar s

s h e h ad b e e n s h u t up i n l i b r ar i e s an d d u s t y r o o m s , p l ay i n g at

b e i n g a m a g i c i a n . A n d a l l f o r w h a t ? N o t h i n g h a d

c h a n g e d . N o t h i n g w o u l d c h a n g e . A c l o a k o f i n j u s t i c e l a y u p o n L o n d o n , a n d s h e , l i k e e v e r y o n e e l s e , w a s s m o t h e r e d b y

i t . T h e C o u n c i l d i d w h a t t h e y p l e a s e d , o b l i v i o u s t o t h e s u f f e r i n g t h e y c a u s e d . A n d s h e w a s u n a b l e t o d o a n y t h i n g a b o u t

i t .

A t T h e F r o g a s i m i l a r l y s o m b e r m o o d p r e v a i l e d . T h e t a p r o o m h a d b e e n t i d i e d , t h e d e v a s t a t i o n o f t w o n i g h t s p r e v i o u s

l y

c l e ar e d aw ay . A t t h e e n d o f t h e c o u n t e r a s h i n y n e w p i e c e o f w o o d f i l l e d t h e h o l e m ad e b y t h e d e m o n 's at t ac k ; i t d i d

n o t q u i t e m at c h t h e r e s t o f t h e b ar , b u t G e o r g e F o x h ad d i s g u i s e d i t w i t h a d i s p l ay o f p o s t c ar d s an d h o r s e b r as s e s . A l

t h e b r o k e n c h ai r s an d t ab l e s h ad b e e n r e p l ac e d ; t h e c i r c u l ar b u r n m ar k n e ar t h e d o o r w as c o v e r e d w i t h a r u g .

M r . F o x g av e K i t t y a s u b d u e d w e l c o m e . " E x t r a w o r k f o r u s t

onight, Clara," he said. "Haven't found anyone yet to ...

you know, replace Sam."

"No, no. Of course not." Kitty's voice was mild, but impotent fury sloshed inside her. She felt she might scream.

Grasping a cloth as if it were the neck of a magician, she went about her business.

Two hours passed; the taproom filled. Men and women huddled at the tables or stood talking quietly by the counter.

Anunenthusiasticdartsmatchbegan.Kittypuleddrinksbehindthebar,lostinherthoughts.Shehardlylookedup

whenthedooropened,bringingwithitagustofautumnchil.

Asifaswitchhadjustbeenpushed,orabatterypuledout,alconversationinTheFrogsuddenlywounddown.

Sentenceswereleftunfinished,glassespausedenroutetooopenmouths;eyesswiveled,afewheadsturned.Adart

embeddeditselfintheplaste
rwalbesidetheboard.Georg
eFox,whohadbeenbentbesi
deatablechatting,slowly

drewhimselferect.

Ayoungmanstoodthere.Hes
hooktherainoffhislongblac
kcoat.

Kittysawthenewcomerbetw
eentheheadsofnearbycusto
mers.Herhandjerked,splas
hinginuponthesurfaceof

thecounter.Hermouthmade
alittlenoise.

Theyoungmanremovedhisgloves.Heranaslenderhandthroughhishair—short,cropped,andfleckedwithrain—

andlookedaroundatthesilentroom."Goodevening,"hesaid."Whoistheproprietorhere?"

Silence.ShufflingThenGeorgeFoxclearedhisthroat."Thatwouldbeme."

"Oh,good.Aword,please."Therequestwasquietlyspoken,butitheldtheassumptionofauthority.Everythingabout

theyoungmandid:hiscoat,hi
ssmartblackjacket,theruche
dwhiteshirt,hispatentleath
ershoes.Inhisownway

hewasasalienafigureinthet
aproomofTheFrogasthedem
onwithoutaface.

Animosityandfearrippledo
utaroundtheroominwaves.T
heyoungmansmiled."Ifyoud
on'tmind."

GeorgeFoxsteppedforward
."WhatcanIdoforyou?"

Theyoungmanwasshorterth
anMr.Foxbyhalfahead,slim

ashewasburly."Ibelieveyou haveagirlworking

here,"hesaid."Whatishern ame?"

Oneortwooftthecustomerss tandingatthecounterflicked theireyesatKitty,whohadsh runkbackagainstthe

cabinetbehindthebar.Thedo ortothepassagewasclose:sh ecouldslipout,throughthek itchensandaway.

Mr.Foxblinked."Urn,Clara Bel.She'stheonlygirl,sinc ePeggyleft...."Hisvoicetr

ai l e d o f f, w as r e p l ac e d w i t h

g u ar d e d h o s t i l i t y. "W h y? W h y d o y o u as k? "

"Is C l ar a B e l w o r k i n g h e r e t o n i g h t? "

G e o r g e F o x h e s i t at e d — p r e c i s e l y t h e an s w e r t h e y o u n g m an w as e x p e c t i n g. "G o o d, " h e s ai d. "F e t c h h e r o u t. " H e

l o o k e d ab o u t h i m. K i t t y w as c o n c e al e d b e h i n d t h e p at r o n s s t an d i n g at t h e b ar. S h e i n c h e d t o w ar d t h e b ac k r o o m d o o r.

"F e t c h h e r o u t, " t h e y o u n g m

ansaidagain.

StilGeorgeFoxdidnotmove;hisfacewassetinstone,hiseyesbulging."Whydoyouwanther?"herepeated

stolidly."Whoareyou?Whatdoyouwantwithher?"

"Iamnotaccustomed,"theyoungmansaid;hisvoicewastired,"toexplainingmyself,nortoaskingmorethanonce.

Iamfromthegovernment.Thatshouldbegoodenoughforanyoffyouhere—Oh,sorry!Idon'tthinkso—"

A m an s i t t i n g n e ar t h e e n t r an c e h ad s l i p p e d f r o m h i s s e at an d h u r r i e d t o t h e d o o r . H e o p e n e d i t , m ad e t o d e p ar t . T h e

m ag i c i an s p o k e a w o r d an d g e s t u r e d . T h e m an w as f l u n g b ac k w ar d b o d i l y i n t o t h e r o o m , l an d i n g h ar d b e s i d e t h e

f i r e p l ac e . T h e d o o r s l am m e d s h u t s o h ar d t h e b r as s e s r at t l e d o n t h e w al s .

"N o t o n e o f y o u l e av e s t h i s r o o m un t i l C l ar a B e l l i s f o un d ." T h e y o un g m an l o o k e d t e s t i l y t o w ar d t h e c o m m o n e r l y i n g

onthefloor."Stopthatgroaning!You'renotinjured."Heturnedbacktogeorgefox."Well?"

Kittywasbythebackroomdoor.Oneofthecustomersatthebarnoddedhisheadalmostimperceptibly."Goon,"he

hissed."Getout."

Theyoungmantappedashoeupponthetiles."Itwon'tsurprise youtolearnthatIhavenotcometothishovelalone.

Unlessthegirlisbroughtbeforemeinthirtyseconds,Ish

allissueordersthatyouwilpresentlyregret." Heglanced

athiswatch.

GeorgeFoxlookedatthefloor. Helookedattheceiling. Hishandsclenchedandunclenched. Hetriednottomeetthe

beseechinggazesofthepeoplealllaround. Linesofwearinessandagewereetchedduponhischeeks. Heopenedhis

mouth, closedit—

"It'sallright, George." Kittypushedherwayaroundtheendo

f t h e b ar ; s h e c ar r i e d h e r c o at ac r o s s o n e ar m . " Y o u

d o n ' t h av e t o . T h an k s . " S h e w al k e d s l o w l y b e t w e e n t h e t ab l e s . " W e l , M r . M an d r ak e ? S h al l w e g o ? "

F o r a m o m e n t t h e m ag i c i an d i d n o t an s w e r . H e w as s t ar i n g at h e r , h i s p al e f ac e a l i t t l e f l u s h e d , p e r h ap s af f e c t e d b y

t h e h e at o f t h e r o o m . C o l e c t i n g h i m s e l f , h e g av e a s l i g h t b o w . " M s . J o n e s ! I am h o n o r e d . W o u l d y o u m i n d c o m i n g

w i t h m e ? " H e s t o o d as i d e . S t i

ff-backed, staringstraightah
ead, Kittypassedhim. Hefol
owedhertothedoor.

Theyoungmanlookedbackatt
hesilentroom. "Myapologie
sfordisruptingyourevenin
g." Hewentout; thedoor

closed. Foralmostaminuten
oonemovedorspoke.

"You'llbeneedinganewbarm
aid, George," someonesaid.

Intheyardthevigilancespher
ehadgone. Afewcarlightsmo
vedonthеroadbeyondthepas
sageway. Alightrain

fel.Kittyheardittappingagainsttheriverinthedarknessbelowtheparapet.Coolairbrushedherface,andspecks

ofdampness;theirsuddentouchmadeherfeelalive.

Behindher,avoice:"Ms.Jones.Mycariscloseby.Isuggestwewalktoit."

Atthesound,afierceexultationsuddenlyfloweredinKitty.Farfromthefearshehadfelt,sheknewonly

defianceandakindofjoy.SincethefirstnumbshockofMan

d r ak e 's ap p e ar an c e s h e h ad b e e
n q u i t e c al m—c al m an d

c u r i o u s l y r e v i v e d . F o r t h r e
e l o n g y e ar s s h e h ad l e d a s o l i t
ar y , c au t i o u s l i f e . N o w , w i t h
al i t s p r o s p e c t s s h att e r e d , s h
e

k n e w s h e c o u l d n o t h av e e n d u
r e d t h at l i f e a m o m e n t l o n g e r .
S h e w an t e d ac t i o n , r e g ar d l e s
s o f t h e c o n s e q u e n c e s . H e r

o l d r e c k l e s s n e s s c ame f l o o d
i n g b ac k t o h e r u p o n a t i d e o f f r
u s t r at e d r age .

S h e t u r n e d . M an d r ak e s t o o d b

eforeher—Mandrake, oneofth eCouncil. Itwaslikethean swertoherprayers.

"Sowhatareyougoingtodo?" shesnapped."Kilme?"

Theyoungmanblinked.Hisf acewasdimlylitbylightsfro mtheoldinn'swindows;itg avehimasickly,yelowcast.

Hecleariedhisthroat."No.I __"

"Whynot?Isn'tthatwhatyoudo totraitors?"Kittyspatthelas twordout."Ortoanyonewhoc rossesyou?Oneof

yourdemonswasheretwonightsago.Itkilledaman.Hehadafamily.He'dneverdoneanythingagainstthe

government.Butitkiledhimevenso."

Themagicianmadeanirritablenoisebehindhisteeth."Thatisunfortunate.Butitisnothingtodowithme."

"No,exceptyoucontrolthedemons."Kitty'svoicewashardandshrill."They'rejustthesslaves.Youdirectthem."

"Imeantitwasn'tmepersonaly

. T h at's n o t m y d e p ar t m e n t . N o w , M s . J o n e s —"

"S o r r y , " s h e s ai d , l au g h i n g , "t h at i s j u s t t h e m o s t l am e n t ab l e e x c u s e I'v e e v e r h e ar d . N ot m y d ep artm en t. O o h , t h at

m ak e s i t al r i g h t t h e n . A n d I s u p p o s e t h e w ar i s n't y o u r d e p ar t m e n t e i t h e r , o r t h e N i g h t P o l i c e , o r t h e p r i s o n s i n t h e

T o w e r . N o n e o f t h e m ar e an y t h i n g t o d o w i t h y o u."

"A s a m att e r o f f ac t , t h e y 'r e n o t." H i s v o i c e g r e w s t e r n . "N o w c an y o u m an ag e t o b e s i l e n t o

n y o u r o w n , M s . J o n e s ? O r

p e r h ap s y o u w i s h m y h e l p ? " H e c l i c k e d a f i n g e r ; a s h ad o w d e t ac h e d i t s e l f f r o m t h e d ar k e s t c o r n e r o f t h e y ar d . " T h at i s

F r i t an g , " M an d r ak e s ai d . " M o s t s av ag e o f m y s l av e s . H e w i l l d o w h at e v e r I c o mm —"

K i t t y g av e a c r y o f d e r i s i o n . "T h at ' s r i g h t , t h r e at e n m e ! J u s t l i k e y o u t h r e at e n e d t h e p e o p l e i n t h e i n n . C an ' t m an ag e

t o d o an y thin g w i t h o u t f o r c e t o b ac k y o u u p , c an y o u ? I d o n ' t k n o w h o w y o u s l e e p at n i g h t ."

"That's rich coming from you" Mandrake snapped."I don't remember the Resistance being afraid to use force when it

suited them. Let's see now, what were the casualty figures? Several people killed, others maimed and—"

"That was different. We were fighting for ideals—"

"Well, so am I. However..." He took a deep breath. "I admit to being discourteous in the present instance."The

magician waved a hand, spoke

awordofdismissal;themen
acingshadowfadedintonothi
ng."There.Nowyoucan

talkwithoutfear."

Kittylookeddirectlyathim.
"Iwasnotafraid."

Mandrakeshrugged.Heglanc
edbackoverhisshoulderatth
eclosedinndoor,thenoutto
wardtheroad.Incontrast

tohisimperiousefficiencyi
nsideTheFrog,heseemedsu
ddenlyhesitant,unsurewhat
todo.

"Wel?" Kittysaid."Whatnor mallyhappensnextwhenyou arrestsomeone?Spotoftort ure?Abeating?What'sitto

be?"

Asigh."I'venotarrestedyou. Atleast,notnecessarily."

"ThenI'mfreetogo?"

"Ms.Jones,"hesnarled,"I am hereasaprivateindividual,n otasamemberofthegovernm ent,thoughifyoudon't

stopyourhistrionics,thatm aychange.Officiallyyouared

e ad . Y e s t e r d ay I r e c e i v e d w o r d t h at y o u w e r e al i v e . I

w an t e d c o n f i r m at i o n ."

K i t t y 's e y e s n ar r o w e d . " W h o t o l d y o u I w as h e r e ? A d e m o n ? "

"N o . It i s n o t i m p o r t an t ."

C l ar i t y c ame . " A h , i t w as N i c k D r e w ."

"I s ai d i t i s n o t i m p o r t an t . Y o u c an n o t b e su rp rised t h at I w o u l d w an t t o f i n d y o u — a f u g i t i v e f r o m j u s t i c e , a m e m b e r o f

t h e R e s i s t an c e ."

"No," she said. "I'm just surprised you haven't cut my throat already."

The magician gave a cry of genuine annoyance. "I am a minister, not a murderer! I help protect our people against..

.against terrorists like you and your friends."

"Yeah, because the people are so safe in your care," Kitty sneered. "Half our young men are dying in America, and

we've got the police mauling others in the street, and d emo

n s at t ac k i n g an y o n e w h o p r o t e s t s , an d e n e mi e s an d s p i e s

at l ar g e i n o u r s u b u r b s . W e 're al h av i n g a g r e at t i me ! "

"If i t w as n't f o r u s , i t w o u l d b e mu c h , mu c h w o r s e ! " M an d r ak e 's v o i c e w as h i g h an d t i g h t ; w i th e v i d e n t e ff o r th e

l o w e r e d i t t o a p u r r . "W e u s e o u r p o w e r t o r u l e f o r th e g o o d o f al . Th e c o mm o n e r s n e e d g u i d an c e . Ad mi t t e d l y , w e 're

g o i n g th r o u g h a r o p e y p at c h , b u t —"

"Yourpowerisbasedonslavery!Howcanitbeforanyone'sgood?"

Themagicianseemedgenuinelyshocked."Nothumanslavery,"hesaid."Justdemons."

"Thatmakesitbetter,doesit?Ithinknot.Everythingyoudoistaintedwiththatcorruption."

Hisanswerwasfaint."That'snotso."

"Itisso,andIthinkyouknowit."Kittyfrownedathim."Whatareyouherefor?Whatdoyou

w an t ? T h e R e s i s t an c e

w as a l o n g t i m e ag o ."

M an d r ak e c l e ar e d h i s t h r o at .
"I w as t o l d . . ." H e d r e w h i s c o
at ar o u n d h i m , l o o k e d o u t ac r o
s s t h e r i v e r . "I w as t o l d

y o u s av e d m e f r o m t h e g o l e m .
T h at y o u r i s k e d y o u r l i f e t o s
av e m i n e ." H e g l an c e d at h e r ; K
i t t y k e p t h e r f ac e

i m p as s i v e . "I w as al s o t o l d y o
u d i e d d o i n g i t . N o w t h at I f i n d
y o u al i v e , I am . . . n at u r al y c u r i
o u s as t o t h e t r u t h ."

Kittyscowled."Whatdoyou want:thedetails?Yes,Idid, andImusthavebeenmad.Istoppedthegolemfrom

crushingyoursorryheadinto apulp.ThenIranaway.That's allthereistoit."

Shestaredathimfixedly;hegazedback,facepaleandstarkinthearticiallight.Therain pattereddownbetween

them.

Mandrakecoughed."Well,thedetailsarefine.Thanks.Infact,thatwasn'texactlyitsomu

c h as —as I k i n d o f

w o n d e r e d why . " H e s h o v e d h i s h an d s i n h i s p o c k e t s .

"I d o n 't k n o w , " K i t t y s ai d . "I r e al y d o n 't k n o w ."

"P u t y o u r c o at o n , " h e s ai d . "Y o u 're g e t t i n g s o ak e d ."

"L i k e y o u c ar e ." E v e n s o , s h e p u t i t o n .

H e w at c h e d h e r as s h e w r e s t l e d w i t h t h e s l e e v e s . W h e n s h e h ad f i n i s h e d d o i n g u p t h e b u t t o n s h e c l e ar e d h i s t h r o at

again."Well,whateveryourreasonsmighthavebeen,"hebegan,"Isuppose Ineedtoth—"

"Don't,"shesaid."Don't.Idon'twanttohearit.Notfromyou."

Hefrowned."But—"

"Ididitwithoutthinkingandifyouwanttoknowthetruth,I'veregrettedit eversince,whenever I'veseenyour

hideous,lyingleafletsonthestreets,orpassedthosestageswhereyouractorsdoyourl

y i n g f o r y o u . S o d o n't t h ank

m e , M r . M an d r ak e ." S h e s h i v e
r e d ; t h e r ai n h ad s t e ad i l y i n t e
n s i f i e d . "If y o u m u st t h an k s o m
e o n e , m ak e i t B ar t i m ae u s .

H e 's t h e o n e w h o p r o mp t e d m e
t o s av e y o u r l i f e ."

E v e n i n t h e d ar k s h e c o u l d s e e
i t s t ar t l e d h i m . H i s p o s t u r e s t
i f f e n e d , h i s v o i c e g r e w b r i t t
l e . "H e p r o mp t e d y o u ? I f i n d

t h at h ar d t o c r e d i t ."

"W h y ? B e c au s e h e 's a d e mo n ?
Y e ah , I k n o w . D o e s n't m ak e mu

chsense.Buthetoldmehowt
ostopthegolem,he

caledmebackwhenIwouldh
averun.Withouthimyou'dbe
dead.Butdon'tletthatbother
you.He'sjustaslave."

Themagicianwassilentforat
ime.Thenhesaid,"Ihadbeen
meaningtoaskyouaboutBarti
maeus.Forsomereason

heregardsyouwithaffection
.Whyisthat?"

Kitty'slaughwasgenuine."T
hereisnoaffectionbetween
us."

"N o ? W h y t h e n d i d h e t e l m e y o u w e r e d e ad ? H e s ai d t h e g o l e m k i l e d y o u .T h at i s w h y I h av e n o t s e ar c h e d f o r y o u i n

al t h e s e y e ar s ."

"H e s ai d t h at ? I d i d n't k n o w . . . ." K i t t y l o o k e d o u t o v e r t h e b l ac k r i v e r . "W e l l ," s h e s ai d , "p e r h ap s i t w as b e c au s e I

t r e at e d h i m w i t h s o m e r e s p e c t ! P e r h ap s b e c au s e I d i d n't e n s l av e h i m , p e r h ap s b e c au s e I d i d n't s e e k t o k e e p h i m i n

s e r v i c e f o r y e ar af t e r y e ar w i t h o u t a b r e ak t i l h i s e s s e n c e w

o r e aw ay ! " S h e b i t h e r l i p , an d l o o k e d q u i c k l y at t h e

m ag i c i an .

H i s e y e s w e r e h i d d e n i n a s t r i p o f d ar k n e s s . "A n d what" h e s ai d v e r y q u i e t l y , "c an y o u p o s s i b l y k n o w ab o u t that Y o u

h av e n't s e e n B ar t i m ae u s f o r y e ar s . H ave y o u ? "

K i t t y e d g e d b ac k t o w ar d t h e r i v e r w al . T h e m ag i c i an s t e p p e d t o w ar d h e r —

A s u d d e n h i s s i n g i n m i d ai r ; r ai n d r o p s f i z z e d an d s t e am e d o

nsomethingmaterializingabovethewater.Asmallorb,

pinkandshiny.Musicsoundedasofanorchestrafarway.Mandrakedrewback;heutteredaquietcurse.

Afaintroundface,disruptedbycracklesofstatic,appearedintheorb.Avoiceissuedforth,similarlydisrupted."John!

I'vefoundyou!Youarelate!Evennowthemusicianswarmingup!Comequickly!"

Themagicianga vealittlebo

w."Quentin.Myapologies.Ihavebeendelayed."

"Notimetowaste!"Thefaceseemedtofixon Kittyforamoment."Bringyourgirlfriendtoo.Ishalsaveaseat.Ten

minutes,John.Tenminutes!"

Theorbfizzed,blurred,vanished.Darkrainfeluninterruptedintothe Thames.

KittyandMandrakestaredateachother."Itseems,"themagiciansaidslowly,"thatweshallhavetocontinuethis

conversationlater.Doyouli
kethetheater,Ms.Jones?"

Kittypursedherlips."Notm
uch."

"Norme."Hemadeanelegantg
estureuptowardtheroad."W
eshalhavetosuffertogether
."

19

OurraidontheAmbassadorH
otelwasplannedwithmilitar
yprecisionandtheutmostcar
e.Justtenminutes'

bickeringinaphoneboxand

w e h ad t h e p l an s e t s t r ai g h t .

A f t e r l e av i n g o u r m as t e r w e 'd
f l o w n s p e e d i l y ac r o s s L o n d
o n i n t h e g u i s e o f s t ar l i n g s , c r
o s s i n g ab o v e t h e p ar k w h e r e s
o

r e c e n t l y I'd h ad m y m i s ad v e n t
u r e .T h e G l as s P al ac e , t h e p ag
o d a, t h e i l -o m e n e d l ak e —al g l
i n t e d d o u r l y i n t h e l as t l i g h t

o f e v e n i n g . M o s t o f t h e i l u m i
n at i o n s w e r e o f f ; t h e n o r m al c
r o w d s w e r e ab s e n t , t h o u g h s
m al p o c k e t s o f c o m m o n e r s

m o v e d h e r e an d t h e r e w i t h u n

knownpurposeacrossthegrass.Isawpolicecordons,hurryingimps,anunusual

amountofactivity...thenwewereovertheStreetsofSt.James,andcirclingdowntothehotel.

Itwasanupmarketaffair,aslendergray-stonehousesetamongtheembassiesandgentlemen'sclubs;aplaceboth

sophisticatedanddiscreet,whereforeigndiplomatsandprincelingsmightresttheirwaletswhileintown.Itdidnot

l o o k t h e k i n d o f h o t e l t o w e l c o m e an i n v as i o n o f f i v e r ag t ag d j i n n , p ar t i c u l ar l y o n e s as u n s av o r y as H o d g e . W e s aw

h e x e s s h i mm e r i n g i n t h e w i n d o w s an d a l att i c e o f t h i n n o d e s up o n t h e f i r e e s c ap e . T h e d o o r man , r e s p l e n d e n t i n l i me -

g r e e n l i v e r y , h ad t h e s h ar p - e y e d l o o k o f s o me o n e w e ar i n g l e n s e s . C au t i o n w as r e q u i r e d . W e c o u l d n ' t j u s t s t r o l i n .

T h e p h o n e b o x w as r i g h t o pp o s i t e . O n e b y o n e , f i v e s t ar l i n g s f l e w d o w n b e h i n d i t . O n e b y o n e , f i v e r at s h o pp e d

throughaholeinside.Mwam
bausedhertailtobrushawayt
heworstofthecigarettebutt
s,andwebeganoursolemn

conclave.

"Right,troops,"Isaidbright
ly."Here'swhatIsuggest—"

Aone-eyedratheldupapawof
protest."Justamoment,Bart
imaeus,"itsaid."Whatmakes
youtheleaderalofa

sudden?"

"Youwantthefullinventoryo
fmytalents?Rememberweh

avetocaptureHopkinssometimethisevening."

"Ifhotaircountedforanything,Bartimaeus,we'dfollowyouwithpleasure." ThiswasCormocodran. Hisbasalt-thick

voiceboomedaboutthephonebox;thevibrationsmademywhiskersripple."Unfortunately,you'reoldandtiredand

useless."

"Weheardaboutyouradventuresasamightyfrog" Hodgeadded,chuckling."Relyingonthemastertosaveyou,

s c at t e r i n g y o u r e s s e n c e l i k e
r ai n ac r o s s t h e c i t y."

"It's h ar d l y h i s f au lt, t h o u g h, i s
i t?" M w am b a p u t i n s y m p at h e
t i c al y. O f al t h e r at s, s h e w as t h
e m o s t e l e g an t an d

c o n v i n c i n g. A s c o b o l h ad o n
e e y e, H o d g e h ad a r o w o f p o i s
o n s p i n e s am o n g s t h i s b r i s t l e
s, an d C o r m o c o d r an, as

al w ay s, l o o k e d m o r e l i k e a s m
al l, b r i c k o u t h o u s e t h an an y t h
i n g e l s e. A s f o r m e, m y e s s e n
c e w as p l ay i n g m e u p ag ai n;

t h e r e w e r e s o m e h a/ y p at c h e s

aroundmyextremities,althoughIhopedtheywereretoosmallforanyonetonotice.

"Maybenot,buthe'saliabilityonajobliketh is,"Ascobolsaid."Lookathisoutlinenow.Alfuzzy."

"He'llslowusup.Hewaslaggingwhenweflew."

"Yeah,andhe'dbeterribleinafight."

"Probablysubsideintoacustard."1

1. Acustard: another technical term.

D enotes a total collapse of essence while on the m ortal

plane. I n the O ther P lace, of course, our essence is freewheeling at al tim es and does not hav e

to b e b ound in any particular shape.

"W e l , y o u w o n 't c at c h m e s c o o p i n g h i m u p ."

"N o r m e . W e 'r e n o t o n b ab y s i t t i n g d u t y h e r e ."

"Y o u r h i g h o p i n i o n o f m y p o w e r s n o t w i t h s t an d i n g , " I g r o w l e d , "I'm t h e o n l y o n e w h o 's ac t u al y seen H o p k i n s . G o o n

w i t h o u t m e i f y o u w ant . S e e h o w f ar y o u g e t ."

"H e 's g e t t i n g h u f f y n o w , " H o d g e s ai d i n c o n t e m p l at i v e t o n e s . "E g o l i k e a b al o o n . W at c h o u t ! It 's g o i n g t o p o p ! "

M w am b a b att e d h e r t ai l i r r i t ab l y ag ai n s t t h e f l o o r . "W e 're w as t i n g t i m e . B ar t i m ae u s m ay b e d e c r e p i t , b u t w e n e e d h i s

ad v i c e b e f o r e w e s t ar t ." S h e s m i l e d as s w e e t l y as a s e w e r r at c an s m i l e . "P lease g o o n , B ar t i m ae u s . T e l l u s w h at y o u

s aw ."

Y o u k n o w m e . I'm n o t o n e t o h o l d g r u d g e s .2 I g av e a c ar e l e s s s h r u g . "In t r u t h , i t i s n't m u c h . I s aw H o p k i n s , b u t o n l y

b r i e f l y . W h e t h e r h e 's a m ag i c i an o r n o t , I c an 't s ay . I as s u m e s o . C e r t ai n l y som eon e u s e d a g an g o f f o l i o t s an d d j i n n

t o c h as e m e o f f ."

2 . A t least not when I can' t do anything ab out them . B ut sooner or later, when I was b ack at

ful v ig or, I ' d m eet H odg e, A scob ol, and C orm ocodran ag ain.Then I ' d apply delayed retrib ution

with al the sav ag e ferocity of a wounded b ear. S uccessful v eng eance is al ab out tim ing .

"J u s t a t h o u g h t , t h i s , " M w am b a s ai d . "Y o u'r e s u r e h e 's h u m an ? "

"H o p k i n s ? Y e p , I c h e c k e d h i m o u t o n al s e v e n p l an e s . H u m an o n e ac h o n e . If w e c an c at c h h i m b y s u r p r i s e , w e

s h o u l d b e ab l e t o h o l d h i m."

"O h , I'l h o l d h i m , " H o d g e s ai d i n a d ar k , e x u l t i n g v o i c e . "D o n't y o u w o r r y ab o u t t h at . I'v e g o t a s n u g p l ac e w ai t i n g f o r

h i m , a p l ac e w h e r e r o p e s an d s
h ac k l e s w o n't b e n e e d e d . A p l
ac e r i g h t h e r e . . . u n d er m y sk in
' . ' H e s n i g g e r e d

l o v i n g l y ; t h e s o u n d f ad e d .

T h e o t h e r f o u r r at s l o o k e d at e
ac h o t h e r .

A s c o b o l s ai d , " I t h i n k w e ' l l s t
i c k t o p l ai n o l d r o p e s , H o d g e
. T h an k s f o r t h e o f f e r . R i g h t , t
o c o n t i n u e , w e k n o w H o p k i n
s

s t ays h e r e . A n y i d e a w h i c h r o
o m ? "

Ishrugged."Notaclue."

"We'lhavetocheckthebookat reception.Whatthen?"

Cormocodranshiftedhishai rybulk."Werampageupstairs ,breakdownthedoor,beatHo pkinstoapulp,andspirit

himaway.Simple,efficient, satisfying.Nextquestion."

Ishookmyhead."Tactical ybr illiant,butHopkinsmightbe alertedaswestompuponthes tairs.Wemustbesubtle

here."

Cormocodranfrowned."I'mnotsureIdosubtle."

"Besides,"Mwambasaid,"Hopkinsmaynotyethavereturned.Weneedtogettohisroomquietlyandsee.Ifhe's

away,welurkwithin."

Inodded."Disguisesarenecessary,andinHodge'scasean additionalbathandfumigation.Humanshaveasenseof

smel,youknow."

Theratinquestionstirredindignantly,rattlinghispoiso

nspines."Stepthisway,Bartimaeus.Iwishtotasteyour

essence."

"Oh,yes?Thinkyoucantakeme?"

"Nothingwouldbeeasierormorewelcome."

Forsomewhiletheargument proceeded,scintillatingingitswit,verve,andskilfulrepartee,3butbeforeIcouldrout

myopponentwithafinaldevastatingproof,ablokecamei

n t o u s e t h e p h o n e b o x , an d t h e r at s t u r n e d t ai l an d

s c at t e r e d .

3 . S am ple dialog ue: " O h, so you reck on you can, eh? " " Y eah, no prob lem , pal! " " Y eah? "

" Y eah! " A ll to a b ack drop of the others whooping and slapping their hairy haunches. F or

intel ectual reach and v ig or, it was m idway b etween the deb ates of ancient A thens and those of

m ore recent E ng lish parliam ents.

Twentyminutespassed.Atthe entrancetotheAmbassadorHotelthedoormanpacedrhythmicallyfromsidetoside

andclappedhishandstogether tokeepwarm.Agroupofguests approached,awomanandthreemen,allbeautifully

attiredinsuitsofSilkRoadcloth.Theyspokequietlytogetherinan Arabictongue;thewomanworejewelsof

moonstoneatherthroat.Each gaveoffreassuringemanations ofwealth,dignity,andsocialpoise.4Thedoorman

s t e p p e d b ac k , s al u t e d .T h e f o u r ac k n o w l e d g e d h i m w i t h n o d s an d g r ac i o u s s m i l e s . T h e y p as s e d u p t h e s t e p s an d i n t o

t h e h o t e l f o y e r .

4 . W ith the possib le ex ception of C orm ocodran, who still contriv ed to resem b le a heifer

shoehorned into a suit.

A y o u n g w o m an s at s m i l i n g b e h i n d a m ah o g an y d e s k . "C an I h e l p y o u ? "

T h e m o s t h an d s o m e o f t h e m e n ap p r o ac h e d . "G o o d e v e n i n g .

W e ar e f r o m t h e E m b as s y o f t h e K i n g d o m o f S h e b a. W e

h av e a r o y al p ar t y ar r i v i n g i n a f e w w e e k s , an d w i s h t o i n s p e c t y o u r p r e m i s e s w i t h a v i e w t o h i r i n g r o o m s ."

"C e r t ai n l y , s i r .W o u l d y o u c ar e t o f o l o w m e ? I w i l l f i n d t h e m an ag e r ."

T h e r e c e p t i o n i s t r o s e f r o m h e r d e s k an d p ad d e d o n l i g h t f e e t d o w n a c o r r i d o r . T h e f o u r S h e b an d i p l o mat s f o l o w e d ; as

t h e y d i d s o , o n e o p e n e d a c l e n

c h e d f i s t . A s m al b u t u n p l e as
an t i n s e c t r o s e o u t , al l l e g s , s
p i n e s , an d s u l p h u r o u s o d o r s
,

an d f l e w o n w h i r r i n g w i n g s t o
t h e v ac at e d d e s k , w h e r e i t p r o
c e e d e d t o s c an t h e r e g i s t e r .

T h e h o t e l m an ag e r w as a s m al l
, am p l y p ad d e d l ad y o f m i d d l e
ag e . H e r b o n e -g r ay h ai r w as s w
e p t b ac k an d f i x e d i n

p l ac e b y a p i e c e o f p o l i s h e d w
h al e b o n e . S h e r e c e i v e d h e r v
i s i t o r s w i t h p o l i t e r e s e r v e .
"Y o u ar e f r o m t h e S h e b an

E m b as s y ? "

I m ad e a c o u r t e o u s b o w . " T h at i s c o r r e c t , m ad am . Y o u r p e r s p i c ac i t y i s b e y o n d c o m p ar e . "

" W e l , t h e g i r l j u s t t o l d m e . B u t I w as n o t aw ar e t h at S h e b a w as an i n d e p e n d e n t s t at e . I t h o u g h t i t w as p ar t o f t h e

A r ab i an C o n f e d e r ac y . "

I h e s i t at e d . " E r m , al t h at i s ab o u t t o c h an g e , m ad am . W e ar e s h o r t l y t o b e c o m e s e l f - g o v e r n i n g . It i s t o c e l e b r at e t h i s

t h at o u r r o y al g u e s t s ar e c o mi

n g."

"I s e e . . . D e ar m e , s e l f-g o v e r n m e n t i s a d an g e r o u s t r e n d . I h o p e S h e b a d o e s n o t s e t an e x am p l e t o o u r e m p i r e . . .

.W e l , I c an c e r t ai n l y s h o w y o u a t y p i c al r o o m . T h i s i s a v e r y p r e s t i g i o u s h o t e l , as I'm s u r e y o u k n o w —p r i v at e an d

ex trem ely e x c l u s i v e . It s s e c u r i t y s y s t e m s h av e b e e n au t h o r i z e d b y g o v e r n m e n t m ag i c i an s . W e h av e s t at e -o f-t h e -ar t

d o o r-g u ar d d e m o n s f o r e v e r y r o o m."

"Is that so? Every single one?"

"Yes. Excuse me—let me just get the appropriate key. I won't be a minute."

The manager bustled swiftly away. At this the female diplomat turned to me. "You id iot, Bartimaeus," she hissed. "You

swore She bastill existed."

"Wel, it did last time I was out there."

"Which was when, exactly?"

"F i v e h u n d r e d y e ar s o r s o ag o . . . Y e s , al r i g h t . Y o u n e e d n ' t g e t al s n i p p y ."

T h e h u l k i n g d i p l o m at s p o k e i n r u m b l i n g t o n e s . " H o d g e i s t ak i n g h i s t i m e ."

"C an h e ac t u al y r e ad ? " I s ai d . "T h at m ay h av e b e e n t h e f l aw i n o u r p l an ."

"O f c o u r s e h e c an . H u s h . S h e ' s c o m i n g b ac k ."

"I h av e t h e k e y n o w , s i r s , m ad am . If y o u w o u l d b e s o g o o d . . ."

T h e m an ag e r t r o t t e d al o n g a d i

mlylitcorridor,aloakpanels,gildedmirrors,andunnecessarypotsonstands,

pointingoutassortedarches."Thatisthediningroomintherе...decoratedintheRococostyle,withanoriginal

paintingbyBoucher;beyondarethekitchens.Toourleftisthegrandlounge,theonlyroomwhereoneispermitted

tousedemons.Elsewhereweforbidtheirpresence,sincetheyareingeneralunhygienic,noisy,andarepellent

nuisance. Particularly djinn. Did you speak, sir?"

Cormoc O'Dran had uttered a croak of frage. He swallowed it down. "No, no."

"Tell me," the manager continued, "is Sheba a magical society? I'm afraid I should know, but I have learned so little

of other lands. One has so much to do to occupy oneself in one's own country, don't you think? It is hard to have

much time for foreigners, particularly when so many of th

e m ar e s av ag e s an d an t h r o p o p h ag i . H e r e i s t h e l i f t . W e

as c e n d t o t h e s e c o n d f l o o r ."

M an ag e r an d d i p l o m at s e n t e r e d t h e l i f t an d t u r n e d t o fac e t h e f r o n t . A s t h e d o o r s e as e d s h u t , a w h i r r i n g s o u n d w as

h e ar d . U n n o t i c e d b y t h e m an ag e r , a n o i s o m e i n s e c t , al l s p i n e s an d s t r an g e e m i s s i o n s , s l i p p e d t h r o u g h t h e c l o s i n g

c r ac k , f l i t t e d o n t o t h e s l e e v e o f t h e S h e b an w o m an an d c r aw l e d up t o h e r e ar . It w h i s p e r e d b r i e f l y .

Sheturnedtome,mouthedthemessage:"Roomtwenty-threee."

Inodded.Wehadtheinformationwerequired.ThefourShebandiplomatsglancedateachother.Asone,theyturned

theirheadsslowlytolookdownatthediminutivemanager,whowaswitteringawaycomplacentlyaboutthedelights

ofthehotelsauna,obliviousttothesuddenchangeinatmosphereinthecrowdedlift.

"Wedon'thaveto,"IsaidinAr

abic."Wecouldtieherup."

"Shemightsqueak,"saidthefemalediplomat."Andwherewouldweputher?"

"True."

"Wel,then."

Theoldlifttrundledon.Itcametothesecondfloor.Thedoorsopened.FourShebandiplomatssteppedout,

accompaniedbyawhirringinsect.Thebiggestofthefourwaspickinghisteethwithapolishedwhalebonehairgrip.

Hefinishedpresently,stuck thewhaleboneinthesoilofa voluminouspotplantoutsid ethelift,andpaddedafterthe

othersdownthesilenthal.

Withthedoortoroomtwenty -threeinsight,wehaltedonc eagain.

"Whatdowedo?"Mwambawh ispered.

Ascobolmadeanimpatientno ise."Weknock.Ifhe'sthere, webreakdownthedoorandge thim.Ifnot..."Hisflood

o f i n s p i r at i o n h ad w e ar i e d h i m ; h e c e as e d .

"W e g e t i n s i d e an d w ai t ." T h at w as H o d g e , b u z z i n g ar o u n d o u r h e ad s .

"T h e w o m an m e n t i o n e d a d o o r g u ar d , " I c au t i o n e d . "W e 'l h av e t o d e al w i t h i t ."

"H o w h ar d c an t h at b e ? "

T h e g r o u p o f d i p l o m at s ap p r o ac h e d t h e d o o r . M w am b a k n o c k e d . W e w ai t e d , l o o k i n g u p an d d o w n t h e c o r r i d o r . A l l w as

s t i l .

Mwambaknockedagain.Therewasmovementwithinacircularpanelinthecenterofthedoor.Thewoodgrains

shifted,ripplingandcontortingtoformthefaintoutlineofafface.Itblinkedsleepilyanddspokeinasqueaky,nasal

voice."Theoccupantofthisroomisout.Pleasereturnlater."

Isteppedbackandconsideredthebaseofthedoor."It'spretttytightfitting.Thinkwecouldslipunderthere?"

"D o u b t f u l , " M w am b a s ai d . "K e y h o l e m i g h t b e o k ay , i f w e c h an g e d t o s m o k e ."

T h e r e w as a t i t t e r f r o m A s c o b o l . "B ar t i m ae u s w o n 't n eed t o c h an g e . L o o k at h i s l o w e r h al f —i t 's g as e o u s al r e ad y ."5

5 . H urtful, coarse, b ut there wa s a g rain of truth in it. I hadn' t q uite deteriorated as far as m y

condition with the frog , b ut with ev ery passing m inute m y streng th, and essence control,

b ecam e a little less. I wa s a little fluid ab out the trousers.

Cormocodranwasfrowningdownathishulkingtorso."I'mnotsureIdosmoke."

Thedoorguardhadlistenedinwithsomeconcern."Theoccupantoftheroomisout,"itsqueakedagain."Pleasedo

notattemptentrance.Iwilbeforcedtoact."

Ascobolsteppedclose."Whatmannerofspiritareyou?Animp?"

"Yes,sir.IndeedIam."Thedoorguardseemedunfeasiblyproud.

"H o w m an y p l an e s c an y o u o b s e r v e ? F i v e ? V e r y w e l —t ak e a l o o k at u s o n t h e f i f t h . W h at d o y o u s e e ? W e l l ? D o y o u

n o t t r e m b l e ? "

T h e f ac e o n t h e d o o r h ad s w al o w e d au d i b l y . "A l i t t l e , s i r ... B u t , i f I m ay as k , w h at i s t h at n e b u l o u s b l o t h o v e r i n g o n

t h e r i g h t ? "

"T h at i s B ar t i m ae u s . P ay n o at t e n t i o n t o h i m . W e o t h e r s ar e r u t h l e s s an d s t r o n g an d d e man d t o e n t e r t h e r o o m . W h at

d o y o u s ay ? "

A p au s e , a h e av y s i g h . " I am b o u n d b y a b o n d , s i r . I m u s t p r e v e n t y o u ."

A s c o b o l c u r s e d . " T h e n y o u s i g n y o u r d e at h w ar r an t . W e ar e p o w e r f u l d j i n n . Y o u ar e a s mu d g e o f i n s i g n i f i c an c e . W h at

c an y o u h o p e t o d o ? "

" I c an s o u n d t h e al ar m , s i r . W h i c h i s w h at I h av e j u s t d o n e ."

A f ai n t p o p p i n g , as o f b u b b l e s b u r s t i n g i n h o t mu d . T h e d i p l o mats g l an c e d l e f t an d r i g h t :

al o n g t h e c o r r i d o r o n e i t h e r

s i d e a n u m b e r o f h e ad s w e r e r
i s i n g f r o m t h e c ar p e t . E ac h h e
ad w as o v al l i k e a r u g b y b al , s m
o o t h an d s h i n y , b e e t l e -

b l ac k , w i t h t w o p al e e y e s s e t c
l o s e l y n e ar t h e b as e . E ac h p o p
p e d f r e e an d r o s e i n t o t h e ai r , t
r ai l i n g a w r i t h i n g s t r i p o f

t e n t ac l e s .

"W e n e e d t o d e al w i t h t h i s q u i
c k l y , q u i e t l y , an d n e at l y , " M
w ar n b as ai d . "H o p k i n s c an 't k
n o w an y t h i n g h as h ap p e n e d ."

"R i g h t."

In a s o me w h at m e n ac i n g s i l e n c e t h e h e ad s d r i f t e d i n o u r d i r e c t i o n.

W e d i d n't h an g ar o u n d t o s e e w h at t h e y p l an n e d t o d o. W e ac t e d, e ac h o n e ac c o r d i n g t o t h e i r s p e c i al t y. M w amb a

s p r an g at t h e w al, s c r amb l e d u p i t an d o n t o t h e c e i l i n g, f r o m w h e r e s h e c l u n g l i k e a l i z ar d, d i s c h ar g i n g S p as m s at t h e

n e ar e s t h e ad. H o d g e s w e l l e d f r o m i n s e c t s i z e i n t h e b l i n k o f an e y e, t u r n e d, an d s h o o k h i s

skin,hurlinginnumerable

poisondartstowardtheenemy.FromAscobol'sshoulders featheredwingsprotruded; heroseintotheairandfireda

Detonation.Cormocodranbe cameaman-boar.Helowereredh istusks,rotatedhismassives houlders,andchargedinto

thefray.Asforme,Inippedb ehindthenearestornamental potplant,erectedwhatShiel dIcouldandtriedtolook

inconspicuous.6

6 . I ' d hav e l o v ed to tak e part in the fig ht. L ov ed to. O rdinarily I ' d hav e b een first in line to fig ht

the sq uidy head thing s. B ut that wasn' t m y b rief j ust then. I had precious little essence left to

spil .

I'd v ag u e l y w o n d e r e d , as I r e ar r an g e d t h e b i g g e s t l e av e s , w h at s o r t o f t h r e at t h e f l o at i n g h e ad s m i g h t p o s e . I s o o n

d i s c o v e r e d . A s s o o n as o n e o r t w o d r e w c l o s e , t h e h e ad s t i p p e d b ac k , t h e t e n t ac l e s d r e w ap ar t , an d t u b e s w i t h i n

s q u i r t e d f o r t h b l a c k s p r a y s t h a t d e l u g e d e v e r y t h i n g b e f o r e t h e m . C o r m o c o d r a n w a s c a u g h t m i d - c h a r g e ; h e l e t f o r t h a

b e l o w o f p a i n — w h e r e i t h i t , t h e l i q u i d b u r n e d h i s e s s e n c e ; i t b u b b l e d , s p a t , a t e i n t o h i s f o r m . E v e n s o , h e w a s n o t

d o n e . H e l u n g e d w i t h h i s t u s k s a n d s e n t a h e a d c r a s h i n g d o w n t h e h a l . A s c o b o l ' s D e t o n a t i o n c a u g h t a n o t h e r , e x p l o d e d

i t i n m i d a i r ; b l a c k s p r a y s p l a s h e d a g a i n s t t h e w a l s , f u r t h e r c o a t i n g t h e w r i t h i n g C o r m o c o

d r an an d e v e n p at t e r i n g o n t o

t h e t o p m o s t l e av e s o f m y t r u s t y p o t p l an t .

U p o n t h e c e i l i n g , M w am b a s p r an g an d d o d g e d , av o i d i n g al l b u t t h e s l i g h t e s t s m e ar s o f b l ac k . H e r S p as m s f o u n d t h e i r

m ar k : h e r e an d t h e r e h e ad s w h i r l e d an d s h o o k t h e m s e l v e s ap ar t . H o d g e 's p o i s o n d ar t s h ad l i k e w i s e s p e ar e d a c o u p l e :

t h e y s w e l l e d , t u r n e d y e l o w , an d s an k t o t h e c ar p e t , w h e r e t h e y b e c am e i c h o r o us an d f ad e

d .

T h e h e ad s p u t o n a s u r p r i s i n g t u r n o f s p e e d . T h e y d ar t e d t h i s w ay an d t h at , s e e k i n g t o e v ad e t h e d ar t s , S p as m s an d

D e t o n at i o n s , an d t o g e t ar o u n d b e h i n d t h e d j i n n f o r f u r t h e r at t ac k s . In t h i s t h e y w e r e h amp e r e d b y t h e c o n f i n e s o f t h e

c o r r i d o r , an d b y a m ad n e s s t h at s e e m e d t o h av e i n f e c t e d C o r m o c o d r an . W i t h m o l t e n t u s k s an d a f ac e t h at b l u r r e d an d

s t e am e d , h e r o ar e d an d c h ar g e d , s w i p i n g w i t h h i s f i s t s , g r

aspingtentacles,trampling withhishooves,seemingly

insensibletothegoutingspray.Withsuchafoe,theheads wereupagainstit.Inlessthan aminutethelastone

gloopilysubsided.Thebattlewasover.

Mwambadroppeddownfrom theceiling,Ascobolfloated tothefloor.Isteppednimbly outfrombehindtheplant.We

regardedthecorridor.Itwas goingtogivenextmorning's cleanersquiteasurprise,wh

at e v e r p l an e t h e y o p e r at e d o n .

H al f t h e w al s w e r e c o at e d w i t h t h e s p r ay ; i t h i s s e d an d f o am e d an d r an i n r i v u l e t s t o t h e f l o o r . T h e c o r r i d o r w as a

k al e i d o s c o p e o f s t ai n s , s c o r c h e s , an d c o n g e al i n g s l i m e . E v e n t h e f r o n t h al f o f m y p o t p l an t h ad b e e n b ad l y b u r n e d ; I

r o t at e d i t c ar e f u l y t o p r e s e n t i t s g o o d s i d e t o t h e w o r l d .

"T h e r e ! " I s ai d b r i g h t l y . "T h i nk H o p k i n s i s g o i n g t o n o t i c e an y t h i n g ? "

Cormocodranwasinpoorshape,theboar'sheadscarcelyrecognizable,histusksblackened,hisnicetattoosquite

gone.Withlimpingsteps,heapproachedthedoorofroomtwenty-three,whereretheimpwatchedblinkinginitscircle.

"Now,myfriend,"hesaid,"wemustdecideuponthenatureofyourdeath."

"Onemoment!"thedoorguardcried."Thereisnoneedforsuchunpleasantness!Ourdifferenceofopinionisatan

e n d ! "

C o r m o c o d r an n ar r o w e d h i s e y e s . " W h y s o ? "

" B e c au s e t h e o c c u p an t o f t h e r o o m h as n o w r e t u r n e d an d y o u c an t ak e u p t h e m att e r w i t h h i m p e r s o n al l y . G o o d d ay

t o y o u . " T h e g r ai n s o f w o o d s h i f t e d an d r e l ax e d ; t h e o u t l i n e o f t h e f ac e w as g o n e .

T h e r e w as a s e c o n d o r t w o w h i l e w e s t o o d p o n d e r i n g t h e m y s t e r y o f t h e i m p ' s w o r d s . T h e n a f u r t h e r s e c o n d as w e

s l o w l y t u r n e d t o l o o k b ac k d o w n t h e h al l .

H al f w ay al o n g i t s t o o d a man .

H e h ad e v i d e n t l y j u s t c o m e i n f r o m o u t s i d e , f o r h e w o r e a w i n t e r c o at o v e r a d ar k g r ay s u i t . H i s h e ad w as b ar e and

s l i g h t l y w i n d s w e p t ; a s h o c k o f b r o w n i s h h ai r f e l d o w n ac r o s s a f ac e t h at w as n e i t h e r o l d n o r y o u n g . It w as t h e s ame

man I'd s e e n i n t h e p ar k : s l e n d e r , p i g e o n - c h e s t e d , t h o r o u g h l y u n r e m ar k ab l e . H e h ad a p l as t i c b ag o f b o o k s i n h i s l e f t

hand. Evenso, somethingabo
uthimtuggedduneasilyatmym
emory, justasithadlasttime.
Whatwasit? I'd have

swornI'dnotmetHopkinsbef
ore.

Iviewedhimonthesevenpl
anes. Hardtobesure, buthis
auraseemedalittlestronger
thanmosthumans'. Perhaps

itwasjustthelights. Hewasc
ertainlyaman.

Mr. Hopkinslookedatus. We
lookedathim.

T h e n h e s m i l e d , t u r n e d , an d r an .

O f f w e w e n t : M w am b a an d A s c o b o l i n t h e l e ad , H o d g e p o u n d i n g af t e r , m e n e x t , c o n s e r v i n g as m u c h e n e r g y as I

c o u l d , an d f i n al y p o o r o l d C o r m o c o d r an b r i n g i n g u p t h e r e ar .7 A r o u n d t h e c o r n e r w e p i l e d , i n t o t h e al c o v e w i t h t h e

l i f t .

7 . I t was his wounds that slowed him m ainly, b ut his recent m eal can' t hav e helped. H e' d real y

b olted the m anag er down.

"W h e r e 's h e g o n e ? "

"T h e r e ! S t ai r s —q u i c k —"

"U p o r d o w n ? "

I s aw a f l as h o f s l e e v e o n t h e t u r n b e l o w . "D o w n ! Q u i c k ! C h an g e , s o m e o n e ."

A s h i m m e r i n g . M w am b a w as a b i r d w i t h b l ac k - g r e e n w i n g s , d i v i n g d o w n t h e c e n t e r o f t h e s t ai r w e l . A s c o b o l b e c am e a

v u l t u r e , a l e s s as t u t e c h o i c e , s i n c e h e h ad t r o u b l e t u r n i n g h

isbulkinthenarrowspace.Hodgeshrank,climbedonto

thebalustradeintheformofanevil-lookingpangolin.Hecurleduptoabal,sothathisplatesprotectedhim,and

droppedbodilydownthesheaft.Nosuchspeedformeor Cormocodran;wehurriedafterthemasbestwecould.

Downtothegroundfloor,throughswingdoors,outintothecorridor.Ihalted,onlytobeknockedsprawlingby

Cormocodranchargingblind

l y al o n g b e h i n d .

"W h i c h w ay d i d t h e y g o ? "

"I d o n 't k n o w . W e 'v e l o s t t h e m . N o —l i s t e n ! "

S o u n d s o f s h o u t s an d s c r e ams —al w ay s a g o o d i n d i c at i o n o f w h e r e m y c h u ms m i g h t b e . It c ame f r o m t h e d i r e c t i o n o f

t h e d i n i n g r o o m .A s w e w at c h e d , a n u m b e r o f h u m an s —a p i c k -'n '-m i x as s o r t m e n t o f c u s t o m e r s an d k i t c h e n s t aff —

c ame b u r s t i n g t h r o u g h t h e ar c h an d f l e d h o w l i n g up t h e c o r r

idor.Wewaitedforthetubbiesttowheezepast,then

hurriedon.Intothediningroom,alongatrailofscatteredchairs,cutlery,andbrokenglass,andthroughasetof

swingdoorsintothehotelkitchen.

Ascobollookedaround."Quick!"hecried."We'vegothimsurrounded!"

Thecyclopswasstandingastrideametalsinktop,pointing.Tohisleft,Mwambablockedthespacebetweentworacks

ofpans,herscalytailswishin
gidlytoandfro,herlongfork
edtongueflickingattheair.T
ohisright,Hodgehad

hoppeduponachoppingtabl
e,andwasraisingandlowerin
ghispoisonspineswithmale
volentintent.Allwerestari
ng

fixedlyatthefarcornerofthe
kitchen,wherethefugitiveh
adtakenrefuge.Behind.him
wassolidwall,nodoorsor

windows.Hehadnochanceof
escape.

Cormocodranand Itookourplacesintheline. Ascobolglancedacrossatus. "Thefool'srefusingtocomequietly," he

hissed. "Weneedtoscarehimabit. Hodgehasdonesomeprettymanictittering, butheh asn't budgedaninch. Come

on, Bartimaeus—can'tyoumanagesomethinga little morefearsome? Pepupyourguise."

Youmightarguethatamanwhowasn'tscaredofacyclops,

aboar-headedwarrior, agiantlizard, andavicious-looking

p an g o l i n w i t h t h e t i t t e r s w o u l d n 't b e t o o f u s s e d at o n e

m o n s t e r m o r e o r l e s s , b u t I t o o k t h e p o i n t . A S h e b an d i p l o m at i s n 't t h e m o s t t e r r i f y i n g t h i n g i n t h e w o r l d . I r u m m ag e d

t h r o u g h m y i n v e n t o r y o f g u i s e s an d p i c k e d o u t o n e t h at u s e d t o aw e t h e p e o p l e o f t h e p l ai n s w e l l e n o u g h . T h e

d i p l o m at v an i s h e d . In h i s p l ac e s t o o d a t al , s i n i s t e r f i g u r e , h u n g ab o u t w i t h a c ap e o f f e at h e r s an d an i m al b o n e s ; h e

h ad a m an 's b o d y , b u t h i s h e ad

—sleekandblackwitheyesof yelowfire—wasasavagecro w's.Thecruelbeak

opened,loosingawickedc aw uponthe world.Assorted cutleryrattledacrossthekit chen.

Ibentmyheadtowar dAscobo l."How'sthat?"

"It'llhavetodo."

Asone,thefiveterribledjin nsteppedclosertotheirpre y.

"Youmayaswelputthatthingd

o w n , " M w am b a ad v i s e d s t e r n l y . " W e ' v e g o t y o u t r ap p e d . "

A h y e s . T h at t h i n g . I ' d n o t i c e d i t t o o . It w as a c e r t ai n k i n d o f k i t c h e n i m p l e m e n t t h at M r . H o p k i n s h ad p i c k e d u p i n

s e l f - d e f e n s e . B u t f ar f r o m h o l d i n g i t f e ar f u l y i n f r o n t o f h i m , as y o u m i g h t e x p e c t , h e w as t o y i n g w i t h i t i n a m anner

u n b e f i t t i n g a s c h o l ar , t o s s i n g i t u p i n t o t h e ai r w i t h o n e h an d an d c at c h i n g i t n i m b l y b e t w e e n f i n g e r an d t h u m b o f t h e

o t h e r . If i t h ad b e e n a t i n - o p e n

erorapotatopeeler,evenal adleorsoupspoon,itwouldn'thavebotheredmeso

much.Butitwasn'tanyofthose things.Itwasameatcleaver, andalargeonetoo.

Somethingaboutthewayhewi eldeditrangafewfaintbells .

"Wel,now,"Mr.Hopkinssaid,smiling."Here'saconundrum.Haveyoutrappedme,oris ittheotherwayaround?"

Hegavealittlekickofhisleg sashesaidthis,asifhewereab

outtostartdancingsomehorr
ibleCelticjig;insteadof

whichherosegentlyoffthef
loorandhoveredoverus,gri
nningfromeartoear.

ThiswasunexpectedEvenH
odgestoppedhiseagersnick
ering.Theothersglancedate
achotherinastonishment.

Notme,though.Iwassilent,f
rozenwhereIstood,anunco
mfortablefingeroficetravel
ingatleisuredownmyspine.

I'dknownthevoice,yousee.
Itwasn'tthatofanyMr.Hopkin

s . It w as n't e v e n h u m an .

It w as F aq u ar l 's .

20

"E r , c h ap s , " I v e n t u r e d . "I t h i n k w e s h o u l d g o c ar e f u l y h e r e ."

F r o m h i s p o s i t i o n i n m i d ai r M r . H o p k i n s t o s s e d t h e c l e av e r h i g h ; f l as h i n g as i t s p u n , i t ar c e d ar o u n d a c e i l i n g l i g h t an d

l an d e d h an d l e - f i r s t b ac k u p o n h i s o u t s t r e t c h e d f i n g e r . H e c au g h t m y e y e an d w i n k e d .

Ascobolwasrattled,buthetalkedbigtocoverit."Sohecanlevitate,"hesnarled."Anddojugglingtricks.Socanhalf

thestarvingfakirsofIndia,anddIneverranfromthem.Comeon.Remember,we'vegottotakehimalive."

Withanunearthlycry,heleapeddownfromhissinktop.Thecrow-headedmanheldoutahandofcaution."Wait!"I

said."Somethingswrongheree.Hisvoice—"

"Youcoward, Bartimaeus!" Thepangolinloosedavolleyoffdartsthatpatteredintothefloorbesidemyfeet. "Youfear

forwhatremainsofyouressence. Well, hoponthenearestchairandsqueal. Fourproperdjinncanhandlethisman."

"Butthat'sjustit," Iprotested. "I'mnotsurethisisaman. He's —"

"Ofcourse Iam." Uponhigh, Mr. Hopkinstappedhischestproudly. "Planesonetoseven, fleshandblood. Can'tyou

s e e ? " It w as t r u e . H e w as h u m an w h i c h e v e r w ay y o u l o o k e d at i t . B u t i t w as F aq u ar l w h o s p o k e .

T h e g i an t l i z ar d s w u n g h e r t ai l i n ag i t at i o n ; i t c au g h t ag ai n s t a c o o k e r an d s e n t i t c r as h i n g o n i t s s i d e . "H o l d o n , "

M w am b a s ai d . "W h at l an g u ag e ar e w e s p e ak i n g ? "1

1. I n the heat of the m om ent we dj inn som etim es lose track of which ling o we' re using . W hen

work ing tog ether in this world, we tend to speak lang uag es fam iliar to us all

and not

necessarily the one used b y the civ iliz ation d u j o u r. (There you g o, you see.)

"E r m . . . A r am ai c , w h y ? "

"B e c au s e h e c an s p e ak i t t o o ."

"S o w h at ? H e 's a s c h o l ar , ai n 't h e ? " In t i m e s o f s t r e s s A s c o b o l c o u l d p u l v e r i z e S e m i t i c t o n g u e s .

"Y e s , b u t i t s e e m s a l i t t l e o d d . . ."

M r . H o p k i n s i n s p e c t e d h i s w

atchostentatiously."Look, I'msorrytobuttin,"hecaled, "butI'mabusyman.Ihave

someimportantbusinessthisevening,whichconcernsusal.Ifyoulotclearoffnow,I'lspareyou.EvenBartimaeus."

Cormocodranhadbeenrestinghispoorlyessenceagainstaneight-hoboven,butatthesewordsheeruptedintolife.

"You'llspareus?"heroared. "Forthatpieceofimpudence Ishalgoreyou,andnotgently!"Hepawedthegroundwith

a h o o f and s t ar t e d f o r w ar d . T h e o t h e r d j i n n f o l l o w e d h i s e x amp l e ; t h e r e w as a g e n e r al r att l i n g o f h o r n s , s p i n e s ,

s c al e s , an d o t h e r ar m o r e d b i t s . M r . H o p k i n s c h u c k e d t h e c l e av e r c as u al y t o h i s r i g h t h an d and s p u n i t ar o u n d h i s

f i n g e r s .

"W ai t , y o u i d i o t s ! " t h e c r o w - man s h o u t e d ."D i d n't y o u hear? H e k n o w s me ! H e k n o w s my n ame ! T h i s i s —"

"It's n o t l i k e y ou t o h o l d b ac k o n t h e e d g e o f a b att l e , B ar t i m

aeus,"Mr.Hopkinscalledcheerily,droppingdowntowardd

theadvancingdjinn."You'renormalymuchfartheraway,cowweringinadisusedcatacomborsomething."

"Thatcatacombincidenthasbeengrosslymisrepresented!"Iroared."AsI'veexplainedcountlesstimes,Iwas

guardingitagainstRome'senemies,whomightwelhavechosen—"Istoppedrightthere.Thatwastheproof.No

h u m an k n e w w h e r e I'd l o i t e r e d d u r i n g t h e b ar b ar i an i n v as i o n , an d p r e c i o u s f e w s p i r i t s e i t h e r .2 In f ac t , I c o u l d o n l y

t h i n k o f o n e d j i n n i t h at s t i l b r o u g h t i t up w i t h m e t r o n o m i c r e g u l ar i t y , w h e n e v e r o u r p at h s c r o s s e d o v e r t h e c e n t u r i e s .

A n d s u r e e n o u g h , t h at o n e w as —

2 . The foliots F risp and P ollux had b een present when I was discov ered; they' d am used

them selv es afterward recounting the

tale to imps of their acquaintance. Sadly, both foliots and

imps were al soon killed in a variety of ways during the course of a single night: a bizarre

coincidence, which quite wore me out.

"Stop!" I cried, hopping from side to side in agitation. "It's not Hopkins at al! I don't know how, but it's Faquarl, and

he—"

It was too late, of course. My companions were making far too many roars and rumbles for t

h e m t o h e ar . M i n d , I

d o u b t t h e y 'd h av e s t o p p e d e v
e n i f t h e y had h e ar d . C e r t ai n l y
A s c o b o l and H o d g e , w h o h ad n
o r e s p e c t f o r t h e i r e l d e r s

o r b e t t e r s , w o u l d h av e c ar r i e
d o n r e g ar d l e s s . M ay b e M w ar
n b a m i g h t h av e h e s i t at e d .

B u t t h e y d i d n 't h e ar , an d t h e y
al p i l e d i n .

W e l , i t w as f o u r ag ai n s t o n e . F
aq u ar l , ar m e d o n l y w i t h a k i t c
h e n k n i f e , v e r s u s f o u r o f t h e
m o s t f e r o c i o u s d j i n n t h e n at

l ar g e i n L o n d o n . It w as a h i d e o u s m i s m at c h .

I'd h av e h e l p e d m y c o m p an i o n s o u t i f I'd t h o u g h t i t w o u l d m ak e an y d i f f e r e n c e .

In s t e ad , I s t o l e c ar e f u l y t o w ar d t h e d o o r . T h i n g w as , I k n ew F aq u ar l . H e h ad a c e r t ai n b r e e z y c o n f i d e n c e t h at c am e

f r o m b e i n g v e r y g o o d at w h at h e d i d .3

3 . H e wasn' t lik e old J ab or had b een, i.e. m oronical y strong to the point of indestructib le. H e

wasn' t lik e g rim Tchue, who rarely needed to lift a fing er to his enem ies, so frig htful and

inv entiv e were his words. N o, F aq uarl was an all-rounder—he had a practical tak e on surv iv al

that respected power and cunning eq ually. A s of this m om ent, this was m y v iew also: it was b y

cunning ly respecting F aq uarl' s power that I intended to av oid b eing k il ed.

V e r y g o o d , an d v e r y q u i c k . C r o w -h e ad h ad j u s t n e g o t i at e d a r ac k o f o m e l e t t e p an s an d w as s l i p p i n g p as t t h e p as t r y

c a s e s w h e n a s h o w e r o f p l a t e s f e l l a r o u n d h i s e a r s . A r m o r p l a t e s , t h a t i s , l a t e l y o f t h e p a n g o l i n .

T h e y w e r e f o l o w e d a s e c o n d o r s o l a t e r b y o n e o r t w o o t h e r t h i n g s — s o m e o f w h i c h , I ' m s o r r y t o s a y , w e r e

r e c o g n i z a b l e .

I t w a s o n l y w h e n I r e a c h e d t h e k i t c h e n d o o r t h a t I r i s k e d a q u i c k l o o k b a c k . A t t h e f a r e n d o f t h e r o o m w a s a w h i r l o f

m o v e m e n t , f l a s h e s o f l i g h t , s o u n d s , a n d s c r e a m s . O c c a s i o

n a l l y h a n d s r e a c h e d o u t f r o m t h e v o r t e x , g r a s p e d t a b l e s o r

s m a l f r i d g e s a n d p l u n g e d w i t h t h e m b a c k o u t o f s i g h t . F r a g m e n t s o f m e t a l , w o o d , a n d e s s e n c e h u r t l e d o u t w a r d

p e r i o d i c a l y .

T i m e t o d e p a r t . S o m e d j i n n o f m y a c q u a i n t a n c e l e t l o o s e a b i l o w i n g F o g t o c o v e r t h e i r t r a c k s ; o t h e r s p r e f e r t o l e a v e a

n o x i o u s i n k y v a p o r o r a f e w I l l u s i o n s i n t h e i r w a k e . M e , I h i t t h e l i g h t s . K i t c h e n a n d d i n i n g r o o m w e r e p l u n g e d i n t o

d ar k n e s s . W e i r d g l i n t s o f a d o z e n c o l o r s e m i t t e d b y t h e f i g h t i n g d j i n n s l i d an d s p u n ac r o s s t h e w al l s . A h e ad , a s o l i t ar y

w e d g e o f l i g h t m ar k e d t h e w ay o u t t o t h e c o r r i d o r . I w r ap p e d m y c ap e o f f e at h e r s c l o s e ab o u t m e an d w as s w al l o w e d

b y t h e s h ad o w s .4

4 . M y crow-headed g uise was the totem of the trib e that liv ed b etween plain and forest. They

v alued the b ird' s stealth and secrecy, his intel ig ence and g uile. The cape

included feathers of

ev ery b ird liv ing in those parts: with their power ab sorb ed into m ine, I could walk unnoticed

ov er g rass and stone and also conv erse respectfully with the trib e' s sham an, who wore a

sim ilar costum e, com plete with m ask .

I h ad n 't g o t h al f w ay ac r o s s t h e d i n i n g r o o m w h e n al s o u n d s o f c o m b at b e h i n d m e c e as e d .

I h al t e d , h o p i n g ag ai n s t h o p e t o h e ar m y c o l e ag u e s ' c r i e s o f t r i u m p h .

N o l u c k . T h e s i l e n c e b e at ag ai n s t m y f e at h e r e d h e ad .

I c o n c e n t r at e d an d really s t r ai n e d f o r a s c r ap o f s o u n d . . . . P e r h ap s I s t r ai n e d t o o h ar d . I t h o u g h t t o i m ag i n e a s o f t

n o i s e , as o f s o m e o n e f l o at i n g t h r o u g h t h e d ar k .

I h as t e n e d o n . N o p o i n t t r y i n g t o r u n — s t e al t h w as t h e k e y . I w as i n n o s t at e t o c o n t e s t w i t h F aq u ar l , h o w e v e r

e c c e n t r i c h i s g u i s e . I k e p t t o t h e m ar g i n s o f t h e d i n i n g r o o m , k e e p i n g w e l l c l e ar o f t h e t

ab l e s , c h ai r s , an d d i s c ar d e d

c u t l e r y . M y c l o ak o f s h ad o w s c o v e r e d m y b o w e d h e ad ; a y e l o w e y e p e e p e d o u t an x i o u s l y b e l o w a f r i n g e o f f e at h e r s .

It c h e c k e d b e h i n d .

T h r o u g h t h e ar c h l e ad i n g t o t h e k i t c h e n c am e a p at c h o f m o v i n g b l ac k n e s s ; l i g h t g l i n t e d o n s o m e t h i n g i n i t s h an d . I

p i c k e d u p t h e p ac e a l i t t l e , an d i n s o d o i n g k i c k e d ag ai n s t a t e as p o o n , •w h i c h c l i n k e d ag ai n s t t h e w al .

"D e ar m e , B ar t i m ae u s , " a f am i l i ar v o i c e c al e d . "Y o u r e al y are ad d l e d t o n i g h t . A h u m an m i g h t b e f o i l e d b y t h e d ar k ,

b u t / c an s e e y o u as c l e ar as n o o n d ay , s k u l k i n g o v e r t h e r e b e n e at h t h o s e r ag s . S t o p a w h i l e an d t al k w i t h m e . I'v e

m i s s e d o u r l i t t l e c h at s ."

C r o w -h e ad m ad e n o r e s p o n s e , b u t h ur r i e d f o r t h e d o o r .

"A r e n't y o u j u s t a l i t t l e c ur i o u s ? "T h e v o i c e w as n e ar e r n o w . "I'd h av e t h o u g h t y o u'd b e d y i n g t o k n o w ab o u t m y c h o i c e

o f f o r m."

S u r e , I w as c u r i o u s , b u t "d y i n g t o k n o w " w as e x ac t l y w h at I w as n't . I'm h ap p y t o i n d u l g e i n s n ap p y b an t e r w i t h t h e

b e s t o f t h e m , b u t c h at s ar e o u t w h e n t h e al t e r n at i v e i s e s c ap i n g w i t h m y l i f e . M i d - s t r i d e , t h e c r o w - h e ad e d m an l e ap e d

f o r w ar d , h an d s o u t s t r e t c h e d , as i f d i v i n g i n t o a s w i m m i n g p o o l ; h i s f e at h e r e d c ap e s w i r l e d r o u n d h i m , f l ap p e d ,

b e c am e d ar k w i n g s . T h e m an w as g o n e ; a d e s p e r at e c r o w d ar t

e d f o r t h , a f e at h e r e d b o l t m ak i n g f o r t h e d o o r —

A s i g h , a t h u d , a c aw k o f p ai n . T h e c r o w 's p r o g r e s s w as h al t e d i n a m an n e r t h at b r o o k e d n o ar g u m e n t , p i e r c e d

t h r o u g h a w i n g t i p an d s u s p e n d e d b e n e at h a s h i m m e r i n g f l as h t h at s h u d d e r e d , v i b r at e d , s t i l l e d —an d b e c am e a m e at

c l e av e r e m b e d d e d i n t h e w al l .

W i t h n o n c h al an t l e i s u r e , t h e t h i n g w i t h t h e b o d y o f M r . H o p k i n s d r i f t e d ac r o s s t h e e m p t

yroom.Thecrowawaitedit,

swinginggently,anindignan
texpressiononitsbeak.

Mr.Hopkinsdrewclose.On
eshoulderofhissuitwasalit
tlescorched,andhehadaslig
htcutupononecheek.Other

thanthatheappeareduninjure
d.Hehoveredinthedarkness
ameterorsoaway,regarding
mewithalittlesmile.I

guessedhewascheckingout
myconditiononthevariousp
lanes;myweaknessmademef
eelembarrassed,almost

nakedItappedthefeathersof myfreewingagainstthewal.

"Sogoonthen," Isnapped."G etitoverwith."

Afrownpassedacrossthein expressiveface."Youwantme tokilyoualready?"

"Notthat.Therubbishjokeyo u'rethinkingup.Aboutitbei nggoodofmetohangaround,or somethinglikethat.Go

on,youknowyouwantto.Get itoutofyoursystem."

Thescholarlookedpained.

"A s i f I'd s t o o p s o l o w , B ar t i m ae u s .Y o u j u d g e m e b y y o u r o w n s u b t e r r an e an s t an d ar d s o f

r e p ar t e e , w h i c h ar e as r e g r e t t ab l e as t h e c o n d i t i o n o f y o u r e s s e n c e . L o o k at y o u ! A s p e r f o r at e d as a s p o n g e . If I w e r e

y o u r m as t e r , I'd u s e y o u t o m o p t h e f l o o r ."

I g av e a g r o an . "T h at 's p r o b ab l y o n t h e ag e n d a. I'v e d o n e e v e r y t h i n g e l s e ."

"I'm s u r e y o u h av e . W e l , i t i s a s o r r y s t at e o f aff ai r s t o s e e an y s p i r i t b r o u g h t s o l o w , e v e n o n

easfrivolousand

irritatingasyou.Italmostmovesmetopity."Hescratchedhisnose."Almost,butnotquite."

Isearchedthepalegrayeyes."Itisyou,isn'tit?"Isaid.

"Certainlyitis."

"Butyouressence...Where—?"

"Righthere,hiddenawayinsidethebodyofourdearMr.Hopkins.Asyoumusthavededuced,thisisnomereguise!"

Faquarl'svoicegavealittlechuckle."Whatwasthatpatheticbirdygetupyouwerewearingjustnow?NativeAmerican

totem?Somessyandantiquated.Wel,I'vegonebeyondthatsortofthing."

"You'reinhisactualbody?"Isaid."Yeucch!That'sicky.Who'sdonethistoyou,Faquarl?Who'syourmaster?"Ididn't

understandthisatall.

"Mymaster?"Thehoveringmanshookwithmirth."Why,Mr

. H o p k i n s , o f c o u r s e , an d v e r y g r at e f u l I am t o h i m . S o

g r at e f u l t h at I t h i n k h e an d I w i l b e w o r k i n g t o g e t h e r f o r s o m e l i t t l e t i m e t o c o m e ." H e b u r s t i n t o an o t h e r r i c h an d

h e ar t y l au g h .5 "M u c h h as h ap p e n e d s i n c e l as t w e m e t , B ar t i m ae u s , " h e w e n t o n . "D o y o u r e m e m b e r h o w w e p ar t e d ? "

5 . C om ing from a fairly senior dj inni lik e F aq uarl, this laug hter was curiously unnerv ing . W e

hig her spirits hav e our hum or, of course, which we em ploy as a correctiv

e to our endless years

of serv itude on E arth. N orm al y it falls into a certain categ ory—dry, sardonic, and

ob serv ational, perpetual y am az ed b y the foib les of the m ag icians. W e don' t tend to fal ab out

in hysterics—that' s j ust not done. (I ' m not talk ing ab out im ps, of course, who seldom rise

ab ov e recreational slapstick .) This b eing so, there was som ething oddly u n res t ra i n ed ab out

F aq uarl' s m irth here, som ething a

little too i n v o l v ed .

"N o ." I d i d .

"Y o u s e t l i g h t t o m e , o l d f r i e n d . S t r u c k a m a t c h a n d l e f t m e b u r n i n g i n a c o p s e ."

T h e c r o w s h i f t e d u n e a s i l y b e n e a t h t h e c l e a v e r . "T h a t ' s a g e s t u r e o f e n d e a r m e n t i n s o m e c u l t u r e s . S o m e h u g , s o m e

k i s s , s o m e s e t e a c h o t h e r o n f i r e i n s m a l l p a t c h e s o f w o o d l a n d . . . ."

"M m m . W e l , y o u ' v e b e e n a s l a v e t o m o r e h u m a n s t h a n m e , B

ar t i m ae u s .Y o u'd k n o w t h e i r w ay s i f an y o n e w o u l d . E v e n

s o , i t was a l i t t l e p ai n f u l . . . ." H e d r i f t e d c l o s e r .

"Y o u w e r e n't t o o b ad l y o f f , " I p r o t e s t e d . "I c au g h t s i g h t o f y o u ag ai n a c o up l e o f d ay s l at e r , p l ay i n g c o o k ag ai n i n t h e

H e d d l e h am k i t c h e n . D i d n't s e e m too s i n g e d . W h at i s i t w i t h y o u an d k i t c h e n s , an y w ay ? Y o u'r e al w ay s h an g i n g ab o u t

i n t h e m ."6

6 . This was true. E v er since the royal

k itchens at N inev eh, circa 7 0 0 B .C ., I ' d b een sent there

b y B ab ylonian m ag icians on a diplom atic m ission, e.g . to slip arsenic into S ennacherib ' s food

during a b anq uet. U nfortunately, F aq uarl was em ployed b y the A ssyrian k ing to seek assassins:

he took ex ception to m y tasty calv es' - fat trifle and chased m e ab out the hal . A fter the m other

of al food fig hts I fel ed him with a wel -aim ed ham b one and m ade g ood m y escape. O ur

relationship had g enerally deteriorated from here.

H o p k i n s —o r F aq u ar l —g av e a n o d . "L o t s o f n i c e s h ar p w e ap o n s i n k i t c h e n s ." H e f l i c k e d t h e c l e av e r w i t h a f i n g e r t i p ;

b l ad e an d t h e c r o w q u i v e r e d an d p u l s e d . "W h i c h i s w h y I c am e d o w n h e r e j u s t n o w . A l s o i t 's m o r e r o o m y t h an t h at

c o r r i d o r u p s t ai r s . I n e e d e d s p ac e t o s w i n g m y ar m s a l i t t l e . . . . S p ac e i s at a p r e m i u m i n t h i s h o t e l . M i n d y o u , m y

r o o m d oes h av e a J ac u z z i ."

M y h e ad s p u n . "W ai t a s e c o n d , " I s ai d . "I k n o w y o u as F aq u ar l o f S p ar t a, s c o u r g e o f t h e A e g e an . I'v e s e e n y o u as a

s l at e -b l ac k g i an t c r u s h i n g h o p l i t e ar m i e s b e n e at h y o u r h e e l s . N o w w h at ar e y o u? A p i g e o n -c h e s t e d h u m an w h o l i k e s

h i s b at h . W h at 's g o i n g o n? H o w l o n g h av e y o u b e e n t r ap p e d l i k e t h i s ? "

"J u s t a c o up l e o f m o n t h s . B u t I'm h ar d l y trap p ed . T h e A m b as s ad o r i s a v e r y p l u s h an d e x c l u s i v e e s t ab l i s h m e n t .

Hopkinsliked the good thing sinlife, yousee. Alsoit's out ofreachofgovernmentspies, soIcancomeandgoasI

please. Isawnoreasontochange thearrangements."

Thecrowroleditseyes. "Not the hotel. Iwastalkingabout the body."

Achuckle. "Theanswer'sthesame, Bartimaeus. It'sonlyafew weekssincethegood Mr. Hopkins—howshalIput

it?—invitedmein. Ittookawhiletoacclimatize, butIamno

w extremely comfortable. And despite appearances, my

power is in no way reduced. As your friends have just found out." He grinned. "Haven't fed so heavily for a long time."

"Yes, well." I coughed uncomfortably. "I hope you weren't thinking of doing the same with me. We go back along

way, you and I. A wonderful association; lots of shared experiences."

Mr. Hopkins's eyes gleamed with merriment. "That's bette

r,Bartimaeus.Yoursenseof
humorisperkingup.Butin

truth,Idonotintendtodevou
ryou."

Thecrowhadbeenhangingfr
omthecleaverinratherawoe
begonemanner.Now,withth
isunexpectednews,it

ralied."Youdon't?Faquarl,y
ouareagenerousfriend!Iapo
logizeforthatincidentinthe
copse,andforourfights

overtheAmulet,andforthatC
onvulsionfrombehindIgoty
ouwith,backinHeidelbergi

n'thirty-two"—Ihesitated—

"whichIseeyoudidn'tknowwasme.Um,andaltherest.So—manythanks,andifyoucouldjustremovethis

cleaver,I'llbeonmyway."

Theblank-facedmandidnotremovethecleaver.Insteadhebentclosetothecrow."Ididn'tsayIwassparingyou,

Bartimaeus.Justthat I'mnotgoingtoeatyou.Theideaofit!Simplylookingatyouressencegivesmeindigestion.

ButnoramIgoingtoletyougo.Thisverynightyoushaldiehorribly—"

"Oh.Great."

"Inaspainfulandlong-drawn-outafashionasIcancontrive."

"Look,youneedn'tputyourselfoutoverthis—"

"ButfirstIwanttotelyousomething."Hopkins'sgrinningfacecameclose."Iwanttotelyouthatyouwerewrong."

Ipridemyselfonmyswiftwitandkeenintelligence,butthi

sonehadmestumped."Eh?"

"Countlesstimes,"Faquarlcontinued,"Ihaveheldouttoyouthehopethatdjinnwouldonedaybefree.Djinnlike

youandme.Whydowefight?Becausewearesetagainstteachotherbyourcursedhumanmasters.Whydoweobey

them?Becausewehavenochoice.CountlesstimesIhavespeculatedthattheserulesmightbechalenged;countless

timesyouhavetoldmeIwasmistaken."

"I d i d n't p u t i t q u ite l i k e t h at . I s ai d y o u w e r e a c o mp l e t e —"

"Y o u s ai d t h at w e h ad n o c h anc e o f e v e r b r e ak i n g f r e e o f t h e t w i n p r o b l e ms , B ar t i m ae u s .T h e p r o b l e ms o f f r e e w i l and

p ai n . A n d I s e e t h at c e r t ai n t y i n y o u r s q u i n t y l i t t l e e y e s ag ai n ! B u t y o u ar e m i s t ak e n . L o o k at m e n o w —w h at d o y o u

s e e ? "

I c o n s i d e r e d . "A m u r d e r o u s m an i ac i n h u man f o r m ? A h i d e o u s am al g am o f t h e w o r s t o f m an an d d j i n n ? E r m —I'm

goingoutonalimbhere—aformerfoelookingatmewithunexpectedpityandgoodfelowship?"

"No,Bartimaeus.No.I'lltellyou.Youseeadjinniwithoutpain.Youseeadjinniwithfreewil.I'mnotsurprisedyou

don'tunderstand:infivethousandyearstherehasneverbeenamarvellikeit!"Heheldoutaveryhumanhandand

gentlyruffledmyheadfeathers."Canyouimagineit,youpoorwoundedcreature?Nopain!Nopain,Bartimaeus!Ah,"

h e s i g h e d , "y o u c an't thin k h o w
c l e ar h e ad e d t h at m ak e s m e ."

N o p ai n ... In t h e b ac k o f m y t i r e
d , b e f u d d l e d m i n d , I s aw a s u d
d e n i mag e : G l ad s t o n e 's s k e l e
t o n , l e ap i n g , p r an c i n g ...

"I m e t an af r i t o n c e , " I s ai d . "H e
s ai d s o m e th i n g l i k e th at t o o .
B u th i s e s s e n c e w as t r ap p e d i
n h u man b o n e s an d h e

w e n t m ad . In t h e e n d h e e m b r ac
e d e x t i n c t i o n r at h e r th an l i v e
o n ."

F aq u ar l s h ap e d H o p k i n s 's f ac
e i n t o th e ap p r o x i mat i o n o f a s

mile."Ah,youspeakofHonorius?Yes,Ihaveheardof

him.Thepoorfelowhasbeenmostinfluential!Myessenceisprotected,justashiswas,andlikehimIhavefreewil.

ButmarkthisBartimaeus—Ishallnotgomad."

"Buttobeinthisworld,youmusthavebeensummoned,"Ipersisted."Soyoumustbedoingsomeone'sbidding...."

"Hopkinssummonedme,andIhavedonehisbidding.NowIamfree."Forthefirsttime Ithou

g h t I s aw s o m e t h i n g o f

t h e d j i n n i h i d d e n w i t h i n t h e
m an : d e e p i n s i d e t h e e y e s a l i t
t l e f l as h o f t r i u m p h , al m o s t l i
k e a f l ame . " Y o u m ay r e c al l ,

B ar t i m ae u s , t h at i n o u r l as t c o
n v e r s at i o n I s p o k e w i t h o p t i
m i s m ab o u t t h e r e c k l e s s n e s s
o f c e r t ai n L o n d o n m ag i c i ans ,

m e n w h o m i g h t o n e d ay g i v e u s
o u r c h anc e ."

" I r e m e m b e r , " I s ai d . " Y o u w e
r e t al k i n g ab o u t L o v e l ac e ."

" T r u e , b u t n o t o n l y h e . W e l , i t

s o h ap p e n s t h at I w as r i g h t . O u r c h an c e h as c o m e . F i r s t , L o v e l ac e o v e r r e ac h e d h i m s e l f .

H i s c o u p f ai l e d , h e d i e d , an d I w as —"

"F r e e d ! " I c r i e d . "Y e s ! T h ank s t o m e, t h at w as . Y o u o w e m e o n e t h e r e , s u r e l y ."

"—s u b m e r g e d i n an o f f s h o r e s af e , t h an k s t o a s t r i n g e n t af t e r -d e at h c l au s e i n m y s u mm o n i n g . I s p e n t m y t i m e

c u r s i n g w h o e v e r k i l e d L o v e l ac e ."

"A h , t h at w o u l d b e m y m as t e r . I told h i m i t w as a h as t y ac t , b u t d id h e l i s t e n—? "

"L u c k i l y I w as r e l e as e d s o o n af t e r w ar d b y o n e o f L o v e l ac e 's

f r i e n d s , w h o k n e w o f m e an d m y t al e n t s . I h av e s i n c e b e e n w o r k i n g w i t h h i m."

"T h i s w o u l d b e H o p k i n s , " I s ai d .

"W e l , as a m att e r o f f ac t , n o . W h i c h r e m i n d s m e "—F aq u ar l l o o k e d at h i s 'w at c h—"I c an n o t s t an d g o s s i p i n g w i t h y o u

al e v e n i n g . T o n i g h t t h e r e v o l u t i o n b e g i n s , a n d I m u s t b e t h e r e t o w i t n e s s i t . Y o u a n d y o u r i d i o t f r i e n d s h a v e d e l a y e d

m e f a r t o o l o n g ."

T h e c r o w l o o k e d h o p e f u l . " D o e s t h i s m e a n y o u w o n ' t h a v e t i m e f o r t h a t p a i n f u l l o n g - d r a w n - o u t d e a t h y o u p r o m i s e d

m e ? "

" I w o n ' t , B a r t i m a e u s , b u t y o u ' l l h a v e a l t h e t i m e i n t h e w o r l d . " H i s h a n d s r e a c h e d o u t , g r a s p e d m e a r o u n d t h e n e c k

andpluckedthecleaverfrom mywing.Hopkins'sformrose intotheairandturnedtoface thedarkeneddiningroom.

"Let'ssee," Faquarlmurmured."Yes...thatlookspromising." Wedriftedoutabovethet ables,towardtheopposite

wal.Atrolleystoodthere,ju stasthewaitershadleftit.On thecenterofthetrolleywasa largetureenwithadomed

lid.Itwasmadeofsilver.

Thecrowwriggledandfidge teddesperatelyinitscaptor

's g r i p . "C o m e on , F aq u ar l , " I i
m p l o r e d . "D o n 't d o an y t h i n g

y o u m i g h t r e g r e t ."

"I m o s t c e r t ai n l y w o n 't ." H e d e
s c e n d e d b e s i d e t h e t r o l e y , h
e l d m e ab o v e t h e t u r e e n ; t h e c
o l d r ad i at i o n o f t h e f at al

m e t al t i c k l e d ag ai n s t m y r ag g e
d e s s e n c e . "A h e al t h y d j i n n i
m i g h t l i n g e r f o r w e e k s i n a s i
l v e r t o m b l i k e t h i s , " F aq u ar l

s ai d . "T h e s t at e y o u 'r e i n , I d o
n 't t h i n k y o u 'l l s u r v i v e l o n g e
r t h an a c o up l e o f h o u r s . N o w t
h e n , I w o n d e r w h at w e 'v e

gotinhere...."Withahastyflickofthefingersheflippedopenthelid."Hmm.Fishsoup.Delightful.Wel,good-bye,

Bartimaeus.Whileyoudie,takeconsolationfromtheknowledgethattheenslavementofthedjinnisalmostover.As

oftonight,wetakerevenge."Thefingersparted;withadelicateplop,thecrowfellintothesoup.Faquarlwavedgood-

byeandclosedthelid.Ifloatedindarkness.Silverallaroundme:myessenceshrankand

b l i s t e r e d .

I h ad o n e c h anc e —o n e c h anc e o n l y : w ai t a l i t t l e f o r F aq u ar l t o d e p ar t , t h e n s u mm o n u p m y l as t g as p s o f e n e r g y and

t r y t o b ur s t o p e n t h e l i d . It w o u l d b e t o u g h , b u t f e as i b l e —p r o v i d e d h e d i d n't w e d g e i t s h u t w i t h a b l o c k o r an y t h i n g .

F aq u ar l d i d n't b o t h e r w i t h a b l o c k . H e w e n t f o r t h e w h o l e w al . T h e r e w as a g r e at r o ar an d c r as h , a f e ar s o m e i mp ac t ;

t h e t ur e e n c o l ap s e d ar o u n d m e , s m as h e d i n t o a c r u mp l e d m

essbytheweightofmasonry above.Silverpressedonal

sides;thecrowwrithed,wriggled,buthadnospacetomove.Myheadswam,myessencebeganto boil;almost

gratefullyIfelintounconsciousness.

Burnedandsquashedtodeath inasilvervatofsoup.There mustbeworsewaystogo.But notmany.

21

Nathaniellookedoutofthew

indowofthelimousineatthe
night,thelights,thehouses,
andthepeople.Theywentby

inakindofblur,amassofcol
orandmovementthatchanged
endlessly,beguilingly,and
yetmeantnothing.Fora

whilehelethistiredgazedri
ftamongtheshiftingforms,t
hen—asthecarslowedtoappr
oachajunction—hefocused

ontheglassitselfandonthere
flectioninit.Hesawhimself
again.

Itwasnotawholyreassurings

i g h t . H i s f ac e w as e t c h e d w i t h w e ar i n e s s , h i s h ai r d amp , h i s c o l ar l i mp l y s ag g i n g . B u t

i n h i s e y e s a s p ar k s t i l b u r n e d .

E ar l i e r th at d ay i t h ad n o t b e e n s o . S u c c e s s i v e c r i s e s —h i s h u mi l i at i o n at R i c h mo n d , t h e t h r e at s t o h i s c ar e e r , an d t h e

d i s c o v e r y o f h i s e ar l i e r b e t r ay al b y B ar t i mae u s —h ad h i t h i m h ar d . H i s c ar e f u l y c o n s t r u c t e d p e r s o n a o f J o h n M an d r ak e ,

In f o r mat i o n M i n i s t e r an d b l i t

helyassuredmemberoftheC
ouncil,hadbeguntocrackaro
undhim.Butithadbeenhis

rejectionbyMs.Lutyensthat
morningthathaddealtthedec
isiveblow.Inafewmoments
ofsustainedcontemptshe

hadshatteredthearmorofhis
statusandlaidbaretheboyben
eath.Theshockhadbeenalmo
sttoomuchfor

Nathaniel;withthelossofse
lf-esteemcamechaos—hehad
spenttherestofthedaylocke
dinhisrooms,alternately

r a g i n g a n d s u b s i d i n g i n t o s i l e n c e .

B u t t w o t h i n g s h a d c o m b i n e d t o d r a w h i m b a c k , t o p r e v e n t h i m d r o w n i n g i n s e l f - p i t y . F i r s t , o n a p r a c t i c a l l e v e l ,

B a r t i m a e u s ' s d e l a y e d r e p o r t h a d g i v e n h i m a l i f e l i n e . N e w s o f H o p k i n s ' s w h e r e a b o u t s o f f e r e d N a t h a n i e l a f i n a l c h a n c e

t o a c t b e f o r e t h e n e x t d a y ' s t r i a l . B y c a p t u r i n g t h e t r a i t o r h e m i g h t y e t o u t m a n e u v e r F a r r a r , M o r t e n s e n , a n d t h e r e s t

ofhisenemies:Devereauxw
ouldforgethisdispleasure
andrestoreNathanieltoapos
itionofprestige.

Suchsuccesswasnotguarant
eed,buthewasconfidentint
hepowerofthedjinnthatheh
adsenttothehotel.And

alreadyhefeltrevivedbythe
mereactofsendingthem.Aw
armfeelingranacrosshisbac
k,makinghimshuddera

littleintheconfinesofthec
ar.Atlasthewasbeingdecisiv
eonceagain,playingforthehi
gheststakes,shruggingoff

theinertiaofthelastfewyears.Hefeltalmostashehaddone as a child, thrilingintheaudacityofhisactions. That

was howithadoftenbeen, beforepeoplesandthestultifying roleofJohnMandrakehadclosedinonhim.

Andhenolongerwishedtoplaythatpart. True, iffatewere kind, hewouldfirstensurehispoliticalsurvival. Buthe

hadlongbeentiredoftheotherministers, andsickenedbytheirmoralcorruption, bytheirself-preservinggreed. It

hadtakenuntiltoday,withthe
disdainintheeyesofMs.Lut
yensandofKittyJones,torec
ognizethatsicknessin

himself.Wel,hewouldnotsi
nkbackintotheroutinesofth
eCouncil!Decisiveactionw
asneededtosavethecountry

fromtheirmismanagement.H
epeeredthroughthewindow
atthesmudgedoutlinesofpe
opleonthestreets.The

commonersneededtobeled;
theyneededanewleader.So
meonewhocouldimposealit
tlepeaceandsecurity.He

thoughtofftheStaffofGladstonelyingredundantinthevaultsofWhitehal.

Notthatheshouldusefforce,ofcourse—atleast,notontheCommoners.KittyJoneshadbeenrightaboutthat.He

glancedacrosstowhere—agreeablycloseto him—thegirlsat,gazingwithremarkablesereni tyoutintothenight.

Shehadbeenthesecondreasonthathisenergieshadrevived,hissparkrekindled,andhewasverygladthathehad

foundher.Herhairwasshorter thanheremembered,buthertonguewasassharpasever.In theirargumentoutside

theinnshehadcutthroughhispretensionslikeaknife,shaminghimrepeatedlywithherpassionateassurance.Yet—

andthiswasthestrangepart—hefoundheeagerlywantedtocontinuetheirtalk.

Notleast—hisbrowdarkened—becauseofthatsuggestionthatsheknewmoreaboutBartimaeus'searliercareerthan

hewouldhavethoughtpossible.Itwasveryodd...butthatcouldbeexploredatleisure,aftertheplay,andafter—

withluck—hisdjinnhadreturnedtriumphant.Bartimaeusmightthrowsomelightonithimself.Whathewoulddowith

herthenhehonestlydidn'tknow.

Thechauffeur'svoiceroused Nathanielfromhisreverie. "Almostatthetheater,sir."

"Good.Howlong'sittaken?"

"Twelveminutes,sir.Ihadto comethelongwayaround.The centeroftown'sstillbarricadedoff.Thereare

demonstrationsinthepark s.Alotofpoliceactivity."

"Wel,-withluckwe'lmissth ebeginningofthepercformance."

KittyJonesspokeforthefirs ttimeonthejourney.Asbefo re,hewasimpressedbyherp oise."Sowhatisthisplay I

mustendure?"

Nathaniel sighed. "A Make peace premiere."

"Not the one who did Swans of Araby?"

"I'm afraid so. The Prime Minister is a fan, therefore every magician in the government, from Council down to third

secretary, must attend the show on pain of his absolute displeasure. It is of the first importance."

She scowled. "What, with a war going on, and people rioting in the street?"

"Evenso.Ihavevitalworkof myowntonight,butImustput itasideuntilthecurtainfals. Ijusthopeit'sgotalotof

intervals."Hefeltthesshapeo fhisscryingglassinsidehis coat—betweenacts,hewoul dcheckonthepro gressofhis

djinn.

TheyenteredShaftesburyAv enue—acluttered curveofre staurants,bars,andtheaters, manyrecentlyrebuiltinfine st

concreteunderthegovernm

ent'sslumclearancemeasures.Glowingneonlights,anewinventionfromJapan,spelled

outthenamesofeachestablishmentinpinks,yelows,mauve,vermilion;throngsoflessermagiciansandhigh-caste

commonersmiledduponthestreets,accompaniedbywatchfulNightPolice.Nathaniellookedforevidenceofsocial

disorder,butthecrowdsseemedcalm.

Thelimousineslowed,pull

e d i n t o a r o p e d -o f f ar e a b e n e
at h a g o l d e n aw n i n g . P o l i c e an
d b l ac k -c o at e d S e c u r i t y

m ag i c i an s s t o o d b e h i n d t h e b
ar r i c ad e s ; a f e w p h o t o g r ap h e
r s k n e l t b e l o w t h e m , c am e r as
s e t o n t r i p o d s . T h e f r o n t o f

t h e t h e at e r w as a b l az e o f l i g h t
; a s m ar t r e d c ar p e t r an b e t w e e
n t h e s t r e e t an d i t s o p e n d o o r s
.

A s h o r t , r o u n d g e n t l e m an s t o
o d up o n t h e c ar p e t , h an d s f r an
t i c al y w av i n g . A s t h e c ar d r e w
t o a h al t , Q u e n t i n

Makepeacebobbedforward andthrustopenthenearestside door.

"Mandrake! Atlastyou'rehere! Wehaven'tamomenttolose."

"I'msorry,Quentin.Troubleonthestreets..."Sincewitnessingtheplaywright'sunsavoryexperimentwiththe

commoner,Nathanielregardedhimwithextremedislike. Themanwasapestilenceandneededtoberemoved.Alin

goodtime.

"I know, I know. Come on, out with you! In three minutes I must be on stage! The hall doors are shut, but I have

space for you in my personal box. Yes, yes—your girl friend too. She is far prettier than any ouor I; we can bask in her

radiance! Come on, chop-chop! Two minutes and counting!
"

With a series of prods, tugs, and encouraging gestures, Mr. Make peace ushered Nathaniel and Kitty out of the car,

al o n g t h e c ar p e t and t h r o u g h t h e t h e at e r d o o r s . T h e h ar s h l i g h t o f t h e f o y e r m ad e t h e m b l i n k ; t h e y f e n d e d o f f b o w i n g

at t e n d ant s , p r o f f e r e d c u s h i o n s , t r ay s o f s p ar k l i n g w i n e . T h e w al s w e r e c o v e r e d w i t h p o s t e r s ad v e r t i s i n g t h e p l ay :

m o s t f e at u r e d Q u e n t i n M ak e p e ac e , g r i n n i n g , w i n k i n g o r l o o k i n g p r o f o u n d f r o m a v ar i e t y o f an g l e s . T h e m an h i m s e l f

s t o p p e d at a n ar r o w s t ai r c as e .

"U p t h e r e ! M y p r i v at e b o x . I w i l j o i n y o u p r e s e n t l y . W i s h m

e l u c k ! " T h e n h e w as g o n e , a d i
m i n u t i v e w h i r l w i n d o f o i l e d

h ai r , g l e am i n g t e e t h , b r i g h t
an d s p ar k l i n g e y e s .

N at h an i e l an d K i t t y as c e n d e d
t h e s t ai r s . A t t h e t o p w as a d r
aw n c u r t ai n . T h e y p u s h e d i t as
i d e an d d u c k e d t h r o u g h i n t o

a s m al e n c l o s u r e h u n g w i t h s
at i n d r ap e s . T h r e e o r n am e n t
al c h ai r s f ac e d a l o w b al u s t r ad
e ; b e y o n d an d b e l o w l ay t h e

s t ag e — h al f c o n c e al e d b e h i n
d t h i c k c u r t ai n s — t h e o r c h e s t
r a p i t an d a s e a o f s t al s , f i l e d

withminutelymovingheads.

Thelightshadbeenturnedlow;thecrowdmurmuredlikethewindinaforest;inthedepthstheorchestraaemitted

discordantsounds.

Theysat,Kittyinthefarthestchair,Nathanielbesideher.Heleanedover,whisperedinnherear."Thisisquitean

honorforyou,Ms.Jones.Youarewithoutdoubttheonlycommonerpresent.Seeinthatboxopposite?Thatfelow

leaningforwardwiththeunc
outheagernessofaschoolbo
y?ThatisourPrimeMinister
.BesidehimsitsMr.Morten
sen,

thebelovedWarMinister.T
heonewiththepaunchisColi
ns,oftheHomeOffice.Inthe
boxbelow,withascowlupo
n

hisface,sitsSholtoFinn,the
famousretailer.Totheleft,y
awninglikeacat,isWhitwel,
ofSecurity.Ms.Farrar,of

thePolice,isintheboxbeyo
nd—"

H e b r o k e o f f—as i f s e n s i n g h i s s c r u t i n y , J an e F ar r ar h ad g l an c e d at h i m ac r o s s t h e g r e at d ar k g u l f . N at h an i e l g av e h e r

an i r o n i c s al u t e , a l i t t l e w av e . H i s f e e l i n g o f r e c k l e s s e x c i t e m e n t h ad g r o w n w i t h t h e p as s i n g m i n u t e s —i f al w e n t w e l l ,

A s c o b o l an d t h e o t h e r s w o u l d s o o n h av e H o p k i n s u n d e r g u ar d . H e w o u l d s e e h o w d e ar M s . F ar r ar h an d l e d that

t o m o r r o w . W i t h a c e r t ai n o s t e n t at i o n , h e b e n t h i s h e ad c l o s e t o K i t t y J o n e s 's ag ai n . "W h

atapityyourResistanceisno

longeractive,"hewhisperedbombhere'wouldddecapitatethegovernment."

Itwastrue.Thestalsbelowwerefiledwithalthesecondaryministers,theirwives,theirassistants,deputies,and

specialadvisers.Hesawtheobsessivecraningofheadsaseachpersoncomparedtheirpositionwiththoseoftheir

rivals;hesawtheflashofbinoculars,heardtherustlingofs

w e e t m e a t w r a p p e r s , s e n s e d t h e e x c i t e m e n t r a d i a t i n g f r o m

t h e c r o w d . O n t h e s e c o n d a n d t h i r d p l a n e s a n u m b e r o f s m a l i m p s w e r e v i s i b l e h o p p i n g a n d j i g g i n g u p o n t h e

s h o u l d e r s o f t h e i r m a s t e r s , b u s i l y i n f l a t i n g t h e i r c h e s t s a n d b i c e p s t o i m p r o b a b l e s i z e s a n d e x c h a n g i n g i n s u l t s w i t h

t h e i r n e i g h b o r s .

T h e n o i s e s f r o m t h e o r c h e s t r a d w i n d l e d . A v i o l i n s h r i e k e d o n c e ; a l w a s s t i l l .

Lightsfadedintheauditorium.Aspotlightilluminatedthecurtainsatthecenterofthestage.

Silence.

Adrumrol;anecstaticfanfarefromthetrumpetsection.Thecurtaintwitchedandwasflungaside.

OutstrodeMakepeace,resplendentinafrockcoatofcrushedgreenvelvet.Hespreadhisarmslikeamothertoher

babesandwelcomedtheaudience'sapplause.Twobowstot

hebalconies,onetothestals.
Heraisedhishands.

"Ladiesandgentlemen,youare
etookind,tookind.Please!"
Thecheeringdiedaway."Th
ankyou.Beforetheshow

begins,aspecialannouncem
ent.Itisaprivilege—nay,anh
onor!—topresentmylatestli
ttletrifletosucha

distinguishedaudience.Ise
ewehaveafulcomplementof
thegreat,ledbyourwonderf
ularbiterofgoodtaste,Mr.

RupertDevereaux."Ajudici

o u s p au s e f o r e n t h u s i as t i c c h e e r i n g . " Q u i t e s o . A n d i t i s b e c au s e o f t h e af f e c t i o n t h at w e

al f e e l f o r d e ar R u p e r t t h at I h av e p e n n e d From W ap p in g to W estm in ster, a s m al d i v e r s i o n b as e d o n h i s i n s p i r i n g l i f e .

A s y o u w i l s e e f r o m t h e p r o g r am n o t e s , o n l y t h e s c e n e i n t h e n u n s ' d o r m i t o r y i s f i c t i t i o u s ; t h e r e s t o f t h e m ar v e l s ,

s e n s at i o n s , w o n d e r m e n t s , an d p r o d i g i e s ar e f i r m l y b as e d o n f ac t . I h o p e y o u ar e e d u c at e d an d e n t e r t ai n e d ! " A b r i e f

b o w , a b r o ad s m i l e . " A s u s u al
w i t h m y p r o d u c t i o n s , m ay I r e
q u e s t t h at n o f l as h p h o t o g r ap
h y t ak e s p l ac e . It c an p u t

o ff t h e p e r f o r m e r s . In ad d i t i o
n , s e v e r al o f t h e s p e c i al e ff e c
t s u s e d o n s t ag e t o n i g h t ar e m
ag i c al i n o r i g i n , c r e at e d b y a

c r e w o f w i l l i n g d e m o n s . T h e
s e i l l u s i o n s w i l b e m o s t s at i s
f ac t o r y i f y o u w at c h w i t h o u t y
o u r l e n s e s i n . T h e r e i s n o t h i n
g

m o r e l i k e l y t o r u i n t h e e n j o y
m e n t o f a w e d d i n g s c e n e t h an
s e e i n g a c o u p l e o f r o u n d - b o t

tomedimpsemittingthe

fireworksinthebackground." Laughter. "Thankyou. CanIalsorequestthatallpersonaldemonsaredismissedforthe

durationoftheshowlestthey provedistracting. Enjoythe evening. Mayitbeoneyouneverforget!"

Astepbackward; aswishofthecurtain. Thespotlightwentout. Alacrossthe auditoriumcameafaintrustlingand

popping—thesoundsoflenscasesbeingremovedfromb

ag s an d j ac k e t p o c k e t s , o p e n e
d , f i l e d , s h u t f as t ag ai n . T h e

m ag i c i an s u tt e r e d t e r s e c o m
m an d s : t h e i r i m p s s h i m m e r e
d , d w i n d l e d , an d v an i s h e d .

A s h e r e m o v e d h i s l e n s e s , N
at h an i e l g l an c e d at K i t t y J o n e
s , w h o s at i m p as s i v e l y w at c h i
n g t h e s t ag e . S h e d i d n 't seem

l i k e l y t o t r y an y t h i n g f o o l i s h
; n e v e r t h e l e s s , h e k n e w h e w
as t ak i n g a r i s k . F r i t an g h ad b e
e n d i s m i s s e d an d al h i s o t h e r

ac t i v e d e m o n s w e r e o f f p u r s u
i n g H o p k i n s . H e h ad n o s e r v an

t s r e ad i l y at h an d . W h at i f s h e r e v e r t e d t o h e r f o r m e r

t y p e ?

A r o l o f d r u m s , a r u s h o f v i o l i n s i n t h e d ar k n e s s b e l o w . H o r n s b l ar e d i n t h e d i s t anc e : a mi l i t ar i s t i c f an f ar e , w h i c h

s w i f t l y b e c ame a j au n t y mu s i c -h al t h e me . T h e c u r t ai n s s w e p t as i d e , r e v e al i n g a b e au t i f u l y p ai n t e d d e p i c t i o n o f a

L o n d o n s t r e e t s c e n e f o r t y y e ar s b e f o r e . T al t o w n h o u s e s , mar k e t s t al s , a f l at b l u e s k y b e h i n d , N e l s o n 's C o l u mn i n t h e

b ac k g r o u n d , f l u f f y p i g e o n s
o n s t r i n g s f l y i n g t o an d f r o . A
p r o c e s s i o n o f b ar r o w b o y s w
h e e l e d c ar t s o n s t ag e f r o m

e i t h e r s i d e ; as t h e y m e t i n t h e
m i d d l e t h e y e x c h an g e d l o u d
C o c k n e y p l e as an t r i e s an d b e
g an s l ap p i n g t h e i r t h i g h s t o

t h e mu s i c -h al b e at . W i t h a s i n
k i n g h e ar t , N at h an i e l k n e w t h
at t h e f i r s t s o n g w as al r e ad y u p
o n t h e m . H e s at b ac k i n

h i s c h ai r , t h i n k i n g d e s p ai r i n
g l y o f t h e s c r y i n g g l as s i n h i s
p o c k e t . P e r h ap s h e c o u l d j u s
t s l i p o f f an d c h e c k w h at w as

goingon—

"Notabadbeginning,eh,John?"Asifhehadsprungupfromahiddentrapdoor,Mr.Makepeacewasathisside,

settlingintohisseat,wipingperspirationfromhisforehead."Anicelittlenumber.Setsthesceneadmirably."He

chuckled."AlreadyMr.Devereauxistransfixed.Seehowhelaughsandclapshishandstogether!"

Nathanielpeereredintothedarkness."Youhavebettereyesi

g h t t h an I. I c an n o t m ak e h i m o u t
."

"T h at i s b e c au s e y o u h av e t ak e
n o u t y o u r l e n s e s , l i k e a g o o d
o b e d i e n t b o y . P u t t h e m b ac k i
n ag ai n an d s e e ."

"B u t —"

"P u t t h e m b ac k i n ag ai n , m y b o y
. H e r e i n m y b o x d i f f e r e n t r u l
e s ap p l y . Y o u ' r e e x e m p t f r o m
t h e g e n e r al d i r e c t i o n ."

"B u t w h at ab o u t t h e i l u s i o n s ?
"

"O h , y o u ' l s e e e n o u g h t o k e e p

youentertained.Trustme." A heartychuckle.

Themanwasacapriciousfool! Withamixtureofannoyance andbemusement,Nathanielr eturnedhislensestohis

eyes.Byviewingthesecond andthirdplanes,hewasinstan tlyabletoreducethedarknes sintheauditoriumand

makeoutthemagicianson thefar side.AsMakepeacehad said,Devereauxwascraningforw ard,eyesrivetedonthe

stage;hisheadnoddedtothe

music.Theotherministers,
invariousattitudesofdejectionanddismay,hadgiven

themselvesuptotheinevitable.

OnstagetheCockneybarrowboysskippedoff,leavingthewayclearfortheappearanceofftheyoungPrimeMinister-

to-be.Thepalethinyouththat
Nathanielhadmetat
Richmond
nowdawdledfromthewings.Heworeaschoolblazer,

shirtandtie,andapairofshorttrousersfromwhichhishair

y l e g s p l u n g e d a d i s c o n c e r t i n g d i s t an c e . H i s c h e e k s h ad

b e e n h e av i l y r o u g e d t o g i v e h i m t h e ap p e ar an c e o f c h i l d i s h v i g o r , b u t h i s m o v e m e n t s w e r e o d d l y l i s t l e s s . H e f l o p p e d

t o a s t an d s t i l l b e s i d e a c ar d b o ar d p o s t b o x an d b e g an a q u av e r i n g o r at i o n . In t h e d ar k n e s s at N at h an i e l 's s i d e

M ak e p e ac e g av e a c l u c k o f d i s s at i s f ac t i o n .

"B o b b y h as p r o v e d su c h a t r i al ," h e b r e at h e d . "D u r i n g r e h e

arsalshedevelopedamostdr
earycough,andbecame

quitewan.Itismybeliefheis
consumptive.Ihadtogivehi
mamightyslugofbrandyjust
togethimon."

Nathanielnodded."Doyouth
inkhehasenoughenergytolas
tthenight?"

"Ithinkso.Itisnotalongprod
uction.Telme,howdoesMs.
Jonesenjoytheshow?"

Inthesecrecyofthehalf-dark
Nathaniel'seyesflittedtow
ardthegirlsittingbesidehi

m. He made outhere elegant

profile, the pleasant gleam of her hair, her face contorted into a grimace of fathomless bored om. Despite himself, the

expression made him grin. He —

The grin froze, and faded. After a pause she leaned back toward Make peace. "Tell me, Quentin," he said. "How exactly

did you know this lady was Ms. Jones?"

He looked; Make peace's small

eyesgleamedinthedarkness. Awhisper:"Iknowmanythings,myboy.Buthush!

Hushnow!Wearecomingtotheclimaxofthepeerformance!"

Nathanielstarted,frowned. "Already?Thisisadmirab—remarkablyshort."

"Ihadtobringitforward,thankstoBobby'sindisposition. Hewouldhavemurderedthemainsoliloquy;notenough

breath.But—silencenow.Areyourlensesin?Good.Then

watch."

Nathaniel'seyesreturnedtothestage,wherehefoundnothingtoexcitehim.Theorchestrahadstruckupagain.

Proppedagainstthepostbox,theyouthattemptedasolo,hisnasalwhineperiodicallyinterruptedbyhackingcoughs.

Otherthanhim,thestagewasbare;oneortwooftheholusefrontswobbledinabreezefromsomewhereinthe

wings.Mandrakelookedinv

ainforsomeevidenceofaclimactic magical illusion. Nothing—onsecondorthirdplanes.

Whatdid Makepeace mean?

Arippleofmovementcaught hiseyeonthesecondplane—notfromthestage, butfromfaroffatthevery backof

thetheater, downbehindthefarthestst al. Atthesameinstant Makepeacenudgedhimwith anelbow, pointed.

Nathaniellooked, andlooked again, hiseyeswideinstupef

action. In the darkest shadows he could just make out

three exit doors leading to the lobby, and through these doors came creeping a multitude of tiny demons. Most were

imps (though one or two—slightly larger, with more ostentatious crests or plumage—were possibly types of foliot), but

all were small and all were silent. Their feet and hooves, claws and stumps, tentacles and sucker-tips passed across

thetheatercarpetwithoutasound,theireyesandteethglitteringlikeglass.Theirclever handsheldloopsofropeand

cloth;theirownershoppedandsprang,skitteredanddodged,dartedforthwiththeagerspeed toward the backrow of

thestalls.Theleaderslеapedontothеseatsandwithoutdelayfeluponthepersonssittingthere—twoorthreeimps

toeach.Ragswerestuffedin mouths,handsseizedandbound together with rope;heads

w e r e w r e n c h e d b ac k ,

b l i n d f o l d s ap p l i e d ; i n s e c o n d s t h e m ag i c i an s o f t h at r o w w e r e c ap t i v e s . M e an w h i l e t h e t i d e o f i mp s s u r g e d o n , l e ap i n g

ac r o s s t o t h e r o w i n f r o n t , an d t o t h e n e x t ; an d s t i l l t h r o u g h t h e d o o r s r e p l ac e m e n t s c am e i n an e n d l e s s s t r e am . S o

s u d d e n w as t h e o n s l au g h t t h at m o s t o f t h e au d i e n c e w as s e c u r e d w i t h o u t a n o i s e : a f e w man ag e d t h e b r i e f e s t

s q u e al s , o n l y t o b e d r o w n e d o

utbythethrummingviolins,theswellandsobofthecla rinetsandcelos.Onacrossthe

stallsthedemonssweptinathinblackwave,hornsflashing,eyesblazing;whileaheadofthemthemagicianss tared

fixedlyatthestage.

Nathanielworehislenses:throughthemthedarknessofthe auditoriumwasmoderated—hesawitall.Hemadeto

springtohisfeet;coldsteelpressedagainsthisneck.Make peace'surgentwhisper:"Do

nothingfoolish,myboy.You

observemyfinesthour!Isthi
snotartofthehighestorder?
Sit,relax,enjoy!Ifyoumove
ahairsbreadth,yourhead

willbounceintothestalls."

Morethanhalfthe auditorium
hadbeenengulfed,andstilth
eimpspouredon.Nathaniel's
eyesrosetotheboxes

opposite;theseniormagici
anshadremovedtheirlenses,
butttheyhadvantagepointssi
milartohisown.Surelythey

w o u l d s e e , s u r e l y t h e y w o u l d a c t ... H i s j aw s ag g e d i n h o r r o r . In e v e r y b o x f o u r o r f i v e d e m o n s , m u c h l ar g e r t h an t h e

o n e s b e l o w —g r e at f o l i o t s an d d j i n n w i t h s l i m w h i t e b o d i e s o f k n o t t e d s i n e w —h ad s l i p p e d t h r o u g h t h e c u r t ai n s at t h e

m ag i c i an s ' b ac k s . U p t h e y s t o l e b e h i n d t h e g r e at e s t f i g u r e s o f t h e E m p i r e —D e v e r e au x s m i l i n g an d w av i n g h i s h an d s t o

t h e m u s i c , M o r t e n s e n an d C o l i n s s l o u c h e d , ar m s f o l d e d , h e ad s n o d d i n g i n t h e i r s e at s ; W

hitwellookingatherwatch;

Ms.Malbindiscribblingwo
rknotesinaclip-file—upthe
ystole,ropesrisinginclawe
dfists,gagsandnetssilently

adjusted,untiltheystoodmo
tionless,likearowoftower
inggravestonesattheirbacks
.Then,asifatasingle

inaudiblecommand,theyfel
uponthem.

Ms.Malbindimanagedashrie
kthatmergedharmonicallyw
iththewailofviolins.Ms.W
hitwell,writhinginabony

embrace, succeeded in igniting an Inferno from her fingertips: it lasted an instant, then her mouth was closed and

bound, her command cut short—the flame withered and died; she subsided in a mass of netting.

Mr. Mortensen struggled manfully in the grip of three fatfoliots; above the orchestra Mandrake heard him call out for

his demon. But as with the rest of the audience, he had obediently dismissed his slave, an

dthecallwentunheeded.

Besidehim,Mr.Colinswent downwithoutasound.

Thesongwasover.Mr.Dever eaux,thePrimeMinisterofG reatBritainandtheEmpire,r osetohisfeet:eyes

glistening•withtears,hebus ilyapplaudedthefinale.Behi ndhiminhisbox,threeofhis personalbodyguardswere

overwhelmedandslain.Hepl uckedarosefromhislapel,t ossedditdowntotheyouthons tage.Ademonsteppedup

close;Devereauxwasinsens
ible—hecriedoutforanenco
re.Theyouthonstagestoope
d,pickedduptherose,and

withasuddenspurtofenergy
,flourishedditattheimperial
box.Atthatmomentthecreatu
reloomingatthePrime

Minister'sshoulderstepped
outfromtheshadows;theyou
thgaveasqueal,faintedonhis
feet,swayed,toppled,and

crashedoffstageintothemou
thoftheeuphonium.Devere
auxsteppedbackinshockand
colidedwiththedemon.He

t u r n e d and w h i m p e r e d o n c e ; b l ac k w i n g s e n v e l o p e d h i m.

T o N at h an i e l , al t h i s h ap p e n e d in the b l i n k o f an e y e . D o w n b e l o w , t h e t i d al w av e o f i m p s h ad p r o g r e s s e d to the f r o n t

o f the s t al l s . E v e r y h u man h e ad w as b o u n d and g ag g e d ; a t r i u m p h ant d e m o n p r anc e d o n e v e r y s h o u l d e r .

H i s p an i c k e d e y e s s w i v e l e d up to F ar r ar 's b o x . In h e r s e at a g r i n n i n g d e m o n s at ; o v e r its s h o u l d e r w as s o m e th i n g

t r u s s e d and w r i g g l i n g . H e l o

o k e d e l s e w h e r e —an d c au g h t
a g l i m p s e o f t h e o n l y , m a g i c i
an t o m o u n t an y t r u e

r e s i s t an c e .

M r . S h o l t o P i n n , b r o o d i n g i n
h i s b o x , h ad n o t r e m o v e d h i s l
e n s e s f o r t h e s i m p l e r e as o n h
e d i d n o t w e ar an y . H e h ad

i g n o r e d M ak e p e ac e 's i n j u n c t
i o n an d k e p t h i s m o n o c l e f i r m
l y l o d g e d i n h i s l e f t e y e . O c c
as i o n al y h e r e m o v e d i t an d

p o l i s h e d i t w i t h h i s h an d k e r c
h i e f . It w as w h i l e h e w as s o o c
c u p i e d t h at t h e w av e o f i m p s b

urstinuponthestals;

nevertheless,hereturnedhis monocletohiseyeintimeto catchtheminmid-flow.

Heutteredanoath,caughtuphiswalkingstick,andturnedtoseethreehulkingshadowstiptoeingintohisbox.

Withoutpreamble,Sholtoraisedhisstickandfiredaplasm—ashadowmewledandcrumbledintodust;theothers

dartedaside,onetotheceiling,onepressedagainsttheflor.Thestickfiredagain:thes

h ad o w o n t h e c e i l i n g w as

c au g h t a g l an c i n g b l o w ; m ai m
e d an d w h i m p e r i n g , i t f e l t o s
p r aw l ac r o s s a c h ai r . B u t e v e n
as i t d i d s o , t h e s h ad o w o n

t h e f l o o r l e ap e d f o r w ar d . It s e
i z e d t h e o l d man's s t i c k an d , u s
i n g i t as a c u d g e l , b l u d g e o n e
d h i m t o t h e g r o u n d .

In t h e b o x o pp o s i t e , M ak e p e
ac e h ad w at c h e d t h i s w i t h a f u r
r o w o f d i s c o n t e n t . "It i s e v e r t
h u s , " h e mu s e d . "N o w o r k o f

ar t c an b e q u i t e p e r f e c t — i t mu
s t al w ays h av e a f l aw . S t i l , P i n

naside,Ithinkwecanconsider thisajobweldone."

Keepinghisknifepressedagainst Nathaniel'sthroat,theplaywrightrosefromhischairandsteppedforwardtobetter

surveythescene.Withagonizingcaution,Nathanielturnedhisheadafraction;hiseyes metKitty's.Lackinglenses,

thegirlhadonlybecomeawareoftheactivityattheveryend,asFinn'splasmshadburstout uponthedarkness,and

onebyonethevictoriousde

monsbecamevisibleontheordinaryplane. Eyeswide, sheglancedatNathaniel—and at

lastsawMakepeaceandtheknife. Herfaceshowedconfusion, doubt, anddisbelief. Nathanielheldhergaze—his

mouthworkedfrantically, uttteringsilentpleas; hiseyebrowsattemptedcomplicatedsupplications. Iftheknifecould

justbeknockedaway, justforaninstant, hemightleaponMakepeace, tearitfromhisgrip. Quick—ifshecouldonly

ac t n o w , w h i l e t h e m ad m an w as d i s t r ac t e d . . . .

K i t t y l o o k e d ac r o s s at M ak e p e ac e , t h e n b ac k at N at h an i e l o n c e ag ai n . H e r b r o w f u r r o w e d . S w e at r an d o w n t h e s i d e o f

N at h an i e l 's f ac e . It w as n o g o o d —s h e w as n 't g o i n g t o h e l p h i m . W h y s h o u l d s h e ? S h e h e l d h i m i n c o n t e m p t .

M ak e p e ac e w as h al f l e an i n g o n t h e b al u s t r ad e , e r u p t i n g i n t o l i t t l e p r i v at e c h u c k l e s as h e c au g h t s i g h t o f n e w

h u m i l i at i o n s b e l o w . W i t h e

achspasm,theknifepressed deeperintoNathaniel'sneck.

ThenNathanielsawKittygiv ethesslightestofnods.Hes awhertense,preparetospri ng.Helickedhislips,readyin g

himself....

KittyJonesleapedforward. Instantlyaboltofgreenenerg ysmashedintoher,knocking herbackagainstthe

balustrade,whichcrackedan dsplitundertheimpact.Eme raldfireplayedoverherbody

;herlimbsjerked,herhair

steamed.Thefiredied away.Kittyslumpedtothefloor,her headandarmdanglingoutover theauditorium.Hereyes

werehalfopen,sightless.

Greenflamesrosesmoking,steamingfromMr.Makepeace 'slefthand,buttheotherkept theknifeatNathaniel's

throat.Hiseyeshadshrunkas smallasraisins;histeethwere bared."Silygirl,"hesaid.He gesturedwiththeknife;

itnickedtheskinonNathaniel'schin,drewblood."Standup."

Dumbly,Nathanielstood.Aroundthehallthecommandhadbeenrepeatedahundredtimes.Withavastrustling,all

thecaptives,rosetotheirfeet,blindandboundandhelpless,encouragedbysundryslapsandpinchesfromtheir

imps.Inseveralcases,wheretheexperiencehadbeentoomuchandthevictimwasunconscious,oneormore

demonssettoworktoliftthe body.Upintheboxes,where thedjinnworkedonthegreat ermagicians,nothingwas

leftto chance: alwereswathe dinthick,blacknetsandwrap pedlikesausage meat.

Nathaniel foundhisvoice."Y ouhavebroughtruinonusal."

QuentinMakepeace'sfacespl itintothebroadestgrin."Har dlythat,John.Westandatthe dawnofanewage!Butthe

curtainhascomedownandImu stattendtothelogistics.Her

e i s s o m e o n e w h o w i l e n s u r e y o u r e t a i n y o u r c o m m o n

s e n s e w h i l e w e ar e ap ar t." H e n o d d e d t o w ar d t h e b ac k o f t h e b o x. T h e c u r t ai n s h i f t e d. A t al f i g u r e i n a b l ac k c l o ak

s t e p p e d t h r o u g h; t h e m e r c e n ar y's p r e s e n c e f i l e d t h e s p ac e .

"I b e l i e v e y o u k n o w e ac h o t h e r w e l," M r. M ak e p e ac e s ai d, s h e at h i n g h i s k n i f e b e n e at h h i s f r o c k c o at. "N o d o u b t y o u

w i l l h av e m u c h t o d i s c u s s. I w i l n o t d e m e an y o u, J o h n, b y u t t

eringpettythreats,butIdoh
aveonewordofadvice."

Helookedbackfromthetopo
fthestairs."Donotchooseto
dielikepooryoungKittythe
re—Istilhavemuchtoshow

you."

Hewasgone.Nathanielstood
staringatthebodyonthefloo
r.Below,inaterriblesilenc
e,brokenonlybytheshufflin
g

offeetandthetwitteringofd
emons,theBritishgovernm
entwasspeedilyremoved.

Part Four

Alexandria: 124 B.C.

It was a dangerous time in Egypt. Raiders from the south had crept up past the Cataracts and put border towns to the

sword. Bedouin tribes were making havoc on the merchant trains negotiating the desert fringes. At sea, Barbary pirates

preyed on shipping. The king's advisers urged him to seek aid from abroad, but he was old, proud, and wary, and

refused.

Inabelatedeffortto appeaseh isenemiesatcourt,Ptolemy puthistalentsattheirservic e.This,ashewashappyto

admit,meantme.

"Youmustforgivethisindig nity,"hesaid,aswesatonther ooftheni ghtbeforeIdeparte d."Withdueres pectto Affa

andPenrenutet,you,mydear Rekhyt,arethemostvigorou sofmyservants.Ifeelsureyo uwilcarryoutwonderson

thenation'sbehalf.Folowthe ordersofthearmycaptains,an dimprovisewhereneces sary.Iapologizeforany

hardshipsyoumayunderg o,b utinthelongrunyoushallben efittoo.Withluck,youreffo rtswilgetmycousins

agentsoffmybackandallowm etofinishmyresearches."

Iwaswearingthesemblanceo fanobledesertlion,andmyg rowlwassuitablylowanddee p."Youknownothingof

thebasenessofmen'shearts

.Yourcousinwilnotrestuntilyouareadead.Spieswatchourevery movement:Icaught

twopriests'impsskulkingiinyourbathhousethismorning.Ihadaword.Inamannerofspeaking,theynowserve

you."

Theboygaveanod."Thatisgratifyingtohear."

Theliongaveabelch."Yes,theykindlydonatedtheiressencestostrengthenmine.Don'tlooksoshocked.Inour

w o r l d w e ar e al o n e an y w ay , as I h av e t o l d y o u ."

A s u s u al , t h e m e r e s t m e n t i o n o f t h e O t h e r P l ac e w as e n o u g h : m y m as t e r 's e y e s s p ar k l e d w i t h a far -o f f l i g h t ; h i s f ac e

b e c am e d r e am y an d r e f l e c t i v e . "R e k h y t , m y f r i e n d , " h e s ai d , "y o u h av e t o l d m e m u c h , b u t t h e r e i s m o r e t h at I w i s h t o

l e ar n . I b e l i e v e t h at a f e w m o r e w e e k s ' w o r k w i l s u f f i c e . A f f a h as h ad s o m e e x p e r i e n c e w i t h t h e s h am an s o f a d i s t an t

l an d ; h e i s ad v i s i n g m e o n t h e i

rmethodsofdepartingtheirbody.Whenyoureturn—wel,letuswaitandsee."

Thelion'stailstruckrhythmicalyuponthestonesofthero of."Youshouldconcentrateonthedangersofthisworld.

Yourcousin—"

"Penrenutetwilprotectmewhileyouaregone,havenofear.Now—see,theyarelightingthewatchfireonthetower.

Thefleetismassingbelow.Youmustdepart."

Therefolowedaspateofmuc
hactivityforme,duringwhic
htimeIhadnocontactwithmy
master.Isailedwiththe

Egyptianfleetagainstthepir
ates,andfoughtinapitchedb
attleoffthe Barbary Coast.1 N
extImarchedwithtroopsto

the Thebandesertandambush
edtheBedouin,carryingoff
anumberofhostages.During
ourreturnmarchwewere

setuponbyagroupofjackal-h
eaddjinn,whowereonlyn
arrowlydefeated.2

1. D uring which we successfully destroyed the principal pirate fort and released a hundred

captiv es. The scrap was m em orab le m ainly for m e fig hting sing le com b at with a fiery afrit

ab ov e two sink ing ships. W e chased b ack and forth along the b urning oars, and fenced am ong

the rig g ing using portions of the b rok en m ast. I n the end I b rained him with a luck y b low and

watched him sink , still sm oldering , into the pea-g reen depths.

2 . A certain red-sk inned indiv idual was prom inent am ong them . A fter causing g eneral hav oc,

J ab or was final y put out of action when I lured him into a system of sandstone cav es and

caused the tunnel roof to col apse upon him .

W i t h o u t p au s e f o r r e s t , I h e ad e d s o u t h t o j o i n t h e m ai n b o d y o f t h e k i n g 's ar m y i n s e ar c h o f v e n g e an c e ag ai n s t t h e h i l l

p e o p l e s o f t h e l o w e r N i l e . T h e c am p ai g n s h e r e l as t e d t w o m o n t h s , e n d i n g w i t h t h e i n f

amousBattleoftheCataracts,

duringwhichIfoughttwenty foliotsonalipofstonehigh abovethefrothingwaters.Lo sseswereregrave,butthed ay

waswon,andpeacewasrestor edtotheregion.3

3.AnEgyptianpeace,that is.Still plenty of rape, pillage, and murder, but now carried out by

us, rather than against us. So that's all right.

Ihadbeenputthroughconsid erabletrials,butmyessence

w as s t r o n g , an d I d i d n o t r e s e n t i t . In t r u t h , m y m as t e r 's

r e s e ar c h e s — h i s d e s i r e t o e s t ab l i s h p ar i t y b e t w e e n d j i n n i an d h u m an — h ad t o u c h e d m e , d e s p i t e m y s k e p t i c i s m . I

d ar e d t o h o p e t h at s o m e t h i n g m i g h t c o m e o f i t . E v e n s o , I f e ar e d f o r h i m . H e w as al t o g e t h e r u n w o r l d l y , i n s e n s i b l e t o

p e r i l s al ar o u n d .

O n e n i g h t , d u r i n g o u r o c c u p at i o n o f t h e h i l c o u n t r y , a b u b b l e m at e r i al i z e d i n s i d e m y t e n t . P t o l e m y 's f ac e s h o w e d i n

theglassysurface,faintandfar away.

"Greetings,Rekhyt.Ihearcongratulationsareinorder.Wordofyoursuccesseshasreachedthecity."

Ibowed."Isyourcousinchuffed?"

Mymasterseemedtosigh."Unfortunatelythepeopleproclaimthisasmyvictory.Despitemyprotestations,they

cheermynametotherooftops.Mycousinisnotpleased."

"Thisisunsurprising.Youmust—What'sthatonyourchin? Isthatascar?"

"Itisnothing.Anarcherfiredonmeinthestreet.Penrenutetflungmeasideandalliswel."

"I'mcomingback."

"Notyet.Ineedanotherweektocompletethework.Returninsevendays.Inthemeantime,gowhereyouwish."

Istaredattheface."Really?"

"Youre alwaysmoaningabout

thelimitationsoffreewill. Now'syourchancetoexperience it. I'msureyoucan

toleratethepainofthisEarth foralittlelonger. Dowhatyouwant. Seeyouinsevendays." Thebubblebecamea

vaporandwasgone.

Thisinvitationwassounexpectedthatforsomeminutes I couldonlywanderaimlessly aroundthetent, rearranging

thecushionsandlookingatmyreflectioninthepolishedbrasses. Thenthefullimporto

fhiswordsstruckme.I

steppedoutside,tookalastl
ookaroundthecampand,with
acry,launchedmyselfintoth
eair.

Sevendayspassed.Ireturne
dtoAlexandria.Mymasterst
oodinhisworkroom,wearin
gawhitetunicwithout

sandals.Hisfacewasthinnert
hanbefore,hiseyesocketsgr
aywithtiredness,buthegree
tedmewithhisold

enthusiasm."Rightontime!"
hesaid."Howwastheworld?"

"It is broad and beautiful, though there is too much water

in it. In the east mountains rise to the stars, to the south forests swallow the land. The architecture of the Earth is

infinitely varied; it has given me much to think about."

"Someday I shall see it too. And humans? What of them?"

"They erupt in isolated patches, like pimples on a bottom. Most do without magic, I believe."

Ptolemygrinned."Yourinsi
ghtsareprofound.Nowitism
yturn."Heled'metoadooran
dshowedmeintoaquiet

innerchamber.Thefloorwas
coveredwithacircle—large
rthanaverage—decoratedwit
hhieroglyphsandrunes.

Besideit,onthefloor,were
herbs,charms,pilesofpapyr
usandwaxtablets,alcovered
inmymaster'sscrawl.He

gavemeatiredsmile."Whatd
oyouthink?"

Iwasbusyscanningthepentac

l e 's b ar r i e r s an d w o r d c h ai n s .
"N o t h i n g s p e c i al h e r e . F ai r l
y s t an d ar d i s s u e ."

"I k n o w . I t r i e d al l k i n d s o f c o
m p l e x r e i n f o r c e m e n t s an d h e
x e s , R e k h y t , b u t i t j u s t f e l t w
r o n g . T h e n i t o c c u r r e d t o m e :

al o u r n o r m al s af e g u ar d s ar e t h
e r e t o restric t m o v e m e n t — y o u k
n o w , k e e p t h e d j i n n i o u t , k e e
p u s s e c u r e . I w an t t h e

o p p o s i t e e f f e c t ; I w an t t o b e
ab l e t o m o v e f r e e l y . S o i f I d o
this"— w i t h a d e l i b e r at e t o e , h e
s m u d g e d t h e c o c h i ne al l i n e

thatmarkedtheperimeteroft
hecircle—"thatshouldalow
myspirittodepart.Throught
hatlittlehole.Mybodyshall

remainhere."

Ifrowned."Whyusethepent
acleatal?"

"Aha.Goodpoint.According
toourfriendAffa,theshaman
sofdistantregions,whocon
versewithdjinnonthe

bordersofourrealms,speak
certainwordsandleavetheir
bodiesatwil.Theydonotuse
circles.Butthey arenot

tryingtopassthroughtheboundariesbetweenourworlds—thoseelementalwalsyouhavetoldmesomuchabout.

AndIam.Ithinkthat,justasthecircle'spowerpullsyoudirectlytomewhenIsummonyou,sothesamecirclecan

propelmeintheoppositedirection,throughthewals,whenthewordsarereversed.Itisafocusingmechanism.You

understand?"

Iscratchedmychin."Erm...Sorry,whatdidAffasayagain?

"

Mymasterraisedhiseyestotheheavens."Itdoesn'tmatter.Butthisbitdoes.IthinkIcanreversethenormal

summonseasilyenough,butifagatedoesopenup,Ineedsomethingontheothersidetoguidemesafelythrough.

Somethingthatprovidesadestination."

"That'saproblem,"Isaid."Thereareno'destinations'intheOtherPlace.Nomountains,noforests.I'vetoldyouthat

countlesstimes."

"Iknow.That'swhereyoucome in." Theboywascrouchingonthefloor,rummagingthroughapileoftheusual

magicalparaphernaliathateveryEgyptianmagicianaccumulated:scarabs,mummifiedrodents,noveltypyramids,the

lot.Heheldupasmalankh4anddthrustitinmydirection."Thinkthisisiron?"

4. Ankh: a kind of amulet, T-shaped, with a loop at the top. Symbol of life. I

n pharaonic E g ypt,

when m ag ic was com m onplace, m any ank hs contained trapped entities and were powerful

protectors. B y P tolem y' s tim e they were usual y sym b olic only. B ut iron, lik e silv er, always

repels the dj inn.

A w af t o f e s s e n c e -s t i n g i n g c o l d ; I l e an e d b ac k i r r i t ab l y . "Y e p . S t o p w av i n g i t ab o u t ."

"G o o d . I'l l k e e p t h i s o n m y b o d y f o r p r o t e c t i o n . J u s t i n c as e an y i m p s c o m e c al i n g w h i l e

I'm gone. Now, back to you.

Rekhyt, I thank you for all the services you have done me; I am in your debt. In a moment Ishal dismiss you. Your

obligation to me, such as it is, wil be at an end."

I bowed in the customary way. "My thanks, master."

He waved his hand. "Forget that master business now. When you are in the Other Place, lis ten out for your name—

your true one, I mean. 5 When I h

av e f i n i s h e d m y i n c an t at i o n , I s h al l c al l y o u r n am e t h r e e t i m e s . If y o u w i s h , y o u m ay

an s w e r m e : I b e l i e v e t h at w i l b e e n o u g h t o p r o v i d e t h e d e s t i n at i o n t h at I n e e d . I s h al p as s t h r o u g h t h e g at e t o y o u ."

5 . B artim aeus, this was. Thoug ht you m ig ht hav e forg otten. P tolem y nev er used it, for

politeness' sak e.

I l o o k e d d u b i o u s i n t h at w ay I h av e . "Y o u r e c k o n ? "

"I d o ."T h e b o y s m i l e d at m e . "R

ekhyt,ifyouaresickofthesi
ghtofmeafteralthistime,th
esolutionissimple.Do

notrespondtomycal."

"It'suptome?"

"Ofcourse.TheOtherPlacei
syourdomain.Ifyoudoseefit
tocalmeover,Ishalbemosth
onored."Hisfacewas

flushedwithexcitement,hi
spupilsdilatedlikeacat's;in
hismindhewasalreadytastin
gthewondersoftheother

side.Iwatchedhismovement

s as h e w e n t o v e r t o a b o w l b e s i d e t h e w i n d o w . It c o n t ai n e d w at e r . H e w as h e d h i s f ac e

an d n e c k .

"Y o u r t h e o r i e s ar e al v e r y w e l ," I v e n t u r e d , "b u t h av e t h e y t o l d y o u w h at w i l h ap p e n t o y o u r b o d y i f y o u p as s

ac r o s s ? Y o u ar e n o t a c r e at u r e o f e s s e n c e ."

H e d r i e d h i m s e l f o n a c l o t h , l o o k i n g o u t o v e r t h e r o o f t o p s , w h e r e t h e c o m m o t i o n an d b u s t l e o f m i d d ay h u n g l i k e an

invisiblepaluponthecity. "Sometimes," hemurmured, "IfeelIamnotacreatureofEarth,either.Almylifehas

beenshutawayinlibraries,neverexperiencingthesensationsoftheworld.WhenIcomeback,Rekhyt,Ishall

wanderafarlikeyouhavedone...." Heturnedandstretchedhisthinbrownarms."Youareright,ofcourse:Idon't

knowwhatwilhappen.Perhaps Iwilsufferforit.Butitisworththerisk,Ithink,toseewhatnoothermanhas

seen!"Hesteppedacrossand closedtheshuttersonthewindow,shroudingusbothindim,palelight.Nextthelocked

thechamberdoor.

"Perhaps,"Isaid,"youwillfindyourselfinmypower,whenwemeetagain."

"Verylikely."

"Yetyoutrustme?"

Ptolemylaughed."Whatelsehaveibeendoingalthistime?WhendidIlastbindyouwithinapentacle?Lookatyou

n o w —y o u 'r e as f r e e as I am . Y o u c o u l d t h r o t t l e m e i n a b l i n k an d b e g o n e ."

"O h . Y e ah ." I h ad n 't t h o u g h t o f t h at .

T h e b o y c l ap p e d h i s h an d s . "W e l l , t h e t i m e h as c o m e . P e n r e n u t e t an d A f f a ar e al r e ad y d i s m i s s e d ; I h av e n o

o b l i g at i o n s l e f t . S o —i t i s y o u r t u r n . If y o u w an t t o h o p i n t o t h e p e n t ac l e , I'l s e t y o u f r e e ."

"W h at o f y o u r o w n s e c u r i t y ? " I g l an c e d ar o u n d t h e d ar k e n e d r o o m . S l at s o f l i g h t f r o m t h e s

h u t t e r s r an l i k e c l aw m ar k s

ac r o s s w al and f l o o r . " W i t h u s d e p ar t e d , y o u ' r e h e l p l e s s i f y o u r e n e m i e s f i n d y o u . "

" P e n r e n u t e t ' s l as t t as k w as t o t ak e m y g u i s e and r i d e s o u t h al o n g t h e o l d h i g h w ay . H e l e t h i m s e l f b e s e e n . T h e s p i e s

w i l l b e f o l o w i n g h i s c ar av an . S o y o u s e e , d e ar R e k h y t , I h av e t h o u g h t o f e v e r y t h i n g . " H e m o t i o n e d t o m e . I s t e p p e d

i n t o t h e c i r c l e .

" Y o u k n o w , y o u d o n ' t n e e d t o r i

skyourselfinthisexperiment," I said. I was looking at his narrow shoulders, his

scrawny neck, the skinny legs sticking out beneath his tunic.

"It's not an experiment," he said. "It's a gesture. It's redress."

"For what? Three thousand years of slavery? Why take the burden of so many crimes? No other magicians have ever

thought this way."

Hesmiled. "That's just it. I'm t

hefirst.Andifmyventurego
eswel,andIreturntorecordi
t,manyotherswilfollow

afterme.Therewilbeanewe
rabetweendjinnandmen.I've
madesomeofthenotesalread
y,Rekhyt—mybookwil

takeprideofplaceineveryli
braryontheEarth.Iwon'tbeth
eretoseeit—butwhoknows,
perhapsyouwill."

Hispassionwonmeover.Ino
dded."Let'shopeyou'reright
."

Hedidn'tanswer,onlysnappe

dhisfingersandspoketheDismissal.ThelastthingIsawasIdepartedwashisface

gazingafterme,confident,serene.

22

Kittywoketoalightthatblindedherandasharppaininhersside.Asthesecondspassed,andshelayquitestill,she

becameawareofthebloodpoundinginherheadandthedry-nessofheropenmouth.Herwristsached.Therewasa

terriblesmellofburnedclothandatightpressurearoundonehand.

Panicsweledinsideherchest;shewrenchedatherlimbs,openedhereyes,soughttoliftherhead.Shewas

rewardedwithscattershotpainandcertaininsightsintohersituation:herwristsweretied,shesatagainstsomething

hard,someonewascrouchedbesideher,lookingintoherface.Thepressureononehandwassuddenlyreleased.

Avoice."Canyouhearme?Are youalright?"

Kittyopenedoneeyeafraction.Adarkshapeswamintofocus.Themagician,Mandrake,bentclose;heworealook

ofconcernmixedwithrelief."Canyouspeak?"hesaid."Howdoyoufeel?"

Kitty'svoiceweasweak."Wereyouholdingmyhand?"

"No."

"Good."Shewasacclimatizingtothelightnow;botheyeso

p e n e d s t e ad i l y an d s h e l o o k e
d ab o u t h e r . S h e s at o n t h e

f l o o r at t h e e d g e o f a g r e at s t o
n e r o o m , o l d e r an d g r an d e r t h
an an y t h i n g s h e h ad e x p e r i e n c
e d . T h i c k p i l l ar s s u p p o r t e d

a v au l t e d c e i l i n g ; o n t h e f l o o
r , b e au t i f u l r u g s w e r e s p r e ad
u p o n t h e f l ag s t o n e s . A r o u n d
t h e w al l s , i n m an y r e c e s s e s ,

s t o o d s t at u e s o f r e g al m e n an d
w o m e n d r e s s e d i n b y g o n e c o
s t u m e s . M ag i c al g l o b e s d r i f t
e d ag ai n s t t h e v au l t i n g ,

c r e at i n g an e v e r - c h an g i n g p at

t e r n o f l i g h t an d s h ad o w . In t h e c e n t e r o f t h e r o o m s at a b r i g h t l y p o l i s h e d t ab l e an d

s e v e n c h ai r s .

O n t h e n e ar s i d e o f t h e t ab l e a m an w as w al k i n g u p an d d o w n .

K i t t y s t r u g g l e d t o s h i f t h e r p o s i t i o n , an o p e r at i o n m ad e d i ff i c ul t b y t h e c o r d s b i n d i n g h e r w r i s t s . S o m e t h i n g d u g i n t o

h e r b ac k . S h e c u r s e d . "A h ! C an y o u —? "

M an d r ak e h e l d u p h i s h an d s , b

oundtightlytogetherwiththefingersswathedinthinwhitecord."Trywrigglingtothe

left.You'releaningagainstastoneshoeatthemoment.Careful—you'vebeenbadlyknockedabout."

Kittyshiftedherbottomsidewaysandbecamemarginallymorecomfortable.Shelookeddownatherself.Onesideof

hercoatwasblackenedandburnedaway;shecouldseetatteredfragmentsofhershirtbeneathand,hangingloosein

aninnerpocket,asingedcor
nerofMr.Button'sbook.Her
browfurrowed.Howhad—?

Thetheater!Inarush,sherem
embered:theexplosionsint
heboxopposite,theraisingo
fthelights,theseaof

demonsinthestalsbelow.Ye
s,andMandrakenexttoher,p
aleandfrightened,withthef
atlittlemanholdingthe

knifetohisthroat.Shehadtri
ed—

"I'mgladyou'realive,"themag
icisansaid.Hisfacewasgray,b

uthisvoicewascalm.Therewasdriedbloodonhis

neck."That'simpressiveresilienceyou'vegotthere.Canyouseethroughilusionstoo?"

Sheshookherheadirritably."Wherearewe?What's—?"

"TheHalofStatuesatWestminster.Thisistheroomwheretheyhaveyourtrial."

"Butwhat'shappened?Whyarewehere?"Panicengulfedher;shepulledfranticallyatherbonds.

"C al m d o w n . . . w e 'r e b e i n g w at c h e d ." H e j e r k e d h i s h e ad t o w ar d t h e f i g u r e b y t h e t ab l e . It w as s o m e o n e K i t t y d i d n 't

k n o w , a y o u n g m an w i t h l o n g , b an d y l e g s , s t i l p ac i n g b ac k an d f o r t h .

"C alm d own ? " K i t t y g av e a s t r an g l e d c r y o f f u r y . "H o w d are y o u ? If I w as f r e e —"

"Y e s , b u t y o u 'r e n o t . A n d n o r am I. S o s h u t u p f o r a m i n u t e an d l e t m e t e l y o u w h at 's h ap p e n e d ." H e l e an e d i n c l o s e .

"T h e w h o l e g o v e r n m e n t w as t

akencaptiveinthattheater.Everyone.Makepeaceusedahostofdemonstosubdue

them."

"I'vegoteyes,haven'tI?Isawalthat."

"Allright,fine.Wel,somemighthavebeenkiled,butmost,Ithink,arealive,butgaggedandtiedsotheycan't

summonanything.Wealgotroundedupandtakenoutthebackofthetheater,whereagroupofvanswaswaiting.

Everyonegotbundledin;theythrewtheministersinoneontopoftheother,likesacksoofbeef.Thevansleftthe

theateranddrovehere.Nooneoutsidethetheaterisanythewiseryet.Idon'tknowwheretheprisonershavebeen

taken.Theymustbelockedinsomewhereclose.That'swhatMakepeaceisseeingtonow,Ithink."

Kitty'sheadached.Shestruggledtograsptheimplications."Wasithimwho"—shelookeddownatherside—"didthis

t o m e ? "

"H e d i d . A n In f e r n o . C l o s e r an g e . W h e n y o u t r i e d t o "—h i s p al e f ac e f l u s h e d a l i t t l e —"w h e n y o u t r i e d t o h e l p m e . Y o u

o u g h t t o b e d e ad ; i n f ac t , w e t h o u g h t y o u were d e ad , b u t j u s t as t h e m e r c e n ar y w as t ak i n g m e o f f , y o u g r o an e d and

d r i b b l e d , s o h e s c o o p e d y o u u p , t o o ."

"T h e m e r c e n ar y ? "

"D o n 't as k ."

Kittywassilentforatime."So Makepeaceistakingover?"

"Itseemshethinksheis."Themagicianscowled."Theman'squitemad.Howheplanstoruletheempirewithouta

governingclass,Ican'timagine."

Kittygaveasnort."Yourgoverningclasswasn'tdoingsowel,let'sfaceit.Hemightbeanimprovement."

"Don'tbeafool!"Mandrake'sfacedarkened."Youhaven'ttheslightestideawhat—"Hecon

troledhimselfwith

difficulty."I'msorry.You're nottoblame.Ishouldn'thave broughtyoutothetheaterint hefirstplace."

"True."Kittylookedaroundt hechamber."Butwhatgetsme isIdon'tunderstandwhyeith erofushasbeenbrought

here!'

"Norme.We'vebeensingled outforsomereason."

Kittyregardedthemanwalkin gtoandfrobesidetheCounci

l t ab l e . T h e r e w as an ai r o f n e r v o u s n e s s ab o u t h i m ; h e

f r e q u e n t l y c o n s u l t e d h i s w at c h an d l o o k e d o v e r t o w ar d a s e t o f d o u b l e d o o r s . " H e d o e s n ' t l o o k th at h o t , " s h e

w h i s p e r e d . " C an ' t y o u w h i p u p a d e m o n an d g e t u s o u t o f h e r e ? "

M an d r ak e g r o an e d . " A l m y s l av e s ar e o n a m i s s i o n . If I c o u l d g e t t o a p e n t ac l e I c o u l d s u m m o n th e m h e r e e as i l y , b u t

w i th o u t o n e , an d w i th m y f i n g e r s t i e d l i k e th i s , I ' m s t u c k . I h

av e n't g o t s o m u c h as an i m p o n t ap ."

"U s e l e s s ," K i t t y s n ap p e d . "C al y o u r s e l f a m ag i c i an ."

A s c o w l . "G i v e m e t i m e . M y d e m o n s ar e p o w e r f u l , e s p e c i al l y C o r m o c o d r an . W i t h l u c k , I'l g e t a c h anc e t o —"

T h e d o o r s at t h e e n d o f t h e h al b u r s t o p e n . T h e m an b y t h e t ab l e s w i v e l e d ar o u n d . K i t t y an d M an d r ak e c r an e d t h e i r

h e ad s .

A s m al p r o c e s s i o n w al k e d i n .

Thefirstfewpersonswereu
nknowntoKitty.Adiminuti
vemanwithround,moisteye
s,builtlikeawintertwig;ad
ul-

faced,somewhatslatternlyw
oman;amiddle-agedgentlem
anwithpale,shinyskinandpr
otrudinglips.Behindthem

cameayoungman,slender,sp
rightlyofstep,withoiledgi
ngerhairandglassesperched
onalittlenose.Aboutthese

fouranairofsuppressedexci
tementseemedtohang:theyt
ittered,grinned,andlooked

abouttthemwithquick,

nervousmovements.

Thebandy-leggedmanbesidethetablehurriedtojointhem."Atlast!"hesaid."Where'sQuentin?"

"Here,myfriends!"Inthroughthedoorsstrode QuentinMakepeace,emeraldfrockcoatflapping,chestpuffedoutlike

abantamcock's.Hisshouldersrolled,hisarmsswungwithaninsolentswagger.Hepassedhiscompanions,clapping

theginger-hairedmansoundly onthebback,rufflingthehair ofthewomanandwinkingatth erest.Ontowardthe

tablehewent,glancingupand downtheroomwithproprietor ialease.OnnoticingKitty andMandrakesittingbythe

wal,hegaveaplump-fingered wave.

AttheCounciltableMakepe aceselectedthelargestofthe chairs,agoldenthrone,orn atelycarved.Hesathimself,

legscrossed;withaflourish

,hedrewfromapocketaneno
rmouscigar.Asnapofthefing
ers:thecigartipburstinto

smolderinglife.QuentinM
akepeaceplaceditbetweenhi
slipsandinhaledwithsatisf
action.

KittyheardMandrakebeside
hergiveagaspofrage.Sheher
selfsawlittlebuttheostent
atioustheatricalityofthe

performance.Ifshehadn'tbee
naprisoner,shemighthaveb
eenamused.

Makepeacemadeanexpansive

gesturewiththecigar."Clive,Rufus—wouldyoubesokindastobringourfriends

over?"

Theginger-hairedmanapproached,folowedbyhisthick-lippedcompanion.Roughly,withoutceremony,Kittyand

Mandrakewerehauledtotheirfeet.Kittynoticedthatboth conspiratorswereregarding Mandrakewithmalevolent

dislike.Asshewatched,theolderman,lipsmoistlyparted,steppedforwardandstruc

k t h e i r p r i s o n e r h ar d ac r o s s t h e

f ac e .

T h e m an r u b b e d h i s h an d . "T hat' s f o r w h at y o u d i d t o L o v e l ac e ."

M an d r ak e s m i l e d t h i n l y . "N e v e r b e e n s l ap p e d b y a w e t f i s h b e f o r e ."

"I h e ar y o u w e r e look in g f o r m e , M an d r ak e , " t h e g i n g e r -h ai r e d m an s ai d . "W e l , w h at ar e y o u g o i n g t o d o t o m e n o w ? "

F r o m t h e g o l d e n c h ai r a m e l l i

fluousvoiceprojected:"Steady,boys,steady!Johnisourguest.Ihaveaffectionforhim!

Bringthemover,Isay."

AgriponKitty'sshoulder;shewaspropeledforwardtostandwithMandrakeonarugbeforethetable.

Theotherconspiratorshadseatedthemselves.Theireyeswerehostile.Thesulen-facedwomanspoke."Whatare

theydoinghere,Quentin?Thisisacrucialtime."

"You should kill Mandrake and have done," the fish-faced magician said.

Make peace took a puff on his cigar; his little eyes sparkled with merriment. "Rufus, you are far too hasty. You too,

Bess. True, John is not yet par to four company, but I have high hopes that he might become so. We have long been

allies, he and I."

Kitty took a sharp side-glance at the young magician. One cheek was scarlet where the blo

w h ad s t r u c k . H e d i d n o t

r e p l y .

"W e h av e n 't g o t t i m e t o p l ay g am e s ."T h i s w as t h e l i t t l e m an w i t h w i d e , w e t e y e s ; h i s v o i c e w as n as al , w h i n y . "W e

n e e d t o g i v e o u r s e l v e s t h e p o w e r y o u p r o m i s e d ." H e l o o k e d d o w n at t h e t ab l e , r an h i s f i n g e r s o v e r i t i n a g e s t u r e at

o n c e c o v e t o u s and f e ar f u l . T o K i t t y h e s e e m e d w e ak and c o w ar d l y , and an g r i l y c o n s c i o u s of t h i s c o w ar d i c e . F r o m w h at

shecouldsee,noneofthecon
spiratorswasanydifferent,s
avefor Makepeace,radiating
self-satisfactionfromhis

goldenthrone.

Theplaywrighttappedadolo
pofashfromhiscigarontothe
Persiancarpet."Nogames,my
dear Withers,"hesaid,

smiling."Icanassureyoul am
perfectlyserious.Devereau
x'sspieshavelongreportedt
hat—amongcommoners—

Johnhereisthemostpopular
ofthemagicians.Hecouldgi

veournewCouncilafresh,at tractiveface—wel,certainly

moreattractivethananyofyou. "Hegrinnedatthedisplease hehadcaused."Besides,heh astalentandambition

tospare.Ihaveafeelinghe'sl ongdesiredthechancetokic kDevereauxoutandstartagain ....Isn'tthatright,

John?"

AgainKittylookedatMandr ake.Againhispalefacegaven oinklingofhisthoughts.

"We must give John a little time," Quentin Make peace said. "Al will become clear to him. And you will shortly get al

the power you can handle, Mr. Withers. If only the good Hop kins would hurry along, we can proceed." He chuckled to

himself—and with that noise, with that name, Kitty knew him.

It was as if a thick veil had fallen from here yes. She was back in the Resistance again, three years before. On the

adviceofthemousyclerk,ClemHopkins,shehadgonetoarendezvousinadisusedtheater.Andoncethere...a

daggerheldtothebackofhernneck,awhisperedconversationwithanunseenman—whosewordsofguidanceled

themtotheabbeyandtothedreadfulguardianofthecrypt...

"You!"shecriedout."You!"

Aleyesturnedtoher.Shestoodstock-stil,staringatthemanonthegoldenthrone.

"Youwerethebenefactor," shewhispered."Youweretheonewhobetrayedus."

Mr. Makepeacewinkedather. "Ah! Yourecognizemeatlast? Iwonderedifyou'deverrecal.... Ofcourse, Iknewyou

assoonasIsawyouwithMandrake. That'swhyitamusedmetoinviteyoutomylittleshowtonight."

AtKitty'ssideJohnMandrake stirredatlast. "What'sthis? You'vemetbefore?"

"Don'tlooksoshocked, John

!Itwasallinagoodcause.Thr
oughmyassociateMr.Hopki
ns—whomyouwilmeet

shortly;heiscurrentlytend
ingtoourcaptives—Ihadlon
gfolowedtheactivitiesofth
eResistance.Itamusedmeto

watchtheirefforts,toseethe
outrageonthefacesofthefoo
lsinCouncilastheyfailedtot
rackthemdown.Present

companyexcepted,John!"An
otherchuckle.

Kitty'svoicewasexpression
less."Youknewaboutthemon

sterinGladstone'stomb,but youandHopkinsstillsentus

theretogetttheStaff.Myfriendsdiedbecauseofyou."Shetookasmalstepinhisdirection.

"Ohtush"QuentinMakepeacerooledhiseyes."Youweretraitorouscommoners.Iwasamagician.Didyouexpectme

tocare'?Anddon'tcomeanycloser,younglady.NexttimeIwon'tbotherwithaspell.I'llcutyourthroat."Hesmiled.

"Intruth,though,Iwasonyour

s i d e . I h o p e d y o u w o u l d d e s t
r o y t h e d e m o n . T h e n I ' d h a v e t
a k e n t h e S t a f f f r o m y o u

f o r m y o w n u s e . i n f a c t " h e t a p
p e d h i s c i g a r , r e f o l d e d h i s l e
g s , a n d l o o k e d a r o u n d a t h i s a u
d i e n c e —" i n f a c t t h e

o u t c o m e w a s m i x e d : y o u r a n o
f f w i t h t h e S t a f f , a n d l e t H o n o
r i u s t h e a f r i t e s c a p e t h e t o m b .
W h a t a n i m p a c t H o n o r i u s

m a d e ! G l a d s t o n e ' s b o n e s , h o
p p i n g a r o u n d t h e r o o f t o p s w i
t h a d e m o n e n c a s e d i n s i d e ! A
m a r v e l o u s s p e c t a c l e . B u t i t s
e t

Hopkinsandmethinking..."

"Telme,Quentin."Mandrake spokeagain;hisvoicewassoft."ThisMr.Hopkinswassupposedtohavebeeninvolved

withthegolemtoo.Wasitso?"

Makepeacesmiled,andpausedawhilebeforeanswering.He'sperformingthewholetime,Kittythought.He'san

incorrigibleshow-off,treatingthislikeoneofhisplays.

"Ofcourse!"Makepeacecrie

d. "Undermydirection! Ihav
e myfingersinmanypies. Iam
an artist, John, a manof

restlesscreativity. Foryear
s theEmpirehasbeengoingto
rackandruin; Devereauxandt
heothershavemismanaged

itdisgracefuly. Didyoukno
w thatseveralofmyplayshav e
actualyhadtoclosеinBoston
, Calcutta, and Baghdad,

thankstolocalpoverty, unre
st, andviolence? Andthisen
dlesswar!... Thingshavegot
tochange! Well, foryearsI

h a v e w a t c h e d o n t h e s i d e l i n e s , e x p e r i m e n t i n g h e r e a n d t h e r e . F i r s t , I e n c o u r a g e d m y g o o d f r i e n d L o v e l a c e i n h i s

a t t e m p t a t r e b e l l i o n . R e m e m b e r t h a t d e c i d e d l y l a r g e p e n t a c l e , J o h n ? T h a t w a s m y i d e a ! " H e c h u c k l e d . " T h e n c a m e

p o o r D u v a l . H e w a n t e d p o w e r , b u t h e h a d n ' t a c r e a t i v e b o n e i n h i s b o d y . A l l h e c o u l d d o w a s f o l l o w a d v i c e . T h r o u g h

H o p k i n s I e n c o u r a g e d h i m t o u s e t h e g o l e m t o s p r e a d u n r e s t . A n d w h i l e t h e g o v e r n m e n t w a s d i s t r a c t e d " — h e b e a m e d

atKittyonceagain—"Inearly acquiredtheStaff.Which,by theway,Ifullyintendtotakei ntomypossessionthisvery

night."

ToKitty,mostofthismeantn othing;shegazedatthehatefu llittlemaninthegreatgoldch air,almostquiveringwith

fury.Shesaw,asiffromfaroff ,thefacesofherdeadcompani ons—withevery word,Make peacedefiledtheir

memory.Shecouldnothaves poken.

Bycontrast,JohnMandrakes eemedtobebecomingalmost talkative."Thisisalveryinte resting,Quentin,"hesaid.

"TheStaffwilcertainlybeus eful.Buthowwillthegovern mentberun?Youhaveemptie dallthedepartments.Thatis

boundtocauseproblems,ev enwithsuchtitanicfiguresas theseinyourteam."Hesmile daroundatthesulen

conspirators.

Makepeacemadeaneasygestu re."Someofthepriisonerswi

l b e f r e e d i n d u e c o u r s e , o n c e
t h e y h av e s w o r n l o y al t y ."

"A n d t h e o t h e r s ? "

"W i l b e e x e c u t e d ."

M an d r ak e s h r u g g e d . "It s e e m s
a r i s k y p r o s p e c t f o r y o u , e v e
n w i t h t h e S t aff ."

"N o t s o ! " F o r t h e f i r s t t i m e M
ak e p e ac e s e e m e d an n o y e d . H
e r o s e f r o m h i s c h ai r , t o s s e d t
h e r e m n an t s o f t h e c i g ar

as i d e . "W e ar e ab o u t t o au g m e n
t o u r p o w e r w i t h t h e f i r s t c r e
at i v e ac t i n t w o t h o us an d y e ar s

o f m a g i c . In f ac t , h e r e i s

t h e v e r y m an w h o w i l s h o w y o u . L ad i e s an d g e n t l e m e n , I g i v e y o u — M r . C l e m H o p k i n s ! "

A m e e k an d d i f f i d e n t f i g u r e s t e p p e d i n t o t h e r o o m . T h r e e y e ar s h ad p as s e d s i n c e K i t t y h ad l as t s e t e y e s o n h i m ,

s i t t i n g at a c af e t ab l e i n t h e p l e as an t s u m m e r ai r . S h e h ad b e e n l i t t l e m o r e t h an a g i r l ; s h e 'd d r u n k a m i l k s h ak e an d

e at e n an i c e d b u n w h i l e h e 'd as k e d h e r q u e s t i o n s ab o u t t h e s t o l e n S t aff . T h e n , w h e n s h e 'd f

ai l e d t o s u p p l y t h e

i n f o r m a t i o n h e r e q u i r e d , M r . H o p k i n s h a d g e n t l y b e t r a y e d h e r o n c e a g a i n — s e n d i n g h e r t o t h e h o u s e w h e r e M a n d r a k e

w a i t e d t o e n t r a p h e r .

S o i t h a d b e e n . A s t h e y e a r s h a d p a s s e d , a n d t h e s c h o l a r 's f e a t u r e s h a d f a d e d f r o m h e r m e m o r y , h i s s h a d o w h a d

g r o w n i n s i d e h e r , s p r e a d l i k e a c o n t a g i o n a t t h e b a c k o f h e r m i n d . H e s o m e t i m e s t a u n t e d h e r w i t h i n h e r d r e a m s .

Andnowherehewas,steppingquietlyacrossthe rugsoftheHalofStatues,alittlesmileonhisface.Hisappearance

seemedtoawakeagreatexcitementintheconspirators;therewasastirringofanticipation.Mr.Hopkinscametostandbesidethetable,directlyoppositeKitty.Helookedat Mandrakefirst,thenatKitty.Hispalegrayeyessurveyed

her,hisfaceexpressionless.

"Youtraitor,"Kittygrowled.Mr.Hopkinsfrownedalittleasifinsomeperplexity.Heshowednotthesleightesthintof

recognition.

"Nowthen,Clem"—Makepeaceclappedhimonthebback—"donotbeputoffbythepresenceofyoungKittyhere.Itis

justmylittlejoketoremindyouofyourResistancedays.Don'tlethergetclose,mind.Sheisquitethelittlevixen!

Howarethepprisoners?"

Thescholarnoddedeagerly. "Quitesafe,sir.Theycannotgoanywhere."

"Andwhataboutoutside?Isallquiet?"

"Thereisstilunrestinthecentralparks.Thepolicegoaboutttheirbusiness.Nooneknowswswehaveleftthetheater."

"Good.Thenitistimetoact.Myfriends,Hopkinshereisamarvel,anabsolutegem.Hebreathesideaslikeyouand I

gulpair;hedreams'eminhissleep,digests'emwithhisdin

n e r . It w as he w h o f i r s t n o t i c e d t h e u n i q u e p r o p e r t i e s o f

t h e af r i t H o n o r i u s . Is n 't t h at r i g h t , C l e m ? "

H o p k i n s g av e a l i t t l e s m i l e . "If y o u s ay s o , s i r ."

"H o p k i n s an d I i m m e d i at e l y o b s e r v e d t h at t h e d e m o n in habited G l ad s t o n e 's b o n e s . It w as n o t a m e r e g u i s e , an

i l u s i o n o f e s s e n c e : t h e s k e l e t o n w as real. T he d e m o n h ad m i n g l e d w i t h t h e ac t u al b o n e s . A n am b i t i o u s i d e a o c c u r r e d

tous: why not summon a demon into a living body—specifically, the living body of a magician? If the magician could

control the demon, and use its power—what wonders she might perform! There would be no more need for pentacles,

for fiddling about with runes and chalks, no more risk of fatal errors! Indeed, summoning itself would soon become

unnecessary!"

Kitty had learned enough from Mr. Button to realize the rad

i c al n at u r e o f t h i s p r o p o s al ; s h e k n e w e n o u g h t o s h ar e

M an d r ak e 's u t t e r d i s b e l i e f. "B u t t h e r i s k s ar e f ar t o o g r e at ! " h e w as s ay i n g. "T h at c o m m o n e r i n y o u r w o r k r o o m—h e

h e ar d t h e d e m o n t al k i n g i n h i s h e ad ! It w o u l d h av e d r i v e n h i m m ad ! "

"O n l y b e c au s e h e d i d n o t h av e t h e will t o s u pp r e s s t h e d e m o n ." M ak e p e ac e w as i m p at i e n t n o w ; h e s p o k e q u i c k l y.

"W i t h i n d i v i d u al s o f i n t e l i g e n c e an d s t r o n g p e r s o n al i t y s

uchasus,theeffectwilbeharmonious."

"Youdon'tmeanyou'realgoingtotakethisrisk?"Mandrakeprotested."Surelynot!Theeffectsmightbe

catastrophic!Youdon'tknowwhatmighthappen."

"Oh,butwedo,wedo.Hopkinssummonedademonintohimselftwomonthsago,John.Hehassufferednoilleffects.

Isn'tthatright,Clem?Telthem."

"That's right, sir." The scholar seemed embarrassed to be the focus of attention. "I summoned quite a powerful

djinni. When I entered, I felt a certain struggling, like a living worm inside my head. But I merely had to concentrate

and the demon accepted the inevitable. He is thoroughly quiet now. I hardly know he's there."

"But you are able to call on his power and knowledge, aren't you, Hopkins?" Make peace said. "It is really quite

r e m ar k ab l e ."

"S h o w u s ! " t h e f e m al e c o n s p i r at o r w h i s p e r e d .

"Y e s , s h o w u s ! S h o w u s ! " A r o u n d t h e t ab l e t h e p l e a w as t ak e n up , o v e r an d o v e r . E ac h f ac e s h o n e w i t h f u r i o u s , av i d

h u n g e r . T o K i t t y t h e y s e e m e d w i c k e d , b u t al s o h e l p l e s s , l i k e n e s t l i n g s w ai t i n g t o b e f e d . S h e w as f i l e d w i t h a s u d d e n

r e p u l s i o n ; s h e l o n g e d t o g e t aw ay .

M ak e p e ac e 's e y e s w e r e g l i t t e

r i n g s l i t s ; h e n u d g e d t h e s c h o l ar 's ar m. "W h at d o y o u t h i n k, H o p k i n s ? S h o w t h e m a l i t t l e ,

j u s t t o w h e t t h e ap p e t i t e ? "

"If y o u t h i n k i t ap p r o p r i at e , s i r ." T h e s c h o l ar t o o k a s t e p b ac k , b e n t h i s h e ad i n c o n c e n t r at i o n. T h e n , w i t h o u t ap p ar e n t

e f f o r t , h e r o s e i n t o t h e ai r . S e v e r al o f t h e c o n s p i r at o r s g as p e d . K i t t y g l an c e d at M an d r ak e ; h e w as w at c h i n g

o p e n m o u t h e d .

H o p k i n s r o s e s i x f e e t ab o v e t

hefloor,thendriftedoff,aw
ayfromthetable.Whenhewas
somewaydistant,heraised

ahand,pointingitatanalabast
erstatueonthefarsideoftheh
all.Itshowedabald,stockym
agicianssmokinga

cigar.Therewasaflashofblu
elight—thestatueexplodedi
nashowerofsparks.Theging
er-hairedmagicianwhooped

withexcitement;theotherss
toodandclapped,orbangedth
etableinwildjoy.Mr.Hopki
nsrosehigher,towardthe

c e i l i n g.

"S h o w t h e m s o m e t h i n g e l s e, H o p k i n s!" M a k e p e a c e c a l e d. "P u t o n a s h o w!"

E v e r y o n e's e y e s w e r e c r a n i n g u p w a r d. K i t t y t o o k h e r c h a n c e. S l o w l y, s l o w l y, s h e b a c k e d a w a y f r o m t h e t a b l e. O n e

s t e p, t w o... N o o n e h a d n o t i c e d; a l w e r e w a t c h i n g t h e s c h o l a r p e r f o r m a c r o b a t i c f e a t s h i g h a g a i n s t t h e c e i l i n g,

t r a i l i n g g o u t s o f f l a m e f r o m h i s f i n g e r t i p s....

Kittyturnedandran.Attheend
dofthehallthedoubledoors
wereopen.Herfeetwerenoi
selessonthethick,soft

rugs.Herhandsweretied,wh
ichmadetherunningawkward
,butinsecondsshewasthrou
gh—outintoacorridorof

stone,withoilpaintingsont
hewalandglasscaseswithorn
amentsofgold----Sheheadedr
ight;thecorridorended

atanopendoor.

Kittyplungedthrough.Sheh
alted,cursed.Anemptyroom

, p e r h ap s an o f f i c i al 's s t u d y : a d e s k , a c as e o f b o o k s , a

p e n t ac l e o n t h e f l o o r . It w as a d e ad e n d .

W i t h a g as p o f f r u s t r at i o n , s h e t u r n e d , r an b ac k t h e w ay s h e h ad c o me —al o n g t h e c o r r i d o r , p as t t h e d o u b l e d o o r s ,

ar o u n d an o t h e r c o r n e r —

—an d c o l i d e d f u l p e l t w i t h s o m e t h i n g h ar d an d h e av y . T h r o w n t o t h e s i d e , s h e i n s t i n c t i v e l y t r i e d t o b r e ak h e r f al w i t h

an o u t s t r e t c h e d h an d —b u t h e

r ar m s w e r e b o u n d , s h e c o u l d n o t d o s o ; s h e l an d e d h e av i l y o n th e f l ag s t o n e s .

K i t t y l o o k e d u p an d c au g h t h e r b r e at h . A m an s t o o d o v e r h e r , f r am e d ag ai n s t t h e c e i l i n g g l o b e s ; a t al m an , b e ar d e d ,

d r e s s e d i n b l ac k . B r i g h t b l u e e y e s c o n s i d e r e d h e r , b l ac k b r o w s r u n k l e d i n a f r o w n .

"P l e as e ! " K i t t y g as p e d . "P l e as e , h e l p m e ! "

T h e b e ar d e d m an s m i l e d . A g l o v e d h an d r e ac h e d d o w n .

InthetHalofStatuesMr.Hopkins hadreturnedtoearth.Thefacesofthe conspiratorswerefiledwithwonder;two of

themenwerepulingrugsaway fromthecenteroftheroom.AsKittywas broughtin,halfchoked,hanging

suspendedbyhercolarfromthe beardedman'supraisedgrip,theystopped anddroppedtherugsagain.Onebyone,

everyoneturnedtolookather.

AdeepvoicespokeatKitty's

shoulder."Whatabouttthisgirl?Icaughtthermakingforthestreet."

Theginger-hairedmanshookhishead."Blimey.Didn'tevennoticeshehadgone."

Mr.Makepeacesteppedforward,apetulantfrownuponhisface."Ms.Jones,werealyhavenotimeforsuch

distractions...."Hescowled,shruggedandturnedaway."Atfirstherpresenceamusedme,buttobefrankshe

interestsmenolonger.You

maykillher."

23

Nathanielsawthemercenarydumpkittyontherug;hesawhimflingbackhiscape,reachintohisbelt,anddraw

forthalongknife,curvedlikeascimitar.Hesawhimreachoutttoclutchherhair,liftupherhead,exposeherthroat.

..

"Wait!"Nathanielsteppedforward;hespokewithasmuchauthorityashecouldmuster.

"D o n't t o u c h h e r ! I w an t h e r

al i v e ."

T h e m e r c e n ar y 's h an d s p au s e d . H e l o o k e d u p at N at h an i e l w i t h h i s s t e ad y p al e b l u e e y e s . T h e n , s l o w l y an d v e r y

d e l i b e r at e l y , h e c o n t i n u e d t o p ul K i t t y 's h e ad b ac k an d b r i n g t h e k n i f e ar o u n d .

N at h an i e l c u r s e d ." W ait, I s ai d ."

T h e c o n s p i r at o r s w e r e w at c h i n g w i t h s o m e am u s e m e n t . R u f us L i m e 's p al e , d amp f ac e g r i

mac e d . "Y o u'r e h ar d l y i n a

p o s i t i o n t o b e s o l o r d l y , M an d r ak e ."

"O n t h e c o n t r ar y , R u f u s . Q u e n t i n h as i n v i t e d m e t o j o i n y o u r c o mp an y . A n d af t e r s e e i n g M r . H o p k i n s 's r e m ar k ab l e

d e m o n s t r at i o n , I'm d e l i g h t e d t o ag r e e t o t h at p r o p o s al . T h e r e s u l t s ar e m o s t i mp r e s s i v e . T h at me an s I'm o n e o f y o u

n o w ."

Q u e n t i n M ak e p e ac e h ad b e e n b us y un b u t t o n i n g h i s e me r al

d f r o c k c o at . H i s e y e s w e r e n
ar r o w e d , c al c u l at i n g ; h e

l o o k e d at N at h an i e l as k an c e .
" Y o u h av e d e c i d e d t o f al l i n w
i t h o u r l i t t l e s c h e m e ? "

N at h an i e l m e t h i s g az e as c al m l
y as h e c o u l d . " I h av e i n d e e d , "
h e s ai d . " Y o u r p l an i s an ac t o f g
e n i u s , a mas t e r s t r o k e .

I o n l y w i s h I ' d p ai d m o r e at t e n t
i o n t o y o u w h e n y o u s h o w e d m
e t h at c o m m o n e r t h e o t h e r d ay
. B u t I i n t e n d t o r e c t i f y

t h at n o w . In t h e m e an t i m e , s t r i
c t l y s p e ak i n g , t h e g i r l i s s t i l

myprisoner,Quentin.Ihave ...plansforher.Noone

touchesher,saveme.

Makepeacerubbedhischin;h edidnotanswer.Themercen aryadjustedtheknifealittle inhishand.Kittygazed

sightlesslyatthefloor.Nath anielfelthisheartthudding againsthischest.

"Verywel."Makepeacemove dsuddenly."Thegirlisyours .Putherdown,Verroq.John, youhavespokenweland

haveconfirmedmygoodopinionofyou.Buttakeheed:wordsareeasy—actionsarebetter!Inamomentweshal

freeyouandwatchasyoubondwithademonofyourchoice.ButfirstIshalprepareformyownsummoning!Burke!

Withers!Clearthoserugsaway!Thepentaclesmustbereadied!"

Heturnedtoissuefurtherorders.Withoutexpression,themercenaryloosenedhisgriponKitty'shair.Nathaniel,

conscious of hostile eyes upon him—-Jenkins and Lime in particular were watching with disguised suspicion—did not

hasten to her side. She remained where she was, slumped on her knees, head lowered, hair hanging over her face.

The sight pierced him.

Twice now that evening Kitty Jones had nearly died, and all because of what he'd done. Because he' d found her,

because he' d wrenched her ou

t o f h e r q u i e t n e w l i f e a n d b r o u g h t h e r w i t h h i m , j u s t t o s a t i s f y h i s s e l f i s h c u r i o s i t y .

W h e n , i n t h e t h e a t e r , t h e I n f e r n o s t r u c k h e r , N a t h a n i e l h a d t h o u g h t h e r d e a d . S o r r o w h a d o v e r w h e l m e d h i m ; h e h a d

b e e n a l m o s t u n m a n n e d w i t h g u i l t . D e s p i t e t h e m e r c e n a r y 's h a r s h w a r n i n g , h e h a d f l u n g h i m s e l f b e s i d e h e r , a n d o n l y

then r e a l i z e d t h a t s h e b r e a t h e d . F o r t h e n e x t h o u r , w h i l e s h e r e m a i n e d u n c o n s c i o u s , h i s s e n s e o f s h a m e h a d s l o w l y

grown. Little by little he began to recognize his folly.

Already, in the last few days, he had begun to detach himself from the name of Mandrake, from the role that for years

had become a second skin. But only with the events in the theater did that detachment become a true separation. The

two key certainties that governed him—his belief in the invulnerability of the government and in the essential virtue of

hismotives—weredashedfr
omhiminamatterofmoments
.Themagicianswereoverpo
wered.Kittywasstruck

down.Bothcameatthehandof
Makepeace,anditwaswithho
rrorthatNathanielrecognize
d,inthatcalous,

indifferenthand,areflectio
nofhisown.

Atfirstttheenormityof Make
peace's crimealmostblinded
himtoitsnature:thetheatric
al panacheofthecoup,the

bizarreperversionofthede

m o n s w i t h i n t h e b o d y , a l t h e s i l l y t a l k o f g e n i u s a n d c r e a t i v i t y h e l p e d d i v e r t a t t e n t i o n f r o m

t h e b a n a l r e a l i t y o f t h e t r u t h . It w a s n o t h i n g b u t a n o t h e r c o l d , a m b i t i o u s l i t t l e m a n p l a y i n g f o r p o w e r . N o d i f f e r e n t

f r o m L o v e l a c e , o r D u v a l o r — a n d a t t h i s t h o u g h t N a t h a n i e l f e l t a c h i l u p o n h i s s p i n e — f r o m N a t h a n i e l ' s o w n m u s i n g s

t h a t v e r y e v e n i n g , a s h e s a t i n t h e c a r a n d d r e a m e d o f s e i z i n g t h e S t a f f a n d p u t t i n g a n e n d t o t h e w a r . O h , y e s , h e ' d

told himself it was for the right treasons, to help the commoners and save the Empire, but where did such idealism

end? With bodies like Kitty's lying on the floor.

How naked and obvious Nathaniel's ambition must have been! Make peace had seen it. Farrar, too. Ms. Lutyens had

understood it and walked away.

No wonder Kitty had treated him with such disdain. ... As she had watched over her body in th

e H al l o f S t at u e s , h e h ad

c o m e t o s h ar e h e r c o n t e m p t .

B u t then s h e h ad w o k e n , an d w i t
h h i s r e l i e f c am e n e w d e t e r mi
n at i o n .

T h e c o n s p i r at o r s w e r e b u s y .
B ac k an d f o r th ac r o s s th e r o o
m th e y s c am p e r e d , b r i n g i n g o
u t th e p ar ap h e r n al i a o f

s u m m o n i n g : c an d l e s , b o w l s ,
h e r b s , an d f l o w e r s . In th e c e n
t e r o f th e h al th e h e av y r u g s h
ad b e e n p u l l e d c l e ar an d

u n c e r e m o n i o u s l y d u m p e d t o

oneside.Severalpentacles wererevealedbeneath,beautifulyinlaidinmother-of-pearl

andlapislazuli.Makepeacestoodwithinone,strippeddownto hisshirttails,pointing,pouting,issuingshril

commands.

KittyJonesstilcrouchedasbefore.

Nathanielstroledforward,bentatherside,andspokesoftly."Kitty,getup."Heextendedhisboundhands."Comeon.

That's it. Sitoverhere." Hepushedasideaheavychairofredwood, andhelpedlowerherdown. "Restthere. Areyou

alright?"

"Yes."

"Thenwait. I'll getyououtofthis."

"How'sthatexactly?"

"Trustme." Heleanedagainstthetable, appraisingthesituation. Bythedoorthemercenarystood, armsfolded,

gazingimplacablytowardthem.Nopossibilityofescapethere.Theconspiratorsthemselveswerefeeble;itwaseasy

toseenowwhyMakepeacehadrecruitedthem.Hehadchosentheweak,theunpreferred,thoseeatenawaywith

jealousyandmalice,whowouldseizetheopportunitybutneverbeathreattohim.Theplaywrightwasadifferent

matter,aformidablemagician.Withouthisdemons,Nathanielwashelpless.

Makepeace...Hecursedagain
hisownstupidity.Foryearsh
ehadsuspectedthepresence
ofatraitorhighin

government,

someoneconnectedtobotht
heLovelaceandtheDuvalplo
ts.Fourmagicianshadbeenne
ededtosummonthegreat

demonRamuthrabackatHedd
lehamHal—thefourthhadnev
erbeenseen,savefora fleeti
ngglimpseinanopen-

toppedcar—aflashofgoggle
s,aredbeard...gone.Makepe

ac e i n d i s g u i s e ? E as y t o i m agi
n e n o w .

D u r i n g t h e g o l e m aff ai r N at h
an i e l h ad b e e n s u r p r i s e d h o w
e as i l y t h e p l ay w r i g h t h ad d i s
c o v e r e d t h e l o c at i o n o f t h e

f u g i t i v e K i t t y : t h at m u s t h av e
b e e n H o p k i n s , t h e n — M ak e p e
ac e 's c o n t ac t w i t h t h e R e s i s t
an c e . N at h an i e l g r o u n d h i s

t e e t h . H o w swif tly M ak e p e ac e
h ad w o n h i m o v e r , u s e d h i m as
an al l y , p l ay e d h i m f o r a f o o l .
W e l , t h e m at t e r w as n 't

o v e r y e t .

S t o n y f ac e d , N at h an i e l w at c h
e d M r . H o p k i n s h u r r y i n g p as t
t o o b e y h i s l e ad e r 's o r d e r s . S
o this w as t h e m y s t e r i o u s

s c h o l ar h e h ad s o u g h t s o l o n g !
A d e m o n 's p o w e r c o u r s e d t h r
o u g h t h e v i l ai n 's b o d y — o f t h
at t h e r e w as n o d o u b t . B u t

t h e m e e k l i t t l e man w o u l d h ar
d l y b e a m at c h f o r C o r m o c o d r
an , A s c o b o l , an d t h e o t h e r s i f
N at h an i e l c o u l d o n l y b r i n g

t h e m t o h i s s i d e . Y e t w h i l e H
o p k i n s w o r k e d h i s m i s c h i e f
h e r e , t h e i n c o m p e t e n t d j i n n
w e r e a m i l e aw ay , w ai t i n g v ai

n l y

f o r h i m at t h e A m b as s ad o r H o t e l !

N at h an i e l 's b r o w s k n o t t e d w i t h f r u s t r at i o n . H e f i d g e t e d w i t h t h e c o r d s t h at b o u n d h i s h an d s . A l h e c o u l d d o w as w ai t

u n t i l M ak e p e ac e f r e e d h i m an d l e t h i m s t e p w i t h i n a p e n t ac l e . T hen h e c o u l d ac t . In an i n s t an t h i s s e r v an t s w o u l d b e

s u mm o n e d an d t h e t r ai t o r s b r o u g h t t o ac c o u n t .

"M y f r i e n d s , I am r e ad y ! C o me

, M a n d r a k e , M s . J o n e s —y o u m u s t j o i n t h e a u d i e n c e ! " M a k e p e a c e w a s s t a n d i n g i n t h e

n e a r e s t c i r c l e , s h i r t s l e e v e s r o l e d u p , c o l a r u n d o n e ; h e h a d a d o p t e d a h e r o i c p o s e : h a n d s o n h i p s , p e l v i s t h r u s t

f o r w a r d , l e g s w i d e e n o u g h t o s t r a d d l e a h o r s e . T h e c o n s p i r a t o r s c o n g r e g a t e d a t a r e s p e c t f u l d i s t a n c e ; e v e n t h e

m e r c e n a r y s h o w e d s u f f i c i e n t i n t e r e s t t o s t a l k a l i t t l e c l o s e r . T o g e t h e r , N a t h a n i e l a n d K i t t y a p p r o a c h e d t h e p e n t a c l e .

"Thetimehascome!"Makepeacecried."Themomenttowardwhi chIhaveworkedforsomanyyears.Onlythethril

ofanticipation,myfriends,keepsmefrombursting withmypentemotions!"Withadynamicflourish,heremoveda

lacyhandkerchieffromapocketanddabbedathiseyes."Howmuchsweat,howmanytearshaveIshedtogetso

far?"hecried."Whocantel?Howmuchblood—?"

"Secretionsaside,"RufusLi

meinterjectedsourly,"hadn'tyoubettergetonwithit?Someofthosecandlesareburning

low."

Makepeaceglaredathim,butreturnedhishankytohispocket."Verywel.Myfriends,following thesuccessof

Hopkinshereinsubduingademonofmoderatepower"—Hopkinsgavealittlesmile,whichmighthavemeant

anything—"Ihavedecidedtoapplymymoreconsiderable

abilitytothetamingofagreat
errentity." Hepaused. "This

veryeveningHopkinslocate
dintheLondonLibraryavolu
melistingthenamesofspirit
sfromancientPersia. Ihave

decidedtomakeuseofaname
hefoundthere. Myfriends, h
ereandnow, beforeyourvery
eyes, Ishallsummoninto

myselfthegreaterdemonkno
wnas... Nouda!"

Nathanieluttereedasmalexcl
amation. Nouda? Themanwasm
ad. "Makepeace," hesaid. "Sur

elyyou'rejoking.This

procedureisriskyenoughwithouttryingsomethingsopowerful."

Theplaywrightpursedhislipsfretfully."I'mnotjoking,John,justambitious.Mr.Hopkinshasassuredmethatcontrol

issimplicityitself—andIamverystrong-willed.Ihopeyoudon'tmeantoimplythatI'mnottuptothis."

"Ohno,"Nathanielsaidhastily."Notatal."Heleanedcloset

oKitty."Theman'safool,"he whispered."Noudaisa

terrible entity;oneofthemostfearsomerecorded.ItleftPersepolisinruins...."

Kittyleanedover,whisperedback."Iknow.DestroyedDarius'sownarmy."

"Yes."Nathanielnodded.Thenheblinked."What?Howdidyouknow?"

"John!"Makepeace'svoicewastetchy."Enoughcanoodling!Ineedsilencenow.Hopkins—ifyouseeanythinggoami

s s ,

r e v e r s e t h e p r o c e s s ; u s e A s p r e y ' s O v e r r u l e . R i g h t . Q u i e t , a l ."

Q u e n t i n M a k e p e a c e c l o s e d h i s e y e s , b e n t h i s h e a d t o w a r d h i s c h e s t . H e f l o u r i s h e d h i s a r m s a n d f l e x e d h i s f i n g e r s . H e

b r e a t h e d d e e p l y . T h e n h e l i f t e d h i s c h i n , o p e n e d h i s e y e s , a n d b e g a n t o d e c l a i m t h e i n c a n t a t i o n i n a l o u d , c l e a r v o i c e .

N a t h a n i e l l i s t e n e d h a r d : a s b e f o r e , i t w a s a s i m p l e e n o u g h L a t i n s u m m o n s , b u t t h e s t r e n g t

hoftheoncomingspirit

meantthatithadtobereinforc
edwithmultipleword-locks
andtortuoussubclausesdou
blingbackonthemselvesto

shoreupthebinding.Hehadt
oadmitthatMakepeacespoke
itwell.Minutespassed—his
larynxneverfaltered,he

ignoredtheperspirationrun
ningdownhisface.Therewas
ahushinthechamber:Nathani
el,Kitty,theconspirators—

alwatched,transfixed.Most
avidofalwasMr.Hopkins—h

e w as l e an i n g f o r w ar d w i t h h i s m o u t h o p e n ; h e h ad a

s l i g h t l y h u n g r y l o o k .

O n t h e s e v e n t h m i n u t e t h e r o o m g r e w c o l d . N o t s l o w l y , b u t i n an i n s t an t , as i f a s w i t c h h ad s u d d e n l y b e e n p r e s s e d .

E v e r y o n e b e g an t o s h i v e r . O n t h e e i g h t h m i n u t e c am e t h e s w e e t e s t o f f r ag r an c e s , t h at o f m e ad o w f l ax an d c e l an d i n e .

O n t h e n i n t h m i n u t e N at h an i e l d e t e c t e d s o m e t h i n g i n t h e p e n t ac l e w i t h M ak e p e ac e . It w as t h e r e o n t h e t h i r d p l an e —

s o m e t h i n g h az y , f l u c t u at i n g ,
s u c k i n g i n t h e l i g h t — a d ar k , h
o r n e d m as s , n o w t al l , n o w b r o
ad , w i t h ar m s t h at s p r e ad

o u t an d p r e s s e d ag ai n s t t h e p e
n t ac l e . N at h an i e l l o o k e d d o w
n ; h e t h o u g h t h e s aw t h e i n l ai d
b o u n d ar i e s o f t h e c i r c l e

b u l g e o u t a l i t t l e i n t h e f l o o r .
T h e f e at u r e s o f t h e n e w c o m e r
c o u l d n o t b e s e e n . It t o w e r e d
o v e r M ak e p e ac e , w h o s p o k e

o n , q u i t e o b l i v i o u s t o h i s n e
w c o m p an i o n .

M ak e p e ac e c ame t o t h e c l i max

ofhiscommand,themomentwhenheboundthedemoninsidehimself.Withacry,he

spokethefinalwords:thedarkfigurevanished,likeblinking.

Makepeacestopped.Hewasquitestil.Hiseyeslookedoutbeyondhisaudience,asifatsomethingfaraway.

Everyonewatched,frozentothespot.Makepeacedidnothing;hisfacewasblank.

"Hopkins,"RufusLimesaidhoarsely."Dismissit...Quick

!"

Withagreatcry,Makepeaces prangintolife.Itwasquitewi thoutwarning.Nathanielcri edout,everyonejumped;

eventhemercenarysteppedb ack.

"Success!"Makepeaceleape dfromthecircle.Heclapped hishands,capered,hopped,s kipped,andtwirled."Succes s!

Suchtriumph',Icannotbegin totelyou..."

Theconspiratorsinchedcloser.Jenkinspeeredoutabovehisglasses."Quentin...isittrue?Howdoesitfeel...?"

"Yes!Noudaishere!Ifeelitwithin!Ah—foramomentortwo,myfriends,therewasastruggle—Iadmitit.Theeffect

wasdisconcerting.ButIcommandeditmoststrictly,withalmypower.AndIfeltthatdemonshrinkbackandobey.

Itissubservientwithinme.Itknowsitsmaster!Whatisitlike?Hardtodescribe....Itisnotpainfulexactly....I

senseitlikeahard,hotcoalwithinmyhead.Butwhenitobeyed—Ifeltsuchasurgeofenergy!Oh,itcannotbe

imagined!"

Withthis,theconspiratorserupteduntoraucousscelebration;theysquealedandjumpedforjoy.

"Thedemon'spower,Quentin!"Limeshouted."Useit!"

"Notyet,myfriends."Makepeaceheldupphishandsforcalm;theroomfelsilent."Icouldestroythisroom,"hesaid,

"turnalofittopowderifIchose.Butthereshalbetimeenoughforfunonceyouhavefolowedme.Gotoyourpen-

tacles!Summonyourdemons!Thenweshalsetaboutourdestiny!WeshallseizetheStaffofGladstoneandtakea

strolthroughLondon.Ibelievesomecommonersarebusydemonstrating.Ourfirsttaskwilbetoputthemintheir

place."

Likeeagerchildren,theconspiratorsscamperedtotheirc

ircles.NathanielgraspedKitty bythearm,drewhertoone

side."Inamoment,"hehissed,"Iwilbecalledupontojointhismadness.Iwilpretendtodoso.Donotbealarmed.

AtthelastminuteIshaluseth epentacletosummonatroupeofthestrongestdjinn.Withluckthey wildestroy

Makepeaceandtheseotherfools.Attheveryleastweshall havetheopportunitytoescape!"Hepausedtriumphantly.

"Youdon'tseemoverlyimpre

s s e d."

K i t t y's e y e s w e r e t i r e d, r e d-r i m m e d. H a d s h e b e e n c r y i n g? H e h a d n't n o t i c e d. S h e s h r u g g e d. "I h o p e y o u'r e r i g h t."

N a t h a n i e l s w a l o w e d h i s i r r i t a t i o n; i n t r u t h, h e w a s n e r v o u s t o o. "Y o u'l s e e."

A c r o s s t h e h a l t h e s u m m o n i n g s b e g a n: R u f u s L i m e, e y e s t i g h t s h u t, f i s h-m o u t h o p e n, i n t o n i n g h i s w o r d s i n a

m u t t e r e d c r o a k; C l i v e J e n k i n s, g l a s s e s r e m o v e d f r o m h i s l i t t l e n o s e a n d h e l d a n x i o u s l

ybetweenhishandsashespoke

inarapidmonotone.Theothers,whosenamesNathanielcouldnotremember,stoodinsolitaryposturesc,hunched,

erect,shaking,stammeringoutttheirincantations,makingthenecessarygestures.Hopkinsand Makepeacewalked

approvinglyamongthem.

"John!" Thatwas Makepeace;withatrilofdelight,heboundedover."Ah!Suchenergy!Icouldleaptothestars!"His

facewentserious."Notholdingbackonus,areyou,boy?Whyaren'tyouinacircle?"

Nathanielraisedhishands."PerhapsifIwasuntied?"

"Ah,yes.Howdiscourteousofme.There!"Asnapofthefingers;thecordsburstintolilacflames.Nathanielshook

himselffree."Thereisanemptypentacleinthatcorner,John,"Makepeacesaid."Whatdemonhaveyouchosenfor

yourself?"

Nathanielchosetwoatrandom."Iwasdebatingbetweentwodjinnfr omEthiopiantexts:ZosaandKarloum."

"Aninteresting,ifmodest,choice.IsuggestKarloum.Well,offyougo."

Nathanielnodded.Hetookaquicksidelongglanceat Kitty,whowaswatchinghimintently,thenstrodetowardthe

nearestvacantpentacle.Hehadn'tmuchtime:throughthecornerofhiseyehesawstrange,contortedshadows

flitteringaboveJenkinsand Lime.Heavenknewwhatthei diotshadsummoned,butwit hluckitwouldtakeawhilefo r

themtocontroltheirintern al slaves.Beforethathappene d,CormocodranandHodgew ouldmakeshortworkofthem .

Hesteppedinsidehiscircle ,clearedhisthroatandlooke daround.Makepeacewaswatc hinghimintently.Doubtles she

wassuspicious.Nathanielgr

i n n e d b l e ak l y t o h i m s e l f ; w e l , t h o s e s u s p i c i o n s w e r e ab o u t t o b e c o n f i r m e d i n t h e m o s t

d r am at i c p o s s i b l e w ay .

A f i n al m o m e n t o f p r e p ar at i o n —h e w o u l d n e e d t o w o r k s w i f t l y w h e n h i s d j i n n ar r i v e d , gi v e p r e c i s e an d ur g e n t o r d e r s —

t h e n N at h an i e l ac t e d . H e m ad e an o r n at e g e s t ur e , c r i e d o ut t h e n am e s o f h i s f i v e s t r o n g d e m o n s an d p o i n t e d at t h e

n e i g h b o r i n g c i r c l e . H e s t e e l e d h i m s e l f f o r t h e e x p l o s i o

ns,thesmokeandhelfire,the suddenappearanceofstraining,

hideousforms.

Withamiserablesquelch,something smalandinsubstantialstruckthecenterofthecircle,spatteringoutwardlikea

fruitdroppedfromonhigh.Ithadnodiscernibleshape,butgaveoffastrongsmeloffish.

Abulgeroseinitscenter.Asmallvoicesounded."Saved!""Thebulgerotated,appearedtonoticeMr.Hopkins."Oh."

Nathanielgazedatitwordlessly.

QuentinMakepeacehadseenitalso.Hesteppedclose,inspectedit."Howpeculiar!Itseemstobesomekindof

uncookedmeal.Withaddedsentience.Whatdoyouthink,Hopkins?"

Mr.Hopkinsapproached;hiseyesglitteredastheyglanced datNathaniel."Nothingsoinnocent,Iamafraid,sir.Itis

theremainsofaperniciousdjinni,whichearlierthiseve

ningattemptedmycapture.S
everalotherdemons,who

accompaniedhim,Ihavealre
adyslain.IfearthatMasterM
andrakewashopingtocatchus
unawares."

"Isthatso?"QuentinMakepe
acestraightenedsadly."Ohd
ear.Thatratherchangesthing
s.Ialwayshadsuchhigh

hopesforyou,John.Irealyth
oughtwemightworkwelltog
ether.Stil,nevermind—Ih
aveHopkinsandmyfiveloyal

friendstocounton."Heglanc

edroundatthecons pirators who,havingfinishedtheirsummonings,stoodquietlyin

theircircles."Thatisenough.Ourfirstpleasurewilbetowatchyouandyourcreatureedie—Ulp!"Heputhishandto

hismouth."Excuseme.Ifear I—hic!—haveindigestion.Nowthen—"Anothergulp,agasp;hiseyesbulged."Thisis

mostcurious.I—"Histongue protruded.Hislimbsshook,hiskneessagged;heseemedabouttofal.

Nathaniel stepped back in shock. Make peace's body gave a sudden wriggle; it writhed, somewhat like a snake, as if all

his bones were newly fluid. Then it steadied, stiffened. The playwright seemed to ral y. For the briefest of instants a

panicked looker upted in the eyes; the tongue managed to g abble out the words: "It is..."

A furious writhing drowned out the rest. Make peace moved like a puppet on twisted str ings.

Theheadjerkedup.Theeyes werestaring,lifeless.

Andthemouthlaughed.

Standingalaroundhimintheir circles,Lime,Jenkins,and therestoftheconspiratorsj oinedinthelaughter.Their

bodiesseemedtoapetheirle ader's;theytwitchedandwri ggledtoo.

Nathanielstoodtransfixedas thenoiseeruptedaroundhim .Itwasnotkindorpleasantlau ghter,norwasit

particularlymaliciousgreedy,triumphant,orcruel.Itwouldhavebeenlessdistressingifithadbeen.Insteadthe

soundwashollow,discordantandutterlyalien.Itcontainednorecognizablehumanemotion.

Infact,itwasn'thumanatal.

24

Itwasthesoupthatsavedme.Fishsoup,it•was,thickandcreamy,filingthespaceofthesilvertureen.Atfirst,

whenIwaspressedhardupag
ainstthesilverwals,myesse
ncedissolvedrapidlyaway.
Butunexpectedly,things go
t

better.Almostassoonas Faq u
arlleftme,Ilapsedintosilve
r-inducedunconsciousness
,andthatmeantmycrow

guisefellapart.Isubsidedin
toanoily,fluidmass,notunli
kedishwater,whichfloated
withinthesoup,insulatedfr
om

thesilverbytheliquidaround.Iwouldn'tsayIwaswelloff

e x ac t l y , b u t m y e s s e n c e w as n o w d i s i n t e g r at i n g a g o o d

d e al s l o w e r t h an F aq u ar l w o u l d h av e e x p e c t e d .

F l i c k e r s o f aw ar e n e s s c am e an d w e n t . O n e m o m e n t I t h o u g h t I w as f ar aw ay i n E g y p t , t al k i n g w i t h P t o l e m y f o r t h e

l as t t i m e ; t h e n e x t I w as w at c h i n g f r ag m e n t s o f c o d an d h al i b u t d r i f t b y . O c c as i o n al l y F aq u ar l 's d e c l ar at i o n e c h o e d i n

m y m i n d : From ton ig ht, we tak e reven g e. S o u n d e d o m i n o u s f o r s o m e b o d y . W e l l , t h e y w e r e

welcometoit.Iwastired.

I'dhadenough.Iwasgladtobesomewherequiet,dyingonmyown.

Andthen,allofasudden,thesoupwasgone;thefreezingtaintofsilverlikewise.Iwasfreedfromthetureen.

Goodnews,unquestionably.Troublewas,Iwasnolongeralone.

Mymaster—yes,thatwaspredictable,Icouldjustaboutcopewithhim.Butthen,whenIrotatedgloopilytocheckout

t h e s c e n e , w h o d i d I s e e n e x t ? L e t 's j u s t s ay t h at w h e n y o u r ar c h e n e m y 's t r ap p e d y o u i n a p l ac e o f c e r t ai n d e at h , an d

y o u 'v e

s u r v i v e d h e r o i c al y ag ai n s t al t h e o d d s , t h e l as t t h i n g y o u w an t t o s e e , w h e n y o u e s c ap e at l as t , i s t h at s am e

ar c h e n e m y g l ar i n g d o w n at y o u w i t h an e x p r e s s i o n o f an n o y e d d i s t as t e .1 N o t o n l y t h at —y o u 'r e w e ak , l o o k l i k e a

j e l y f i s h , an d s m e l l o f c l am c h o w d e r . In s u c h c i r c um s t an c e

s t h e w i n d k i n d o f g o e s o u t o f y o u r s e n s e o f t r i u m p h .

1 E v en a d i f f eren t archenem y would hav e b een m arg inally b etter.

B u t t h at w as n't t h e h al f o f i t . A s w e l as M an d r ak e an d F aq u ar l , t h e r e w e r e o t h e r s i n t h at r o o m , an d I ar r i v e d j u s t i n

t i m e t o s e e e x ac t l y w h at t h e y w e r e .

F i v e g at e s t o t h e O t h e r P l ac e w e r e o p e n an d m y e s s e n c e t r e m b l e d w i t h t h e o n r u s h o f ac t i v i t y . H u m an s s t o o d i n f i v e

p e n t ac l e s . O n t h e f i r s t p l an e t
h e y s e e m e d t o s t an d al o n e . O n
t h e s e c o n d an d t h i r d , t h e y w e
r e ac c o m p an i e d b y

b i l o w i n g s h ad o w s o f un c e r t
ai n p r o p o r t i o n s ; o n t h e h i g h e
r p l an e s t h e s e s h ad o w s r e s o l
v e d t h e m s e l v e s i n t o h i d e o u s

w r i t h i n g m as s e s , i n w h i c h n u
m e r o u s t e n t ac l e s , l i m b s , e y e
s , s p i n e s , an d p r o n g s k e p t un
c o m f o r t ab l e p r o x i m i t y . A s I

w at c h e d , e ac h m as s c o m p r e s s
e d i t s e l f d o w n an d m e r g e d i n s
i d e t h e w ai t i n g h u m an . S o o n e
v e n t h e m o s t aw k w ar d l e g

o r f e e l e r w as w i t h d r aw n f r o m s i g h t .

F o r t h e f i r s t f e w s e c o n d s t h e h u m an s s e e m e d t o b e i n c h ar g e . T h e y b l i n k e d , s t i r r e d , s c r at c h e d t h e i r h e ad s an d , i n t h e

c as e o f m y o l d c h um J e n k i n s , p l ac e d h i s g l as s e s c ar e f u l y o n h i s n o s e . O n l y t h e f ac t t h at t h e i r au r as n o w g l o w e d w i t h

e x t r ao r d i n ar y s t r e n g t h i n d i c at e d t h at an y t h i n g o d d h ad h ap p e n e d . I w as n 't f o o l e d , o f c o u r s e . F r o m w h at I'd s e e n o f

F aq u ar l an d h i s t r e at m e n t o f M

r. Hopkins, I didn't think the humans would be on top for long.

And sure enough, they weren't.

A vibration in the planes behind me: I swiveled like an amoeba on a turntable and saw another human, a short, round

man wearing an excessively frilly shirt. And this is when I got really worried: his aura was huge—it radiated out like a

sunburst, vibrating with other worldly colors and a malev

olentvitality.Ididn'tneedto betoldthatsomethingh ad

alreadytakenresidenceinhim.

Hespoke;Iwasn'tlistening. Alofasudden,hisaurapulsed,justonce,asifadoortoafurnacedeepinsidehimhad

beenopenedwide.Andthesh ort,roundmanlosthismind.

ForalFaquarl'sprotestations tothecontrary,thenotionof bondingwithahumanisapret tyobnoxiousone.Forone

thingyoudon'tknowwhereit's been. Foranother, mixingyouressencewithhorridheavyearthyfleshisanaesthetic

no-no; itmakesyouqueasyjustthinkingaboutit. Andthenthere'sthesmallmatterofcontrol, oflearninghowto

operatethehumanbody. Faquarlhadhadsomepracticeatthiswithhopkins. Butthenewcomershadnot.

Asone, thesixmagicians—theshort, roundmanandtheothersinthecircles—laughed, twitched, shook, stumbled,

jerkedtheirarmseverywhic
hway,andfelover.

IlookedupatFaquarl."Oooh,
scary.Therevengeofthedji
nnbegins."

Hescowled,benttoassisthi
sleaderandwasdistractedby
amovementnearthedoor.Itw
asanotheroldfriend—the

mercenary.Hisface,whichn
ormalyshowedaltheweaknes
sandsoftemotionofagranite
slab,waswide-eyedwith

shock.Perhapsitwasthesigh
tofthemagicianslyingonthe

irbackslikeupturnedwoodlice,armsandlegswriggling

helplessly.Perhapsitwasthe realizationthathewasunlikelytogetafee.Whicheveritwas,hedecidedtodepart.He

movedtothedoor—

Faquarlsprangthroughtheair;helandedbythemercenary.Asingleshrugofthespindlyarms—themercenarywas

flungacrossthe roomtolandheavilyagainstastatue.Hestruggledtohisfeetanddrewaknife;Faquarlwasonhim

inaflash.Therewasablurof movement,thesoundofmult ipleblowsbeingstruck;its oundedlikeabrawlina

saucepanfactory.Thescimit arspunacrossthefloor.The mercenaryslumpedagainstth eflagstones,gaspingfor

breath.Faquarlstraightened ,adjustingMr.Hopkins'stie, andstrodebacktothecentero ftheroom.

I'dwatchedwithgrudgingapp roval."Niceone.I'vebeentry ingtodothatforyears."

Faquarlshrugged."Thesecret istoavoidmagic,Bartimaeus.Thefelow'sresilienceisexcessive;italmostseemsto

feedoffourenergies.Ithelpstobeencasedinamortalbody.Anddon'tthinkyou'regoinganywhereeither.I'lltend

toyoushortly."Hetrottedafterthebodyofthesshort,roundman,whichwasnowrolling acrossthefloor,utteringodd

barksandcries.

Maybeitwasavanitything,bu

tIwasabittiredofremaining asapoolofglop.Withatremendouseffort,Idrew

myselfupintoapyramidofslime.Wasthatanybetter?No.ButIwastoofargonetotryanythingsophisticated.The

slimelookedaboutforMandrake.Ifthingswerebadforme,theywerent'toosunnyforhimeither.

TomyastonishmentIsawhimstandingatatablewithKittyJones.2

2.Itwas the Kitty Jones bit that was

astonishing . N ot the tab le. Thoug h it was v ery nicely

polished.

N o w that t o o k m e b y s u r p r i s e . I c o u l d n't f i t h e r i n t o t h e e q u at i o n at al . W h at w as m o r e , M an d r ak e w as b u s i l y t r y i n g t o

u n t i e s o m e c o r d s b i n d i n g h e r h an d s . W e i r d ! If an y t h i n g , t h i s w as o d d e r t h an t h e F aq u ar l / H o p k i n s c o m b o t h i n g .

N e i t h e r l o o k e d i n v e r y g o o d n i c k , b u t t h e y w e r e t al k i n g av i d l y , p e e r i n g t o w ar d t h e d o o r . T h e m e r c e n ar y's

misadventurehadnotbeenlo stuponthem—theymadenoh astymove.

Slowly,asslimewil,Isetoff acrossthefloortowardthem. ButIhadn'tgonefarwhenthew holefloorshook,

flagstonescracked,andstatu estoppledagainstthewal.Itw asasifanearthquakehadstruc k,oramotherrochad

landedoverhead.Infact,thec ulpritwasthesshort,roundm an,whostillayuponthegroun d.Hehadmanagedtorol

ontohisside,butwasnowatte
mptingtoriseusinghislegs
alone—aneffortthatmadehim
rotateslowlyina

clockwisedirection.Whate
verwasinsidehimwasgrowi
ngfrustrated;ahandslapped
petulantlyagainstthestones
—

witheveryslap,itshookther
oom.

Faquarlhadhastenedoverand
wasseekingtohaulhimuprig
ht."Pressthefeetflatagainstt
heground,LordNouda.

T h e r e ! L e t m e t ak e y o u r w e i g h t . T h at ' s i t . S t e ad y y o u r s e l f . N o w y o u c an r i s e . S u c c e s s ! W e ar e v e r t i c al ! "

N ou d a . . . T h e p y r am i d o f s l i m e t i l t e d i t s ap e x . H ad i t h e ar d c o r r e c t l y ? S u r e l y n o t . S u r e l y n o t e v e n t h e s t u p i d e s t

m ag i c i an w o u l d h av e b e e n s o v ai n , s o f o o l h ar d y , s o p l ai n ign o r an t as t o i n v i t e a b e i n g l i k e N o u d a w i t h i n t h e m . S u r e l y

every on e k n e w h i s t r ac k r e c o r d .3

3 . O h. R ig ht. W ell, it' s lik e this. A s

I m ay hav e m entioned once or twice, there are fiv e b asic

lev els of spirit: im ps (reprehensib le) , foliots (neg lig ib le) , dj inn (a fascinating class, with one or

two ab solute g em s) , afrits (ov errated) , and m arids (dreadful y full of them selv es) . A b ov e these

lev els ex ist m ore powerful entities, shadowy b y nature, who are only occasional y sum m oned or

ev en defined. N ouda was one such, and his rare appearances on E arth left a trail of b lood and

m isery. O nly the m ost unpleasant reg im es em ployed him : the A ssyrians (during the b attle of

N inev eh, when N ouda dev oured a thousand M edes) , Tim ur the C ruel (at the sack of D elhi,

during which N ouda stack ed the heads of prisoners to a heig ht of 5 0 feet) , the A z tecs (a

reg ular eng ag em ent for N ouda this; in the end he discov ered an am b ig uity in M ontez um a' s

sum m ons—as a reward, N ouda rav ag ed Tenochtitlan and left it defenseless ag ainst tne

S panish) . H e was a form idab le custom er, in other words, hung ry and not sym pathetical y

inclined.

It s e e m e d n o t . F aq u ar l w as u s h e r i n g t h e t w i t c h i n g b o d y f o r w ar d l i k e an i n v al i d , e n c o u r ag i n g i t w i t h s o o t h i n g w o r d s .

"J u s t a l i t t l e f ar t h e r , L o r d N o u d a. A c h ai r aw ai t s .T r y m o v i n g t h e f e e t i n s t e ad o f t h e h an d s . T h at's i t —y o u ar e d o i n g

s p l e n d i d l y."

F r o m t h e m an's s ag g i n g m o u t h c am e a g r e at v o i c e . "W h o s p e ak s ? "

"It i s I, F aq u ar l ."

"A h , F aq u ar l ! " t h e g r e at v o i c e c r i e d . "Y o u d i d n o t l i e . It i s e x ac t l y as y o u s ai d ! W h at j o y I f e e l ! N o p ai n ! N o

c o mp u l s i o n ! I s m e l l t h e h u m an w o r l d an d al t h e j u i c y b o d i e s w ai t i n g . O h , b u t m y c o o r d i n at i o n v e x e s me . T his y o u d i d

n o t p r e p ar e me f o r ."

"It t ak e s a l i t t l e t i me , a l i t t l e t

i m e , " F aq u ar l c r o o n e d . " Y o u
w i l l s o o n ac c l i m at i z e . "

" S o m an y p e c u l i ar m u s c l e s — I
c an n o t m ak e o u t t h e i r u s e ! J o i
n t s t h at s w i v e l s o f ar an d n o m o
r e , t e n d o n s r u n n i n g

e v e r y w h i c h w ay ! T h e d u l s l o
s h i n g o f t h e b l o o d — h o w s t r an
g e f o r i t t o b e m y o w n ! I w i s h t o
t e ar t h e f l e s h ap ar t an d

d r i n k i t d o w n . "

" I w o u l d c u r b t h at i m p u l s e , s i
r , " F aq u ar l s ai d c r i s p l y . " Y o u
m i g h t f i n d i t i n e x p e d i e n t . T h
e r e w i l b e p l e n t y o f o t h e r f l e

s h

t o e n j o y , f e ar n o t . N o w , h e r e :
s i t o n t h i s t h r o n e . R e s t aw h i l
e ." H e s t o o d b ac k ; t h e s h o r t , r
o u n d b o d y o f M ak e p e ac e

s an k u p o n t h e g o l d e n c h ai r . It s
h e ad l o l e d s i d e w ay s , i t s l i m b
s t w i t c h e d . O n t h e o t h e r s i d e
o f t h e t ab l e K i t t y an d

M an d r ak e s h r an k aw ay .

"W h e r e ar e m y t r o o p s , d e ar F
aq u ar l ? " t h e g r e at v o i c e s ai d .
"W h e r e i s m y ar m y t h at y o u p r o
m i s e d ? "

Faquarlclearedhisthroat."Rightinthisroom,sir.They,likeyou,arejust...comingtotermswiththeirnewstatus."

Helookedoverhisshoulder.Ofthefivemagicians,threewerestilllyingonthefloor,onewassittingupandgrinning

inanely,whilethefifthhadactualyrisenandwasstumblingrandomlyaboutthehal,witharmsrotatinglikea

windmillandfeettrippingontherugs.

"L o o k i n g g o o d , " I s ai d . "O n e d ay t h e y m ay e v e n m an ag e t o c o n q u e r t h i s r o o m."

F aq u ar l t u r n e d p u r p o s e f u l y . "A h , y e s . I' d f org otten ab o u t y o u ."

E y e s r o t at e d b l i n d l y i n t h e l i m p r o u n d h e ad . "T o w h o m d o y o u s p e ak , F aq u ar l ? "

"A d j i n n i . P ay n o at t e n t i o n . H e w i l n o t b e w i t h u s l o n g."

"W h at d j i n n i i s t h i s ? Is h e a s u p p o r t e r o f o u r p l an ? "

"It i s B ar t i m ae u s , a s k e p t i c ."

O n e ar m r o s e , m ad e a s p as m o d i c m o v e m e n t t h at w as p r o b ab l y m e an t t o b e c k o n . T h e g r e at v o i c e b o o m e d . "C o m e

h e r e , d j i n n i ."

T h e p y r am i d o f s l i m e h e s i t at e d , b u t t h e r e w as n o h e l p f o r i t . I d i d n o t h av e t h e p o w e r t o r e s i s t o r f l e e . W i t h al t h e

v e r v e o f a w o u n d e d s l u g I s q u e l c h e d m y w ay t o w ar d t h e g o l d e n c h ai r , l e av i n g an u n p l e as an t t r ai l b e h i n d . I b o w e d as

b e s t I c o u l d .

"It is an honor to meet a spirit of such strength and renown," I said. "I am but a wisp upon the wind; nevertheless,

my power is yours."4

4. Note the absence of any jokes, sneers, or satirical content in these sentences. Despite

Nouda's current indisposition, I didn't doubt that he could atomize me with a single glance.

Best to be polite, I felt.

The limp head gave a jerk; with a wild swivel, the eyes disc

e r n e d m e . "G r e at e r o r l e s s , w e ar e al l c h i l d r e n o f t h e O t h e r

P l ac e . M ay y o u r e s s e n c e p r o s p e r ."

F aq u ar l s t e p p e d f o r w ar d . "W e l , I w o u l d n't g o t o o f ar , " h e s ai d . "B ar t i m ae u s i s as f i c k l e as a m o o n b e am an d as f l i g h t y

as a c o l t . A n d s ar k y w i t h i t . I w as ab o u t t o —"

T h e g r e at s p i r i t w av e d a p l u m p l i t t l e h an d i n w h at w as p r o b ab l y i n t e n d e d t o b e a m i l d g e s t u r e ; i t s w u n g o u t w i l d l y an d

cracked the table top in two. "Be gentle, Faquarl. After centuries of slavery a lour personalities distorta little."

"I don't know," Faquarl said doubtfuly. "He's pretty distorted."

"Evenso. We do not fight among ourselves."

The pyramid of slime nodded eagerly. "That's right. Hear that, Faquarl? Listen and learn."

"Especialy," the great voice continued, "when the djinnii s as pitiable as this. Look at hi

m ! A b ab y 's b u r p c o u l d

d i s p e r s e h i s e s s e n c e . Y o u h av e b e e n p o o r l y t r e at e d , B ar t i m ae u s . T o g e t h e r w e s h al l o c at e y o u r o p p r e s s o r an d d e v o u r

h i s f l e s h ."

I g l an c e d s u r r e p t i t i o u s l y at m y m as t e r , w h o w as s t e ad i l y b ac k i n g aw ay t o w ar d t h e d o o r , s h e p h e r d i n g K i t t y w i t h h i m . 5

"T h at 's a g e n e r o u s o f f e r , L o r d N o u d a ."

5 . H is treatm ent of her seem ed . . .

well, let' s put it this way: it was hard to tell ex actly ho w it

was self-serv ing . N o doub t there were ulterior m otiv es aplenty, if you only k new where to look

for them .

F aq u ar l l o o k e d a l i t t l e p e e v e d . "T h e p r o b l e m , " h e s ai d , "i s t h at B ar t i m ae u s d o e s n o t ap p r o v e o f o u r s c h e m e . H e h as

al r e ad y r e f e r r e d t o m y o c c u p at i o n o f t h i s v e s s e l "—h e p o i n t e d t o H o p k i n s 's c h e s t an d p au s e d d r am at i c al y —-"as 'i c k y ."

"W e l , look at y o u , " I s n ap p e d . "T r ap p e d i n s i d e a h o r r i d —" I c o n t r o l l e d m y s e l f , c o n s c i o u s ag ai n o f N o u d a's f e ar s o m e

au r a. "T o b e h o n e s t , L o r d N o u d a, I am n o t s u r e e x ac t l y w h at y o u r s c h e m e is. F aq u ar l h as n o t e x p l ai n e d f u l l y."

"T h at i s e as i l y r e m e d i e d , l i t t l e d j i n n i ." N o u d a s e e m e d aw ar e t h at h i s j aw m u s c l e s w e r e s o m e h o w as s o c i at e d w i t h

s p e ak i n g . A s h e s p o k e , t h e m o u t h o p e n e d and c l o s e d at r and o m , s o m e t i m e s w i d e , s o m e t i m e s n o t ; i n an y e v e n t , i t

w as e n t i r e l y o u t o f s y n c w i t h h i s w o r d s . " F o r c e n t u r i e s w e h av e s u f f e r e d p ai n at h u m an h an d s . N o w i t i s o u r t u r n t o

i m p o s e t h at p ai n o n t h e m . T h an k s t o F aq u ar l , an d t o t h e f o o l i s h m ag i c i an w h o s e b o d y I n o w w e ar , o u r c h an c e h as

c o m e . W e h av e e n t e r e d t h e w o r l d o n o u r o w n t e r m s — an d i t i s f o r u s t o d e c i d e w h at t o d o w i t h i t . " H i s t e e t h c l ac k e d

t o g e t h e r t w i c e i n a h u n g r y s o r t o f w ay . T his s p as m l o o k e d q u i t e i n t e n t i o n al .

"Butwithallduerespect," Iventured, "thereareonlyseveno fyou, and—"

"Thehardpartha salreadybeend one, Bartirnaeus." Faquarls mootheddownhiscoat. "Byme. Ithastakenyearsto

lureMakepeacetohisdoom. Hisambitionwasalwaysunwieldy, butitwasn'tuntiltheappearanceofHonoriusin

Gladstone'sbonesthatIsawhowbesttouseit. Makepeace's weaknesswashisvainglorious desireforinnovation, for

therecklesscreativeact.AfterHonorius,heandHopkinsbecameinterestedinsummoningaspiritintoalivingbody.

BysubtleinsinuationsIencouragedthem.InduecourseHopkinsvolunteeredfortheexperiment,andIwasthe

djinnisummoned.Afterthat,thingswereeasy.IdestroyedHopkins'smindbutconcealedthisfromMakepeace.Now

hehasalsosacrificedhimselfandseveralofhisfriends."

"Therearesevenofusnow," Noudasaid,"butwecansoongetreinforcements.Allweneeddaremorehumanvessels."

"Andthankstо Makepeacewehaveplenty," Faquarladded.

Thegreatentityseemedsurprised."Howso?"

"Theentiregovernmentliesinanearbychamber,gaggedandboundandready.Youhavedevouredthemagician's

memory,LordNouda.Youwouldnotrecall."

Noudagaveawildlaughthatk
nockedoveranearbychair.
"Truе—thereisnopointshari
ngthesebrains...So—alis

wel!Ouressencesareprotec
ted!Wehavenobonds!Soon
weshalroaminhundredsabou
tthewworldandfeed,feed,

feeduponitspeople!"

Wel,IsupposeIdidn'tthinki
twasgoingtobesimpletouri
sm.IwaswatchingMandrake
andKitty;theywerealmost

atthedoor."Onequestion,"I
said."Whenalthekilling'sdo

n e , h o w w i l l y o u g e t b ac k ? "

"B ac k ? " N o u d a s ai d .

F aq u ar l e c h o e d h i m . "W h at d o y o u m e an , bac k "? "

"W e l . . ." T h e p y r am i d o f s l i m e at t e mp t e d a s h r u g , w i t h s c ant s u c c e s s . "B ac k t o t h e O t h e r P l ac e . W h e n y o u 'v e h ad

e n o u g h o f i t h e r e ."

"T h at i s n o t p ar t o f t h e p l an , l i t t l e d j i n n i ." N o u d a's h e ad r o t at e d t o w ar d m e i n a s u d d e n r u s h . "T h e w o r l d i s b i g . It i s

v a r i e d . It i s o u r s n o w ."

"B u t —"

"O u r h at r e d h as g r o w n s o l o n g , i t c an n o t b e h e al e d e v e n i n th e O t h e r P l ac e . T h i n k o f y o u r o w n e x p e r i e n c e s . F o r y o u

t o o i t m u s t b e .s o ."A s u d d e n o u t c r y . N o u d a j e r k e d c o n f u s e d l y i n h i s c h ai r , s p l i t t i n g th e b ac k p an e l d o w n i t s c e n t e r .

"W h at d i s t u r b anc e i s th i s ? "

F aq u ar l g r i n n e d . "B ar t i m ae u s 's m as t e r , I b e l i e v e ."

Shouts, screams... Sureenough, withtheincompetencethatwashistrademark, Mandrakehadn'treachedthedoor.

InsteadheandKittyhadbeenapprehendedbythebodyofJenkins, whichwasbeginningtomovewithsome

coordination. Evidentlythespiritinsideitwasafastlearner.

Nouda'svoiceheldinterest. "Bringhimhere."

Ittookawhile; Jenkins'slegswerenotyetbendingattheknees

e e s . B u t f i n a l l y t w o d i s h e v e l e d h u m a n s s t o o d b e f o r e t h e

g o l d e n c h a i r , J e n k i n s ' s h a n d s a r o u n d t h e i r n e c k s . B o t h M a n d r a k e a n d K i t t y l o o k e d h a g g a r d a n d d e f e a t e d . T h e i r

s h o u l d e r s s l u m p e d , t h e i r c l o t h e s w e r e r i p p e d ; K i t t y ' s c o a t h a d b e e n b u r n e d r i g h t t h r o u g h . U n n o t i c e d , t h e p y r a m i d o f

s l i m e g a v e a s m a l l , s h o r t s i g h .

N o u d a e x p e r i m e n t e d w i t h a g h a s t l y , h a l f - b a k e d s m i l e ; h e t

witchedandwriggledexcitedlywherehesat."Meat!Ismelit!Whatablissfulflavor."

Alightofdefiancegliммeredin Mandrake'seyes."Bartimaeus,"hecroaked,"Iamstilyourmaster.Iorderyouto

helpusnow."

FaquarlandNoudalaughedheartilyatthis;Ididnot."Thattimeispast,"Isaid."Youwoulddoweltokeepsilent."

"Iorderyou—"

A deep feminine voice emerged from Jenkins's mouth. "Is that you, Bartimaeus?"

The slime gave a start. "Naeryan! Haven't seen you since Constantinople!"

"Listen to me! I order—"

"What's with the slime, Bartimaeus? You're looking peaky."

"Yeah, been better. How about you, though? Ginger hair, glasses, just two legs... bit of a comedown, isn't it?"6

6 . This was true: N aeryan' s norm al form inv olv ed an ink y b lue-b lack torso, three piercing eyes

placed at random interv als, and a m ultitude of spiderlik e lim b s. O k ay, that g uise was an

acq uired taste, b ut it was a lot m ore dig nified t ha n J en k i n s .

"I o r d e r y o u t o ... t o ..." M an d r ak e 's h e ad d r o p p e d . H e s ai d n o m o r e .

"It 's w o r t h i t , B ar t i m ae u s ! " N ae r y an s ai d . "Y o u c an 't i m ag i n e w h at i t 's l i k e . T h e b o d y i s d r e ar y , b u t i t g i v e s s u c h

freedom!Willyoujoinus?"

"Yes!"Nouda'sgreatvoiceputin."Joinus!Weshallfindyouanappropriatemagician.Wewilforcehimtosummon

youforthwith."

Theslimedrewitselfastalasitcould."Mythankstoyoubothb.Theofferiscourteousandkind.ButIfearImust

declineIhavehadenoughofthisworld,andeverythinginit.Myessencehurtsme;myonlywishistoreturntothe

p e ac e o f t h e O t h e r P l ac e as f as t as I c an ."

N o u d a s e e m e d a l i t t l e p u t o u t . "T h i s i s an o d d d e c i s i o n ."

F aq u ar l s p o k e e ag e r l y . "It i s as I s ai d —B ar t i m ae u s i s b o t h f i c k l e an d p e r v e r s e ! H e s h o u l d b e d e s t r o y e d w i t h a S p as m ! "

A g r e at g r o w l c ame f r o m M ak e p e ac e 's t h r o at ; t h e ai r q u i v e r e d w i t h h e at h az e . T h e c l o t h e s o n F aq u ar l 's b o d y c r ac k l e d

i n t o f l ame . N o u d a s u c k e d t h e ai r b ac k i n . T h e f l ame s w e n t o u t . M ak e p e ac e 's e y e s g l i t t e r e d

.7 "B e w ar e , F aq u ar l , " t h e

g r e at v o i c e s ai d , "l e s t y o u r g o o d ad v i c e b e c o m e s o f f i c i o u s .T h e d j i n n i i s f r e e t o g o ."

7 . S om ewhere deep inside those eyes I g lim psed the fearful energ ies of the O ther P lace,

swirling , swirling . I couldn' t help b ut wonder how long the m ortal b ody would surv iv e the strain

of such an inhab itant.

T h e s l i m e b o w e d . "M y g r at i t u d e i s u n d y i n g , L o r d N o u d a. If i t p l e as e s y o u t o h e ar m e f u r t h e

r, I have one last request

to make."

"On this triumphant day," Nouda said, "when my earthly reign begins, I shall grant the wish of the seventh weakest,

most insignificant of my fellow spirits. And that's you, without a doubt. I shall permit your request, if it lies within my

power. Speak on."

The slime bowed lower still. "Spare the lives of these two humans, Lord Nouda. The world

d, as you say, is big. There

are many others to devour. Spare these."

That got a bit of a reaction. Faquarl gave a snort of disgust, Naery ant utted with surprise. As for Nouda, he clashed

his teeth together with such force that several cherubs fell off his chair. His eyes flashed fire, his fingers gouged the

table top like butter. I'd say he wasn't overly pleased. "I have given my word, djinni, and I cannot break it," the great

voicesaid."Butthisisildone.Ineedsomebalastinmybely.Iwaslookingforwardtothesetwo,particularlythe

girl.Theboylookssourandsinewy—Ibelievehisfleshwouldtastelikecandlewax—butsheisediblebeyonddoubt.

Andyouwouldhavemespareth em!Itseemsthat Faquarlwasright.Youareperverse."

Thatwasprettyrichcomingfromsomeonewhohadpurposefullytrappedhimselfwithinthehumanworld,butIdidn't

argue. I just bowed lower.

"Tcha!" Noud aw as working himself into a strop; with sudden rough coordination, Make peace's body half rose from his

seat. "To have a bond with a human... Ah, you are a corruption! A traitor! I itch to destroy you.... But no, I

cannot break my promise. Go from here! Be gone from my sight!"

I did not show my anger. "We do have a bond of sorts," I said q

uietly,"butforthepresentthererearelimitstoit.Which

iswhyItakemyleave."Thepyramidofslimerotatedtoface Mandrake,whohadbeenlistening,white-faced.

"Dismissme."

Ittookhimseveralsecondsto respond,andonlythenwhen Kittynudgedhimsharply.Whenhespoke,hestumbled

threetimesandhadtobeginag ain.Hisvoiceneverroseabo veawhisper;hedidnotlooki nmydirection.By

contrast—asIrose,flickered,faded,vanished—Kittyne vertookherreyesoffme.

Mylastsightwasofthemcowering together,twohunchedandfragileforms,aloneamongthedjinn.WhatdidIfeel?

Nothing.I'ddonewhatIcould.Nouda'swordwashisbond;hewouldsparetheirlives.Beyondthat,itwasn't my

businesswhathappenedtothem.Iwasgettingout,andabouttimetoo.Iwasluckytoescapewithmylife.

Yes, I'd done what I could. I didn't need to think about it anymore. I was free.

Free.

Look, even at full strength I'd still have been a speck of insignificance compared to Nouda. What else could I have

done?

25

For Kitty, the moments following Bartimaeus's departure were the bleakest and most terrible of all. The last fragment

ofhopedeparted,andwithit,thefocusofhercaptorsimmediatelychanged.Hopkins'sheadturned;inthegolden

chair,theglassyeyesofMakepeaceroledaroundtostareather.Shefelttheferocityofthedemons'gazes,ofthe

coldinteligenceshiddenbehindthewaxyfaces.Sheknewwhatitwastobealumpofmeatuponabutcher'sslab.

Thegreatdemonseemedtobegainingcontrolofhishumanbody—itstwitchesandshakinghaddiminished;it

sprawledquietlyacrossthec
hair.Elsewhereintheroom,
byasimilargradualprocess,
thebodiesofthecons pirator
s

hadrisentotheirfeet,andina
spiritofexperimentationwe
rehobblingabouttheroomin
littlejerksandscampers.

Theirarmsswung,theyjump
ed,crouched,spunonthespo
t.Theirmouthswereopen:th
eroomwasfulofthe

gabbleoflanguages,oftrium
phantlaughter,andanimalcri
es.Kittyshuddered;itwasa

parodybothofeverything

thatwashumanandofthedignitysheh adpreviouslyobservedinspirits—eventhemostgrotesque.

Atherbackthedemoninjenkins'sbodyspoke.Shedidnotunderstandthewords.Hopkinsnodded,replied,turnedto

thegreatdemonsittinginthechair.Alongconversationensued.KittyandMandrakestoodeadstill,waiting.

ThenHopkins'sbodymoved;thesuddennessmadeKittyjo

l t w i t h f e ar . It t u r n e d t o t h e m
an d b e c k o n e d . W i t h s t i f f

m o v e m e n t s an d r i g i d l i m b s t h
e y f o l o w e d i t ac r o s s t h e h al l ,
am o n g t h e g am b o l i n g d e m o n s
, p as t t h e b e ar d e d m an

c r o u c h i n g s i l e n t l y i n a c o r n e
r , an d o u t i n t o t h e c o r r i d o r . T
h e y t o o k t h e p as s ag e t o t h e l e f
t , ar o u n d n u m e r o u s t w i s t s

an d t u r n s , ab o v e a b r o ad s t o n e
s t ai r c as e l e ad i n g u n d e r g r o u
n d , i n t o an ar e a o f m an y d o o r s .
K i t t y t h o u g h t t o h e ar

m o an i n g c o m i n g f r o m b e h i n d

thefirsttheypassed.Thede
moncontinuedon;induecou
rsehehalted,flungopena

door,andgesturedforthemt
oenter.Itwasanemptywindo
wlessroom,litbyasingleel
ectricclight.

Thedemon'svoicewasharsh.
"ThankstoLordNouda'sunbr
eakableoath,wareobligedt
obemerciful.You"—it

indicatedKitty—"arenotam
agician,soyoushallbecome
anordinaryservant.Howeve
r,you"—thistoMandrake—"ar
e

dueagreaterhonor.Youshalbecomeahosttooneofournumberbeforedawn.Donotlooksoglum.Thinkofalthe

spiritsyouhaveenslaved!Thisjudgmentuponyouhasapleasantsymmetry.Untilthenyoushalremainhere.Itis

notseemlyforyoutoobserveusinourcurrentstate."Thedoorclosed,akeyturned.Footstepsreceded.

Kittycouldfeelherbodyshakingwithsuppressedshockandfear.Shebitherlip,forcedthefeelingdown.Nogood

—

theyhadn'ttimeforthat.Shelookedat Mandrake,andtoherssurprisesawflecksoftearsin thecornersofhiseyes.

Perhaps,likeher,.hewasalmostoverwhelmed.Hewasspeakingquietly,asiftohimself:"Demonshaveenteredthe

world...withoutrestraint.Itisacatastrophe...."

No.Theyhadn'ttimeforthat. "Acatastrophe?"shesaid."Funny,thewayIseeit,thingsare lookingup."

"H o w c an y o u s ay —? "

"T h e d e m o n s p l an t o u s e m e as a s l av e . N o t g o o d , t r u e . B u t h al f an h o u r ag o y o u r f r i e n d t h e f at m ag i c i an w as g o i n g

t o h av e m e k il ed . I l o o k o n t h at as a m ar k e d i m p r o v e m e n t ."

J o h n M an d r ak e b l e w o u t h i s c h e e k s . "M ak e p e ac e w as n ot m y f r i e n d . H e w as i n s an e , a r e c k l e s s , ar r o g an t m ad m an .

A n d I w o u l d n't g e t t o o o p t i m i s t i c , " h e w e n t o n d u l y . "N ou d a m ay h av e p r o m i s e d n o t t o k i l y o u , b u t t h at d o e s n't m e an

oneoftheotherswon't. I'msur
prisedtheyhaven'tspottedth
at. It'sthekindofambiguityth
eynormallypounce

on.Yes,they'leatyousoonen
ough,takeitfromme."

IcyfurysurgedthroughKitty
;shesteppedforwardandslap
pedMandrakehard. Hereeled
backinshock,clutchinghis

face. "Whatwas thatfor?"

"Whatfor?" Kittyshouted. "F
oreverything! Forabductin
gme,forgettingmeintothis
mess! Forbeingamemberof

t h e s t u p i d g o v e r n m e n t ! F o r t h e w a r ! F o r b e i n g a m a g i c i a n ! F o r e n s l a v i n g d e m o n s a n d s p u r r i n g t h e m t o i n v a d e o u r

w o r l d ! F o r b e i n g a c o m p l e t e a n d u t t e r i d i o t ! " S h e t o o k a b r e a t h . " A n d f o r w h a t y o u j u s t s a i d . F o r b e i n g d e f e a t i s t n o w .

E s p e c i a l y t h a t . I d o n ' t i n t e n d t o d i e . "

S h e h a l t e d , b u t k e p t h i m s p e a r e d s q u a r e l y o n h e r g a z e . H e b l i n k e d , r a n a h a n d t h r o u g h h i s s t u b b l e d h a i r , l o o k e d

a w a y , l o o k e d b a c k a t h e r . S h e s

t ar e d at h i m.

"A l l r i g h t, " h e s ai d. "I'm s o r r y. S o r r y f o r w h at I'v e d o n e t o y o u—f o r w h at I d i d b e f o r e, an d n o w. I s h o u l d h av e l e f t y o u

al o n e. I r e g r e t I'v e g o t y o u i n t o t h i s. B u t w h at's t h e p o i n t o f s ay i n g i t? It's al l i r r e l e v an t. T h e d e m o n s ar e l o o s e d u p o n

t h e w o r l d an d w e're p o w e r l e s s t o s t o p t h e m, s o w h e t h e r y o u 're h e r e o r b ac k i n t h at p u b w o n 't m ak e m u c h d i ff e r e n c e

i n t h e l o n g r u n."

Kittyshookherhead."Youre wrong.Yourapologyisn'tirr elevantandyou'reafoolifyo ucan'tseeit.I'mgrateful that

youstoppedMakepeacefrom havingmekiled.Nowstopbe ingsuchawetblanketandtryt othinkofsomethingto

do."

Helookedather."Holdon—w asthereathanksburiedinthat pileofinvective?"

Shepursedherlips."Ifso,it wasaverysmallone.Now—y ou'reamagician.Butyou'ven

o t g o t an y s l av e s t o h and ?

N o t e v e n an y i m p s ? "

"N o . A l m y s l av e s ar e d e ad . E x c e p t B ar t i m ae u s . A n d he l e f t u s ."

"H e s av e d o u r l i v e s ."

M an d r ak e s i g h e d . "Y e s ." H e l o o k e d at K i t t y i n t e n t l y . "A n d I d o n't t h i n k h e d i d i t f o r m e . W h y —? " H i s e y e s w i d e n e d

s u d d e n l y . "H o l d o n , I d o h av e t h i s ." H e f i s h e d i n h i s j ac k e t and p r o d u c e d a m e t al d i s c . "Y o u m i g h t r e c al i t ."

Kitty'sheart,havingleapedwithhope,descendedleadenly."Oh.Yourscryingglass."

"Yes.Theimpwithincanobserveandspeaktothirdparties,butitcannotact.Itcannotfreeus,ortheother

magicians—"Hebrokeoff,thinkinghard.

"Observationmightbeusefu l..."Kittycouldn'thideherdoubt."Providingyoucantrustwhatitsays.It'saslave.

Whyshoulditspeaktruthfulyafteralitsiltreatment?"

"Comparedtomost,Iamakindandsensitivemaster.Inever—"Hemadeanimpatientnoise."Oh,thisisridiculous.

Bickeringwilgetusnowhere.Let'sseewhatthedemonsaredoing."

Heraisedthediscandwavedahandacrossitssurface.Kittymovedcloser,fascinatedddespiteherself.Thepolished

bronzesurfaceseemedtoripple;aroundshapeformed,hazyandremote,asifdeepdownunderwater.Itsweled,

drewclose,becameasweetl
ittlebaby'sface,contortedin
toanexpressionofthepurest
woe.

"Notagain,master!"thebaby
whimpered."Ibegyou!Dono
tpunishmeagainwiththecruel
STipplesortheInfernal

Coals!Iwildomybest,Iswe
ar!Ah,butImustacceptyourh
arshjustice,yoursterndisci
pline.Whatchoicehavel,

alas...?"Itfinishedwithapath
etic,lingeringsniffle.

Mandrakeglancedfurtively

atKitty."So..."shesaidgrimly."'Akindandsensitivemaster..."

"Ah!No!Heexaggerates!Hexcelsinmelodrama!"

"Thatpoor,innocentlittlebabe—"

"Donotbemisled.Heisahellish,vile—oh,what'stheuse?Imp!Inahalclosetohereyouwillfindseveralpotent

entities,masqueradinginthebodiesofmenandwomen.Whatarethedoing?Observeanddonotlinger,ortheywil

seizeyouandplaceyouonagriddle.Next,andstillwithinthisbuilding,locatethegovernmentmagicians.Arethey

aliveordead?Whatconditionaretheyin?Couldwecommunicatewiththem?Finalyobservethesituationonthe

Whitehalstreets.Aregovernmentforcesanywheretobeseen?Thatisenough.Beoffwithyou."

Aplaintivecry;thediscwentblank.Kittyshookherheadsourly."Howcanyouclaimanymoralauthority,whenyou

keepsuchathingimprisoned? It'spurehypocrisy."

Mandrakescowled."Nevermindthatnow.Youwantedmetoact.I'macting." Therewasanewurgencyabouthim;

hepacedtheroom."Thedemonsareformidable,particularlyNouda...itisamarid,orstronger.Onceitlearnsto

controlthebody,itspowerwilbeterrible.Howcanweopposeit?Ifthegovernmentwerefreed,wemightsummon

enoughdjinntodestroyitBu

tthegovernmentiscaptive.Sowhatremains?"Heglancedatthescryingglass;alwas

stilwithinit."Thereisonepossibility,"hewenton,"butthe oddsagainstitareexcessive."

"What?"

"Gladstone'sStaffisinthisbuilding.Itwouldbeamatchfor Nouda.Butitismagicallyguarded.I'dhavetofindaway

togettoit."

"AndevadeNoudafirst,"Kit

tysaid.

"Andthenthere'sthelittlequestionofwhetherI'dhavethestrengthtouseit."

"Yes.Youdidn'tlasttime."

"Allright.Iknow.Iamstrongerthanthen.ButI'malsotired."Hetookupthediscagain."Whereisthatimp?"

"Probablydeadinaditchfromilltreatment.Mandrake,"Kittysaid,"doyouknowofthemagicianPtolemaeus?"

Hefrowned."Ofcourse.But

h o w h av e y o u —? "

"A n d h i s Ap oc ry p ha? Y ou h av e h e ar d o f t h at ? "

"Y e s , y e s . It i s o n m y s h e l f . S o —"

"W h at i s P t o l e m y 's G at e ? "

H e r e g ar d e d h e r b l an k l y . "P t o l e m y 's G at e ? K i t t y , t h at i s a q u e s t i o n f o r s c h o l ar s an d m ag i c i an s , h ar d l y f o r c o mm o n e r s .

W h y d o y o u as k ? "

"S i m p l e , " s h e s ai d . "B e c au s e I c an 't r e ad an c i e n t G r e e k ." S h

e p u t h e r h an d i n h e r t at t e r e d c o at an d d r e w o u t M r .

B u t t o n's b o o k . "If I c o u l d , I'd h av e f o u n d o u t f o r m y s e l f . Y o u , I as s u m e , w i t h al -y o u r p r i v i l e g e s , c an an d h av e . W h at

i s t h i s G at e ? H o w d o e s o n e g e t t o t h e O t h e r P l ac e ? A n d s t o p as k i n g m e q u e s t i o n s ; w e h av e n't t i m e ."

M an d r ak e r e ac h e d o u t an d t o o k t h e s m al l , s l i m v o l u m e , s l i g h t l y s c o r c h e d w h e r e t h e In f e r n o h ad s t r u c k . H an d i n g h e r

t h e b l an k b r o z e d i s c , h e o p e n

edthebookwithgentlefinge
rsandflippedthepagesslowl
yatrandom,eyesscanning

thecolumns.Heshrugged."A
workoffiction;charminglyi
dealisticinsomeofitsconce
its,ifnotwrongheaded.Som
e

ofitsstatements...wel,Ptol
emy'sGateisasupposedmeth
odofreversingthenormalsu
mmoningprocess,

wherebythemagician,orsom
eelement,spiritorsentienc
ethereof,withdrawsforati
metotheparticularremotene

s s

w h e r e d e m o n s r e s i d e ; t h e aut h o r —b y r e p u t at i o n t h i s w as t h e A l e x an d r i n e , P t o l e m ae u s —c l ai m s t o h av e d o n e i t

h i m s e l f , t h o u g h why h e s h o u l d r i s k s u c h a t e r r i f y i n g o r d e al i s f ar f r o m c l e ar . G o o d e n o u g h f o r y o u ? O h , s o r r y —t h at 's a

q u e s t i o n ."

"N o . It 's n o t g o o d e n o u g h . W h at 's t h e e x ac t f o r m u l a ? D o e s h e g i v e i t ? "

M an d r ak e c l ap p e d h i s h e ad i n i

r r i t a t i o n . " K i t t y ! H a v e y o u g o n e q u i t e m a d ? W e h a v e m o r e i m p o r t a n t t h i n g s t o —"

"J u s t t e l m e ! " S h e s t a r t e d t o w a r d h i m , f i s t s c l e n c h e d .

M a n d r a k e v e e r e d b a c k ; a s h e d i d s o , t h e s c r y i n g g l a s s t h r o b b e d a n d h u m m e d i n K i t t y ' s h a n d s . T h e b a b y ' s f a c e

r e t u r n e d , l o o k i n g f r i g h t e n e d a n d o u t o f b r e a t h . F o r a f e w s e c o n d s i t d i d n o t s p e a k , b u t o n l y w h e e z e d a n d p u f f e d

i m m o d e r a t e l y . K i t t y s h o o k h e r h e a d i n p i t y . " Y o u r s l a v e ' s b

ac k. H e 's p r ac t i c al y d e ad , p o o r l i t t l e mi t e ."

T h e b ab y b e l c h e d l o u d l y , t h e n s p o k e i n a h o ar s e w h i s p e r . "W h o 's t h i s t r o l l o p ? "

W i t h p o i n t e d g al l an t r y , M an d r ak e t o o k t h e d i s c f r o m h e r h an d s . "J u s t t e l u s w h at y o u s aw ."

"It w as n 't a p r e t t y s i g h t , b o s s ." T h e b ab y p i c k e d i t s n o s e w i t h an ag i t at e d f i n g e r . "A m I r i g h t i n t h i n k i n g t h i s w i l l b e

t h e l as t j o b y o u g i v e me ? O n ac c o u n t o f t h e f ac t t h at y o u 'r e l o c k e d i n a c e l an d s u r r o un d e d b

y r am p an t d e m o n s

preparingtotakethevengeance thatthey'vecravedforthousandsofyears? Justwondering."

Kittygroundherteethwithimpatience. Mandrakeglanced ather."Whatdoyouthink? The Infernal Coals?"

"Anything."

Thebabygaveananxiouscroakandspokeatspeed: "Ifolowedyourorderstotheletter; youcanhavenocomplaint.

First, thegreatspirits. Ah—theyarepowerful; theplanes

warpwiththeirpassing.There areseven;alwearactual

humanbodies,concealingtheirtrueforms.Attheircentersits Nouda;heissuesrapidcommands.Theotherssscutter

todohisbidding.Inneighboringchambersthecorpsesof Whitehalbureaucratslielikeskittles.Fromasideroom __"

Mandrakeinterruptedthedesperateflow."Wait.Howdothedemonsmove?Aretheycomfortableintheirhosts?"

"Forthemostpart,no.Theymoveasifwithbrokenlimbs.Butyetttheysingwiththejoyoffreedom.WouldthatI

couldjointhem,"thebabysaid-wistfuly."Iwouldsetyourbonesuponametalplatterandmakepercussivemusic.

Youwantmore?"

"Descriptions,yes.Emptythreats,no."

"Fromasideroomcomesasteadyherdofbedraggledhumans.Theirarmsarebound,theirmouthsstoppedwithwax

andlinen.Thegreatspiritsh
erdthemlikegoatstowardap
recipice.Onebyone,inthec
enterofthehall,their

mouthsarefreedandtheystan
dbeforeLordNouda'schair.
Hegivesthemanultimatum."

"Thesehumans,"Mandrakesai
d."Describethem."

Thebabysniffed."Tricky...
Couldyouindividuateatrib
eofrabbits?"Itconsidered.
"Severallackedchins,while

othersboastedseveral."

Kittyand Mandrake exchanged a glance. "It is the government."

"Nouda gives each a choice. Following a certain formula, they must summon a spirit into themselves. The djinni

Faquar l stands by Nouda's chair, holding a weighty tome: he gives them the name to call. If they agree, the

procedure is carried out. If not, they are to be destroyed."

Mandrake bit his lip. "What is the general consensus?"

"So far, each politician has agreed to surrender his or her mind. They prefer to accept the vilest humiliation rather

than a more honorable way out."

Kitty kicked out at the wal. "No oud aisn't wasting time. He's creating his army."

"And by doing so, removing the only people capable of resisting him," Mandrake said. "Imp, what is the situation

elsewhere?"

Thebabyshrugged."Itdepen
dsonyourpointofview.Fro
mmyperspectivetheoutloo
kisrosy.Fewhumansremain

alivewithinthisbuilding.B
eyond,incentralLondon,gr
eatgatheringsofcommoners
assemble,emboldenedbyth
e

lackofresponsefromthegov
ernment.InWhitehal,twobat
talionsofwerewolvesmaint
ainraggeddefenseofthe

Parliamentzone.Afewmagic
ianstryfranticalytocommun
icatewiththeirleaders,butt

o n o av ai l ."

"H a! S o m e m ag i c i an s ar e s t i l i n ac t i o n ! " M an d r ak e n o d d e d e ag e r l y . "T h e l o w e r o r d e r s d i d n o t at t e n d t h e p l ay . P e r h ap s

t h e y c an ai d u s . . . .W h at d e m o n s d o t h e y u s e ? "

"A h o t c h p o t c h o f f o l i o t s t h at c o w e r b e h i n d t h e d u s t b i n s as t h e c o m m o n e r s m ar c h b y ."

M an d r ak e g r o an e d . "H o p e l e s s . Im p , y o u r n e w s i s p o o r , b u t y o u h av e d o n e w e l ." H e m ad e a m ag n an i m o u s g e s t u r e . "If

I s u r v i v e , y o u s h a l l h a v e y o u r f r e e d o m."

"T h a t's m e h e r e f o r a l e t e r n i t y t h e n." T h e d i s c w e n t b l a n k.

"S o , t h e r e w i l l b e n o o u t s i d e h e l p , " t h e m a g i c i a n s a i d s l o w l y. "It w i l h a v e t o b e t h e S t a f f , i f I c a n r e a c h i t. If I c a n g e t

i t t o w o r k . . ."

K i t t y t o u c h e d h i s a r m. "Y o u w e r e t e l l i n g m e a b o u t P t o l e m y 's G a t e. W h a t's t h e e x a c t m e t h o d? C a n i t b e e a s i l y d o n e? "

H e t o r e h i m s e l f a w a y, e y e s a n

gryandbewildered." Whydoy
oupersistinthis?"

"PtolemyusedtheGatetoreac
houttothedjinn—itwasages
tureofreconciliation,ofgo
odfaith.Weneedtodothis,

andfast,ifwe'retogetsomeh
elp."

"Getsome—?Ohdear." Mandr
akespokeasiftoasimplechil
d."Kitty,thedemonsareour
enemies. Theyhavebeen

formillennia.True,theirpo
wersareuseful,buttheyarew
ickedthings,andwillhurtus

iftheycan.Asprovedthis

verynight!Givenhalfachance,theyareinvading!"

"Someareinvading,"Kittysaid."Butnotall.Bartimaeusdidnotagreetostay."

"Sowhat?Bartimaeusisnothing!Nothingbutamiddlingdjinni,frayedtoathread,whomIkeptheretoolong."

"Evenso,hehasloyaltytous.Certainlytome.Maybeeveneyou."

Themagicianshookhishead.

"Rubbish. His loyalty change
s with every summoning. Jus
t days ago he served another

master, doubtless one of myr
ivals. But this is beside the p
oint. To get the Staff—"

"I summoned him."

"—I will need to get away. You
must cause a distract—hold o
n. What?"

"I summoned him."

Mandrake's eyes seemed to gl
aze; he swayed where he stoo
d. His mouth made odd poppin

gnoiseslikeastranded

fish."But...butyou'rea—"

"Yes,"Kittycried."I'macommoner.Weldone.Butthatdoesn'tmeanmuchanymore,doesit?Lookaroundyou.

Everything'sturningupsidedown:magicianshavedestroyedthegovernment;demonsarewilinglybeingsummoned

bytheirownkind;commonersaretakingcontrolofthestreets.Theoldcertaintiesarefallingapart,Mandrake,and

onlythosewhoadaptaregoingtoprevail.Iintendto.What aboutyou?"Sheindicatedthedoor."Anymomentnow

Faquarl'sgoingtowalkbackinandleadyoubeforeNouda.Doyouwanttokeepquibblinguntilthen?Yes,Ilearneda

littleofyourart.IsummonedBartimaeus.Iwantedanalliancewithhim,butherejectedit becauseIcouldn'ttrust

him.He'sskepticalaboutus,yousee.Onlyonepersoninhispasthastreatedhimwithabsolutetrust,andthatwas

Ptolemaeus."

Mandrake'seyesbulged."What?NotthesamePtolemythat__"

"Theverysame.HeusedtheGate,hemadethegesture.Whydoyouthinkbartimaeusstillwearshisform?Oh,you

hadn'trealized?Althoseyearsoftraininganduc an'tseewhat'srightinfrontofyoureyes."Sheshookherhead

sadly."WhenIsummonedhim,"shewenton,"Bartimaeustoldmethathewouldhavedone

an y t h i n g f o r P t o l e m y

b e c au s e o f t h e g e s t u r e h e m ad e .'T here was n o lim it to ou r bon d ' T h at's h o w h e p u t i t . A n d y o u h e ar d w h at h e s ai d j u s t

n o w , w h e n h e l e f t ? "

A d o z e n e m o t i o n s h ad w as h e d ac r o s s t h e m ag i c i an's f ac e , l e av i n g i t s m o o t h , b l an k , c h as t e n e d . H e s h o o k h i s h e ad . "I

d i d n't h e ar ."

"H e s ai d h e h ad a b o n d w i t h u s t o o , b u t t h at t h e r e w e r e 'l i m i t s ' t o i t . T h at's w h at h e t o l d N o u d

a. A n d h e w as l o o k i n g at

m e as h e w e n t . D o n 't y o u s e e ? If I c an f o l o w h i m . .." S h e w as g az i n g b e y o n d M an d r ak e n o w , e y e s s p ar k l i n g . "I k n o w

t h at I n e e d t o c al B ar t i m ae u s 's n am e as p ar t o f t h e i n c an t at i o n , b u t b e y o n d t h at I h av e n 't a c l u e . U n t i l y o u t e l me

w h at 's i n t h e b o o k ." S h e s m i l e d at h i m .

T h e m ag i c i an t o o k a s l o w , d e e p b r e ath . T h e n h e o p e n e d t h e b o o k an d s k i m m e d t o a c e r t ai n p ag e . F o r a m o m e n t h e

readinsilence.Whenhespoke,hisvoicewasflat."Theprocedureissimplicityitself.Themagicianreclinesina

pentacle—hemustsit,orlie,sincehisbodywilcolapseatthemomentoftransfer.Nocandlesorspecificrunesare

required;indeedsuchbarriersarekepttoaminimumtospeedthereturnofthemagiciantohisbody.Ptolemy

suggestsbreakingthecirclesymbolicalytohelpthisprocess....Healsorecommendsholdingsomethingiron—su

c h

as an ankh—to keep out evil influences; that, or one of the normal herbs—rosemary or such like. Okay, well, the

magician closes his eyes and shuts his mind to all outside stimuli; then he inverts the basic summoning. His own true

name is substituted for the demon's one, and all directions are reversed: 'to go' instead of 'to come' and so forth.

Finally the name of a 'benevolent' demon—Ptolemy cal sith

e'sponsor'—iscaledthreetimes.Theattentionofthis

demonisnecessaryforanopeningtobemade.Ifalgoeswel,themagicianseparatesfromhimself,theGateopens,

andhepassesthrough.Ptolemydoesnotgivedetailsofhowworwhere."Helookedup."Satisfied?"

Kittysniffed."Ilikeyourassumptionthatthemagicianmustbemale."

"Look,I'vetoldyouthemethod.Listen,Kitty"—Mandrakec

l e ar e d h i s t h r o at —"I'm i m p r e s s e d w i t h y o u r i n i t i at i v e and

b r av e r y , r e al y I am , b u t t h i s i s j u s t i m p o s s i b l e . W h y d o y o u s u p p o s e n o o n e h as f o l o w e d i n P t o l e m y's f o o t s t e p s ? T h e

O t h e r P l ac e i s al i e n and t e r r i b l e , a r e g i o n r e m o v e d f r o m n o r m al p h y s i c al l aw s . It w o u l d h ar m y o u , m ay b e k i l l y o u . A n d

B ar t i m ae u s —e v e n i f y o u s u r v i v e d , e v e n i f y o u f o u n d h i m , e v e n i f h e ag r e e d t o s o m e h o w h e l p y o u —i s j u s t a d j i n n i . H i s

p o w e r i s n e g l i g i b l e c o m p ar e

dtoNouda's.Youridealsnoble,butthechancesofsuccessareabsolutelyminute." He

coughed,andlookedaway."Sorry."

"That'salright."Kittyconsidered."Yourplan—theStaff.Whatarethechancesofsuccessthere,wouldyousay?"

"Oh,I'dsaytheywere..."Hecaughtherеye,hesitated."Absolutelyminute."

Shegrinned."Exactly.Andweprobablywon'tgetawayfromNoudainthefirstplace.Bu

t i f w e d o . . ."

"W e b o t h d o w h at w e c an." H e s m i l e d at h e r t h e n, f o r t h e f i r s t t i m e. "W e l, i f y o u d o t r y, I w i s h y o u l u c k."

"G o o d l u c k t o y o u t o o, M r. M an d r ak e."

A r at t l e o f a k e y, a m e t al s c r e e c h i n g: t h e b o l t b e y o n d t h e d o o r b e i n g d r aw n.

"Y o u d o n't n e e d t o c al m e t h at, " h e s ai d.

"It 's y o u r n am e."

"No. My name is Nathaniel."

Without ceremony, the door was flung aside. Kitty and the magician stepped back; a figure stepped through, black-

coated, implacable. The mercenary gave a flinty smile.

"Your turn," he said.

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Curiously, Nathaniel's immediate sensation was one of relief. The mercenary, at least, was human. He spoke quickly.

"Y o u ar e al o n e ? "

T h e b e ar d e d m an s t o o d i n th e d o o r w ay an d r e g ar d e d h i m s t e ad i l y w i t h h i s p al e b l u e e y e s . H e d i d n o t r e p l y . N at h an i e l

t o o k th i s as a y e s . "G o o d , " h e s ai d . "T h e n w e h av e a c h an c e . W e m u s t f o r g e t o u r d i ff e r e n c e s an d e s c ap e t o g e th e r ."

T h e m e r c e n ar y r e m ai n e d s i l e n t . N at h an i e l p l o w e d o n . "T h e d e m o n s ar e s t i l s l o w an d aw k w ar d . W e w i l l b e ab l e t o s l i p

o u t an d o r g an i z e d e f e n s e s . I am a n o t ab l e m ag i c i an ; s o m e w

herenearhereotherminister
sliebound—ifwecan

releasethemwewilbeableto
fightttheinvaders.Your,er,s
kilswilbeinvaluableintheb
attlestocome.Past

murdersandotheratrocities
wilbediscounted,I'msure.T
heremayevenbearewardfor
yourservice.Come,sir—

whatdoyousay?"

Themercenarygavealittles
mile.Nathanielbeamedback.
"LordNouda,"themercenary
said,"iswaitingforyou.We

w o u l d d o w e l n o t t o b e l a t e ." H e s t e p p e d i n t o t h e r o o m ; g r a s p i n g N a t h a n i e l a n d K i t t y b y t h e a r m s , h e l e d t h e m t o t h e

d o o r .

" A r e y o u m a d ? " K i t t y c r i e d . " T h e d e m o n s t h r e a t e n u s a l , a n d y o u w i l l i n g l y s e r v e t h e m ? "

A t t h e d o o r w a y t h e m e r c e n a r y p a u s e d . " N o t w i l i n g l y , " h e s a i d i n h i s d e e p , s o f t v o i c e . " B u t I m u s t b e r e a l i s t i c . T h e

d e m o n s ' p o w e r w a x e s e v e r y m o m e n t . B e f o r e d a w n a l l L o n d o n w i l l b e i n f l a m e s a n d t h o s

e w h o o p p o s e t h e m w i l b e

d e ad . I w i s h t o s u r v i v e ."

N at h an i e l s q u i r m e d i n t h e i r o n g r i p . " T h e o d d s ar e ag ai n s t u s , b u t w e c an p r e v ai l . R e c o n s i d e r , b e f o r e i t i s t o o l at e ! "

T h e b e ar d e d f ac e b e n t c l o s e ; t h e t e e t h w e r e b ar e d . " Y ou h av e n o t s e e n w h at I h av e s e e n . Q u e n t i n M ak e p e ac e ' s b o d y

s i t s o n t h e g o l d e n c h ai r , h an d s c l as p e d u p o n t h e p l u m p n e s s o f h i s b e l y . H i s f ac e i s s m i l i n g , s m i l i n g . O n e b y o n e t h e

magicians of your precious government are brought before him. Some he allows to pass—they go to the pentacle to

receive a demon. To others he takes a liking. He beckons them. They approach his chair, helpless as rabbits; he leans

forward..." The mercenary's jaw closed with a snap; Kitty and Nathaniel flinched. "After ward he wipes his waistcoat

and sits back smiling. And the demons around him howl like wolves."

Nathanielswalowed."Notpleasant.Evenso,withthosebootsofyours,surelyyoucould—"

"Iseeallsevenplanes,"themercenarysaid."Iseethepowerinthatroom.Itwouldbesuicidaltoresistit.Besides,

withpowercomesprofit.Thedemonsrequirehumanhelpers;thereismuchhereheydonotunderstand.Theyhave

offeredmewealthifIservethem,andthisgirlhasthatoptionntoo.Whoknows,bycooperatingwithLordNouda,she

and I may flourish...." Here ached out his gloved hand and touched Kitty's neck. She recoiled from him with an

oath. Blind anger surged inside Nathaniel, but he fought it down.

The mercenary spoke no more. Gloved hands grasped their collars; firmly, but without undue roughness, they were

guided out of the door and up the corridor. In the distance they heard a great gabbling and babbling, a cacophony of

shrieksandyels—thegatheri
ngsoundofpandemonium.

Nathanielwasquitecalm.Sob
lackwastheoutlooknowthatf
earhadbecomeredundant.Th
eworstwasuponthem,

deathwasalbutinevitable,ye
thefaceditwithoutanxiety.
Hisfinalconversationwith
Kittyhadlitafirewithinhim
—

toNathanielitseemedshehad
burnedawayallhisweakerem
otions.Hisheadstillspunwi
thherrevelationsof

Bartimaeus's past, but it was her own example that inspired him as the crisis approached. It scarcely mattered that

she had pinned her hopes on Ptolemy's Gate—a mirage, a phantom, a fairytale that all sensible magicians had long

ignored—it was the look in her eyes as she talked of it that fascinated him. Excitement had shone there, and wonder,

and belief—sensations that Nathaniel had almost forgotten. Now, at the last, she had reminded him, and he was

grateful. He felt cleansed, almosteager for what was to come. He glanced across; her face was pale, but set. He

hoped he would not weaken in front of her.

His eyes flickered from side to side as they went, taking in the familiar surroundings of the Whitehall passages, the oil

paintings, the plaster busts sitting in their niches, the panelled walls and imp-light. They passed the stairs that led to

thevaultsand,distantly,the Staff;instinctively,Nathaniel flinchedtowardit.Thegripon hiscolartightened.They

roundedthefinalcorner.

"Here,"themercenarywhispered."Letthissightputanend toyourdreams."

Duringtheirabsencethedemonshadbeenbusy.TheHallof Statues,forahundredyearsthesedatemeetingplaceof

theCouncil,hadbeentransformedbyitsnewrulers.Everywherewasmovement,noise

,uncoordinatedhubbub.

Nathaniel'sseneseswerebriefl yoverwhelmed.

Theroundtableanditschairshadbeenswept fromthecenterofthe room.Thetablenowrestedagainstthefarwall;

uponitsatthegoldenchair.Hereloled Nouda,thegreatdemon,inanattitudeoftemporaryrepletion.Oneleg

dangledoverachairarm,theotherextendedbeforehim.Makepeace'sshirthadbeenuntucked—ithunglooseabout

theswolenstomach. Theeye swereglazed; themouthunn aturalystretched—itworeat iredsmile, asofonewhohas

latelycompletedapleasantm eal. Afewoddragsandclothe slayonthetableto paroundhi m.

Belowthetable, uponaredw oodchair, thedemonFaquarl stoodcloakedinMr. Hopkin s's body. Itwashewho

orchestratedevents: heheld abookopeninhishandsandut teredcrisporderstothecom panybelow.

Thebodiesofthefiveoriginal conspirators—Nathanielrecognized Lime, Jenkins, and the scrawny Withers—were now

operated by their demons with some efficiency. True, there were still plenty of trips and stumbles, the legs and arms

swinging with abrupt staccato movements, but they no longer fell or collided with the wall. This had enabled them to

venture out of the room and—as the scrying-glass imp had reported—bring forth selecte

dmembersofthe

governmentfromtheircels.
Batchbybatch,greatandsmal,
themagicianswerebeingtran
sformed.

Totheleft,LimeandWithers
stoodwatchfulguardoverah
uddleofwaitingprisoners,p
erhapstwentyinnumber,

theirhandsstillbound.Notf
araway,inapentaclecloseto
Nouda'sthrone,oneofthesep
risonershadbeenuntied;

nowshestoodfree,utteringt
hefatalsummonsinaquaverin

g v o i c e . S h e w as a w o m an u n k n o w n t o N at h an i e l ,

p r e s u m ab l y f r o m an o t h e r d e p ar t m e n t . A s h e w at c h e d , s h e s t i f f e n e d an d s h o o k . T h e ai r ab o u t h e r s h i m m e r e d as t h e

ar r i v i n g d e m o n t o o k p o s s e s s i o n . F aq u ar l m ad e a g e s t u r e ; t h e d e m o n N ae r y an , d r e s s e d i n J e n k i n s 's b o d y , l e d h e r

g e n t l y t o t h e f ar c o r n e r o f t h e h al , t o j o i n —

T h e h ai r s p r i c k l e d o n N at h an i e l 's h e ad . T h e r e t h e y w e r e — m o r e t h an t w o d o z e n m ag i c i an

s f r o m e v e r y l e v e l o f t h e

g o v e r n m e n t , r o l i n g , t w i t c h i n g , l a u g h i n g , f a l l i n g , a s t h e i r m a s t e r s e x p l o r e d t h e i r l i m i t a t i o n s . O c c a s i o n a l b u r s t s o f

m a g i c a l e n e r g y e x p l o d e d a g a i n s t t h e w a l s ; t h e a i r w a s f u l l o f t h e m u r m u r i n g o f a l i e n t o n g u e s , s t r a n g e c r i e s o f j o y a n d

p a i n . A n d w h a t w a s t h a t a m o n g t h e m , h e a d t w i t c h i n g , h a n d s r i s i n g a n d f a l i n g l i k e a p u p p e t ' s , f l o r i d f a c e g l e a m i n g

a n d v a c u o u s ? N a t h a n i e l r e c o i l e d .

RupertDevereaux,thePrime Minister...

Despiteeverythingthathado ccurred,despitehisawakeni ngabhorrenceofwhatthema nhadbeenandrepresented,

Nathanielfelttearspricking athiseyes.Foraninstantthew astwelveyearsoldagain,caug htupintheswirlof

WestminsterHall,seeingDe vereauxforthefirsttime—d azzling,charming,everythi ngheaspiredtobe....

Devereaux'sbodygaveacape

r,colidedwithanother,andc
ollapsedinawrithingheap.
Nathanielwassickwith

horror;hefelthiskneessag.

"Upwithyou!"Themercenary
gavehimacursoryshove."Jo
intheline."

"Wait!"Nathanielhalfturned
."Kitty—"

"Shedoesnotshareyourdesti
ny,forwhichyoumaybethank
ful."

NathanielstaredacrossatKit
ty,whoforasinglemomentc

aughthisgaze;thenhewaspro
peledsavagelytowardthe

crowdofprisoners.Lime'sb
odyturned,caughtsightofhi
m;hesawgreenlightsfaroffb
ehindtheeyes.Aharsh

voice,likethesnappingoftw
igs,emergedfromtheloose
mouth:"Faquarl!HereisBart
imaeus'sfriend!Youwanthi
m

next?"

"CertainlyIdo,Caspar.Hecan
jumpthequeue.Heshallcom
eafterthissourcreature.Lord

N o u d a, I as s u me y o u

h av e n o w i s h t o t as t e t h i s o n e
."

T h e g r e at v o i c e r u m b l e d fr o
m o n h i g h. "I h av e s e e n b e t t e r f
l e s h o n a p h ar ao h's c o r p s e. W h
e n s h e t u r n s s i d e w ay s, s h e

al b u t d i s ap p e ar s. P r o c e s s h e
r an d b e d o n e."

N at h an i e l's e y e s w e r e fi x e d o
n t h e fi g u r e i n t h e p e n t ac l e. S t
i c k-t h i n, w h i t e h ai r d i s h e v e l
e d, h i s o l d m as t e r J e s s i c a

W h i t w e l l s t o o d s t ar i n g u p t o

w a r d t h e t h r o n e . T h e d e m o n i n W i t h e r s 's b o d y h a d j u s t r e m o v e d h e r b o n d s ; h e r h a n d s

w e r e k n o t t e d f i s t s .

"V e r y w e l ." F a q u a r l c o n s u l t e d h i s b o o k . "N u m b e r t w e n t y - e i g h t . L e t m e s e e . I h a v e c h o s e n t h e a f r i t M o r m e l f o r

y o u . Y o u s h o u l d b e h o n o r e d . H e i s a n o b l e s p i r i t ."

M s . W h i t w e l l s t a r e d u p a t t h e f i g u r e o n t h e t h r o n e . "W h a t i s y o u r p l a n f o r u s ? "

"D o n o t t h i n k t o a d d r e s s t h e g r

eatNouda!" Faquarlcried."Y
ouandyourkindhaveenslave
dusforcenturies,showing

noconsideration.Whatdoyo
uthinkweplan?Thisrevengeh
asbeenincubatedforfivetho
usandyears!Noportionof

theworldwilbesafefromus
."

Ms.Whitwelllaughedconte
mptuously."Ithinkyouareov
eroptimistic.Lookatyoual,t
rappedinawkwardbodies,

barelyabletowalkinastraigh
tline."

"Ourinconveniencesareonlytemporary," Faquarlsaid."Yourssshalbepermanent.Beginthesummons."

JessicaWhitwellspokequietly."Toaltheotherspouhavegivenachoice.Youhavenotaskedmeformine."

Faquarllowereredhisbook;hiseyeswerenarrowed."Well, Iassume,likealtheotherwretches,youpreferlifeto

death,evenifitislifeworkedthroughanother."

"Youassumewrongly."

Ms.Whitwellraisedherhand
sandmadeanornatesign;shes
houtedouttwowords.Aburs
tofyelowlight,acloudof

brimstone—herafrit,wearin
gtheformofanuneasy-lookin
ggrizzlybear—appearedabo
veherhead.Whitwel

screamedanorder;ashimmer
ingblueShieldroseuparoun
dherbody.TheafritsentaDe
tonationatthestartled

Faquarl:itstruckhimhead-on
,knockinghimoffhischairan
dhalfwaythroughthewal.

Thedemonsinthebodiesoft heconspiratorssetupaclam or.Naeryanraisedafinger:fr omJenkins'shandalanceof

emeraldlightstabbedatWhit well.TheShieldabsorbedit ;Whitwelwasalreadyturning ,runningfortheexit.The

demonCaspar,encasedinthe bodyofLime,leapedforward tointerceptther;Nathanielst retchedoutaboot;the

demontripped,wasunableto rightitself,felcrashingtoth eground.

Nathanielturnedandran;abovehisheadthebearafritsentsuccessiveDetonationstowardthegoldenthrone.

WherewasKitty?There!Butthemercenaryheldherbythearm.Shestruggled,kicked,couldnotbreakfree.

Nathanielspedtowardher—

Thefloorshook;hestumbled,fel—and,foramoment,lookedbehindhim.

Thebodyinthegoldenchairhadmoved.Itwassurroundedbyanimbusofpalefire.Energ

i e s c r ac k l e d f r o m i t s

f i n g e r s ; i t s e y e s w e r e s i l v e r
n o t c h e s i n t h e d ar k e n e d f ac e .
O n e h an d w as o u t s t r e t c h e d . T
h e p o w e r t h at c ame f r o m i t —

ar c i n g o u t i n f i v e l o o p i n g b o l
t s , o n e f r o me ac h f i n g e r —m ad
e s t atu e s f al l an d m o r t ar t umb l
e f r o mth e c e i l i n g . T h e b o l t s

w e r e r an d o m l y d i r e c t e d : t w
o p l u n g e d h ar m l e s s l y i n t o th
e f l o o r ; o n e l e ap e d am o n g th e
c r o w d o f n e w l y s u mm o n e d

d e m o n s ,

destroyingseveralhumanbodies.ThefourthstruckWhitwelTsShield,brokeitintoshardsandcutstraightthrough

herback,kilingherinstantly.Thebearafritvanished.Shefelmidstride,facedownupontheflagstones.

Thefifthboltburstthefloor atthemercenary'sfeet:hewas blownoneway,KittyJonesthe other.

Nathanielwasonhisfeet."Kitty!"

Hisvoicewasdrownedoutby

assortedhowls,roars,bays,
andtrumpetingsfromthedem
onsinthehal.Confused

andpanic-stricken,theywiled
dtheirhumancarriersinever
ydirection,legsworkingod
dly,kneestoohigh,elbowso
ut.

Theycollidedwitheachothe
r,letflyrandomDetonations
andInfernos.Amongthemstu
mbledafewmagicianswho

hadyettobeprocessed,arms
stilltied,mouthsgagged,ey
eswideandstaring.Theroom
wasfiledwithsmoke,

l i g h t s , an d r u s h i n g f o r m s .

A m i d t h e t u m u l t N at h an i e l c
am e t o t h e p l ac e w h e r e K i t t y J
o n e s h ad f al e n . S h e w as n o w h e
r e t o b e s e e n . H e f l i n c h e d

as a m ag i c al p u l s e p as s e d ab o v
e h i s h e ad , an d l o o k e d r o un d a
f i n al t i m e . N o , s h e h ad g o n e .

W i t h o u t f u r t h e r h e s i t at i o n h
e d u c k e d b e t w e e n t w o f l ai l i n
g d e m o n s an d m ad e f o r t h e d o u
b l e d o o r s . A s h e l e f t t h e H al

o f S t at u e s , h e c o u l d h e ar F aq u
ar l 's v o i c e r i s i n g ab o v e t h e c o
m m o t i o n . " F r i e n d s , c al m d o

w n ! C al m d o w n ! T h e c r i s i s i s

o v e r ! W e m u s t r e s u m e t h e s u m m o n i n g s . C al m d o w n . . . ."

It t o o k N at h an i e l l e s s t h an a mi n u t e t o n e g o t i at e t h e c o r r i d o r s an d ar r i v e at t h e s t ai r s t o t h e W h i t e h al v au l t s .

A b an d o n i n g al c au t i o n , h e l e ap e d o v e r t h e b al u s t r ad e an d c ar e e r e d d o w n t h e s t ai r c as e t w o s t e p s at a t i m e . D o w n ,

d o w n . . . t h e ai r g r e w c o l d e r , al s o u n d f r o m ab o v e f ad e d c l e an aw ay ; N at h an i e l h e ar d n o t h i n g n o w b u t t h e g as p i n g o f

h i s b r e at h .

A t t h e e n d o f t h e t h i r d f l i g h t t h e s t e p s o p e n e d o u t i n t o t h e e n t r an c e v au l t . T w o d ay s b e f o r e —o r w as i t t h r e e ? —h e h ad

c o m e h e r e as In f o r m at i o n M i n i s t e r an d b e e n s h o w n t h e t r e as u r e r o o m b y a s u p e r c i l i o u s c l e r k . It s e e m e d an o t h e r l i f e .

N o w t h e c l e r k 's d e s k w as e m p t y . It g av e s i g n s o f b e i n g ab an d o n e d i n a h u r r y ; p ap e r s w e r e s c at t e r e d u p o n i t , a p e n

l ay o n t h e f l o o r .

Attheendofthechamberapas
sageledawayintotheearth.A
lineofredtilesmarkedthebe
ginningofthesecurity

zone.Nathanielsteppedtow
ardthem;ashisshoerosetocr
ossttheline,hecursed,stopp
eddead,andfeltinsidehis

pocket.Careful!Hehadalmo
sttriggeredthetrap.Nothin
gmagicalwaspermittedbeyo
ndtheline!Hedepositedthe

scryingglassuponthedesk,s
mootheddownhishair,andst
eppedacrossthetiles.

If only the Pestilence guarding the Staff could be so easily bypassed. He hadn't a clue how to —

A little noise behind him, a scraping of metal.

Nathaniel stopped, looked back... Across the chamber, at the bottom of the stairs, the mercenary was standing. A

curved knife glinted in his hand.

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Kitty shut the door.

Noisesfromthe Hal of Statue sechoedinherears;shecould hearthecommotionevendo wnthecorridorand

throughtheheavywood.Sher emainedstilforatime,press inghereragainstthedoor.M orethananythingelseshe

fearedbeingfolowedbythet erriblebeardedman.Someth inginhimfiledherwithmore dreadthanthemassing

hordesofdemons.

Shelistened.... Asfarasshec ouldtell,nothingstirredint

h e c o r r i d o r o u t s i d e .

A h e av y k e y p r o t r u d e d b e s i d
e h e r h and . W i t h s o m e d i ff i c u
l t y , and f u l y c o n s c i o u s o f t h e
o n l y m o d e r at e s e c u r i t y i t

r e p r e s e n t e d , K i t t y l o c k e d t h
e d o o r . T h e n s h e t u r n e d t o fac
e t h e r o o m .

It w as j u s t as s h e r e m e m b e r e d i
t fr o m h e r f ai l e d e s c ap e at t e m
p t : s o m e o n e 's o ff i c e , s p ar s e
l y fur n i s h e d . A b o o k c as e

r an al o n g o n e w al ; o p p o s i t e w
as a d e s k p i l e d h i g h w i t h p ap e
r s . And , c r u c i al y , i n t h e n e ar c

orner,scuffedandscoured

withmanyyearsofbureaucraticuse—twocircles,twopentacles.

Kittyonlyneededone.

Thepentacledesignwassimple,ofthekindshehadfrequentlypreparedwithMr.Button:conventionalstar,double

circle,normalLatinhex-locks.Ithadbeenpaintedonaraiseddais and,owingtothedimensionsoftheroom,wasnot

particularlylarge.Elsewher

e—she made a quick inspection—she found the usual magician's accessories, gathered in

the drawers of the desk. Chalks, pens, paper, candle stubs, lighters, jars of assorted herbs. The herbs were what she

needed. She extracted them with calm efficiency and set them on the floor beside the outermost circle.

From somewhere not so very distant came a loud explosion. Kitty started nervously, heart pounding in her chest; sh

e

l o o k e d t o w ar d t h e d o o r . . . .

C on c en trate. W h at d i d s h e h av e t o d o ?

M an d r ak e 's —n o , N athan iel' s s u m m ar y o f t h e i n s t r u c t i o n s i n t h e Ap oc ry p ha h ad b e e n r ap i d an d h ar d t o d i g e s t , b u t

K i t t y h ad g r o w n u s e d t o s u c h t h i n g s d u r i n g h e r t i m e w i t h M r . B u t t o n . H e r m e m o r y w as s u i t ab l y e l as t i c .

S o ... a c o n v e n t i o n al p e n t ac l e . N o c an d l e s r e q u i r e d . Y e p , t

h i s o n e w as f i n e .

B u t h e r b o d y s h o u l d b e p r o t e c t e d —an d t h at m e an t h e r b s an d i r o n . S h e e m p t i e d o u t t h e r o s e m ar y , S ai n t -J o h n 's -w o r t ,

an d s t i c k s o f r o w an w o o d , m i x e d t h e m t o g e t h e r , an d s e p ar at e d t h e r e s u l t i n t o s e v e r al r o u g h p i l e s , w h i c h s h e p l ac e d at

i n t e r v al s w i t h i n t h e p e n t ac l e . A s f o r t h e i r o n , t h at w as m o r e t r i c k y . F o r a m o m e n t s h e c as t h e r e y e s ab o u t t h e r o o m i n

v ai n . P e r h ap s s h e w o u l d h av e t o d o w i t h o u t i t . ...

Thekey.Wasitiron?Kittyh
adnoidea.Ifitwas,itmightpr
otecther.Ifnot,itwoulddon
oharm.Shepuleditfrom

thedoor.

Whatelse?Yes...Nathanielh
adsaidsomethingaboutbreak
ingthecircle,asymbolicact
toallowthemagicianto

returntohisbody.Verywel,
thatcouldbedone.Shebentd
own,andwiththekey'sedges
coredagashinthe

paintedcircle.Itwasuseless
nowforanyordinarysummon

s.Butthiswasnotwhat Kittyplanned.

Shestooduppright.Finished.Nootherphysicalpreparationswerenecessary.

Except...thesmalmatterofhercomfort.Onthechairbehindthedeskshediscoveredadirtyoldcushion,much

usedandbattered,andthisshepl acedinthepentacleasapillow.

Amirrorhungonthewalbehindthedesk;assherereturnedfromthedoor,shecaughtsight

ofherselfinpassing.Only

thendidKittypause.

Ithadbeenawhilesincesheh
adlookedatherface;shecoul
dnotrememberthelasttime.
Thereshewas:thethick

darkhair,darkeyes(complet
ewithoutstandingbags),the
quizzicallips,apurplebrui
seswelingbecominglyabov
e

oneeye.Nodoubtaboutit,sh
ewasalittleshop-worn.Buts
tilyoung,stillwel.

And if she succeeded in what she planned? Terrible things had happened to those magicians who had tried to follow

Ptolemy's course. Mr. Button had been unspecific in the details, but given dark hints of madness and deformity. As for

Ptolemy himself, she knew he had not survived for long after creating his Gate. And Bartimaeus had said his face

had —

With a curse, Kitty turned fr

omthemirror.Intruth,whatever risksheranwasimmaterial comparedwithwhatwas

goingonnearby.Shehadresolvedtotryandthatwasanendtoit.Therewasnothingmoreshecoulddo.Getting

tearywouldachievenothing.So.

Sotherewasnothingleftforherbuttoliewithinthepentacle.

Thefloorwashard,butthecushionfeltpleasantagainstthebackofherhead.Herbsmelsf

iledhernostrils.Shetook

thekeyandclosedinherfist.Adeepbreath—

Anafterthoughtstruckher.Sheraisedherhead,lookedalongherbody,andtoherannoyancediscoveredanawkward

fact.Shewastoolongforthecircle—herfeetstuckoutovertheinnerlines.Perhapsitwouldn'tmatter,butperhapsit

would.Kittyroledontohersside,drewherkneestoherchest,andassumedacurled-upposition,asifshewerein

b e d . A q u i c k s q u i n t al o n g ... f i
n e , s h e w as n i c e an d t i d y n o w .
N i c e an d r e ad y .

B u t r e ad y f o r w h at ? A s u d d e n
b u r s t o f s k e p t i c i s m e x p l o d e
d i n h e r . T h i s w as n o t h i n g b u t
an o t h e r o f h e r d r e ams , o n e o f

t h e r i d i c u l o u s f an c i e s B ar t i
m ae u s h ad d e r i d e d . It w as t h e h
e i g h t o f ar r o g an c e t o t h i n k s h
e c o u l d s u cc e e d w h e r e n o o n e

e l s e h ad i n t w o t h o u s an d y e ar s
o r m o r e . W h at w as s h e t h i n k i n
g ? S h e w as n o m ag i c i an .

B u t p e r h ap s t h i s w as an ad v an t

ag e . B ar t i m ae u s h ad p r o m p t e d h e r t o t r y i t , s h e k n ew h e h ad . H i s l as t w o r d s as h e l e f t

t h e m h ad e c h o e d h i s d e s c r i p t i o n o f P t o l e m y : "W e d o h av e a b o n d . . . b u t f o r t h e p r e s e n t t h e r e ar e l i m i t s t o i t ." For

the p resen t . . . W h at w as t h at i f n o t an i m p l i c i t i n v i t at i o n t o h e r an d h e r al o n e ? P t o l e m y h ad k n o w n n o l i m i t s : h e h ad

c o m e t o t h e O t h e r P l ac e b y r e j e c t i n g al t h e e s t ab l i s h e d m ag i c al c o n v e n t i o n s —b y t u r n i n g t h e m o n t h e i r h e ad . A n d y o u

d i d n't n e e d m o r e t h an t h e b as i c k n o w l e d g e o f s u m m o n i n g t o d o w h at h e h ad d o n e —-t h e i n s t r u c t i o n s i n t h e Ap oc ry p ha

w e r e e n t i r e l y s t r ai g h t f o r w ar d . T h e c r u c i al p ar t w as c al i n g t o t h e d e m o n at t h e e n d . K i t t y c oul d d o al l t h i s . T h e

q u e s t i o n w as : w o ul d i t w o r k ?

T h e r e w as o n l y o n e w ay t o f i n d o u t .

S h e c l o s e d h e r e y e s an d t r i e d t o r e l ax h e r m us c l e s .T h e r o o m w as v e r y q u i e t —n o s o un d c

amethroughthedoor.Time

tobeginthesummons?No,so methingwasstilnotright----What

wasit?Afteramomentshere alizedherhandwasclenched sotightlyuponthekeythatit dughardintoherskin.That

wasasymbolofherfear.Shec oncentratedforafewmomen ts,alowingherfinger-gripto slacken....Nowshe

cuppedthemetalgently.Bett er...

R e m e m b e r e d f r ag m e n t s c ame i n t o h e r h e ad , w o r d s w r i t t e n b y p as t au t h o r i t i e s ab o u t t h e O t h e r P l ac e : a reg ion of

c haos, a whirl of en d less abom in ation s, a su m p of m ad n ess . . . c h e e r f u l p r o n o u n c e m e n t s al l . T h e n t h e r e w as M r .

B u t t o n 's p i t h y e d i c t : to ven tu re there risk s bod y an d sou l. O h , G o d , s o w h at w o u l d h ap p e n t o h e r ? W o u l d s h e m e l t o r

b u r n ? W o u l d s h e s e e —? Y e s , b u t w h at e v e r s h e s aw c o u l d h ar d l y b e w o r s e o r m o r e ab h o r r e n t t h an N o u d a an d h i s

crippledhybrids—hisdemo
nscloakedinhumanflesh.An
dnoneofMr.Button'sauthori
tieshadevenvisitedtheOthe
r

Place!Itwasalpurespeculati
on.Besides,Ptolemyhadret
urnedalive.

Sheranthroughthewordsoft
hereversesummonsinherhe
ad,then—sincetodelaywas m
erelytoinvitefurther

fears—shespokethemoutlo
ud.Asfarasshecouldtel,itw
asalcorrect—sheusedherow
nnamerathertha

demon's and swapped the normal verbs. She finished by calling Bartimaeus's name, three times.

Done.

She lay there in the quiet room.

Seconds passed. Kitty quelled her mounting frustration. No good being impatient. Conventional summonings needed

time for the words to travel to the Other Place. She listened, though for what she did not k

now. Her eyes were closed.

She saw nothing but darkness and flickering brain-echoes of light.

Stil nothing. Evidently the process was not going to work. Kitty's hopes passed away; she felt hollow and a little sad.

She toyed with getting up, but the room was warm, she was comfortable on her pilow and after the privations of the

night, was happy to rest a little. Her mind drifted on currents of its own devising: she wo

n d e r e d ab o u t h e r p ar e n t s ,

w h at t h e y w e r e d o i n g , h o w t h e s e e v e n t s w o u l d t o u c h t h e m ; h o w J ak o b , f ar aw ay i n E u r o p e , m i g h t r e s p o n d ; w h e t h e r

N at h an i e l h ad s u r v i v e d t h e c o n f l ag r at i o n i n t h e h al . S h e f o u n d h e r s e l f h o p i n g s o .

A d i s t an t s o u n d c ame t o h e r e ar s , a c l e ar b e l l r i n g i n g . T h e d e m o n s , p e r h ap s , o r s u r v i v o r s t r y i n g t o al e r t t h e c i t y . . .

N at h an i e l h ad s av e d h e r f r o m t h e m e r c e n ar y 's k n i f e . S h e h ad e n j o y e d s p ar r i n g w i t h h i m , f

orcinghimtofacethetruth

aboutmanythings,Bartimaeus mostofal.Hehadtakenitsurprisinglywel.AsforBartimaeus...sheremembered

howshe'dlastseenhim,aforlornshapelessmassofslime,worndownbywearinessoftheworld.Wasitwrongtobe

pursuinghim?Likeanyoneelse,thedjinnineededrest.

Thebelcontinuedtoring.Itwasanoddsound,nowshethoughtaboutit—highandpure,asifstruckoncrystal,not

l o w an d b o o m i n g as m o s t b e l s i n t h e c i t y w e r e . A l s o , r a t h e r t h an r e p e at e d l y r i n g i n g , i t w as a s i n g l e c o n t i n u o u s

v i b r at i o n t h at r e m ai n e d s l i g h t l y o u t o f r e ac h , r i g h t o n t h e e d g e o f h e r h e ar i n g . S h e s t r ai n e d t o c at c h i t . ... F i r s t i t

f ad e d , t h e n g r e w l o u d e r — b u t t h o u g h al u r i n g , i t s c h ar ac t e r w as s t i l l i m p o s s i b l e t o p i n d o w n ; i t w as l o s t s o m e w h e r e

am i d t h e p u l s i n g o f h e r b l o o d , h e r q u i e t b r e at h i n g , t h e l i t t l e r as p s o f h e r c l o t h i n g as h e r c h e s t w e n t u p an d d o w n . S h e

t r i e d ag ai n , s u d d e n l y f as c i n
at e d . T h e r i n g i n g s e e m e d s o
m e w h e r e ab o v e h e r , f ar aw ay .
S h e s t r o v e t o l i s t e n , w i s h i n g

s h e c o ul d d r aw c l o s e r t o t h e s
o ur c e . S h e t r i e d t o b l o c k o ut
al o t h e r s o und s . H e r e f f o r t s p
ai d o f f — l i t t l e b y l i t t l e , t h e n

w i t h a s ud d e n r us h , t h e r i n g i
n g c l ar i f i e d , b e c am e un m uff l
e d . S h e w as al o n e w i t h i t . It r an
g p e r p e t ual y , l i k e s o m e t h i n g

p r e c i o us o n t h e v e r g e o f b r e
ak i n g . S h e f e l t t h at i t w as v e r y
c l o s e .

W a s i t v i s i b l e t o o ? K i t t y o p e n e d h e r e y e s .

A n d s aw m an y t h i n g s at o n c e . A c o m p l e x g r i d o f s t o n e w o r k al ar o u n d , l i t t l e w al s and f l o o r s r u n n i n g o f f i n t h r e e

d i m e n s i o n s , s e p ar at i n g , j o i n i n g , ar c h i n g , e n d i n g . A m o n g t h e m w e r e s t ai r s , w i n d o w s , an d o p e n d o o r s ; s h e w as p as s i n g

am o n g t h e m at s p e e d , b o t h v e r y c l o s e and s o m e h o w f ar aw ay . G l an c i n g d o w n , s h e s aw a g i r l 's b o d y c u r l e d u p at a

distance—itremindedherof asleepingcat.Otherfigures werefrozen,dol-like,alabo utthegridofstone—groupso f

menandwomenclusteredclo sely,manylyingprone,asifas leeporordead.Aroundthemsto odstrangeblurrythings

withuncertainoutlines—nei therhumannorcompletelyot herwise.Shecouldnotdisti nguishtheirnature—eachone

seemedalmosttocancelitsel fout.Belowitall,insomere motecorridor,shesawayout

hfixedinarunningposture,

faceturnedoverhisshoulder;behindhimwasafigurinethatmoved—amanwithaknife,legsgoingslowly,boots

coveringground.Andaboutthembothdifferentshapes,remoteandindistinct...

Kittyfeltacertaindetachedcuriosityaboutalthis,butherrealinterestlayelsewhere.Theringingsoundwasloude
r

thanbefore;somewhereveryclose.Sheconcentratedstil

harder, and slightly to her surprise the pretty little

lattice work of stones and figures distorted and twisted out of focus, as if pulled in four directions all at once. First it

was quite clear, next it had blurred into a smudge; then even the smudge had gone.

Kitty felt a rushing on all sides; not a physical sensation, for she was not aware of having an actual body, but a

conceptual one. Dimly she glimpsed four barriers all arou

ndher:theytoweredabove,plummetedbelow,stretchedto

infinityoneitherside.Onewasdarkandsolid,andthreatenedtocrushherwithremorselessweight;thenextwasa

ragingfluid,whichsurgedavidlytocarryheraway.Thethirdbarriertoreatherwiththeunseentumultofa

hurricane;thefourthwasanimplacablewalofunquenchablefire.Alfourbeatuponherforaninstantonly,thenthey

recoiled. With reluctance, they gave her up and Kitty passed through the Gate to the other side.

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It was as well for Kitty that she experienced what followed with the detachment of an observer, rather than as a

helpless participant—if it had been otherwise, she would immediately have gone mad. As it was, the lack of bodily

sensation gave what she saw a certain dreamlike quality. C

uriosityw ashermainemotio
n.

Shefoundherselfin—wel,in
didnotseemquiteappropriat
e:shefoundherselfpartoface
aselessswirlofmovement,

neitherendingnorbeginnin
g,inwhichnothingwasfixed
orstatic.Itwasaninfiniteoce
anoflights,colors,and

textures,perpetuallyformi
ng,racing,anddissolvingin
uponthemselves,thoughthe
effectwasneitherasthickor

solidasaliquidnorastracele

s s as a g as ; i f an y t h i n g i t w as a c o m b i n ati o n o f t h e t w o , i n w h i c h f l e e ti n g w i s p s o f

s u b s t anc e e n d l e s s l y p ar t e d an d c o n v e r g e d .

S c al e an d d i r e c ti o n w e r e i m p o s s i b l e t o d e t e r m i n e , as w as t h e p as s i n g o f ti m e -—s i n c e n o th i n g r e mai n e d s t i l an d n o

p att e r n s w e r e e v e r r e p e at e d , th e c o n c e p t i t s e l f s e e m e d b l an k an d m e an i n g l e s s . Th i s m at t e r e d l i t t l e t o K i t t y , an d i t

w as o n l y w h e n s h e att e m p t e d t o l o c at e h e r s e l f , w i th a v i e w t o e

stablishingherpositioninh
ersurroundings,thatshe

grewalittlediscconcerted.S
hehadnofixedpoint,nosing
ularitytocalherown;indeed
,sheseemedoftentobein

severalplacesatonce,watchi
ngthewhirlingtracesfromm
ultipleangles.Theeffectw
asmostdisorientating.

Shetriedtofixuponaparticu
larfleckofcolorandfolowit
,butfounditnoeasierthanfol
lowingthemotionofa

singleleafinadistantwindb

lowntree.Assoonasitformed,eachcolorsplit,melted,mergedwithothers,shrugged

offtheresponsibilityofbeingitself.Kittygrewdizzywiththelooking.

Tomakemattersworseshebegantonoticesomethingelsetoo,flickinginandoutofexistencewithinthegeneral

swirl—randomimages,sofleetingsshecouldnotpinthemdown—likephotographsturnedonandoffbycrackling

electriclight.Shetriedtow

orkoutwhattheywere,butth
emovementwastoofast.This
filedherwithfrustration.

Shesensedtheymighthaveto
ldhersomething.

AfteranunknowndurationKi
ttyremembereredthatshehadc
omeherefor a purpose,altho
ughwhatthatpurposewas

shecouldnotrecal.Shehadn
oinclinationtodoanythingp
articularly;hermainimpulse
wastoremainexactlyasshe

was,movingamongtherushin
glights....Neverthelesssom

ethingaboutthecceaselesschangeirritatedherandkept

hersepar atefr omit.Shewantedtoimposealittleorder,somesolidity.Buthowcouldshedothiswhenshelacked

solidityherself?

Halfheartedlyshewiledherselftomovetowardaparticularpatchoforangeandmaroonswirlingatanunknown

distance.Tohersurprise,shemovedalright,butinseveraldiscordantdirections;whenhervisionstabilized,the

patchofcolorwasnoclosert
hanbefore.Shetriedsevera
timeswiththesameresult:he
rmovementswereveering

andhaphazard;itwasimpossi
bletopredicttheoutcome.

ForthefirsttimeKittyfeltaf
aintanxiety.Shenotedsever
alpatchesofboilingdarknes
scurlinganduncurlingamon
g

thelights;theystirredecho
esofoldearthboundfears—o
fnothingnessandsolitude,o
fbeingaloneamidinfinity.

T his is n o g ood , K i t t y t h o u g h t . I n eed a bod y .

W i t h m o u n t i n g d i s q u i e t , s h e w at c h e d t h e r e m o r s e l e s s m o v e m e n t f l o w i n g al ar o u n d , t h e i m ag e s f l i c k e r i n g n e ar and

f ar , t h e c r ac k l e s o f l i g h t and s e n s e l e s s t r ai l s o f c o l o r . O n e m e r r y d an c i n g b l u e - g r e e n c o i l c au g h t h e r at t e n t i o n .

S tan d S T IL L ! s h e t h o u g h t f u r i o u s l y .

W as i t h e r i m ag i n at i o n , o r h ad a l i t t l e p o r t i o n o f t h e f l o w i n g c o i l d e v i at e d f r o m i t s c o u r s

e,slowingforaninstant?The

motionwassoquick,shecouldnotbesure.

Kittyspiedanotherrandomwispandwiledittohaltandattendtoher.Theresultswereimmediateandsatisfactory:

asizabletendrilofmattersolidifiedintosomethingresemblingtherolledtipofafernfrond,colorlessandglassy.

Whensherelaxedherattention,thecoilunfurledandvanishedbackintothegeneralswirl.

Kittytriedagain,thistimewillingapatchofmatterto formathicker,morecompactobject.Oncemoreshehad

success,andbyconcentratingfurtherwasabletomoldthe glassylumpintosomething approachingablock,unevenly

squared.Again,whenshedesisted,theblockdissolvedto nothing.

Themaleabilityofthesubstancealaroundremindedkitty ofsomethingshehadseenbefore.Whatwasit?With

difficulty, her mind grasped at a memory—that of the djinni Bartimaeus, changing form. He needed to occupy a shape

of some kind when he came to Earth, though his choices were always fluid. Perhaps, now that the positions were

reversed, she should try the same.

She could make herself a shape.... And with this inspiration, the object of her visit came back to her. Yes, it was

Bartimaeus she had come to fi

n d .

K i t t y 's an x i e t y f ad e d ; s h e w as e n t h u s e d . S h e s e t t o w o r k s t r ai g h t aw ay , b u i l d i n g h e r s e l f a b o d y .

U n f o r t u n at e l y t h i s w as e as i e r t h o u g h t t h an d o n e . S h e h ad n o d i ff i c u l t y , b y ap p l y i n g h e r w i l l o n c e m o r e , i n f o r m i n g a

p at c h o f t h e f l o w i n g e n e r g i e s i n t o s o m e t h i n g ap p r o x i m at i n g a h u m an s h ap e . It h ad a b u l b o u s h e ad o f s o r t s , a s t u m p y

t o r s o , an d f o u r u n e v e n l i m b s , al l d u l l y s e e - t h r o u g h , s o t h at

therushingcolorsandlights
behindwereredistortedonits

surfaces.ButwhenKittytried
toimprovethisroughmarionette
intosomethingmorerefined
andaccurate,she

discoveredshewasunableto
concentrateonitalatonce.W
hileshehastenedtorepairth
isandaddatokenface,thebott
omhalfdrippedand

sagged.Soitwent,untilhers

eriesofrushedimprovements hadentirelyruinedthefigurine, anditha dstabilizedas a

pinheadedblobwithenormous buttocks. Kittyregardedit withdissatisfaction.

Italsoprovedoverlycomplex tomaneuver. Althoughshe was able to direct it back and forth—it floated among the

raging energies like a bird amid a storm—Kitty found she could not individualy direct its limbs. Whileshestruggled to

doso,thebody'ssubstancedribbledawayfromitsextremities,likethreadunravelingfromaspindle.Afteratime

Kittygaveupindisgustandallowedthefiguretodissolveintonothing.

Despitethissetbackshefeltpleasedwithherideainprinciple,andimmediatelybeganworkagain.Inquick

successionshetriedavarietyofothersurrogatebodies,testingeachforeaseofcontrol.Thefirst,astickfigure—

ratherlikeachild'sdrawing—containedlesssubstancethanitspredecessor;Kittywasabletopreventitfrom

unraveling,butfoundthesavageenergiesallaroundmadeitcrumplelikeacranefly.Thesecond,asnakingsausage

withaquestingtendrilatitsfront,wasmorestable,butaesthetically unsound.Thethird,asimplebalofswirling

matter,wasfarstrongerandeasiertomaintain,andwithitsheprogressedaconsiderabledistance,floatingserenely

t h r o u g h t h e c h ao s .

L ac k of lim bs is the k ey , K i t t y t h o u g h t . A sp here is g ood . It im p oses ord er.

T h e s h ap e c e r t ai n l y h ad som e e f f e c t o n h e r s u r r o u n d i n g s , s i n c e i t w as n o t l o n g b e f o r e K i t t y b e g an t o n o t i c e a s l i g h t

c h an g e i n t h e f ab r i c t h r o u g h w h i c h h e r b al w as p as s i n g . U p u n t i l t h e n t h e c o i l s o f c o l o r , t h e s h i m m e r i n g l i g h t s , t h e

i n t e r m i t t e n t i m ag e s h ad al b e e n e n t i r e l y n e u t r al an d u n r e s p o n s i v e , f l o w i n g r an d o m l y

w h e r e t h e y w o u l d . B u t n o w —

p e r h ap s b e c au s e o f t h e n e w d e
c i s i v e n e s s w i t h w h i c h s h e m
ai n t ai n e d t h e s p h e r e —t h e y s e
e m e d t o b e c o m e aw ar e o f

h e r p r e s e n c e . S h e s e n s e d i t i
n t h e m o v e m e n t o f t h e s w i r l s ,
w h i c h s u d d e n l y b e c am e m o r e
d e f i n i t e , i n t e n t i o n al . T h e y

b e g an t o c h an g e d i r e c t i o n s l i
g h t l y —d ar t i n g i n c l o s e t o t h e
b al , t h e n v e e r i n g aw ay as i f i n d
o u b t . T i m e an d ag ai n t h i s

h ap p e n e d , w i t h t h e c o i l s an d f
l i c k e r s g r o w i n g s t e ad i l y i n s

trengthandnumber.Theyseemedmerelyinquisitive,butit

wasanominouskindoffattention,likesharksgatheringaboutaswimmer,andKittydidn'tlikeit.Sheslowedthe

progressofherbal,andwithacarefulexertionofwil—shewasnowgainingingconfidence—imposedherselfuponthe

whirlingsubstance.Takingthestaticsphereashercenter,shedroveoutward,,pushingbackthenearestintrepid

coils,whichdissolvedands
cattered.

Theremissionthisprovided
wasshort-lived.JustasKitty
wascongratulatingherselfo
nherstrengthofpurpose,a

suddenglassycoilextended
outfromthemainmasslikean
amoeba'spseudopodiumandb
itintotheedgeofher

sphere,carryingoffachunk.
Asshestrovetomakegoodth
edamage,anothercoildarted
infromtheoppositeside

andtookanotherslice.

Furiouslyshebeatthecoilsback. Themainmassalabouther pulsedandquivered. Lightsflickeredintentlyinrandom

clusters. Forthefirsttime Kittyfelttruefear.

Bartimaeus, shethought. Where are you?

Thewordseemedtoconjure areactioninthesubstance; a suddenburstofstaticimages firedandfaded, stronger

andmorelingeringthanbefore. Oneortwolastedlongenough forhertocatchdetails: fig

u r e s , f ac e s , r an d o m

s n at c h e s o f s k y , o n c e a d e f i n i t e b u i l d i n g — a r o o f w i t h c o l u m n s . T h e f i g u r e s w e r e h u m a n , b u t w o r e u n f a m i l i a r s t y l e s o f

c l o t h e s . T h e f l e e t i n g p i c t u r e s r e m i n d e d K i t t y o f p a s t o c c a s i o n s , w h e n l o n g - f o r g o t t e n m e m o r i e s r o s e u n b i d d e n i n t o h e r

m i n d . B u t t h e s e w e r e n o t h e r m e m o r i e s .

A s i f i n r e s p o n s e t o t h i s t h o u g h t , a s u d d e n b u r s t o f a c t i v i t

y f ar o u t i n t h e w h i r l i n g c o n f u s i o n e n d e d w i t h an i m ag e t h at

d id l i n g e r . It w as f r ac t u r e d , as i f s e e n t h r o u g h t h e l e n s o f a b r o k e n c am e r a, b u t w h at i t s h o w e d w as c l e ar e n o u g h : h e r

p ar e n t s , s t an d i n g t o g e t h e r h an d i n h an d . A s K i t t y w at c h e d , h e r m o t h e r r ai s e d a d i s t o r t e d h an d an d w av e d .

K itty ! C om e bac k to u s.

G o away . . . K i t t y r e ac t e d w i t h c o n f u s i o n an d d i s m ay . It w as a t r i c k , o b v i o u s l y i t w as , b u t t h at d i d n't m ak e i t an y l e s s

upsetting. Herconcentratio
nwavered; herholdoverhers
phereandhersinglearea ofcl
earedorderlurchedand

trembled. Thespheres lump
edandsagged; coilsofmatter
camecreepinginfromeverys
ide.

Kitty, we love you.

Get lost! Shedrovethecoilsb
ackagain. Theimageofhermo
manddadwinkedout. Withgri
mdetermination, Kitty

returnedherspheretoitspro
pershape. Shewasincreasing

l y d e p e n d e n t o n i t f o r a n y s e m
b l a n c e o f c o n t r o l , f o r a n y

s e m b l a n c e o f b e i n g h e r s e l f . M o
r e t h a n a n y t h i n g s h e f e a r e d b e
i n g a d r i f t a g a i n w i t h o u t i t .

O t h e r p i c t u r e s f l a s h e d o n a n d
o f f , e a c h o n e d i f f e r e n t , m o s t
t o o f a s t t o f a t h o m . S o m e , t h o u
g h b a r e l y p e r c e p t i b l e , m u s t

h a v e b e e n f a m i l i a r t o h e r — t h e
y a w o k e i n a r t i c u l a t e f e e l i n g s
o f a g i t a t i o n a n d l o s s . A f l u r r y
o f l i g h t s ; a n o t h e r p i c t u r e ,

v e r y f a r a w a y . A n o l d m a n l e a n i
n g o n a s t i c k . B e h i n d h i s b a c k

w as a r u s h i n g s l ab o f b l ac k n e s s .

K itty , help ! It' s c om in g !

M r. P en n y f eather . . .

D on ' t leave m e! T h e f i g u r e l o o k e d o v e r i t s s h o u l d e r , c r i e d o u t i n t e r r o r . . . . T h e v i s i o n w as g o n e . A l m o s t i m m e d i at e l y

an o t h e r ap p e ar e d —a w o m an r u n n i n g b e t w e e n c o l u m n s w i t h s o m e t h i n g d ar k an d ag i l e s k i t t e r i n g i n p u r s u i t . A f l as h o f

w h i t e am o n g s h ad o w s . K i t t y c o n c e n t r at e d h e r e n e r g i e s o n t

h e s p h e r e . Ig n o r e t h e m . T h e y w e r e n o t h i n g b u t

p h an t as m s , b l an k an d e m p t y . T h e y m e an t n o t h i n g .

B artim aeu s! A g ai n s h e t h o u g h t t h e n ame , b e s e e c h i n g l y t h i s t i m e . A g ai n i t aw o k e ac t i v i t y am o n g t h e f l o at i n g l i g h t s an d

d r i f t i n g s p u r s o f c o l o r . C l o s e u p , w i t h c r y s t al c l ar i t y , c am e J ak o b H y r n e k , s m i l i n g s ad l y .

Y ou alway s d id try to be too in d ep en d en t, K itty . W hy n ot j u st g ive u p ? C om e an d j oin u s here. It' s best n ot

to g o bac k

to E arth. Y ou won ' t lik e it if y ou d o.

W hy ? S h e c o u l d n't h e l p b u t as k t h e q u e s t i o n .

P oor c hild . Y ou ' ll see. Y ou are n ot as y ou were.

A n o t h e r i m ag e ap p e ar e d al o n g s i d e , a t al m an w i t h d ar k s k i n , s t an d i n g o n a g r as s y h i l . H i s f ac e w as g r av e .

W hy d o y ou c om e here an d m olest u s?

A w o m an w e ar i n g a h i g h w h i t e

h e ad d r e s s , g at h e r i n g w at e r at a w e l l .

Y ou were a f ool to c om e here. Y ou are n ot welc om e.

I c om e f or help .

Y ou will n ot g et it. T h e w o m an 's i m ag e s c o w l e d an d v an i s h e d .

T h e m an w i t h d ar k s k i n t u r n e d t o w al k aw ay u p h i s h i l .

W hy d o y ou m olest u s? h e as k e d ag ai n , o v e r h i s s h o u l d e r . Y ou wou n d u s with y ou r p resen c e. A f l i c k e r o f l i g h t s ; h e t o o

w as g o n e .

J ak o b H y r n e k g av e a r u e f u l s m i l e .

G ive u p , m ag ic ian . Forg et y ou rself . Y ou c an n ot g et hom e in an y c ase.

I am n ot a m ag ic ian .

T ru e. Y ou are n othin g n ow. A d o z e n c o i l s e n v e l o p e d h i m ; h e c r ac k l e d an d f i z z e d i n t o a m u l t i t u d e o f w h i r l i n g s h ar d s

t h at f l o at e d f ar aw ay .

N othin g . . . K i t t y r e g ar d e d h e r

b a l l , w h i c h d u r i n g h e r r e c e n t
i n a t t e n t i o n h a d m e l t e d a w a y l i
k e s n o w . L i t t l e f l a k e s w e r e

f l u t t e r i n g o f f w h a t r e m a i n e d
o f i t s s u r f a c e ; a s i f b l o w n b y a
w i n d , t h e y s k i p p e d a n d d a n c e
d a c r o s s t o j o i n t h e e n d l e s s

w h i r l a b o u t h e r . W e l l , i t w a s t
r u e , o f c o u r s e — s h e w a s n o t h i
n g : a b e i n g w i t h o u t s u b s t a n c
e , w i t h o u t a n c h o r a g e .

T h e r e w a s n ' t a n y p o i n t i n p r e t
e n d i n g o t h e r w i s e .

A n d t h e y w e r e r i g h t a b o u t a n o
t h e r t h i n g t o o : s h e d i d n ' t k n o

w h o w t o g e t h o m e .

H e r w i l f ad e d . S h e al o w e d t h e s p h e r e t o d w i n d l e ; i t s p u n l i k e a t o p , s t r e am i n g i n t o n o t h i n g . S h e b e g an t o d r i f t . . . .

A n o t h e r i m ag e f l i c k e r e d i n t o v i e w at an i n d e t e r m i n at e d i s t an c e .

H el o, K itty .

G et lost.

An d there I was thin k in g y ou were ask in g af ter m e.

F o r al m o s t t h i r t y s e c o n d s N at h an i e l an d t h e m e r c e n ar y r e g ar d e d e ac h o t h e r s i l e n t l y ac r o ss t h e c h am b e r f l o o r . N e i t h e r

o f t h e m m o v e d . T h e k n i f e i n t h e m e r c e n ar y 's h an d w as s t i l ; h i s e m p t y h an d h o v e r e d c l o s e b e s i d e h i s b e l t . N at h an i e l

w at c h e d i n t e n t l y , b u t w i t h o u t h o p e . H e h ad s e e n h o w f as t t h o s e h an d s c o u l d m o v e . A n d h e w as q u i t e d e f e n s e l e s s . A t

t h e i r o t h e r m e e t i n g s h e h ad h ad B ar t i m ae u s o n h i s s i d e .

Themercenaryspokefirst."Ihavecometotakeyoubac k,"hesaid."Thedemonwishestohaveyoualive."

Nathanielsaidnothing.Hedidn'tmove.Hewastryingtothinkofastrategy,buthisbrainwasstiffwithfear;every

thoughtmovedwiththecreakingsluggishnessofice.

"Ibelieveseveralofthepros pectivehostshavebeenkiled,"themercenarywenton."Noudaiskeentosaveasmany

youngbodiesashecan.Wel?

Orwouldyoupreferamoreh
onorabledeath?Icanoblige."

"Wedon't"—Nathaniel'svoice
wasthick;histongueelttoo
largeforhismouth—"wedon't
havetofightatal."

Arumblinglaugh."Fight?That
impliessomeparitybetween
us."

"Ihaveoneslaveleftatmycom
mand,"Nathaniellied."Thin
kquickly,beforehestrikes.
Wecanstilworktogether

againsttheenemy.Itisinyour
intereststoo,youmustseeth

at; I will pay you well from the nation's treasury. I shall

give you gold uncounted! I can make you a lord, give you lands, territories, whatever your black heart desires. Only

you must fight alongside me. Here—in these vaults—are weapons we can use—"

For answer the mercenary spat upon the chamber floor. "I want no lands or titles! My sect forbids such fripperies.

Gold—yes! But that the demons will give me, if I serve them.

And—Donotspeak!Iknowyo
urargument!Sowhatif

NoudadestroysallLondon—
oralEurope,forthatmatter?
HecanburntheworldforalIc
are!Ihavenofaithin

empires,ministers,orkings
.Letchaoscome!Ishalflouri
sh.So,whatisyouranswer?
Wilyoudiehere?"

Nathaniel'seyesnarrowed.
"Myanswercomesbehindyou
ontiptoedfeet.Kilhim,Bel
azael!Strikehimdown!"

Asheshouted,hepointedbac

kupthestairs.Themercenary ducked,whirledaroundinreadiness,sawthestairs

empty.Breathingacurse,hespunagain,asilverdiscnowcuppedinhishand,onlytoglimpseNathanielalsoturning,

headingupthepassage,intothevaults.Hisarmmoved;thediscwasgone—

Nathanielhadtwistedandtriedtoruninasingledesperatemovement.Helosthisbalance,trippedonaflagstones

edgeandfell—

The silver disc flashed through the air, struck the wall above Nathaniel's falling head, ricocheted against the opposite

side of the passage, and clattered to the floor.

Nathaniel landed on hands and knees; he scrambled to his feet and, scooping up the silver disc, ran on. He snatched a

glance behind him.

In the distance the mercenary strode across the chamber floor toward the passage, his face heavy with irritation. He

w e n t u n h u r r i e d l y ; a b o u t h i s b o o t s h u n g p u l s i n g l i g h t s a n d s m u d g e s . H i s f i r s t s t e p w a s t h r e e t i m e s a n o r d i n a r y m a n ' s ;

w i t h h i s s e c o n d h e w a s r i g h t a t N a t h a n i e l ' s b a c k . H e r a i s e d h i s k n i f e . N a t h a n i e l c r i e d o u t , l u r c h e d t o o n e s i d e —

F r o m t h e s t o n e w o r k o f t h e p a s s a g e a g r a y s h a d o w e m e r g e d , s i l e n t a s s m o k e . A c o i l i n g l i m b e n t w i n e d i t s e l f a r o u n d t h e

m e r c e n a r y ' s w a i s t ; a n a r m l o o p e d u p o n h i s t h r o a t . T h e m a n ' s h e a d j e r k e d b a c k . H e r a i s e d h i s k n i f e , s l a s h e d o u t . T h e

s h ad o w m o an e d , b u t c l u n g o n t
i g h t e r . A s i c k l y b l u e r ad i an c
e e m e r g e d f r o m t h e s h ad o w an
d e n v e l o p e d t h e m e r c e n ar y ;

h e c o u g h e d an d s p at . O t h e r s h
ad o w s d r i f t e d f r o m t h e w al s
an d f l o o r , w o u n d t h e m s e l v e s
ar o u n d t h e b o o t s an d

t r o u s e r s , g r as p e d t h e f l ap p i
n g c l o ak . T h e m e r c e n ar y s l as h
e d l e f t an d r i g h t ; h e t ap p e d a h
e e l — t h e s e v e n - l e ag u e b o o t s

t o o k w i n g . In a s i n g l e s t e p h e
w as aw ay al o n g t h e c o r r i d o r , h
al t i n g at a j u n c t i o n f ar ah e ad . B
u t t h e b l u e g l o w h u n g

abouthishead,theshadowsclungtohimlikeleeches,andstilmorecamehurryingfromthestones.

Nathaniellean edagainstthewalforsupport.Itwasthe boots, ofcourse:theiraurahadtriggeredthetrapassoonas

themercenaryenteredthecorridor.Theshadowshadimmediatelysetupontheirowner.Troublewas,itwasa

magical attack, and—as he knew frombitterexperience—themercenary'sresiliencetomagicwashuge.

Buttheirinterventionhadgivenhimrespite.Thetreasurevaultwassomewhereupahead,pastwherethemercenary

thrashedandstruggled.Therewasnohelpforit.Clutchingthesilverdiscgingerly(theedgeswereverysharp),

Nathanielstolealongthecorridor,pastnumerousdoors,anddsideturnings,nearerandnearertothejunction.

Bynow,somanyoftheshadowshadpouredthemselvesuponhisenemythatNathanielcouldscarcelymakehimout.

H e w as h i d d e n am i d a p i l e o f w r i t h i n g b o d i e s . T h e i r w e i g h t al o n e h ad f o r c e d h i m t o h i s k n e e s ; o c c as i o n al y h i s f ac e ,

p u r p l e b e h i n d t h e b e ar d an d t h e c h o k i n g r ad i an c e , c am e i n s i g h t . H e s e e m e d h al f t h r o t t l e d , b u t h i s k n i f e s t i l f l as h e d

ab o u t h i m . C u r l s o f m e l t i n g e s s e n c e l i t t e r e d t h e f l o o r l i k e w o o d s h av i n g s .

It' s silver too, N at h an i e l t h o u g h t . T he k n if e—they c an ' t withstan d it. S oon er or later he' l be f ree.

T h i s u n p l e as an t k n o w l e d g e s

purredhimon.Hereachedthe
junction;keepingthediscr
aisedandhisbacktothewal,

heroundedit,watchingthec
ombatantsthewholetime.Ev
enashedidso,oneshadowfel
away,cutcleanintwoby

asingleblow.Nathanielling
eredno longer;hedidn'thave
muchtime.

Downthecorridor,deadstr
aightintotheearth.Thereatth
eend:thesteeldoorwiththe
littlegrile—theentranceto

thetreasurevault.

Nathaniel reached it at a run. He looked back the way he had come. Distant scuffles, gasps, unearthly moans. Forget

the mercenary wow. What was he to do?

He inspected the door. It was ordinary enough: the hatch with the viewing grille, a simple handle, no other marks or

indentations. Might it contain a trap? It was possible; then again, the clerk had not mentioned one done. A Pestilence

guarded the treasures inside

, h e k n e w t h at m u c h , b u t h o w w as t h i s t r i g g e r e d ? P e r h ap s s i m p l y o p e n i n g t h e d o o r w o u l d

s e t i t g o i n g -----

N at h an i e l 's h an d h o v e r e d o v e r t h e h an d l e . S h o u l d h e ?

H e l o o k e d b ac k o v e r h i s s h o u l d e r . It w as n o g o o d , h e had t o g e t t h e S t aff . H e w as d e ad o t h e r w i s e . H e g r as p e d t h e

h an d l e , t u r n e d , an d p u l e d —

N o t h i n g h ap p e n e d . T h e d o o r r e m ai n e d f as t .

Nathanielcursedandletgo.Lockedsomehow...Heracked
hisbrains.Thereseemednoob
viouskeyhole.Some

magicalhex-lock?Ifso,he'dn
everfindtheCharm.

Afoolishthoughtstruckhim
.Heturnedthehandleagain.T
histimehepushed.

Ah.Thedoorswungopen.Nat
hanielletitswing.Heheldhi
sbreath....

NoPestilencebubbledforth
.Automaticlights,perhapsf
romsomecaptiveimpimpris

onedintheceilingofthetre
asure

vault,switchedon.Everythi
ngwasashehadseenittwoday
sbefore:theplinthofmarble
inthecenter,piledhigh

withtreasures;theotherwis
eemptyroom;thewideringo
folive-greenfloortilesalar
oundtheplinth,stretching

almosttothedoor.

Nathanielrubbedhischin.In
allprobability,ifhestepped
uponthosegreenfloortiles,
thePestilencewouldriseup

,

and in seconds he would perish horribly. The idea was unappealing. But how could he bypass it? The ring of tiles was

far too wide to jump, he had no means of climbing above them, and he could not fly....

Indecision gripped him. He could not go back—the situation was too desperate, and Kitty was relying on him to

succeed. But to enter the room was death. He had no means of defense; no Shield or Charm.

...

H i s e y e s f i x e d u p o n a n o b j e c t l y i n g i n t h e c e n t e r o f t h e d i s t a n t p l i n t h . A j a d e s t o n e s e t i n a d e l i c a t e o v a l o f p r e s s e d

g o l d ; i t h u n g b y a c h a i n f r o m a w o o d e n s t a n d . T h e A m u l e t o f S a m a r k a n d ... N a t h a n i e l k n e w v e r y w e l w h a t i t c o u l d

d o . H e h a d s e e n i t r e p e l t h e p o w e r o f t h e d e m o n R a m u t h r a ; i t c o u l d c o p e w i t h a l i t t l e P e s t i l e n c e a l r i g h t . W h a t i f h e

r a n a s h a r d a s h e c o u l d ... ?

He bithislip. No—thedistan ce tothepl inthwas muchtoo g reat. He'd never be able to getto the Amulet before—

It was not a sound that alerted hi m; the corridor behind his b ack was utterly silent. But ani ntuition, a sudden sharp

forebodingthatsentprickle s alonghisspine, madehimtur n. Thesightalongthecorrido rknottedhisstomach, made

hiskneesweaken.

Withknifeandfist, themerce nary had succeeded in dislod

gingalbutoneofthesshadows;
fragmentsoftheotherslay

floppingonthefloorraround
him.Newshadowswerestile
mergingfromthestonework
—oneofthemfiredablue

pulseatthemercenarythatkn
ockedhimmomentarilyagain
stthewall,buthedidnotfalte
r.Ignoringtheshadowon

hisbackthatsoughttothrottl
ehim,themercenarystooped
andkickedofffirstoneboot,
thentheother.Theystruck

thestones,layontheirside.

Themercenarysteppedawayfromtheboots;instantlythesha dows'interestinhimrecede d.Theyflittedaboutthe

boots,sniffingandproddingwithlongfingers.Theshadowonhisbackwasdistracted,itloosenedits grip.Ashrugof

theback,aswingofthesilverknife—wherewasthesha dow now?Twopiecesclawingforeachotherontheflo or.

AsNathanielwatched,themercenarysetoffupthecorridortowardhim.Hecameimplac

ab l y , b u t s l o w l y ; h i s c ap e

w as t att e r e d , h e w al k e d i n h i s s o c k s . T h e f e r o c i t y o f t h e s h ad o w s ' as s au l t s e e m e d t o h av e w e ak e n e d h i m — h i s f ac e

w as m au v e w i t h e x e r t i o n ; h e l i m p e d , an d c o u g h e d w i t h e ac h s t e p .

N at h an i e l s t o o d i n t h e d o o r w ay , h al f i n , h al f o u t o f t h e t r e as u r e r o o m . H i s h e ad m ad e f r ant i c m o v e m e n t s — s i d e t o s i d e ,

g r e e n t i l e s t o m e r c e n ar y . H e w as s i c k w i t h p an i c ; h e h ad n o t h i n g t o d e c i d e b u t t h e m e t h o d

ofhisdeath.

Hesteeledhimself.Oneway,deathwasinevitable.Theexpressiononthemercenary'sfacepromisedhimpain.Asfor

theotherway...

Thecoolglintofthe Amuletshoneontheplinthacrossthe room,beckoninghimover.It wassoJar...butthe

Pestilencewouldatleastbequick.

Nathanielmadehisdecision.Hewalkedoutofthedoor,aw

ayfromthetreasureroom,to
wardtheoncoming

mercenary.

Theblueeyesboredintohim
.Themansmiled.Theknifero
se.

Nathanielspunonhisheelsan
dsprintedbacktowardthedo
or.Heignoredthesnarlofrag
ebehindhim,focusedonly

straightahead.Itwascrucialt
opickupspeed,hitthegreen
tilesatmaximumvelocity....

Anexplosionofpaininhissh

oulder;hecriedoutlikeananimal,stumbled,butranon.Throughthedoor,intothe

room;greentilesstretchedoutahead—

Limpingfootstepsrightbehind.Amutteredcough.

Thetiles'edge.Hesprang,leapedthroughtheairasfarashecould—

Landed.Ranon.

Alaboutthim,thehissofathousandserpents;yellow-greenvaporrosefromthetiles.

Ahead was the plinth; treasures gleamed upon it. Gladstone's Staff, a jeweled glove, an ancient violin, stained with

blood; goblets, swords, caskets, and tapestries. Nathaniel's eyes were fixed on the Amulet of Samarkand, juddering

and jerking with the impact of each stride.

Green vapor covered everything in a sallow veil. Nathaniel felt his skin sting—the stinging intensified, became a

sudden desperate pain. He sm

elledaburning—

Acoughbehindhim.Somethi
ngbrushedhisback.

Theplinth.Hishandreached
out,snatcheduptheneckla ce
;toreitfromitsstand.Hejum
ped,twisted,fellsprawling

uponthepplinth,sentjewels
andwondersscattering,role
dacross,droppedtothetiles
ontheotherside.Hiseyes

burned;hescrewedthemshu
t.Hisskinwasafire;atadist
ancehehearda voicegiveasc
reamofagony—itwashis

own.

Blindlyhepuledthenecklace overhisneck, feltthe Amulet of Samarkand brushagainst hischest—

Thepainwasgone. Hisskinstilburned, butitwasaresidual stinging, notanescalating torment, saveinhis

shoulder, whereitthrobbed withsickintensity. Heheard awhispering, openedoneeye—saw thevaporcoilingall

abouthim, swirling, seeking outhisflesh, butbeingdrawn

inexorablyaroundanddown,
intothejadestoneatthe

centeroftheAmulet.

Nathanielraisedhisheadfro
mwherehelay.Hecouldseet
heceiling,thesideofthepli
nthbesidehim,thevaporthat

filedtheroom.Theviewbey
ondwashidden.

Sowhere—?

Acough.Justbehindtheplin
th.

Nathanielmoved;notfast,bu

tasfastashecould.Thepaininhisshoulderpreventedhimputtingweightonhisright

arm.Withthelefthelevered himselfintoacrouchingposition,thenslowlyrose.

Ontheothersideoftheplinth themercenarywasstanding,surroundedbythebillowingcloudofyellow-greenvapor.

Hestilheldtheknife;hiseyeswerefixedonNathaniel.Butheleanedheavilyontheplinthtop,andcoughedwith

everybreath.

S l o w l y h e d r e w h i m s e l f u p . S l o w l y h e s t ar t e d t o w al k ar o u n d t h e p l i n t h t o N at h an i e l .

N at h an i e l b ac k e d aw ay .

T h e b e ar d e d m an m o v e d w i t h t h e u t m o s t c ar e , as i f h i s l i m b s p ai n e d h i m . H e i g n o r e d t h e b o i l i n g P e s t i l e n c e , w h i c h at e

aw ay h i s c l o ak , w h i c h b i t i n t o h i s b l ac k c l o t h e s , i n t o t h e t h i c k b l ac k s o c k s u p o n h i s l i m p i n g f e e t . H e s t e p p e d aw ay f r o m

t h e p l i n t h .

N at h an i e l 's b ac k b u m p e d ag ai

n s t t h e w al l at t h e f ar e n d o f t h e c h am b e r . H e c o u l d g o n o f ar t h e r . H i s h an d s w e r e

e m p t y . H e h ad d r o p p e d t h e s i l v e r d i s c s o m e w h e r e as h e r an . T h e r e w as n o d e f e n s e n o w .

T h e P e s t i l e n c e s w i r l e d e v e r d ar k e r ar o u n d t h e o n c o m i n g f o r m . N at h an i e l s aw a g r i m ac e f l i c k e r ac r o s s t h e m e r c e n ar y 's

f ac e , p e r h ap s o f d o u b t o r p ai n . W as h i s r e s i l i e n c e w an i n g ? It h ad al r e ad y b e e n f o r c e d t o c o p e w i t h t h e s h ad o w s ' l o n g

assault, and now the Pestilence beat against it too.... Had the skin changed color? Was it perhaps a little yellowed, a

little blotchy...?

The remorseless steps continued; the pale blue eyes pierced him.

Nathaniel pressed back against the stones. Instinctively his hand closed around the Amulet; the metal was cold to the

touch.

The cloud of Pestilence gave

a s u d d e n f l u r r y , b i l l o w e d ar o u n d t h e m e r c e n ar y l i k e a c l o ak . It w as as i f i t h ad s u d d e n l y

f o u n d a p u n c t u r e , a w e ak n e s s i n h i s ar m o r . It s w i r l e d l i k e a s t o r m o f h o r n e t s e n v e l o p i n g a f o e , s t i n g i n g , s t i n g i n g . Th e

m e r c e n ar y k e p t w al k i n g . Th e s k i n o n h i s f ac e c r ac k e d l i k e o l d p ap e r . Th e f l e s h b e l o w f e l i n w ar d , as i f b e i n g s u c k e d

d r y . C o l o r d r ai n e d f r o m th e j e t - b l ac k b e ar d . Th e p al e b l u e e y e s s t ay e d f i x e d u p o n N at h an i e l w i th c o n s u m i n g h at r e d .

Closer, closer. The hand that held the knife was shriveled, nothing but a knot of bones beneath a rind of skin. Now the

beard was gray, now it was white; cheek bones protruded through the hair like jags of slate. To Nathaniel, it seemed

the mercenary smiled. The smile broadened, displayed impossible extents of teeth... The skin on the face fell away

entirely, to leave a gleaming skul with clipped white beard and pale blue eyes, which g

av e a b u r s t o f b r i g h t n e s s and

s u d d e n l y w e n t o u t .

B o n e s i n b l ac k c l o t h e s . It s s t e p b e c am e w h o l e s al e c o l ap s e ; i t d r o p p e d , s p l i n t e r e d , c r as h e d d o w n u p o n i t s e l f ,

s c att e r i n g a m e s s o f r ag s an d s c r ap s ab o u t N at h an i e l 's f e e t .

T h e mal i g n i t y o f t h e P e s t i l e n c e d i mi n i s h e d ; w h at r e mai n e d o f i t w as s u c k e d aw ay i n t o t h e A mu l e t as N at h an i e l

h o b b l e d b ac k ac r o s s t h e r o o m . H e c am e t o t h e p l i n t h . V i e w e

dthroughhislenses,thecollectiveauraofthetreasures

hurthiseyes.Brightestofallwasthe Staff.Hereachedouthishand(notingsubconsciouslythepatinaoflittlewounds

uponhisskin)andpickeditup.Herecaledatoncethesmoothness,thelightnessoftheagedwood.

Nathanielfeltnotriumph.Hewastooweak.TheStaffwasinhishand,butthemerenotionofactivatingitdaunted

him. The pain in his shoulder made him nauseous. He caught sight of the culprit—a blooded silver disc lying on the

tiles. Beside it was a second disc—the one he'd dropped. Stiffly he stooped and placed it in his pocket.

The Staff, the Amulet... Anything more? He considered the array of objects on the plinth. Some—the ones he had

heard of—were of no immediate use; others were glowering mysterious, and best left twelalone. Without further

d e l ay , h e d e p ar t e d t h e r o o m o f t r e as u r e s .

O n h i s w ay b ac k t h r o u g h t h e p as s ag e s t h e g u ar d i an s h ad o w s , at t r ac t e d b y t h e p u l s i n g au r as o f t h e S t aff an d A m u l e t ,

at t e mp t e d t o w ay l ay h i m . T h e i r f r e e z i n g b l u e r ad i an c e w as ab s o r b e d b y t h e A m u l e t ; an y i n d i v i d u al s t h at f l u n g

t h e ms e l v e s u p o n N at h an i e l w e r e , i n s h o r t o r d e r , s u c k e d i n t o t h e p i e c e o f j ad e . N at h an i e l w as u n m o l e s t e d . A s h e w e n t ,

h e r e t r i e v e d t h e s e v e n - l e ag u

eboots;afewminuteslaterh
ecrossedthelineoftilesand
cameoutintotheentrance

room.

Hisscryingglasslayonthede
sk.

"Imp,you'havethreetasks,the
nyouarefree."

"You'vegottobekidding.On
eofthem'simpossible,right
?Makingaropeofsand?Build
ingabridgetotheOther

Place?Hitmewithit.Givem
etheworst."

Duringtheimp'sabsencethe magicianssatslumpeduponth edesk,supportinghimselfw iththeStaff.Hisshoulder

throbbed;theskinabouthisf aceandhandsstillburned.Hi sbreathingcameinfitfulgasp s.

Theimpwasback.Itsfacewasn ewlyscrubbedandgleaming; itcouldbarelycontainitseag ernesstobeoff."First

question.Thegreatspiritsar eatthisverymomentleavingt hebuilding.Observe."Apic tureinthedepths:Nathaniel

r e c o g n i z e d t h e ag e d f r o n t o f
W e s t m i n s t e r H al l . A h o l e h ad
b e e n b l o w n i n t h e w al . F r o m t
h i s i s s u e d a c av o r t i n g

t h r o n g —m e n an d w o m e n o f t h
e g o v e r n m e n t , b o u n d i n g w i t
h aw k w ar d , i n h u m an m o v e m e n
t s . D e t o n at i o n s f l as h e d ,

In f e r n o s s p ar k e d , r an d o m b o l
t s o f m ag i c p l u m e d an d f ad e d .
A t t h e i r h e ar t s t al k e d t h e s h o r
t , r o u n d f i gu r e o f Q u e n t i n

M ak e p e ac e .

"O f f t h e y g o ," t h e i m p r e m ar k
e d . "A b o u t f o r t y - o d d , I'd s ay .

Someofthemarestillabitun certainontheirfeet,like

newborncalves.They'll getusedtoit,I'msure."

Nathanielsighed."Verywel ."

"Secondquestion,boss.You 'llfindacacheofweaponsupt hestairs,thirddooronthelef t.Thirdquestion—"

"Yes?Whereisshe?"

"Upstairs,takearight,pastth eHalofStatues.Doorstraigh tahead.Here,Icanshowyouif

youlike."Apicture

formed:aWhitehaladministrator'sstudy.Onthefloor,inapentacle,agirllayverystil
.

"Closerin,"Nathanielordered."Canyougetcloserintoher?"

"Yep.Butit'snotpretty.Itisthesamegirl,mind.Don'tthinkit'snot.There.SeewhatImean?Icouldn'tbesureat

first,butIrecognizedtheclothes...."

"O h , K itty ," N at h an i e l s ai d .

30

Y ou took y ou r tim e K i t t y t h o u g h t .

W hat d o y ou m ean ? Y ou ' ve on ly j u st arrived .

R u bbish! I' ve been f loatin g here f orever. T hey ' ve been al arou n d m e, tel in g m e to g o, an d that I was n othin g an d

shou ld n ' t bother look in g , an d I beg an to believe them , B artim aeu s. I was j u st g ivin g u p c om p letely when y ou c am e to

m e j u st n ow.

G ivin g u p ? Y ou ' ve n ot been here m ore than a f ew sec on d s. E arth tim e, that is. It d oesn ' t work the sam e way on this

sid e. M ore loop ed . I w o u l d try to ex p lain it, bu t hey . T he im p ortan t thin g is—y ou ' re here. I d id n ' t thin k y ou ' d c om e.

It wasn ' t so d if f ic u lt. I su p p ose it was bec au se y ou help ed m e throu g h.

It' s hard er than y ou k n ow. Y ou ' re the f irst sin c e P tolem y to su c c eed . It req u ires the ability to sep arate f rom y ou rself ,

whic h is an im p ossibility f or m ag ic ian s, bein g what they are. T hose who f ail g o m ad .

T hat' s m y p roblem n ow, that sep aration . N ot bein g m e.

W hy d on ' t y ou try m ak in g y ou rself a g u ise? S om ethin g to f oc u s on . Y ou m ig ht f eel better.

I' ve alread y m ad e som e! T he on ly on e that work ed was a bal , an d that seem ed to g et the—to g et t h e m an g ry .

W e' re n ot an g ry . D o I seem an g ry to y ou ?

K i t t y c o n s i d e r e d t h e d i s t an t , f l i c k e r i n g i m ag e . It w as a s t at e l y w o m an , d ar k -s k i n n e d , l o n g -n e c k e d , w e ar i n g a t al

h e ad d r e s s an d a l o n g w h i t e g o w n ; s h e s at o n a m ar b l e d t h r o n e . H e r f ac e w as b e au t i f u l an d s e r e n e .

N o, s h e t h o u g h t , n ot at al . B u t y o u 'r e d if f eren t.

I d on ' t m ean her. T hat isn ' t m e —it' s a m em ory . I'm al arou n d y ou . W e 'r e al arou n d y ou . It' s n ot the sam e as on

y ou r sid e of the G ate. T here' s n o d if

f eren c e between the sp irits here. W e' re al on e. An d that in c lu d es y ou n ow.

C o i l s o f m u l t i p l e s h ad e s an d t e x t u r e s s w i r l e d al ar o u n d , as i f i n c o n f i r m at i o n . T h e i m ag e o f t h e w o m an v an i s h e d ;

o t h e r s r e ap p e ar e d . K i t t y c o u l d s e e e ac h o n e a d o z e n t i m e s , as i f r e f r ac t e d i n an i n s e c t 's e y e , b u t s h e k n e w i t w as n o t

t h e i m ag e s t h at w e r e m u l t i p l i e d , b u t h e r s e l f .

I d on ' t lik e this m u c h, s h e t h o u g h t .

T he p ic tu res are m em ories; som e of them m ig ht even be y ou rs. It i s a bit hard to g et y ou r head arou n d , I k n ow.

P tolem y f ou n d it tric k y too, bu t he p erk ed u p when he m ad e him self a shap e. Q u ite artistic it was, a g ood

ap p rox im ation of him self . W hy d on ' t y ou have an other g o?

I c an d o a ball.

I' m n o t c on versin g with a ball. H ave a bit of c on f id en c e.

K i t t y s t e e l e d h e r s e l f an d ap p l i e d h e r w i l l t o t h e s u r g i n g s u

b s t an c e s ; as b e f o r e , s h e m an
ag e d t o c r e at e s o m e t h i n g t h at

ap p r o x i m at e d a h u m an f o r m . It
f e at u r e d a b i g w o b b l y h e ad , a
l o n g t h i n b o d y e n d i n g i n a t r i
an g u l ar m as s t h at m i g h t

h av e b e e n a s k i r t , t w o s t i c k ar
m s , an d a p ai r o f r at h e r t r u n k l i
k e l e g s . It h ad an u n g ai n l y l o o k
.

S e v e r al t e n d r i l s o f m att e r i n
s p e c t e d i t t e n t at i v e l y .

W hat' s that bit?

T hat' s an arm .

O h, rig ht. T hat' s a relief . H m m . . .
Is t h i s how y ou see y ou rself , K itty ?
T here' s seriou s self -esteem issu es g
oin g on

here. H ere' s a tip : y ou r real leg s aren
' t q u ite that thic k . N ot arou n d the an
k les, an y way .

T ou g h, K i t t y t h o u g h t . It' s the
best I c an d o.

G ive y ou rself a f ac e, at least, an d f
or heaven ' s sak e m ak e it a n ic e on e.

K i t t y s t r o v e h ar d an d s u c c e e
d e d i n f o r m i n g a c o u p l e o f p i g
g y e y e s , a l o n g w i t c h l i k e n o s
e , an d a m o u t h c r o o k e d i n a

w o n k y s m i l e .

W el , y ou ' re n o L eon ard o.

A b r i e f i m ag e f l i c k e r e d o n an d o f f c l o s e b y —a b e ar d e d m an s t ar i n g at a w al l .

It wou ld help , K i t t y t h o u g h t s av ag e l y , if I had som ethin g to look at other than all this m ess. W i t h an e x t r e m e e f f o r t ,

s h e m ad e h e r s u r r o g at e b o d y j e r k an ar m o u t at t h e s w i r l i n g m at t e r al ar o u n d .

S o m e o f t h e c u r l i n g t e n d r i l s r e c o i l e d i n m o c k h o r r o r .

Y ou hu m an s are s o in c on sisten t. Y ou c laim to love stability an d ord er, bu t what' s E arth if n ot on e big m ess? C haos,

violen c e, d issen t, an d strif e whic hever way y ou look . It' s f ar m ore p eac ef u l here. B u t m ay be I c an help y ou ou t. M ak e

thin g s a little easier. K eep c on trol of that lovely bod y of y ou rs, n ow. I wou ld n ' t wan t those arm thin g s to f al of f -—that

wou ld ru in its p erf ec tion .

A s K i t t y w at c h e d , n e ar b y r e g i o n s o f t h e f l o w i n g m at t e r u n

derwentatransformation.Flickeringwispsoflight

elongated,broadened,solidifiedintoplanes;coilsandspiralsgrewstraightandtal,branchingoutatrightangles,

joiningothersandredi-viding.Inmomentsthesemblanceofaroomhadformedaroundherbody:aglassyfloor;

squaredpilarsonallsides;beyondthem,stepsleading,downtoalip,thennothingness.Abovewasasimpleflat

roof,alsotranslucent.Beyo

n d t h e r o o f , b e t w e e n t h e p i l ar s , b e l o w t h e f l o o r , t h e r e l e n t l e s s m o v e m e n t o f t h e O t h e r

P l ac e c o n t i n u e d u n ab at e d .

T h e i l u s i o n o f a p h y s i c al s p ac e m ad e K i t t y s u d d e n l y f e ar f u l o f t h e v o i d ar o u n d ; h e r m an n e q u i n c o w e r e d i n t h e c e n t e r

o f t h e r o o m , as f ar f r o m t h e v e r g e s as p o s s i b l e .

H ow' s that?

It' s . . . ok ay . B u t what abou t y ou ?

I am here. Y ou d o n ot n eed to see m e.

B u t I wou ld p ref er it.

O h, very well. I su p p ose I am the host.

F r o m b e t w e e n t h e p i l ar s at t h e e n d o f t h e l i t t l e h al l a f i g u r e s t e p p e d —t h e b o y w i t h t h e ag e l e s s f ac e . W h e r e h e h ad

b e e n at t r ac t i v e o n E ar t h , h e r e h e w as r e s p l e n d e n t l y b e au t i f u l ; h i s f ac e r ad i at e d j o y an d c al m , h i s s k i n s h o n e w i t h l i g h t

an d c o l o r . H e s t e p p e d s i l e n t l y ac r o s s t h e f l o o r an d c am e t o a h al t f ac i n g K i t t y 's w o b b l e -h e ad e d , s t i c k -c h e s t e d , t r u n k -

t h i g h e d f o r m .

T han k s, K i t t y t h o u g h t b i t t e r l y . T hat' s m ad e m e f eel a l o t better.

It' s n ot ac tu ally m e, an y m ore than t h at 's y ou . In f ac t, y ou ' re as m u c h p art of this f orm as I am . T here aren ' t an y

d ivision s in the O ther P lac e.

It d id n ' t f eel that way bef ore y ou c am e. T hey told m e I wasn ' t wan ted , said I was a wou n d .

O n ly bec au se y ou k eep try in g to im p ose ord er on u s—an d ord er m ean s lim itation s. T here shou ld be n o lim

itation s

here: n othin g d ef in ite, n othin g d ef in ed . W hether it' s a c lu m sy stic k f ig u re or a f loatin g bal —or a "hou se" lik e this—t h e

b o y w av e d a c ar e l e s s ar m—it' s alien , an d c an n ot last lon g . It p ain s u s to be restric ted in an y f ashion .

T h e b o y s t e p p e d aw ay f r o m h e r an d l o o k e d o u t b e t w e e n t w o p i l ar s an d t h e r u s h i n g l i g h t s . K i t t y s s u r r o g at e t o t t e r e d

af t e r h i m .

B artim aeu s—

N am es, n am es, n am es! N ow they ' re the u ltim ate restric tion . T hey ' re the worst c u rse of al . E ac h on e is a sen ten c e of

slavery . H e r e we are on e—we have n o n am es. B u t what d o the m ag ic ian s d o? T hey reac h in with their su m m on s;

their word s d raw u s ou t, p iec e by sc ream in g p iec e. As eac h p iec e p asses throu g h, it is d ef in ed : it g ain s a n am e an d

p owers of its own , bu t is sep arated f rom the rest. W hat hap p en s then ? L ik e p erf orm in g m on k ey s, we d o tric k s to

p lease ou r m asters, lest they hu rt ou r f rag ile essen c e. E ven when we retu rn here we are n ever saf e. O n c e a n am e has

been bestowed we c an be c al ed ag ain , an d y et ag ain , u n til ou r essen c e is worn away .

H e t u r n e d an d p at t e d K i t t y 's s e m b l an c e o n t h e b ac k o f i t s b u l b o u s h e ad .

Y ou ' re so d istu rbed by the c o n n e c t e d n e s s of thin g s here that y ou p ref er to c lin g to som ethin g as u n ap p etiz in g as this

m on strosity —n o of f en se I' m su re

—rather than f loat f reely with u s at wil
. For u s, on E arth, it is the reverse. S u
d d en ly

we are c u t of f f rom this f lu id ity , lef
t alon e an d vu ln erable in a world of
vic iou s d ef in ition . B y c han g in g
shap e we g et a

little solac e, bu t it n ever k eep s the p
ain away f or lon g . N o won d er som e
of u s bec om e resen tf u l.

K i t t y h ad i g n o r e d t h e m o n o l o
g u e . S h e s o d i s l i k e d t h e c r u d
e n e s s o f h e r c r e at u r e t h at s h e
h ad b e e n s t e al t h i l y ad j u s t i n g

t h e s i z e o f t h e h e ad , c h an n e l i

n g s o m e o f t h e m at t e r d o w n t o p l u m p u p h e r s p i n d l y t o r s o . S h e 'd r e d u c e d t h e n o s e a

l i t t l e t o o , an d m ad e t h e m o u t h s m al l e r an d l e s s l o p s i d e d . Y e s ... i t w as m ar k e d l y b e t t e r .

T h e b o y r o l e d h i s e y e s .

T his is e x ac t l y what I m ean ! Y ou c an ' t g et y ou r m in d away f rom the n otion that this thin g is in som e way y ou . It' s

n othin g bu t a p u p p et. L eave it alon e.

K i t t y g av e u p h e r at t e m p t t o d r

aw o u t s o m e h ai r f r o m t h e b ac k o f t h e c r e at u r e 's h e ad . S h e t u r n e d h e r f u l at t e n t i o n o n

t h e r ad i an t b o y , w h o s e f ac e w as s u d d e n l y g r av e .

W hy have y ou c om e here, K itty ?

B ec au se that' s what P tolem y d id . I wan ted to p rove m y self , show that I tru sted y ou . Y ou said that af ter he m an ag ed

it, y ou ' d have been hap p y to be his slave. W el , I d on ' t wan t slaves, bu t I d o n eed y ou r help . W hic h is why I' ve c om e.

T h e b o y 's e y e s w e r e b l ac k c r y s t al s f u l o f s t ar s .

In what way d o y ou wish m y help ?

Y ou k n ow why . T hose d e—those sp irits that have brok en f ree. T hey p lan to f al on L on d on , k il its p eop le.

H aven ' t they y et? t h e b o y r e m ar k e d c as u al l y . T hey ar e bein g slow abou t it.

D on ' t be c ru el! In h e r ag i t at i o n , K i t t y 's c r e at u r e s w u n g i t s s t i c k ar m s ab o v e i t s h e ad an d l u r c h e d f o r w ar d ac r o s s t h e

h al . T h e b o y s t e p p e d b ac k i n s

u r p r i s e . M ost of the p eop le in L on d on are in n oc en t! T hey d on ' t wan t the m ag ic ian s an y

m ore than y ou d o. I' m ask in g y ou on t h e i r ac c ou n t, B artim aeu s. It' s they who are g oin g to su f f er when N ou d a' s arm y

g ets loose.

T h e b o y n o d d e d s ad l y .

Faq u arl an d N ou d a are sic k . It' s what hap p en s to som e of u s when we' re su m m on ed m an y tim es. S lavery c orru p ts u s.

O u r p erson alities bec om e bru taliz

ed , d u l , vin d ic tive; we d wel f ar m ore on trivial in d ig n ities su f f ered in y ou r world

than on the won d ers an d p leasu res of this p lac e. H ard to believe, bu t tru e.

K i t t y l o o k e d o u t at t h e f l as h e s o f l i g h t an d t h e i n f i n i t y o f m o v i n g e s s e n c e .

W hat d o y ou ac tu al y d o here? s h e as k e d .

It' s n ot abou t d oin g . It' s abou t bein g . D on ' t ex p ec t to u n d erstan d it: y ou ' re a hu m an —y ou c an on ly see su rf ac es, an d

then y ou wan t to im p ose y ou rself u p on them . An d Faq u arl an d N ou d a an d the rest have been twisted in y ou r im ag e.

T hey d ef in e them selves n ow by their hatred —it' s so stron g , they ac tu al y w an t to be ap art f rom this, p rovid in g they

c an tak e reven g e. In a way it' s a f in al c ap itu lation to the valu es of y ou r world . H ey —y ou ' re g ettin g better at

m an ip u latin g that thin g . . . .

S h i e l d e d f r o m t h e f u l e n e r g i e s o f t h e O t h e r P l ac e , K i t t y w

as f i n d i n g i t e as i e r t o m ak e h e r m an n e q u i n m o v e ab o u t . It

s t r u t t e d t o an d f r o ab o u t t h e l i t t l e h al , s w i n g i n g i t s ar m s an d m o v i n g i t s b al o o n h e ad j e r k i l y f r o m s i d e t o s i d e as i f

ac k n o w l e d g i n g an au d i e n c e . T h e b o y n o d d e d w i t h ap p r o v al .

Y ou k n ow, it' s alm ost an im p rovem en t on y ou r real self .

K i t t y i g n o r e d t h i s . T h e m an n e q u i n s t o p p e d at t h e b o y 's s i d e .

I' ve d on e what P tolem y d id , s h e t h o u g h t . I' ve p roved m y self to y ou . An d y ou an swered m y c al —y ou ' ve ac k n owled g ed

it. N ow I n eed y ou r help to stop what the d e—what Faq u arl an d N ou d a are d oin g .

T h e b o y s m i l e d .

Y ou r sac rif ic e is in d eed g reat, an d in P tolem y ' s m em ory I wou ld be p leased to retu rn the g estu re. B u t there are two

p roblem s that p reven t it. First y ou ' d have to su m m on m e bac k to E arth, an d that m ay be bey on d y ou n ow.

W hy ? K i t t y as k e d . T h e b o y w as l o o k i n g at h e r w i t h a g e n t l e , al m o s t k i n d l y e x p r e s s i o n . It u n n e r v e d h e r . W hy ? s h e

as k e d ag ai n .

T he sec on d p roblem , t h e b o y w e n t o n , is m y u n f ortu n ate weak n ess. I haven ' t been here lon g en ou g h to rebu ild m y

en erg ies f u lly , an d Faq u arl—let alon e N ou d a—has m ore p ower in on e of his big toes than I d o rig ht at this m om en t.

I' m d isin c lin ed to en ter in to slavery that is g u aran teed to be f atal. I' m

sorry , bu t there it is.

It won ' t be slavery . I told y ou that bef ore. T h e m an n e q u i n s t r e t c h e d o u t an ar m t o w ar d t h e b o y i n a h e s i t an t g e s t u r e .

B u t it w o u l d be f atal.

K i t t y 's m an n e q u i n l o w e r e d i t s ar m . O k ay . W hat if we had the S taf f ?

G lad ston e' s? H ow? W ho' d u se it? Y ou c ou ld n ' t.

N athan iel' s try in g to g et hold of it rig ht n ow.

Al very wel , bu t c ou ld he u se—W ait a m in u te! T he r ad i an t f e at u r e s o f t h e b o y c o n t o r t e d , s l i p p e d o u t o f t r u e , as i f t h e

c o n d o l i n g i n t e l i g e n c e h ad d r aw n b ac k i n s h o c k ; an i n s t an t l at e r t h e y w e r e as p e r f e c t as b e f o r e . L et' s g et this straig ht.

H e told y ou his n am e ?

Y es. N ow—

I lik e that . . . I l i k e that! H e' s been g ivin g m e g y p f or y ears, sim p ly bec au se I c o u l d have sp il ed the bean s, an d n ow

he' s tellin g an y old broad he m eets, f ree of c harg e! W ho e l s e k n ows? Faau arl? N ou d a? D id he d ec k his n am e ou t in

n eon lig hts an d p arad e it rou n d the town ? I ask y ou ! An d I n ever told an y on e!

Y ou let it slip last tim e I su m m on ed y ou .

W el , ap art f rom that.

B u t y ou c o u l d have told his en em ies, c ou ld n ' t y ou , B artim aeu s? Y ou ' d have f ou n d a way to harm him if y ou ' d real y

wished it. An d N athan iel k n ows that too, I thin k . I had a talk with him .

T h e b o y l o o k e d t h o u g h t f u l . H m m . I k n ow all abou t those talk s of y ou rs.

An y way , he' s g on e f or the S taf f ; I wen t to f in d y ou . T og ether—

T he lon g an d the short of it is that n o n e of u s are u p to a f ig ht. N ot an y m ore. Y ou won ' t be, f or starters. As f or

M an d rak e, last tim e he tried to u se the S taf f he k n oc k ed him self ou t. W hat m ak es y ou thin k he' ll have the stren g th to

d o it n ow? H e was ex hau sted last tim e I saw him . . . . M ean while, m y essen c e is so shot I c ou ld n ' t m ain tain a sim p le

f orm on E arth, let alon e be u sef u l. I p robably c ou ld n ' t even withstan d the p ain of m aterializ in g in the f irst p lac e.

Faq u arl' s g ot on e thin g rig ht. H e d oesn ' t have to worry abou t the p ain . N o, let' s f ac e f ac ts, K itty — A p au s e . W hat?

W hat' s the m atter?

T h e m an n e q u i n h ad t i l t e d i t s b u l b o u s h e ad an d w as r e g ar d i n

g t h e b o y w i t h an ai r o f q u i e t i n t e n t n e s s . T h e b o y b e c am e

u n e as y .

W hat? W hat are y ou —? O h. N o. Absolu tely n o way .

B u t, B artim aeu s, it wou ld p rotec t y ou r essen c e. Y ou wou ld n ' t f eel an y p ain .

U h-u h. N o.

An d if y ou c om bin ed y ou r p ower with his, m ay be the S taf f —

N o.

W hat wou ld P t o l e m y have d on e?

T h e b o y t u r n e d aw ay . H e c r o s s e d t o t h e n e ar e s t p i l ar an d s at d o w n o n t h e s t e p s , l o o k i n g o u t o v e r t h e s w i r l i n g v o i d .

P tolem y showed m e the way it m i g h t have been , h e r e m ar k e d at l as t . H e thou g ht he wou ld be the f irst of m an y —bu t

in two thou san d y ears y ou , K itty , are the on ly on e who' s f ol owed him . T he on ly on e. H e an d I c on versed as eq u als f or

two y ears. I help ed him ou t f rom tim e to tim e; in retu rn he let m e ex p lore y

ou r world a little. I wan d ered as f ar as the

Fez z an oasis an d the p illared hal s of Ax u m . I f loated over the white c rests of the Z ag ros M ou n tain s an d the d ry ston e

g u lc hes of the H ej az d eserts. I f lew with the hawk s an d the c irru s c lou d s, hig h, hig h over earth an d sea, an d took with

m e m em ories of those p lac es when I retu rn ed hom e.

A s h e s p o k e , l i t t l e f l i c k e r i n g i m ag e s d an c e d b e y o n d t h e p i l ar s o f t h e h al . K i t t y c o u l d n o t

m ak e t h e m o u t , b u t s h e h ad

l i t t l e d o u b t t h e y s h o w e d f r ag m e n t s o f t h e w o n d e r s h e h ad s e e n . S h e s e n t h e r m an n e q u i n t o s i t b e s i d e h i m o n t h e

s t e p ; t h e i r l e g s d an g l e d o u t o v e r n o t h i n g n e s s .

T he ex p erien c e, t h e b o y c o n t i n u e d , was ex hilaratin g . M y f reed om ec hoed that of m y hom e, while m y in terest was

rou sed by what I saw. T he p ain I f elt was n ever too p ressin g , sin c e I was able to retu rn here when I wished . H ow I

d an c ed between the world s! It was a g reat g if t that P tolem y g ave m e, an d I have n ever f org otten it. I k n ew him f or

two y ears. An d then he d ied .

H ow? K i t t y as k e d . H ow d id he d ie?

A t f i r s t n o an s w e r c am e . T h e n :

P tolem y had a c ou sin , the heir to the thron e of E g y p t. H e f eared m y m aster' s p ower. S everal tim es he attem p ted to

g et rid of him , bu t we—the other d j in

n an d I—stood in his way . O u t am o n g t h e s w i r l i n g m at t e r K i t t y g l i m p s e d

r e c u r r i n g i m ag e s o f m o r e t h an u s u al c l ar i t y : f i g u r e s c r o u c h i n g o n a w i n d o w l e d g e , h o l d i n g l o n g c u r v e d s w o r d s ;

d e m o n s f l i t t i n g o v e r n i g h t t i m e r o o f s ; s o l d i e r s at a d o o r . I wou ld have tak en him f rom Alex an d ria, p artic u larly af ter his

j ou rn ey here had ren d ered him m ore vu ln erable. B u t he was stu bborn ; he ref u sed to g o, even when R om an m ag ic ian s

arrived in the c ity an d were hou sed by his c ou sin in the p alac e c itad el. B r i e f f l as h e s i n t h e v o i d : s h ar p t r i an g u l ar s ai l s ,

s h i p s b e l o w a l i g h t h o u s e t o w e r ; s i x p al e m e n i n c o ar s e b r o w n c l o ak s s t an d i n g o n a q u ay .

It p leased m y m aster, t h e b o y w e n t o n , to be c arried abou t the c ity m ost m orn in g s, to let the sc en ts of the m ark ets

d rif t over him —the sp ic es, f lowers, resin s, hid es, an d sk in s. All the world was p resen t in Alex an d ria, an d he k n ew it.

B esid es, the p eop le loved him . M y f el ow d j in n an d I c arried him in his p alan q u in . H e r e K i t t y c au g h t t h e s u g g e s t i o n o f

a c u r t ai n e d c h ai r , s u s p e n d e d o n p o l e s . D ar k s l av e s s u p p o r t e d i t . B e h i n d w e r e s t al s an d p e o p l e , b r i g h t t h i n g s , b l u e

s k y .

T h e i m ag e s w i n k e d o u t ; t h e b o y s at s i l e n t o n t h e s t e p .

O n e d ay , h e c o n t i n u e d , we took him to the sp ic e m ark et—his f avorite p lac e, where the sc en ts were m ost in tox ic atin g .

W e were f oolish to d o so; the streets were n arrow, c log g ed with p eop le. P rog ress was slow. K i t t y s aw a l o n g , l o w s t al

s t u d d e d w i t h r ac k s o f w o o d e n b o x e s , e ac h f i l e d w i t h c o l o r e d s p i c e . A b ar r e l m ak e r s at c r o s s -l e g g e d b e f o r e an o p e n

d o o r , f i x i n g s t r u t s i n t o a m e t al r i n g . O t h e r i m ag e s c am e an d w e n t : h o u s e s , p ai n t e d w h i t e ; g o at s m i l i n g am o n g

c r o w d s ; c h i l d r e n f i x e d m i d r u n ; t h e c h ai r ag ai n , i t s c u r t ai n s s h u t .

In the c en ter of the m ark et I sp otted som ethin g m ovin g on a roof u p ahead . I g ave m y p ole to P en ren u tet, bec am e a

bird , rose u p to c hec k . Above the roof s I saw—

H e b r o k e o f f . T h e f ab r i c o f t h e O t h e r P l ac e w as b l ac k as s y r u p ; i t s w i r l e d an g r i l y , s l o w l y , l i t b y l i g h t n i n g f l as h e s . A n

i m ag e l i n g e r e d —r o o f t o p s s t r e t c h i n g aw ay , b l e ac h e d b o n e -w h i t e b y a d az z l i n g s u n . A c r o s s t h e s k y d ar k f i g u r e s h u n g i n

s i l h o u e t t e — g r e at w i n g s s p r e ad , l o n g t ai l s o u t s t r e t c h e d ; h e r e an d t h e r e l i g h t g l i n t e d o n ar m o r e d s c al e s . N o w K i t t y s aw

h o r r o r s : a s n ak e 's h e ad , a w o l f 's s n o u t , a s k i n l e s s f ac e w i t h b ar e d t e e t h g r i n n i n g . T h e p i c t u r e v an i s h e d .

T he R om an m ag ic ian s had su m m on ed m an y d j in n . Af rits too. T hey c am e at u s f rom al sid es. W e were f ou r d j in n .

W hat c ou ld we d o? W e stood an d f ou g ht. T here in the street, am on g the p eop le, we stood an d f ou g ht f or him .

A final

confusion of images, rapidly changing and out of focus—smoke, explosions, blue-green energies crackling up and

down a narrow lane; humans screaming; the demon with the skinless face falling from the sky, clawing at a hole in

the center of its torso. Other djinn too—one had a hippo's head, one an ibis's bill—standing close beside the curtained

chair.

Af f a d ied f irst, t h e b o y c o n t i n u e d . T hen P en ren u tet an d T eti. I threw u p a S hield , sn atc hed P tolem y away . I brok e

throu g h the wal , k il ed those who p u rsu ed m e, f led ac ross the sk y . T hey c am e af ter u s, lik e a swarm of bees.

W hat hap p en ed ? K i t t y as k e d . T h e b o y h ad f al e n s i l e n t o n c e ag ai n . N o i m ag e s ap p e ar e d i n t h e v o i d .

I was c au g ht by a D eton ation . W ou n d ed . C ou ld n ' t f ly . B rok e in to a little tem p le; barric ad ed u s in . P tolem y was in bad

shap e—worse, I m ean , than he had been bef ore. I thin k it was the sm ok e, or som ethin g . T he en em y su rrou n d ed the

tem p le. T here was n o way ou t.

An d then ?

I c an n ot sp eak of it. H e g ave m e a f in al g if t. T hat is the essen c e of the m atter.

T h e b o y s h r u g g e d t h e n . H e l o o k e d ac r o s s at K i t t y 's m an n e q u i n f o r t h e f i r s t t i m e .

P oor P tolem y ! H e thou g ht his ex am p le m ig ht help to rec on c ile ou r

k in d s. H e was c on vin c ed the ac c ou n t of his j ou rn ey wou ld be read an d

f ollowed d own the c en tu ries, an d lead to a u n ion of world s. H e told m e

so, rig ht here! W el , f or al his lig ht an d c larity , he was c om p letely

wron g . H e d ied , an d his id eas have been f org otten .

K i t t y 's c r e at u r e f r o w n e d . H ow c an y ou say that, when I' m here too? An d N athan iel' s read his book , an d M r. B u tton ,

an d —

T he A p o c r y p h a's on ly f rag m en ts. H e n ever su rvived to write the rest. B esid es, p eop le lik e N athan iel read , bu t they

d on ' t believe.

I believed .

Y es. Y ou d id .

If y ou c om e bac k , an d help save L on d on , y ou will be c on tin u in g P tolem y ' s work . H u m an s an d d j in n work in g tog ether.

T hat' s what he wan ted , isn ' t it?

T h e b o y l o o k e d o u t at t h e v o i d

. P tolem y m ad e n o d em an d s on m e.

I' m n ot m ak in g an y d em an d s either. Y ou c an d o what y ou wish. I' m ask in g f or y ou r help . If y ou d on ' t wan t to

resp on d , that' s f in e.

W el . . . T h e b o y s t r e t c h e d o u t h i s t h i n b r o w n ar m s . It' s ag ain st m y better j u d g em en t, bu t it w o u l d be n ic e to settle

sc ores with Faq u arl. W e' d n eed the S taf f , m in d . U seless withou t the S taf f . An d I' m n ot stay in g lon g , esp ec ial y if I' m

c oop ed u p in —

T han k y ou , B artim aeu s! In a s w e l l o f g r at i t u d e , K i t t y 's m an n e q u i n l e an e d ac r o s s an d f l o p p e d i t s s t i c k ar m s o u t ar o u n d

t h e b o y 's n e c k . T h e b u l b o u s h e ad r e s t e d b r i e f l y ag ai n s t h i s s l i m , d ar k o n e .

Al rig ht, all rig ht. D on ' t g et sop p y . Y ou ' ve m ad e y ou r sac rif ic e. N ow I su p p ose it' s m y tu rn .

F i r m l y , b u t w i t h r e s t r ai n t , t h e b o y e x t r i c at e d h i m s e l f f r o m t h e m e s s o f l i m b s an d s t o o d u p o n t h e s t e p .

Y ou ' d better g et bac k , h e s ai d . B ef ore it' s too late.

T h e m an n e q u i n l o o k e d u p , h e ad t w i s t e d ac c u s i n g l y , t h e n s p r an g t o i t s f e e t i n a f u r y .

W hat d o y ou m ean , ex ac tly ? Y ou k e e p say in g this. W hat sac rif ic e?

I thou g ht y ou k n ew. I' m sorry .

W hat? I' m g oin g to thu m p y ou in a m in u te.

H ow? Y ou haven ' t an y han d s.

O r—or—I' ll p u sh y ou of f the ed g e. J u st t e l m e.

T he tru th is, K itty , the O ther P lac e is n ot c on d u c ive to hu m an s. In the sam e way that m y essen c e su f f ers on E arth, so

y o u r essen c e su f f ers here.

M ean in g ?

M ean in g y ou have wilf u l y sep arated y ou rself f rom y ou r bod y . N ot f or too lon g , whic h is to y ou r ad van tag e. P tolem y

stay ed f ar lon g er, ask in g q u estion s, alway s ask in g q u estion s. H e was here twic e the tim e that y ou have been . B u t . . .

B u t? C om e o n .

T h e m an n e q u i n l e ap e d f o r w ar d , ar m s o u t s t r e t c h e d , h e ad t h r u s t o u t ag g r e s s i v e l y . T h e b o y s t e p p e d b ac k t o t h e f i n al

s t e p , t e e t e r i n g o n t h e e d g e o f t h e v o i d .

D on ' t y ou see how g ood y ou ' re bec om in g at m an eu verin g that thin g ? Y ou were hop eless at f irst. Alread y y ou ' re

f org ettin g y ou r earthly ties^ W hen P tolem y g ot bac k , he' d f org otten alm ost every thin g . H e c ou ld n ' t walk , c ou ld barely

u se his lim bs. . . . T ook him al his stren g th even to su m m on m e ag ain . An d that' s n ot al . W hile y ou ' re here, bac k on

E arth y ou r bod y ' s bu sy d y in g . C an ' t real y blam e it, c an y ou ? It' s been aban d on ed . B etter g et bac k f ast, K itty . B etter

g et bac k f ast.

—B u t how? s h e w h i s p e r e d . I d on ' t k n ow how.

F e ar f l o o d e d h e r ; h e r m an n e q u i n , h e r b u b b l e -h e ad e d c r e at u r e , s t o o d d i s c o n s o l at e o n t h e s t e p . T h e b o y s m i l e d ,

s t e p p e d f o r w ar d an d k i s s e d i t o n t h e f o r e h e ad .

T hat' s easy , B ar t i m ae u s s ai d . T he G ate' s stil op en . I c an d ism iss y ou . R elax . W ork ' s over. Y ou ' ve d on e y ou r bit.

H e s t e p p e d aw ay . T h e m an n e q u i n , t h e b o y , an d t h e p i l ar e d h al l e x p l o d e d i n t o w i s p s an d t r ai l s . K i t t y b u r s t ac r o s s t h e

m ae l s t r o m o f t h e O t h e r P l ac e , am o n g t h e l i g h t s an d w h i r l i n g c o l o r s . S h e d r i f t e d , d r i f t e d . A l ar o u n d h e r w as t h e

w e i g h t l e s s n e s s o f d e ath .

Part Two

Alexandria: 124 B.C.

A h o p , a l i mp —w e f e l l u p t h e s t e p s b e t w e e n t h e c o l u mn s . A h e ad o f u s , a d o o r o f b r o n z e , g r e e n w i t h ag e . I s h o v e d i t

o p e n , p i t c h e d f o r w ar d i n t o t h e s an c t u ar y o f t h e g o d . C o o l , d an k ai r , n o w i n d o w s . I p u s h e d t h e d o o r s h ut an d s l am m e d

f as t an an c i e n t b o l t . E v e n as I d i d s o , s o m e t h i n g c o l l i d e d ag ai n s t t h e o t h e r s i d e .

I p u t a S e al u p o n t h e d o o r f o r n e at n e s s ' s ak e , t h e n s e n t a W i s p -l i g h t f l ar i n g ag ai n s t t h e c e i l i n g , w h e r e i t h u m m e d and

f l i c k e r e d w i t h a p i n k i s h g l o w . A t t h e e n d o f t h e r o o m a m e t al s t atu e o f a b e ar d e d c o v e l o o k e d at u s w i t h g r av e

d i s ap p r o v al . B e y o n d t h e d o o r , an d al ar o u n d t h e s an c t u ar y , c am e t h e t h w ac k o f l e at h e r w i n g s .

I l ai d m y m as t e r b e n e at h t h e W i s p -l i g h t and b e n t m y m u z z l e c l o s e . H i s b r e at h i n g c am e e r r at i c al y . B l o o d s e e p e d

againsthisclothes.Hisravaged face, alwealsandwrinkles likeanancientfruit, wasble achedofcolor.

Hiseyesopened;heraisedhimselfononearm."Steady," Isaid."Saveyourstrength."

"Idon'tneedto, Bartimaeus," hesaid, usingmytruename."Notanymore."

Theliongaveagrowl."None ofthattalk," Isaid."Thisiscaledtactics.We'rehavingarest. I'llbreakusoutofherein

aminute."

H e c o u g h e d . B l o o d c a m e u p .
"T o b e h o n e s t , I d o n ' t t h i n k I c
o u l d t a k e a n o t h e r o f y o u r f l i g
h t s ."

"O h , g o o n . It ' l b e e v e n m o r e i n
t e r e s t i n g w i t h j u s t o n e w i n g .
T h i n k y o u c o u l d f l a p a n a r m ? "

"N o . W h a t h a p p e n e d ? "

"It w a s t h i s s t u p i d m a n e ! I d i d n
' t s e e t h a t d j i n n i c o m i n g f r o m t
h e s i d e . H e a m b u s h e d u s ; g o t
m e w i t h a D e t o n a t i o n !

T h a t ' s t h e l a s t t i m e I w e a r o n e
a s b u s h y a s t h i s ."

Therewasasmallgratingupnearthetopoftheoldsmoothwal.Severalshadowswheeledacrossitsstripsoflight.

Somethingheavylandedonthe roofabove.

Ptolemycursedsoftlyunderhisbreath.Thelionfrowned."What?"

"Backatthemarket.Idroppedtheparchment.Mynotesontheo therPlace."

Isighed.Icouldsensethemovementallaround,theclick-clackofclawonstone,thesm

allskitteringsofscales

acrossthetheroofstiles;Icould hearthewhisperingsinLatin .Ivisualizedthem,clingingt oeverysurfaceofthebuildin g

likegiantflies."That'sunfor tunate,"Isaid,"butit'snotour mainconcern."

"I'venotfinishedmyaccount, "hewhispered."Nothing'sle ftinmyroomsbutfragments."

"Ptolemy,itdoesn'tmatter."

"Butitdoes!Thiswasgoingt

o m a k e t h i n g s d i f f e r e n t . I t w as g o i n g t o c h an g e t h e w ay m a g i c i an s w o r k e d . I t w as g o i n g

t o e n d y o u r s l av e r y ."

T h e l i o n l o o k e d d o w n at h i m . "L e t 's b e fr an k , " I s ai d . "M y s l av e r y — an d m y l i f e — ar e g o i n g t o e n d i n ... o h ,

ap p r o x i m at e l y t w o m i n u t e s ."

H e fr o w n e d . "N o t s o , B ar t i m ae u s ."

T h e w al s e c h o e d t o t h e m u ff l e d s o u n d o f b l o w s . "Y e s s o ."

"I c an't g e t o u t , b u t y ou c an ."

"W i t h this w i n g ? Y o u m u s t b e —A h ... I s e e ." T h e l i o n s h o o k i t s h e ad . "N o t a c h an c e ."

"I'm t e c h n i c al y y o u r m as t e r , d o n't f o r g e t . I s ay y o u c an g o . I s ay y o u will g o ."

B y w ay o f r e p l y , I r o s e , s t o o d i n th e c e n t e r o f th e l i t t l e t e m p l e , an d l e t o u t a r o ar o f d e f i an c e . T h e b u i l d i n g s h o o k ; f o r

a c o up l e o f s e c o n d s af t e r w ar d al ac t i v i t y o u t s i d e w as s t i l l e d . T h e n i t i n d u s t r i o u s l y r e s u m e d ag ai n .

I s n ap p e d m y t e e t h t o g e t h e r n as t i l y . "In a f e w m o m e n t s , " I s ai d , "t h e y 'r e g o i n g t o b r e ak t h r o u g h , an d w h e n t h e y d o ,

t h e y 'l l e ar n t o f e ar t h e p o w e r o f B ar t i m ae u s o f U r u k ! A n y h o w —w h o k n o w s ? I'v e t ak e n o u t s i x d j i n n at o n c e b e f o r e

n o w ."

"A n d h o w m an y ar e o u t t h e r e ? "

"O h , ab o u t t w e n t y ."

"R i g h t . T h at s e t t l e s i t ." W i t h s h ak i n g ar m s , t h e b o y r o s e t o a s i t t i n g p o s i t i o n . "H e l p m e l e

an b ac k ag ai n s t t h at w al .

C o m e o n ! C o m e o n ! D o y o u w an t m e t o d i e l y i n g d o w n ? "

T h e l i o n d i d as h e w as b i d , t h e n s t r ai g h t e n e d . I t o o k u p m y p o s t fac i n g t h e d o o r , w h i c h , i n t h e c e n t e r , w as g l o w i n g r e d

w i t h an i n t e n s e h e at an d b e g i n n i n g t o b u l g e a l i t t l e . " D o n ' t as k ag ai n , " I s ai d . " I ' m n o t s h i f t i n g ."

" O h , I w o n ' t ask , B ar t i m ae u s ."

S o m e t h i n g i n h i s t o n e m ad e m e s w i v e l r o u n d . I s aw P t o l e m

y g r i n n i n g l o p s i d e d l y at m e , o n e h an d r ai s e d .

I r e ac h e d t o w ar d h i m . "D o n't __"

H e s n ap p e d h i s f i n g e r s , s p o k e t h e D i s m i s s al w o r d s . E v e n as h e d i d s o , t h e d o o r e x p l o d e d i n a s h o w e r o f m o l t e n m e t al ;

t h r e e t al f i g u r e s s p r an g i n t o t h e r o o m . P t o l e m y g av e m e a s m al s al u t e , t h e n h i s h e ad f e l b ac k g e n t l y ag ai n s t t h e

w al . I r o t at e d t o w ar d t h e e n e m y an d r ai s e d a p aw t o s m i t e t h e m , b u t m y s u b s t an c e h ad b e c o

mediffuselikesmoke.

Despitemymostdesperateur gings,Icoulddonothingtoh oldditfirm.Allightaroundme vanished,myconsciousness

departed;theOtherPlacepul edmeaway.Furiously,agains tmywil,IacceptedPtolemy's lastgift.

31

Thefirstfeelingwasthatofte rribleconstriction.Withth esuddenactofwaking,herinf initedimensionswerealat

o n c e r e d u c e d t o a s i n g l e p o i n t . S h e w as c o m p r e s s e d b ac k d o w n t o t h e m ar g i n s o f h e r b o d y , t an g l e d u p w i t h i n i t s

l u m p e n w e i g h t . A m o m e n t o f s u f f o c at i o n , t h e h i d e o u s s e n s at i o n o f b e i n g b u r i e d al i v e —t h e n s h e r e m e m b e r e d h o w t o

b r e at h e . S h e l ay i n d ar k n e s s , h e ar i n g t h e r h y t h m s w i t h i n h e r : t h e b l o o d m o v i n g , t h e ai r w h e e z i n g b ac k an d f o r t h , t h e

b u b b l e s s h i f t i n g an d g u r g l i n g i n s t o m ac h an d b o w e l s . S h e 'd n e v e r r e al i z e d b e f o r e q u i t

e h o w n oisy s h e w as , h o w

h e av y , h o w d e n s e l y p ac k e d . It
s e e m e d an ap p al l i n g c o mp l e x
i t y , an d o n e t h at w o u l d b e q u i t
e i mp o s s i b l e t o o p e r at e .

T h e i d e a o f mov in g i t my s t i f i e
d h e r .

G r ad u al y t h e c o n f u s i o n r e s o l
v e d i t s e l f i n t o v ag u e r e c o g n i
t i o n o f t h e c o n t o u r s o f h e r l i m
b s —t h e k n e e s d r aw n u p al mo s
t

t o h e r w ai s t , t h e f e e t g e n t l y o
v e r l ap p i n g e ac h o t h e r , t h e h
an d s c l as p e d c l o s e ag ai n s t h e

r b r e as t . S h e v i s u al i z e d i t i n

h e r h e ad , an d w i t h th i s , a s e n s
at i o n o f af f e c t i o n an d g r at i t u d
e f o r h e r b o d y c am e f l o o d i n g t
h r o u g h h e r . It w ar m e d h e r :

aw ar e n e s s g r e w . S h e s e n s e d t
h e h ar d n e s s o f t h e s u r f ac e o n
w h i c h s h e l ay ; t h e s o f t n e s s o f
t h e c u s h i o n p i l l o w i n g h e r

h e ad . S h e r e m e m b e r e d w h e r e
s h e w as —an d w h e r e s h e h ad b e
e n .

K i t t y o p e n e d h e r e y e s . E v e r y
t h i n g w as b l u r r e d . F o r a s e c o
n d t h e s w i m m i n g l i n e s o f l i g h

tandshadowbeguiledher;sh
e

thoughtshewasdriftinginth
eOtherPlaceagain....Thens
hesteadiedherselfandconce
ntrated,andslowly,

grudgingly,thelinessnagge
dandstoppedandyieldedupa
pictureofapersonsittingin
achair.

Hesatinaposturefextreme
exhaustion.Hisheadhadslum
pedsideways;hislegslolle
dleftandright.Sheheard

theraspingofhisbreath.His

eyeswereclosed.

A chainhungaboutthisneck;at itsendwasanovalpieceofgold,centeredwithagreen-blackstone.Itroseandfell

withtherhythmicmovementofhischest.Betweenhiskneesalongwoodenstaffrestedatanacutediagonal.One

handwascuppedlooselytosupportit;theotherhunglimplyoverthechairarm.

Afterawhilesheremembereredhisname."Nathaniel?"

Hervoicewassofaintshecouldnotbesurewhethershehadactualymadeanoise,oronlysoundedthewordinher

head.Nevertheless,itseemedtowork.Agrunt,asplutter—themagician'slegsandarmsjerkedasifelectricaly

charged.Thestafffelltothefloor;withsomethingmidwaybetweenaleapandaplunge,hewascrouchingather

side.

Shetriedtosmile.Itwashard.Herfacehurt."Hello,"shesai

d.

Themagicianddidn'tanswer.Hejuststared.

"YougotttheStaffthen,"shesaid,and:"Mythroat'sdry.Gotanywater?"

Stilnoreply.Hisskin,shenoticed,wasreddandchafed,asifhehadbeenoutinahighwind.Hewasgazingather

withextremeattention,yetstillcontrivingtoignoreherwordscompletely.Kittybecameirritated.

"M o v e o u t t h e w ay , " s h e s n ap p e d . "I'm g e t t i n g u p ."

S h e t e n s e d h e r s t o m ac h m u s c l e s , m o v e d an ar m , an d p r e s s e d h e r f i n g e r s t o t h e f l o o r t o p u s h h e r s e l f up . A n o b j e c t

f e l f r o m h e r g r as p w i t h a d u l c l an g . A w av e o f n au s e a f i l e d h e r ; h e r m u s c l e s f e l t l i k e w at e r .

K i t t y 's h e ad f e l b ac k u p o n t h e c u s h i o n . S o m e t h i n g ab o u t h e r w e ak n e s s s c ar e d h e r . "N at h an i e l ..." s h e b e g an .

"W h at ... ? "

Hespokeforthefirsttime."It'salright.Justrestthere."

"Iwanttogetup."

"Irealydon'tthinkyoushould."

"Helpmeup!"Thefurywasfueledbyanxietyblossomingintosuddenterror.Theweaknesswasalwrong."I'mnot

lyinghere.Whatisit?What'shappenedtome?"

"You'llbefineifyoujuststayput...."Histonewasunconvincing.Shetriedagain,pushed

herselfupalittle,colapsed

withacurse.Themagiciansworeintandem."Allright!Here.I'lltrytosupportyourback.Don'ttryandtakeyour

weight.Yourlegswil—There!WhatdidItelyou?DowhatIsayforonce."Hegraspedherbeneathherarms,lifted

herupandswungherround,haulinghertowardthechair.Herlegstrailedbehindher;herfeetscrapedacrossthe

linesofthepentacle.Withscantceremony,Kittyfoundhe

r s e l f d u m p e d i n a s i t t i n g p o s i t i o n . T h e m a g i c i a n s t o o d f a c i n g

h e r , b r e a t h i n g h a r d .

"H a p p y n o w ? " h e s a i d .

"N o t r e a l l y . W h a t ' s h a p p e n e d t o m e ? W h y c a n ' t I w a l k ? "

"T h e y ' r e n o t q u e s t i o n s I c a n a n s w e r . " H e s t a r e d a t h i s b o o t s —l a r g e s c u f f e d l e a t h e r o n e s —t h e n a c r o s s a t t h e e m p t y

c i r c l e . " W h e n I b r o k e i n , K i t t y , " h e s a i d , " t h e r o o m w a s i c y c o l d . I c o u l d n ' t f i n d a p u l s e o n

y o u , an d y o u w e r e n 't

b r e at h i n g , j u s t l y i n g t h e r e . I t h o u g h t y o u w e r e — I r e all y t h o u g h t y o u w e r e d e ad t h i s t i m e . In s t e ad ..." H e r ai s e d h i s

e y e s . "S o . T e l m e . D i d y o u r e al l y — ? "

S h e l o o k e d at h i m f o r a t i m e w i t h o u t s p e ak i n g .

T h e t e n s i o n i n t h e m ag i c i an 's f ac e l o o s e n e d i n t o b l an k as t o n i s h m e n t . H e e x h al e d s l o w l y , an d h al f s at , h al f s l u m p e d

ag ai n s t t h e d e s k ." I s e e , " h e s ai

d."Isee."

Kittyclearedherthroat."I'lte lyouinaminute.First,passm ethatmirror,wouldyou?"

"Idon'tthink—"

"I'dratherlook,"shesaidcris ply,"thanusemyimagination. Sohurryitup.We'vegotthin gstodo."

Noamountofargumentcould dissuadeher.

"Afterall,"shesaidatlast,"it 'snothingverydifferenttow hathappenedtoJakobwiththe

BlackTumbler....Andhe

wasfine."

"That'strue."Themagician'shandswereegrowingtired.Headjustedthepositionofthemirror.

"Icandyethehair."

"Yes."

"Andasfortherest—I'llkindofgrowintoit."

"Yes."

"Inaboutfiftyyears."

"It'sjustlines,Kitty.Justlines.Lotsofpeoplehavethem.Besides,theymightfade."

"Youthink?"

"Yes.Theylookalotlessbadalreadythanwhen Ifirstfoundyou."

"Realy?"

"Definitely.Anyway,lookatme.Checkoutthesebliisters."

"Iwasmeaningtoaskaboutthem."

"Pestilencedidit.WhenIgot

theStaff."

"Oh...Butit'sthe weaknessthatr eallyscaresme,Nathaniel.W hatifInever—?"

"Youwill.Lookatyouwaving yourhandsabout.Youweren 'tdoingthatfiveminutesago."

"Wasn'tI?Oh.Good.Nowyou mentionit,Idofeelalittlest ronger."

"Thereyougo,yousee."

"Butit'sjustsodifficult,"s he said,"tolookinthemirroran dsee...adifferentface.Tosee

thateverything'schanged"

"Noteverything," hesaid.

"No?"

"No.Youreyes.Theyhaven'tchangedatal."

"Oh." Shepeereddubiouslyatthe glass."Youthink?"

"Well,theywerefinebeforeyoustartedsquinting.Takemywordforit." Helowered the mirror,placeditonthetable.

"Kitty," hesaid."Ihavetotellyousomething.Thedemonsh

av e b r o k e n o u t ac r o s s L o n d o n . A f t e r I f o u n d y o u , I t r i e d t o

s e t t h e S t a f f o f G l ad s t o n e g o i n g , b u t "—h e s i g h e d —"I c o u l d n 't m ak e i t . It 's n o t t h e i n c an t at i o n s . I'v e g o t t h e k n o w l e d g e

t h at I d i d n 't h av e b e f o r e . It 's j u s t ... I h av e n 't g o t t h e p h y s i c al s t r e n g t h t o f o r c e m y w i l u p o n i t . A n d w i t h o u t t h e S t aff ,

w e c an 't f ac e u p t o N o u d a."

"N at h an i e l —"

"T h e r e m ay b e o t h e r m ag i c i an s l e f t al i v e an d u n p o s s e s s e d .

I h av e n't g o n e l o o k i n g y e t . B u t e v e n i f w e c an r o u n d u p

s o m e al l i e s an d g e t t h e i r d j i n n o n o u r s i d e , N o u d a's m u c h t o o s t r o n g . T h e S t a f f w as o u r o n l y h o p e ."

"T h at's n o t s o ." K i t t y l e an e d f o r w ar d i n t h e c h ai r . (It w as t r u e w h at h e 'd s ai d — s h e w as m o v i n g a l i t t l e m o r e e as i l y

n o w . T o b e g i n w i t h , e v e r y t h i n g h ad f e l t un c o m f o r t ab l e an d m i s al i g n e d , as i f s h e w e r e o u t o f s y n c w i t h h e r b o n e s an d

s i n e w .) "I d i d n't g o t o t h e O t h e

rPlacejustforfun,"shesaidprimly."YougotttheStaff,IfoundBartimaeus.Nowal

weneedtodoisputthemtogether."Shegrinnedathim.

Themagicianshookhisheadinvexation."Meaningwhat?"

"Ah.Now,you'renotgoingtolikethispart."

32

Thesulphurcloudcontracteddintoanailingcolumnofsmokethatslouchedinthemiddleofthepentacle.Itdribbledu

p

towardtheceilingwiththe awesomeforceofwaterspurt ingfromadrinkingfountain. Twotimorousyeloweyes

materializedintheheartofth esmoke.Theyblinkedanxio usly.

Iwashavingsecondthoughts .

Thedark-hairedyouthstoodi nthepentacleopposite,lean ingheavilyontheStaff.Ireco gnizeditstraightaway.

Difficultnotto:theauraofthetalismanbeatuponmycirclewiththeintensityofasolarflare.Myessencequailedat

theproximity.

Bad.Iwastooweak.Ishouldnothaveagreedtothis.

Mindyou,itlookedtomeasifthemagicianwasofsimilarmind.Hisfacewasthedelightfullcoloroffoffmilk.

Hedrewhimselfupasbesthecouldandtriedtolookimposing."Bartimaeus."

"N at h an i e l ."1

1. W e each strov e to m ak e the sounds curt, assertiv e, g rowling . N either of us q uite succeeded.

H is v oice had the k ind of pitch usually reserv ed for b ats and dog whistles, while m ine warb led

lik e that of an elderly spinster req uesting a cucum b er sandwich with her cup of tea.

H e c l e ar e d h i s t h r o at , g az e d at t h e f l o o r , s c r at c h e d h i s h e ad , h u m m e d a f e w o d d n o t e s . . . d i d e v e r y t h i n g i n f ac t b u t

l o o k m e s t r ai g h t i n t h e e y e l i k
e a m an s h o u l d . N o t t h at I w as m
u c h b e t t e r . In s t e ad o f b i l o w i
n g o m i n o u s l y , t h e c o l u mn

o f s m o k e s e e m e d i n t e n t o n w i
n d i n g i t s r i s i n g t h r e ad s i n t o
p r e t t y b r ai d y p at t e r n s . If w e 'd
b e e n l e f t t o o u r s e l v e s , I'd

p r o b ab l y h av e e n d e d u p k n i t t
i n g a v i r t u al c ar d i g an o r s o me
t h i n g , b u t af t e r a f e w s e c o n d s
o f h i g h - q u al i t y d i t h e r i n g , a

r u d e i n t e r r u p t i o n c ame .

"G e t on w i t h i t ! "

Noprizesforguessingwho thatwas.Magicianandsmokes wiveledintheircircles,cou ghingandmuttering.Bothwo re

expressionsofwoundedagg ravation.

"Iknow,Iknow,"Kittysaid. "Idon'tenvyeitherofyou.Jus tdoit.Wehaven'ttimetowast e."

Imustsayshewaslookingrath ermoresprythanIexpected. Okay,shewasabitfraillooki ng,andshehadgrayhair

andherskinwaslinedandaged,butshewasnothinglikePtolemyhadbeen.Andhereyeswereasbrightasabird's;

theyshonewiththelightofwhatthey'dseen.Iregardedherwithmingledreverenceandcompassion.

"Keepyourknickerson," Isaid."We'regettingtoit."

"That'sright," Nathanielagreed."Can'trusthesethings."

"Likeyou'dknow," shesnorted."What'stheholdup?"

"W e l , " h e b e g an . "It's j u s t —"

"F o r m y p ar t , " I s ai d , i n t o n e s o f q u i e t d i g n i t y , "I ag r e e d t o th i s p r o p o s al o n th e as s u m p t i o n th at m y h o s t w o u l d b e o f

m o d e r at e p h y s i c al q u al i t y . N o w , h av i n g v i e w e d h i m , I'm h av i n g d o u b t s ."

T h e m ag i c i an g l ar e d at m e . "W h at's th at s u pp o s e d t o m e an ? "

"W e l , y o u w o u l d n't b u y a h o r s e w i th o u t s e e i n g i t , w o u l d y o u ? I'm al o w e d an i n s p e c t i o n . L e t's s e e y o u r t e e th ."

"G e t l o s t ! "

"I'm s o r r y , " I s ai d . "H e 's r u b b i s h . C an b ar e l y s t and . S k i n 's b e e n b u r n e d b y a P e s t i l e n c e . A n d h i s s h o u l d e r 's b l e e d i n g . I

b e t h e 's g o t w o r m s an d al ."

T h e g i r l f r o w n e d . "W h at 's t h at ab o u t h i s s h o u l d e r ? W h e r e ? "

N at h an i e l m ad e a d i s m i s s i v e g e s t u r e , an d w i n c e d . "It 's n o t h i n g . N o t a p r o b l e m ."

"W h y d i d n 't y o u t e l m e ? "

"B ec au se" h e s n ar l e d , "as y o u k

e e p s ay i n g , w e h av e n 't g o t t i m e ."

"F ai r p o i n t , " I s ai d .

"In f ac t , I'm n o t s u r e I w an t t o g o ah e ad w i t h i t e i t h e r , " t h e m ag i c i an c o n t i n u e d , r e w ar d i n g m e w i t h an u n p l e as an t

l o o k . "I d o n 't s e e h o w i t c o u l d p o s s i b l y w o r k . H e 's f ar t o o w e ak t o h e l p w i t h t h e S t aff , as w e l as b e i n g u t t e r l y v i l e i n a

t h o u s an d w ay s . H e av e n k n o w s w h at d am ag e h e 'd d o t o m e ! It 's l i k e i n v i t i n g a h e r d o f h o g s t o c o m e an d l i v e i n y o u r

b e d r o o m."

"Is t h at s o ? W e l , I' m n o t t o o e n am o r e d o f b e i n g e n c as e d i n s i d e y o u r e ar t h l y g u n g e , " I c r i e d . "T h e r e 's a d ar n s i g h t t o o

m u c h d r i p p y s t u f f g o i n g o n i n t h e r e . A l l t h at p h l e g m an d c o n g e al i n g w ax an d —"

"S h u t u p ! " K i t t y s h o u t e d . Ith as t o b e s ai d , h e r j o u r n e y h ad n 't af f e c t e d h e r l u n g s . "B o t h o f y o u —shu t u p \ M y c i t y i s

b e i n g d e s t r o y e d o ut t h e r e , an d w e n e e d t h at S t af f t o w o r k . T h e o n l y w ay w e c an t h i n k o f t o d

o t h at i s b y c o m b i n i n g

y ou r k n o w l e d g e , N at h an i e l ,
w i t h y ou r e n e r g i e s , B ar t i m ae
u s . A l r i g h t , b o t h o f y o u mi g h
t b e a l i t t l e i n c o n v e n i e n c e d ,

b u t —"

I l o o k e d at N at h an i e l . "H e ar t h
at ? A little, s h e s ay s ."

H e s h o o k h i s h e ad i n d e e p d i s
g u s t . "T e l m e ab o u t i t ."

"—b u t i t w o n't l as t l o n g . H o u r
s at t h e mo s t . T h e n , N at h an i e l ,
y o u c an d i s mi s s B ar t i m ae u s f
o r g o o d ."

"W ai t , " h e s ai d , "I w an t a g u ar an t e e t h at t h i s c r e at u r e w o n't t r y t o d e s t r o y m y m i n d . It'd b e j u s t l i k e h i m."

"Y e ah rig ht" I c r i e d , "an d b u r n m y o n l y t i c k e t o u t o f t h e r e ? I'm n o th an g i n g o u t i n y our h e ad f o r al l e t e r n i t y , p al . D o n't

w o r r y . I n e e d t h at D i s m i s s al . I w o n't t o u c h n o th i n g."

"Y o u'd b e t t e r n o t."

W e g l ar e d at e ac h o t h e r f o r a s p e l .

T h e g i r l c l ap p e d h e r h an d s . "O

hhh-kay.Posturingover?

Good.Ididn'truinmyhealthjusttositherеandwatchyoutwoidiotsfight.Canweplease getonwithit?"

Themagicianssniffed."Alright."

Thesmokecoiledsullenlyskyward."Alright."

"That'sbetter."

Iwouldneverhavedoneithadit notbeenfortheGirl.Butshehadbeenquitecorrect,backthereintheOtherPlace,

t o ap p e al t o m e i n P t o l e m y's n ame . A s s h e'd i n s t an t l y p e r c e i v e d , t h at w as m y w e ak s p o t , m y o p e n w o u n d . A n d t w o

t h o u s an d y e ar s o f ac c u m u l at e d c y n i c i s m h ad n't m an ag e d t o h e al i t u p , t r y as I m i g h t . F o r al t h at l o n g an d w e ar y t i m e

I'd c ar r i e d r o u n d t h e m e m o r y o f h i s h o p e —t h at d j i n n an d h u m an s m i g h t o n e d ay ac t t o g e t h e r , w i t h o u t m al i c e , w i t h o u t

t r e ac h e r y , w i t h o u t s l au g h t e r . L e t's f ac e i t , i t w as a s t u p i d i d e a an d I d i d n't b e l i e v e i t f o r an i n s t an t —t h e r e w as s i m p l y

t o o m u c h e v i d e n c e t o t h e c o n t r ar y . B u t P tolem y h ad b e l i e v e d i t an d t h at w as e n o u g h . J u s t t h e e c h o o f h i s f ai t h w as

p o w e r f u l e n o u g h t o w i n m e o v e r w h e n K i t t y r e p e at e d h i s g r e at g e s t u r e , an d c am e ac r o s s t o m e e t m e .

S h e 'd r e n e w e d h i s b o n d . A n d o n c e that w as d o n e , m y f at e w as s e al e d . N o m att e r w h att h e g r o an s and c u s s i n g o f m y

b e t t e r j u d g e m e n t , I'd h av e t h r o w n m y s e l f i n t o a p i t o f f i r e f o r P t o l e m y , an d t h e s am e w as t r u e f o r K i t t y n ow.

Mindyou...pitoffire?Vatof acid?Bedofnails?Anyofthe mwould'vebeenpreferablet owhatIwasabouttodo.

Inonecirclethemagicianwas busypsychinghimselfup.H ewasgettinghislinesstraigh t,readyingtheincantation.

Intheother,thecolumnofsm okedriftedbackandforthlik eacagedtiger.Inoticedthatb othpentacleshadhad

holesscratchedintheirperi meterstoallowmeimmediate transitfromonesidetotheot her.Boy,theywere

t r u s t i n g ... I c o u l d h av e n i p p e d o u t t h e r e an d t h e n , an d g o b b l e d t h e m b o t h u p b e f o r e d e p ar t i n g w i t h a s m i l e an d a

s o n g . P ar t o f m e itc hed t o d o i t as w e l , j u s t t o s e e t h e e x p r e s s i o n o n m y o l d m as t e r 's f ac e . It h ad b e e n ag es s i n c e I'd

d e v o u r e d a m ag i c i an .2 B u t o f c o u r s e , u n s c h e d u l e d d e v o u r i n g w as o f f K i t t y 's ag e n d a f o r t h e d ay . R e g r e t f u l y , I r e s i s t e d

t h e t e m p t at i o n .

2 . A couple of hundred years, in fact. A

C z ech m aster of m ine had b een inclined to plum pness.

I used to criticiz e him for his lack of condition, g radually b uilding up in him a sense of annoyed

defiance. O ne nig ht I challeng ed him to touch his toes while in his pentacle. H e succeeded

v aliantly, b ut in so doing stuck his b ack side ov er the edg e of the circle, allowing m e to b reak

m y b onds. A nd sure enoug h, he wa s a b it fatty, b ut he still tasted pretty g ood.

T h e r e w as al s o t h e s m al m at t e r

ofmycondition.Evensosim
plefaformasthesmokewaspr
ovinghardtomaintain.I

neededprotection,andInee
deditfast.

"Sometimetoday,"Isaid."Ify
oudon'tmind."

Themagicianrannervousfing
ersthroughhishairandturne
dtoKitty."Anysnidecomme
ntswhenhe'sinthereand

I'lldismisshimrightoff,Staf
fornoStaff.Youtelhim."

Shetappedafoot."I'mwaiting,

Nathaniel."

Acurse,aruboftheface,then hewasoff.Theincantationw asatadimprovised,Ifelt—di dn'thavetheelegance and

refinementIwasusedto.The clause"snarethiscursedddem onBartimaeusandcompressh imwithunmerciful

precision"wasalittlecrude ,forinstance,andcouldhave beenmisinterpreted.Butits eemedtodothetrick.One

momentthecolumnofsmoke wasrisinginnocentlyinitsc

i r c l e , t h e n e x t i t h ad b e e n s u c k e d u p an d o u t w ar d , o v e r t h e

b r e ak i n m y p e n t ac l e , o v e r t h e b r e ak i n h i s , an d d r aw n d o w n , d o w n , d o w n t o w ar d m y m as t e r 's h e ad ....

I b r ac e d m y s e l f . I g l i mp s e d h i ms q u e e z e h i s e y e s t i g h t s h u t ...

P lu n k .

G o n e . T h e p ai n w as g o n e . T h at w as m y f i r s t s e n s at i o n . T h at w as al t h at m att e r e d . It w as l i k e a c u r t ai n h ad s u d d e n l y

b e e n f l u n g o p e n a n d e v e r y t h i n g h a d g o n e f r o m d a r k t o l i g h t . I t w a s l i k e b e i n g p l u n g e d i n t o a n i c e - c o l d s p r i n g . I t w a s a

l i t t l e l i k e r e t u r n i n g t o t h e O t h e r P l a c e a f t e r m o n t h s o f s l a v e r y — t h e c r i s s c r o s s l a t t i c e s o f h u r t t h a t r a n t h r o u g h o u t m y

e s s e n c e j u s t f e l l a w a y l i k e s c a b s , l e f t m e s u d d e n l y f e e l i n g w h o l e . I t w a s l i k e b e i n g r e f r e s h e d a n d r e b u i l t a n d r e b o r n , a l

a t t h e s a m e t i m e .

M y e s s e n c e s u r g e d w i t h a t e r

r i b l e j o y , t h e k i n d I h ad n't f e l t o n E ar t h s i n c e m y f i r s t f e w s u m m o n i n g s b ac k i n S u m e r ,

b ac k w h e n I t h o u g h t m y e n e r g i e s c o u l d c o p e w i t h an y thin g . 3 I h ad n't r e al i z e d h o w m u c h o f m y r e c e n t w e ak n e s s h ad

s i m p l y b e e n d o w n t o t h e ac c u m u l at e d p ai n ; t h e m o m e n t i t w as g o n e I w as t e n t i m e s t h e d j i n n i t h at I'd b e e n b e f o r e .

N o w o n d e r F aq u ar l an d t h e o t h e r s h ad r e c o m m e n d e d i t s o .

3 . T ha t didn' t last long , of course. " O h, B artim aeus, could you j ust irrig ate

the F ertile

C rescent? " " C ould you j ust div ert the E uphrates here and here! " " L ook , while you' re at it, do

you m ind j ust planting a few m illion wheat seeds up and down the flood-plain? Thank s." D idn' t

ev en g iv e m e a dib b le. B y the tim e I g ot to U r I wasn' t surg ing with any of that terrib le j oy, oh

no. M y b ack was k i l l i n g m e.

I l e t o u t a c r y o f t r i u m p h .

W h i c h e c h o e d c u r i o u s l y , as i

f I w e r e t r ap p e d i n a b o t t l e .4

4 . B eliev e m e, I k now al ab out b ottle acoustics. I spent m uch of the six th century in an old

sesam e oil j ar, cork ed with wax , b ob b ing ab out in the R ed S ea. N o one heard m y hol ers. I n

the end an old fisherm an set m e free, b y which tim e I was desperate enoug h to g rant him

sev eral wishes. I erupted out in the form of a sm ok ing g iant, did a few lig htning b olts, and b ent

to ask him his desire. P oor old b oy had

dropped dead of a heart attack . There should b e a

m oral there, b ut for the life of m e I can' t see one.

A n i n s t an t l at e r c am e an other c r y , c u r i o u s l y l o u d an d al ar o u n d . It d e af e n e d m e . W i t h t h i s d i s t r ac t i o n , I aw o k e t o m y

s u r r o u n d i n g s . T o w h at c l o ak e d m e an d s h i e l d e d m e f r o m th e w o r l d . N o t t o p u t t o o f i n e a p o i n t o n i t , i t w as h u m an

f l e s h .

N at h an i e l 's , t o b e p r e c i s e .

Wherethesoupin Faquarl'stu reenhad givenmeamodicumo fprotectionfromthedeathly silveronallsides,

Nathaniel'sbodymadeamuch betterjobofit. Myessencew asimmersed—inboneandblo od and littlethreadythings

thatIsupposemighthavebeen sinew; I'dspreadthroughou thimfromhairtotoe. Ifeltthe pulsingofhisheart, the

endlessflowacrossthevein s, thewhisperywheeze-box ofhislungs. Isawtheflitting driftsofelectricitymoving

b ac k

an d f o r t h ac r o s s t h e b r ai n ; I s
aw (l e s s c e r t ai n l y) t h e t h o u g
h t s t h e y s i g n i f i e d . A n d f o r a
m o m e n t t h e r e I m ar v e l e d — i t

w as l i k e s t e p p i n g i n t o a g r e at
b u i l d i n g — s o m e h o l y m o s q u
e o r s h r i n e — an d g l i m p s i n g i t
s p e r f e c t i o n ; s o m e t h i n g ai r y

b u i l t o f c l ay . T h e n c am e t h e s e
c o n d ar y w o n d e r : t h at s u c h a r
o p e y t h i n g c o u l d ac t u al y w o r
k at al , s o f r ag i l e w as i t , s o

w e ak an d c u m b r o u s , s o t i e d t o
e ar t h .

H o w easy i t w o u l d h av e b e e n t o t ak e c o n t r o l , t o t r e at t h e b o d y l i k e a c ar t o r c h ar i o t — a h u m b l e v e h i c l e t o b e r i d d e n

w h e r e I p l e as e d ! T h e f ai n t e s t o f t e mp t at i o n s r an t h r o u g h m e ... W i t h o u t a s e c o n d 's p au s e , I c o u l d h av e c l o s e d i n u p o n

t h e b r ai n an d d am p e d d o w n i t s l i t t l e e n e r g i e s , s e t m y s e l f t o p u l t h e l e v e r s t o k e e p t h e m e c h an i s m g o i n g . . . . N o

d o u b t N o u d a an d F aq u ar l an d N ae r y an an d al t h e r e s t h ad b e e n p l e as e d t o d o t h i s . It w as t h e i r r e v e n g e i n

microcosm, their triumph over humanity carried out in miniature.

But that was not for me.

Not that it wasn't tempting, mind.

I've never been the biggest fan of Nathaniel's voice. It was just about bearable at a distance, but now it was as if I

were tied up inside a loudspeaker on full volume. When he spoke, there reverberations shummed and quivered through

myessence.

"Kitty!" thatgreatgalumphingelephantofavoicecried."Ifeelsuchenergy!"

Hervoicecametomeslightlymuffled,refractedthroughhisears."Tellme!Whatdoesitfeellike?"

"Itripplesthroughme!Ifeelsolight!Icouldleaptothestars!"5Hehesitated,asifembarrassedathisunmagicianish

enthusiasm."Kitty,"hesaid,"doIlookanydifferent?"

5 . A log ical sensation from his point of v iew. H e had ab sorb ed m e: a b eing of fire and air.

"N o ... E x c e p t y o u 'r e l e s s s t o o p e d . C an y o u o p e n y o u r e y e s ? "

H e o p e n e d t h e m f o r t h e f i r s t t i m e an d I l o o k e d o u t . It w as an o d d d o u b l e v i s i o n t o b e g i n w i t h ; f o r a m o m e n t i t w as al

b l u r r e d an d v ag u e . I s u p p o s e t h at w as h i s h u m an v i s i o n —s o w e ak an d h al t i n g ! T h e n I s h i f t e d m y e s s e n c e i n t o

al i g n m e n t an d t h i n g s g o t c l e

arer.Iratchetedthroughthes
evenplanesandheardNathani
elgasp.

"Youdneverbelieveit!"hebe
lowedinmyear."Kitty!It'sl
ikeeverything'sgotmorecol
ors,moredimensions.And

aroundyouthere'ssuchag
lowl"

Thatwasheraura.Alwaysstro
ngerthanaverage,sinceherv
isittotheOtherPlaceithadw
axedintonoonday

splendor.JustasPtolemy'sh
addone.Ineversawanotherh

u m an o n e l i k e i t . R i p p l e s o f w o n d e r r an t h r o u g h

N at h an i e l 's b o d y ; h i s b r ai n f i z z e d w i t h i t . "Y o u 'r e s o beau tif u ll" h e s ai d .

"O h , o n l y n o w ? " H e 'd r e al y f al e n i n t o t h at o n e . It w as t h e t o n e o f s t u p e f i e d am az e m e n t t h at h ad s u n k h i m .6

6 . N othing chang es. N efertiti was a l wa y s doing that to A k henaton, sidling ov er while he was

doing the crop accounts, ask ing him how she look ed in her nice new headdress. H e nev er

learned.

"No! I only meant—"

I thought it was time to assert myself. The poor sap wasn't doing so well on his own. I took control of his larynx. "Do

you mind keeping your voice down?" I said. "I can't hear yourself think."

He went very quiet then. They both did. I felt him raise a hand to his mouth, as if he'd just hiccuped in company.

"That's right," I said. "Me. Wh

at, didyouthinkI'dbealnicean
dquietforyou?Thinkagain,s
onny.Thereareetwoof

usinthisbodynow.Checkthi
sout."

ToprovemypointIliftedone
ofhisfingersandmethodical
ypickedhisnose.Heuttered
asquawkofprotest."Stop

that!"

Iloweredthearm."That'snot
allIcandoifIputyourmindto
it.Sheesh...it'sastrangelitt
leworldinhere...

Likebeingdunkedinchocolatemousse,exceptwithoutthenicefl avor.Someofyourthoughts,Nathaniel...Wel!If

Kittyonlyknew..."

Hewrestedcontrolofhismouthagain."Enough!I'minchar ge.Weagreedthat.Wemustactinharmony,orrisk

destruction."

Kittyspokefromherchair."He'sright,Bartimaeus.We'vewastedtoomuchtimealready.You'vegottowork

t o g e t h e r ."

"F i n e , " I s ai d , "b u t h e n e e d s t o l i s t e n t o m e. I k n o w m o r e ab o u t F aq u ar l an d N o u d a t h an h e d o e s . I'l b e ab l e t o

p r e e mp t t h e i r ac t i o n s . A n d I c an m o v e h i s b o d y ar o u n d al r i g h t . W at c h t h i s . . . ."

I'd f i g u r e d o u t t h e l e g m u s c l e s n i c e l y ; I b e n t t h e m , s t r e t c h e d t h e m — m y e s s e n c e d i d t h e r e s t . F r o m a s t an d i n g s t ar t

w e l e ap e d o v e r t h e d e s k t o t h e f ar s i d e o f t h e r o o m .

"Notbad,eh?"Ichuckled."Smoothassilk."Ibentthelegsagain,gaveastretch...Atexactlythesametimethe

magicianattemptedtowalkintheoppositedirection.Ourbodyfloundered,onelegupintheair,theotherabout170

degreesakimbofromit.Wedidthesplits,utteredharmoniccriesofmilddiscomfort,andcrashedduponthecarpet.

"Yeah,"Kittysaid."Realysmooth."

IalowedNathanieltoorganiz

ethebusinessofgettingtohis feetagain."Iknewthatwould happen,"hesnarled."This

ishopeless."

"Youjustdon'tliketakingorders,"Isnappedback."Don'tlikeyourslavecalingtheshots.Onceamagician,always

a—"

"Quiet,"Kittysaid.Whetheritwasherauraornot,somethingabouthernowadaysbrookednoargument.Westood

quietandletherspeak."Ifyou

tookamomenttostopsquabbling," shewenton,"you'dseethatyou'reacting

togetherfarbetterthanNoudaandtheothersaremanagingintheirstolenbodies.Faquarlwasathomeinhopkins,

buthe'dhadpractice.Theotherswerealmosthelpless."

"She'sright...."Nathanielsaid."Noudacouldn'twalk."

Ittookadjinnitogettothenubofthematter."Therearetwocrucialdifferences,"Isaid."Ihaven'tdestroyedyour

mind. That's got to help. Also, I know your birth name. I'll bet that gives me deeper access to you than the other

spirits can hope to gain. There you go, you see. I knew it would come in useful one day."

The magician scratched his chin. "Maybe..."

Our philosophical speculations were curtailed by an impatient cry. "Whatever," Kitty said. "Just tell each other what

you plan and you should avoid stupid pratfalls. Now—how

ab o u t t h e S taf f ? "

H o w abou t t h e S t af f ? A l t h i s t i
m e w e h ad h e l d i t i n o u r f i s t , an
d e v e n t h r o u g h N at h an i e l 's i n
s u l at i n g b o n e s an d f l e s h I

c o u l d f e e l i t s i m m an e n c e . I s
e n s e d t h e r e s t l e s s w r i t h i n g
o f t h e g r e at b e i n g s t r ap p e d i n
s i d e i t , d i m l y h e ar d t h e i r

p l e ad i n g t o b e f r e e . T h e l o c k
s an d b i n d i n g s e al s t h at G l ad s t
o n e h ad w r o u g h t u p o n t h e w o o
d w e r e s t i l as s t r o n g as t h e

d ay h e f i x e d t h e m . F o r t u n at e ,
t h at — s i n c e , i f r e l e as e d al at o

n c e , t h e p e n t -u p e n e r g i e s w o u l d h av e l e v e l e d a c i t y

b l o c k .7

7 . U sing an item lik e this is a b it lik e unscrewing the top of a cola b ottle. N o. P erhaps it i s

m oderately m ore ex citing : im ag ine shak ing the b ottle first. Then you slowly, slowly turn the

top. . . . The secret is to turn it enoug h to g et j ust a l i t t l e f i z z . Then the m ag ician can direct

that power where he wants. Too m uch turning or doing it too fast, and your

hands g et stick y.

I n a m anner of speak ing . N otab le b uilding s destroyed b y careless use of talism ans include:

A lex andria' s L ib rary and the P haros L ig hthouse, B ab ylon' s H ang ing G ardens, the citadel of

G reat Z im b ab we, and the U nderwater P alace of K os.

K i t t y w as w at c h i n g u s n ar r o w l y . "D o y o u t h i n k y o u c an ac t i v at e i t ? "

"Y e s , " w e s ai d .

Nathaniel held the Staff with both hands. (I allowed him to manipulate our limbs here. This was his moment—we

needed his formula to start the process, his direction. I was just providing the extra energies, the strength behind his

will.) We stood with legs slightly apart, body braced for the impact. He began to speak. While he did so, I looked

through his eyes around the little room. There was Kitty, sitting in the chair. Her aura more than matched the Staff's.

Beyondwasadoorway,brokeninbysomesmalblast.Piledupontheflooreralln
fernosticksandelemental

spheres.Nathanielhadbroughtthem;he'dusedaDetonationcubetodestroythedoor.He'dbeensoanxiousabout

Kitty,he'dforgottenthepaininhisshoulder,forgottenhiswearinessforatime....

Acuriousthing,feelingaman'smindmove.Itshiftedlikeasleeperinthedark,whileelsewherehisconscious

thoughtschurnedoutthe incantation. Facesfloatedpastme: Kitty's; anolderwoman's; otherstha tIdidn'trecognize

atal. Andthen(ashockthis)—Ptolemy'stoo, clearasabell. Solongsinceihadseenit.... twothousandyears...

Butofcourse, this imagewasnothingbutamemoryofme.

Timetoconcentrate. Ifeltmyenergiesbeingdrawnupon—suckedoutthroughNathaniel'swordsandconvertedinto

bondsaroundtheStaff. Thein

c an t at i o n w as c o m i n g t o i t s c l o s e . G l ad s t o n e 's S t af f s h u d d e r e d . P al e s t r e am s o f l i g h t

r an u p i t s l e n g t h an d c o n g r e g at e d b y t h e c ar v e d p e n t ac l e at t h e e n d . W e f e l t t h e b e i n g s w i t h i n p r e s s i n g ag ai n s t t h e

c r ac k w e h ad c r e at e d i n t h e i r p r i s o n ; w e f e l t G l ad s t o n e 's l o c k i n g m e c h an i s m s s t r u gg l i n g t o s e al t h e m s e l v e s . W e

d e n i e d t h e m b o t h .

N at h an i e l 's c h an t c am e t o an e n d . T h e S t af f p u l s e d o n c e — a b r i l i an t w h i t e l i g h t f i l e d t h e r o

o m o n e v e r y p l an e . W e

s t u m b l e d w h e r e w e s t o o d : N
at h an i e l s h u t o u r e y e s . T h e n t
h e l i g h t f e l b ac k . E q u i l i b r i u
m w as r e ac h e d . A l w as s t i l l . T
h e

r o o m w as q u i e t . A l m o s t t o o f
ai n t l y t o b e h e ar d , t h e S t af f o f
G l ad s t o n e h umm e d i n o u r gr
as p .

A s o n e , w e t u r n e d t o w h e r e K i
t t y s at w at c h i n g i n h e r c h ai r .

"R e ad y n o w , " w e s ai d .

Justforamoment,whentheStaffhadbeenactivatedandthedjinnisenergieshadflowedthroughhimtokeepits

powerincheck,Nathanielremembereredthewoundinhisshoulder.Hegotanindignantstabofpain,asudden

woozinessinhishead...thenhisnewstrengthwaxedinhimonceagain,andthefrailtyvanished.Hefeltbetterthan

hehadeverdone.

Hisbodystilechoedwiththesensationofthatfirstinstant

, w h e n B ar t i m ae u s 's p o w e r s h
ad f u s e d w i t h i n h i m . It w as

l i k e an e l e c t r i c s h o c k , a s u r g
e t h at t h r e at e n e d t o c ar r y h i m o
ff t h e f l o o r , t o d e n y g r av i t y al
t o g e t h e r —al h i s w e i g h t and

w e ar i n e s s f e l aw ay . H e b u r n e
d w i t h l i f e . W i t h s u d d e n c l ar i
t y (h i s m i n d s e e m e d s h ar p e r ,
n e w l y w h e t t e d) , h e p e r c e i v
e d

t h e d j i n n i s n at u r e —u n d e r s t o
o d i t s c e as e l e s s u r g e f o r m o v
e m e n t , c h an g e , an d t r an s f o r m
at i o n . H e s e n s e d h o w h ar s h a

fateitwasforthisnaturetobe forciblyrestricted,tobepe ntupamongearthly,solidthi ngs.Heglimpsed(only

blearilyatfirst)anendlesss uccessionofimages,memori es,imprints,stretchingbac kintoaterribleabyssoftime .It

gavehimafeelingnotunlike vertigo.

Alhissenseswereafire.His fingersfelteachwhorlandgr ainupontheStaff,hisearsc aughtitsminutehum.Bestof

al h e s aw an d u n d e r s t o o d e ac h p l an e —al s e v e n o f t h e m. T h e r o o m w as b at h e d i n t h e c o l o r s o f a d o z e n au r as —f r o m

t h e S t aff, f r o m h i m s e l f an d, m o s t e x t r ao r d i n ar y o f al, f r o m K i t t y. T h r o u g h i t s g l o w h e r f ac e s e e m e d s m o o t h an d

y o u n g ag ai n, h e r h ai r s h o n e l i k e f l am e s. H e c o u l d h av e g az e d at h e r f o r e v e r —

S top that n on sen se rig ht n ow. I f eel q u ite sic k.

If a w r e t c h e d d j i n n i h ad n't b e e n g ab b l i n g i n h i s h e ad.

I wasn ' t d oin g an y thin g , h e t h o u g h t .

N o t m u c h y ou weren ' t. S taf f ' s u p an d ru n n in g . W e n eed to g o.

Y es. W ar i l y ; i n c as e t h e d j i n n i h ad o t h e r p l an s f o r h i s l e g s , N at h an i e l t u r n e d t o K i t t y . "Y o u s h o u l d s t ay h e r e ."

"I'm f e e l i n g s t r o n g e r ."T o N at h an i e l 's al ar m , s h e i n c h e d f o r w ar d i n t h e c h ai r an d , s u p p o r t i n g h e r w e i g h t w i t h s h ak i n g

h an d s , g o t t o h e r f e e t . "I c an w al k , " s h e s ai d .

"Evenso,you'renotcomingwithus."

Hefeltthedjinnistirwithinhismind;itsvoiceechoedfromhismouth.Asbefore,theeffectwasdisconcerting.Also,it

rathertickled."Nathaniel'sright,"Bartimaeussaid."You'refartooweak.Ifhismemory'suptoscratch,whichIdoubt,

theremaystilbeprisonersinthebuilding—ifNoudahasn'tkiledthemal.Whynottrytofindthem?"

Shenodded."Okay.Whatsyourplan?Whydon'tyouusethescryingglasstoseewhereNoudais?"

Nathanielshifted."Wel—"

"He'sbustit,"thedjinnisaid."Settheimpfree.Bigmistake,inmyopinion."

"Icananswerformyself,"Nathanielgrowled.Hefounditparticularlyannoyingtobeinterruptedbyhisownlarynx.

Kittysmiledathim."Goodforyou.Well,seeyoulaterthen."

"Yes...Sureyou'llbealright?
"

Hefeltaburstofimpatiencef
romthedjinni.Hislimbsqui
vered;helongedtogiveale
ap,surgethroughtheair----

"I'llbefine.Here—you'dbett
ertakethis."Heduckedhishe
ad,liftedtheAmuletofSamar
kandfromaroundhisneck

andheldittouttoher."Wearit,
"hesaid."It'llprotectyou."

"Justagainstmagic,mind,"th
edjinniadded."Notagainstp
hysicalattack,ortrippingup

,orbangingyourhead,or

stubbingyourtoe,oranythingliketha t.Butwithinitsstrictlylimitedparameters,itworksprettywel."

Kittyhesitated."Idohavesomeresilience,"shebegan."MaybeIshouldn't—"

"Notenoughtocopewith Nouda," Nathanielsaid."Especialyafterwhatyou'vebeenthrough.Please..."

Sheputtheneck lace overher head."Thanks,"shesaid."Goodluck."

"Youtoo." Therewasnothing moretosay. Themomenthadcome. Nathanielstrodetothedoorway, chinforemost,

eyessomberandpurposeful. Hedidnotlookback. Amoundofdebrisfromthebrokendoorlitteredthefloor; he

steppedcarefulyoveritatth everymomentthatthedjinnif orcedhislegsintoaskipand ajump. Hisfeetcolided;

hetripped, sprawled, droppedtheStaff, androlledheadacrossheelsoverthedebrisan doutthroughthedoor.

S u avely d on e, B ar t i m ae u s s ai d .

N at h an i e l m ad e n o au d i b l e r e s p o n s e . S c o o p i n g up t h e S t aff o f G l ad s t o n e , h e t r u d g e d o ff d ow n t h e c o r r i d o r .

A s c e n e o f i n v e n t i v e d e v as t at i o n un f o l d e d at t h e H al l o f S t at u e s , w h e r e t h e m ar b l e h e ad s o f e v e r y d e c e as e d P r i m e

M i n i s t e r h ad b e e n r i p p e d f r o m t h e i r t o r s o s an d ap p ar e n t l y u s e d t o p l ay a g am e o f b o w l s . T h e b r o k e n C o un c i l t ab l e s at

n e ar t h e w al ; ar o un d i t , o n t h e s e v e n c h ai r s , t h e b o d i e s o f v ar

i o u s m ag i c i an s h ad b e e n p l ac e d i n c o m i c al p o s i t i o n s , as

i f i n g h as t l y c o n c l av e . T h e r o o m h ad s u f f e r e d e v e r y k i n d o f m ag i c al as s au l t , s p o r ad i c an d at r an d o m : ar e as o f f l o o r ,

w al , an d c e i l i n g w e r e b r o k e n , p i e r c e d , b l ac k e n e d , m e l t e d , an d c u t aw ay . S m o k i n g f r ag m e n t s s h o w e d w h e r e t h e r u g s

h ad b e e n . C o r p s e s l ay h i g g e l d y - p i g g e l d y f o r l o r n , b r o k e n , l i k e d i s c ar d e d t o y s . A t t h e f ar e n d o f t h e h al l a g i an t h o l e

h ad b e e n b l as t e d i n t h e s t o n e

w o r k . C o l d ai r c am e g u s t i n g t h r o u g h i t .

"L o o k at t h e p e n t ac l e s , " N at h an i e l s ai d s u d d e n l y .

I am look in g . I' ve g ot y ou r ey es, haven ' t I? An d I ag ree with y ou .

"W h at ? "

W hat y ou ' re thin k in g . T hey ' ve d estroy ed them sy stem atic al y . T hey wan t to m ak e it hard er f or an y m ag ic ian s who' ve

su rvived .

E v e r y p e n t ac l e h ad b e e n s o m

ehowdefacedorruined:the
mosaiccirclestornupandsc
attered,thecarefullinessho
t

tofragmentsbycasualbursts
offire.Itwasjustlikethesce
nesintheForumatRome,whe
nthebarbariansc ame

knockingatthegateandthecit
izensroseupagainsttherulin
gmagicians.They'dbegunbyd
estroyingthepentacles

too....

Nathanielshookhishead."Th
at'sirrelevant,"hesaid."Stic

k t o t h e j o b i n h an d ."

I am . C an I help it if y ou raid m y m em ories?

N at h an i e l d i d n 't an s w e r . H e h ad c au g h t s i g h t o f f ac e s h e r e c o g n i z e d l y i n g am i d t h e r u b b l e . T h e c o r n e r s o f h i s m o u t h

c l am p e d d o w n . "L e t 's g o , " h e s ai d .

W hat' s with the retrosp ec tive g rief ? Y ou d id n ' t lik e them an y way .

"W e n e e d t o s p e e d u p ."

Al rig ht. L eave the m ovem en t to m e.

Thiswasthemostpeculiarse
nsationofall:torelaxyourmu
scles,todeliberatelycutoff
alcommandfromthem,yet

feelthemtenseandspring,m
ovewithgreatharmoniousswe
epsandbounds,feelthemsu
rgingwithanexuberance

thatwasnothuman.Nathaniel
kepttightholdoftheStaff;ot
herthanthis,healowedthedj
innifreerein.Witha

singlebound,hehadcrossed
thehal,landedonafalenbloc
k.Apause;hisheadmovedlef
tandright,thenhewas

aw ay ag ai n—a g i ant s t r i d e , t h e
n an o t h e r ; h e d u c k e d d o w n t h r
o u g h t h e h o l e i n t h e w al , s o ar e
d u p i n t o an o t h e r r o o m ,

d ar k , r av ag e d , f i l e d w i t h d e b
r i s . H e d i d n o t g e t a c h anc e t o f
o c u s o n i t ; h e w as t o o b u s y t r y
i n g t o c o p e w i t h h i s

l u r c h i n g s t o mac h , w i t h t h e t h
r i l l o f t h e e n e r g i e s aw o k e n w
i t h i n h i m . U p i n t o t h e ai r and d
o w n ag ai n—o u t o f t h i s r o o m

and t h r o u g h an o t h e r—p as t a s t
ai r c as e b l o w n t o mat c h w o o d ,
ac r o s s a me s s o f mas o n r y , b o u
l d e r -s i z e d . T h r o u g h a

gapingarchofrupturedstone
—

OutontothestreetsofWhite
hal.

Theylanded,kneesbent,re
adytospringagain.Nathaniel
'sheadwascocked,hiseyess
wiveled;theysawalplanes.

"Ohno..." hewhispered.

OhYES, the djinni said.

Whitehalwasaflame.Abovet
herooftopsthelowestcloud
sglowedpinkandorange;fie
rylightdrainedbetweenthe

m

intochasmsofblacknesspri
ckedwithstars.Thegreatmin
istriesofgovernment,wher
eimperialbusinessnever

ceased,stooddarkandempty.
Allightswereoff,thestreet
lampstoo.Abuildingtothen
orth—wasitttheEducation

Ministry?Nathanielcouldn
ottell—hadafireburningon
anupperfloor.Littleflicker
ingdartsofrednesswavedfr
om

thewindowslikeautumnleav

es. Smokerosetomingle with the clouds. Other blazes crackled in buildings opposite. It

al had an unreal quality, like ill usions in one of Make peace's plays.

The street was empty save for debris, toppled lamps and statues, and—lying dark and small like scalded ants—

scattered human bodies. Her eali mousine had been hurled through the glass front of the Ministry of Transport; there

oneofthevastsculptures"RespectforAuthority"layinruins—itsmonolithicfeetallthatremainedupon its

pedestal.Thewarmemorialshadbeenlikewiseshattered,theroadhalfblockedwithgranite.Fromuptheslowcurve

ofWhitehal,fromthedirectionofTrafalgarSquare,adulexplosionsounded.

"Thatway,"Nathanielsaid.Hislegssprang,hesoaredhigh,divedlow.Athisheightheweaslevelwiththesecond

s t o r y o f t h e b u i l d i n g s ; e a c h t i m e h e d r o p p e d t o e a r t h h e g a v e i t o n l y t h e l i g h t e s t g l a n c i n g t o u c h b e f o r e s p r i n g i n g o n .

H i s b o o t s r a t t l e d l o o s e l y o n h i s f e e t .

"Y o u k n o w I'm w e a r i n g t h e s e v e n - l e a g u e b o o t s , " h e g a s p e d . T h e w i n d t o o k h i s b r e a t h a w a y .

O f c o u r s e I k n o w . I a m y o u f o r t h e m o m e n t , l i k e i t o r n o t . W e d o n ' t n e e d t h e m y e t . A r e y o u r e a d y w i t h t h e S t a f f ?

T h e r e ' s s o m e t h i n g u p a h e a d .

Pastthewarmemorials,past abandonedcars.Thebodyofa wolflayinthemiddleoftther oad,alongwithtattersof

barbedwire,warningsigns,t heremnantsofapolicecordo n.Aheadwas Trafalgar Square .Nelson'sColumnroseinto

thenight,bathedinamustard -yelowglow.Smalexplosion sechoedbackandforthbeneat hit.Amongthestalsand

boothsofthetouristmarket, littleshadowsfledandscatte red.Somethingboundedatth eirheels.

N at h an i e l c am e t o r e s t at t h e e d g e o f t h e s q u ar e . H e b i t h i s l i p . "It 's c h as i n g t h e p e o p l e ."

B it of sp ort. P robably thin k s she' s bac k at the C olosseu m . . . 1 L ook ! T hat m an su rvived a D eton ation . S om e of these

g u y s have resilien c e.

1. S lav es and prisoners of war were g iv en iron k niv es and sent into R om e' s g reat arena to

com b at captiv e dj inn. The R om an elite used to j ust l o v e the com edy chases and all the hilarious

m ethods of death.

N at h an i e l p l ac e d a h an d o v e r h i s e y e s . "Y o u r t h o u g h t s w e n t i n d i f f e r e n t d i r e c t i o n s t h e r e . K e e p i t s i m p l e . I c an't c o p e ."

O k ay . S taf f read y ? W el then , here we g o-o-o-!

B e f o r e N at h an i e l c o u l d p r e p ar e h i m s e l f , h i s l e g s h ad g i v e n a b o u n d : h e w as ac r o s s t h e r o ad , i n am o n g t h e b u r n i n g

s t al l s . D o w n t h r o u g h t h e s m o k e —p as t a c o w e r i n g w o m an an d a s mal c h i l d . A h o p , a l e ap ... S

t r ai g h t ah e ad , s t an d i n g

b y a f o u n t ai n , b e n t l i k e a b e as t —t h e b o d y o f C l i v e J e n k i n s . P al e g r e e n f i r e s b u r n e d b e h i n d h i s e y e s ; h i s m o u t h h u n g

s l ac k , d i s t e n d e d . Y e l o w v ap o r c u r l e d f r o m h i s h an d s .

N at h an i e l s t ar e d i n s h o c k , w i t h d i ff i c ul t y r e g ai n e d c o n t r o l . H e r ai s e d t h e S t aff —

H i s l e g s l e ap e d o n c e m o r e . H e f o u n d h i m s e l f f l y i n g t h r o u g h t h e ai r . A t h i s b ac k , an e x p l o s i o n ; t i n y p i e c e s o f c o n c r e t e

s t r u c k t h e s i d e o f h i s f ac e . H e l an d e d o n t h e h e ad o f a l i o n s t at u e , d i r e c t l y b e n e at h t h e c o l u m n .

"W h at d i d y o u m o v e u s f o r ? " h e s h o u t e d ."I w as j u s t g e t t i n g r e ad y —"

An other sec on d an d we' d have been blown ap art. G ot to be f aster. N aery an ' s an af rit; she d oesn ' t waste tim e. 2

2 . I first encountered N aeryan in A frica during the S cipio cam paig ns. H er fav orite m anifestation

was as a lissom b el y dancer, who

would lure—

"W i l y o u stop d o i n g t h at ? I'm t r y i n g t o c o n c e n t r at e ." N at h an i e l f o c u s e d t h e S t af f , r e ad i e d h i m s e l f . . .

W el , hu rry it u p . S he' s g ettin g c loser. If we had the Am u let we' d be lau g hin g . W hy ' d y ou have to g ive it to K itty

an y how? . . . M m m , y eah, I k n ow. Fair p oin t. Isn ' t it hard to m ain tain an arg u m en t when y ou c an read eac h other' s

m in d ? U h-oh—D eton ation c om in g . I' m g oin g to j u m p .

"G o o n t h e n."

S u re? Y ou d on ' t m in d ?

"J u s t d o i t ! "

O u t f r o m t h e s m o k e c am e a h o r r i b l y h o p p i n g f i g u r e . T h e af r i t w i t h i n h ad m as t e r e d t h e l i m b s , y e t c h o s e t o m o v e o n

t i p t o e r at h e r t h an w i t h h u m an t r e ad . A f l as h o f g o l d e n l i g h t b l e w t h e l i o n s t at u e ap ar t , b u t B ar t i m ae u s h ad al r e ad y

p u l e d t h e c o r r e c t t e n d o n s , e n g ag e d t h e m u s c l e s —N at h an i e l f o u n d h i m s e l f s o m e r s au l t i

n g d i r e c t l y o v e r t h e m o n s t e r 's

h e ad , l an d i n g at i t s b ac k .

N ow, B ar t i m ae u s s ai d .

N at h an i e l s p o k e a s i n g l e w o r d . T h e S t aff w as t r i g g e r e d . A s h af t o f w h i t e l i g h t , d i am o n d h ar d , n ar r o w as a h an d 's

b r e ad t h , s h o t f r o m t h e c e n t e r o f t h e c ar v e d p e n t ac l e at i t s h e ad . T h e g r o u n d s h u d d e r e d ; N at h an i e l 's t e e t h r at t l e d i n

h i s j aw .T h e l i g h t m i s s e d C l i v e J e n k i n s 's b o d y b y s e v e r al f e

etandstruckNelson'sColumn,snappingitlikeabread

stick.Thewhitelightvanished.Nathaniellookedup.Theafritlookedup.Inuttersilencethecolumnteeteredshifted,

andslowly,slowlyseemedtogrow....Thenitwascolapsingonthemwithawhistlingalmostlikeascream,and

Bartimaeuswaslaunchingthemsideways,throughthefabricofaburningstall,downnottothepaving,harduponthe

w o u n d e d s h o u l d e r , as t h e c o l u m n f e l t o e ar t h an d s l i c e d t h e s q u ar e i n t w o .

N at h an i e l w as o n h i s f e e t i n an i n s t an t . P ai n f l ar e d i n h i s c o l l ar b o n e . A v o i c e o f f u r y w as .s h o u t i n g i n h i s m i n d . Y ou ' ve

g ot to d irec t it p rop erly ! I'l l d o it n ex t tim e!

"N o , y o u w o n't . T h e d e m o n — w h e r e i s i t ? "

L on g g on e by n ow, n o d ou bt. Y ou really m essed that u p big tim e.

"N o w l i s t e n —" A m o v e m e n t a

f e w m e t e r s aw ay at t r ac t e d h i s n o t i c e . F o u r w h i t e f ac e s —a w o m an an d h e r c h i l d r e n

c r o u c h i n g b e t w e e n t h e s t al s . N at h an i e l h e l d o u t h i s h an d . "It 's al r i g h t , " h e s ai d . "I'm a m ag i c i an —"

T h e w o m an g av e a l i t t l e s c r e am ; t h e c h i l d r e n s t ar t e d an d c l u s t e r e d c l o s e t o h e r . A s ar d o n i c v o i c e s o u n d e d i n h i s h e ad .

O h, n ic e on e. V ery reassu rin g . W hy n ot of f er to c u t their throats too, while y ou ' re abou t it?

Nathanielcursedinwardly. Outwardly, hetriedtosmile. "I'monyourside," hesaid. "Stayhere. I'll —"

Helookedupsuddenly. Thevoiceinhishead: See it? Throughtheburningtattersofthestal, amidthecloudsofdust

thatrosefromtheshatteredpiecesofthefalencolumn, heccaughttheglintofgreen. Herefocused: onthehigher

planeshesglimpsedthenarrowedeyesmoreeasily, thefurtivellopingmovementinthedark. Nearerandnearer

C l i v e J e n k i n s 's b o d y c am e , t i p t o e i n g f r o m s t al t o s t al , h o p i n g t o c at c h h i m u n aw ar e s .

B ar t i m ae u s s p o k e q u i c k l y : It' l be a Flu x this tim e. . . . B ec au se I' m a d j in n i—that' s how I k n ow these thin g s. Flu x es

c over a wid e area. S he' l hop e to d isable y ou . I c an p u t a S hield over u s, bu t that' l d ef lec t the stream f rom the S taf f .

"C an y o u p u t t h e S h i e l d o v e r t h o s e p e o p l e ? . . . D o t h at , t h e n . W e w o n 't n e e d o n e ."

N at h an i e l al l o w e d h i s h an d t o

l i f t . E n e r g i e s c o u r s e d t h r o u g h t h e o u t s t r e t c h e d f i n g e r s . A b l u e s p h e r e e x t e n d e d o v e r t h e

h u d d l e d c o m m o n e r s , s e a l i n g t h e m i n . H e t u r n e d b a c k t o w a r d t h e s q u a r e . D u s t r o s e ; b l a c k f r a g m e n t s d r i f t e d f r o m t h e

b u r n i n g f a b r i c o f t h e s t a l s . N o t i p t o e i n g d e m o n t o b e s e e n .

"W h e r e i s i t ? "

H ow shou ld I k n ow? Y ou ' ve n ot g ot ey es in the bac k of y ou r head . I c an on ly look where y ou d o.

"A l l r i g h t , al r i g h t , c al m d o w n ."

I'm c alm . It' s y o u who isn ' t. Al these weird c hem ic als shootin g throu g h y ou r sy stem , p ep p in g y ou u p . It' s n o won d er

hu m an s d on ' t thin k straig ht. T here! N o—j u st the win d f lap p in g that c an vas. O oh. M ad e m e j u m p , that d id .

N at h an i e l s c an n e d t h e s q u ar e . T h e S t af f h u m m e d i n h i s h an d . H e t r i e d t o t u n e o u t t h e c o n s t an t f l i t t e r o f t h e d j i n n i 's

v o i c e , i t s f l o o d o f m e m o r i e s

; at t i m e s t h e y al m o s t s w amp e d h i m.W h e r e w as t h e d e m o n h i d i n g? B e h i n d t h e c o l u m n's

s p l i n t e r e d b as e ? D o u b t f u l . . . t o o f ar aw ay . . . W here, t h e n ?

It' s bey on d m e, B ar t i m ae u s s ai d . M ay be she' s ru n of f .

N at h an i e l t o o k a f e w t e n t at i v e s t e p s f o r w ar d . H i s s k i n c r aw l e d ; h e f e l t t h e i mm i n e n c e o f d an g e r . F ar aw ay ac r o s s t h e

s q u ar e h e s aw a r ai l i n g , a s e t o f s t e p s l e ad i n g b e l o w t h e p av e m e n t . It w as t h e s u b w ay , t h e U n d e r g r o u n d . . . . B e l o w

thesquarestretchedanetwo
rkoftunnels,connectingwit
hthetrains,carryingpedestr
iansbeneaththeroads.And

thosetunnelscameup...

Atdifferentpointsaboutthe
square....

Turn!Hethoughttheorder,r
elaxedhismuscles,allowedt
hedjinnitodotherest.Ashe
spun,hespoketheword,

directedtheStaff.Aboltofw
hitelightbeamedout—cutthr
oughtheair,atomizedthebod
yofCliveJenkinsthatcame

c r e e p i n g u p b e h i n d h i m . O n e m i n u t e t h e d e m o n w as t h e r e , c l am m y h an d o u t s t r e t c h e d t o d e al a F l u x , t h e n e x t i t h ad

v an i s h e d , al o n g w i t h t h e s u b w ay e n t r an c e b e y o n d i t . F o u l as h b l e w u p o n t h e m o l t e n p av e m e n t .

G ood thin k in g , that was, t h e d j i n n i s ai d . D id n ' t rem em ber N aery an bein g that sn eak y .

N at h an i e l t o o k a s l o w b r e at h . H e c r o s s e d t o w h e r e t h e l i t t l e g r o u p c r o u c h e d b e n e at h t h e i r S h i e l d an d w av e d a h an d .

Bartimaeusremovedthesphere.Thewomanstoodupquickly,clutchingthechildrenclose."Whitehall'sthesafest

way," Nathaniel began. "Thedemonsaregonefromthere,Ithink. Gothatway,butdonotfear, madam. I'l —" He

halted; thewomanhadturnedfromhim; faceblank, eyessuleandremote, sheushereredthechildrenawaybetween

thestalls.

What do you expect? The djinni'svoicecutinonhissurprise

. Y ou an d y ou r k in d g ot her in to this m ess in the f irst

p lac e. S he won ' t be than k in g y ou in a hu rry , whatever y ou d o. D on ' t worry , thou g h, N at. Y ou ' re n ot total y alon e.

Y ou ' ve alway s g ot m e. L au g h t e r b u b b l e d u n b i d d e n t h r o u g h h i s m i n d .

F o r a f e w s e c o n d s N at h an i e l s t o o d w h e r e h e w as , h e ad a l i t t l e b e n t , l o o k i n g o u t u p o n t h e d e s o l at i o n o f t h e s q u ar e .

T h e n h e s e t h i s s h o u l d e r s , f i r m e d h i s g r i p u p o n t h e S t aff , r

appedtheheelofhisbootonc
euponthegroundandwas

gone.

34

Kittylocatedtheprisonersf
arfasterthanshehadexpected
.Theslowestpartwasattheou
tset—asshegearedherself

uptoleavethelittleroom.W
henshefirststood,everymu
scleinherbodyprotestedto
theskies;sheshudderedasif

fromextremecold;herheadf
eltlightandwatery.Butshed

i d n o t c ap s i z e .

I'v e j u s t g o t t o r e l e ar n i t , s h e t
h o u g h t . R e m i n d m y b o d y w h at
i t c an d o .

A n d i t w as t r u e t h at w i t h e ac h s
h u f f l i n g s t e p , h e r c o n f i d e n c
e g r e w . S h e m ad e i t t o t h e c ac h
e o f w e ap o n s p i l e d b e s i d e

t h e d o o r . S h e g r i mac e d , b e n t
h e r k n e e s , c r o u c h e d , an d h e l
d t h at p o s i t i o n , w o b b l i n g an d
c u r s i n g , as s h e r u mm ag e d

t h r o u g h t h e p i l e . J o l t - s t i c k s
, In f e r n o s t i c k s , e l e m e n t al s p
h e r e s . . . f am i l i ar o b j e c t s f r o

mtheResistanceyears.Shehad

nobag,buttuckedanInfernoandajolt-stickinherbelt.Twospheres,withdifficulty,fittedinthetatteredpocketsof

herjacket.(SheremovedPtolemy'sApocryphaandsetit,notwithoutacertainreverence,onthefloor.Ithadserved

itspurposewel.)Amongthemagicalobjectslayasilverdisc,smoothandrazor-edged.Subduingaslight,

unaccountable, aversion, she added it to a pocket. Then, supporting herself against the wall, she clawed herself back

to her feet.

Carefully, little by little, she set off out of the room, over the shattered fragments of the door, down the corridor, past

the bleak expanse of the ruined Hall of Statues. She had a memory in her mind—of plaintive sounds coming from

behind a door close to where

Nathanielandshehadbeenim
prisoned.

Asshewent,Kittywasconsci
ousofastrangedivisionwith
inher.Neverhadshefeltsoap
palinglyweak,so

tentativelytiedtoearthlystr
ength.Yet,bythesametoken,
neitherhadsheeverfeltsow
holysureofherselfasshe

didnow.Ofteninthepastshe
hadbeenfiledwithreckless
certainty,withjoyfulconfi
denceinheryouthand

vigor.Thiswasnotlikethat.It

w as a c al m e r f e e l i n g , q u i e t e r , e n t i r e l y u n c o n n e c t e d w i t h p h y s i c al t h i n g s , an d l ac k i n g

t h e e d g i n e s s t h e y t e n d e d t o i n v o l v e . It w as a k i n d o f i m p l ac ab l e as s u r anc e ; s h e f e l t i t r ad i at e f r o m h e r as s h e s h u ff l e d

al o n g .

H e r f i r s t t e s t d i d n o t d e n t t h i s f e e l i n g i n t h e s l i g h t e s t . At t h e p o i n t w h e r e t h e c o r r i d o r b r o ad e n e d o u t , c l o s e t o a s e t o f

s t ai r s , K i t t y e n c o u n t e r e d o n e o f t h e d e m o n s . P r o b ab l y i t w as t h e l as t t o t ak e p o s s e s s i o n o

fabody;certainlyithadnot

mastereditwithanygreatsuc
cess.Itshosthadbeenatall,t
hinmanwithblondandlankyh
air,dressedindark

clothesofobviousexpense.
Nowtheclotheswererippedd
andtorn,thehairdisordered
,theeyesopaquelikeseaglas
s.

Thelegsstumbledfromones
ideofthecorridortotheothe
r,thearmsthrashingblindly.
Aferalgrowlingissuedfrom

histhroat,with—everynow

andthen—angrywordsinanunknownlanguage.

Theheadturned;itcaughtsightofKitty.Ayellowgleamburnedbehindtheeyes.Kittyhalted,waiting.Thedemon's

interestshoweditselfinasuddenwildululationthatsetthe glassrattlinginthecabinetsalongthecorridor.Itdecided

to attack, but seemed indoubt exactly how to issue a magical bombardment. First it raised a leg, pointed a foot, and

b l e w i t s o w n s h o e o f f . N e x t i t
t r i e d a n e l b o w , w i t h c o m p a r
a b l e s u c c e s s . L a s t l y , w i t h p a i
n f u l h e s i t a t i o n , a h a n d w a s

r a i s e d , a t r e m b l i n g f i n g e r e x
t e n d e d , a n d a b o l t o f l i l a c l i g h
t w a s d e l i v e r e d f o r t h , t o s t r i
k e t h e A m u l e t o f S a m a r k a n d

a n d b e a t o n c e a b s o r b e d .

T h e d e m o n i n s p e c t e d i t s f i n g
e r i n a n n o y a n c e . K i t t y t o o k t h
e j o l t - s t i c k f r o m h e r b e l t , s t e
p p e d q u i e t l y f o r w a r d , a n d s e
n t

a b u r s t o f s h i m m e r i n g b l u e c u

r r e n t r a t t l i n g t h r o u g h i t s b o d y . S w a t h e d i n b l a c k s m o k e , t h e d e m o n j i t t e r e d , j i g g e d ,

f l u n g i t s e l f b a c k w a r d , c r a s h e d t h r o u g h t h e b a l u s t r a d e , a n d f e l f o u r m e t e r s t o t h e s t e p s b e l o w .

K i t t y w e n t h e r w a y .

M i n u t e s l a t e r s h e c a m e t o t h e d o o r s h e h a d r e m e m b e r e d . L i s t e n i n g c l o s e l y , K i t t y d e t e c t e d m u f f l e d g r o a n s . S h e t r i e d

t h e d o o r , f o u n d i t l o c k e d a n d b l e w i t o p e n w i t h t h e f i r s t o f h e r e l e m e n t a l s p h e r e s . O n c e

t h e f i n al w i n d s h ad d i e d aw ay ,

s h e s t e p p e d i n s i d e .

T h e r o o m w as n o t l ar g e , an d w h at s p ac e i t h ad w as b l o t t e d o u t b y r e c u m b e n t b o d i e s . A t f i r s t s i g h t K i t t y f e ar e d t h e

w o r s t ; t h e n s h e s aw t h at al l w e r e n e at l y t i e d an d g ag g e d , j u s t as t h e y h ad b e e n l e f t b y M ak e p e ac e s i mp s s o many

h o u r s b e f o r e . M o s t w e r e s e c u r e d b y t h e mi n i mu m o f r o p e s an d c o r d s , b u t o n e o r t w o w e r e s w at h e d i n s h e e t s o r t h i c k

w a d s o f b l a c k n e t t i n g . T h e r e w e r e p e r h a p s t w e n t y i n d i v i d u a l s i n t h e r o o m , s a r d i n e - p a c k e d , h e a d t o t o e . T o K i t t y ' s

g r e a t r e l i e f , s h e s a w t h a t m a n y o f t h e m w e r e m o v i n g w i t h s a d l i t t l e w r i g g l e s , l i k e m a g g o t s i n a j a r .

O n e o r t w o p a i r s o f s t a r i n g e y e s c a u g h t s i g h t o f h e r ; t h e i r o w n e r s w r i t h e d a n d u t t e r e d p l e a d i n g m o a n s . S h e t o o k a

m o m e n t t o g a t h e r h e r s e l f ; h e r l e g s s h o o k w i t h t h e e f f o r t o f h e r s t r o l l t h u s f a r . T h e n s h e s p o k e a s c l e a r l y a s s h e c o u l d .

"I'mheretohelpyou," shesaid. "Waitaspatientlyasyoucan. I'll tryto cutyoufree."

Thispronouncementinduced aremarkableflurryofsquirmsandwails. Legsthrashed, headsbuckedandtwisted.

Kittywasnearlyknockedoverbytheflailingofthebodies nexttoher. "Ifyoudon'tlie quiet," shesaidseverely, "I'll

leave you." Instantquietness amongtheprone magicians. "That'sbetter. Nowthen..."

Withclumsyfingers, shetoo

kthesilverdiscfromherpocketand,holdingitcarefulysoasnottoslicehe
rfingers,set

touponthenearestbonds.Thecordspartedlikebuttertoahotknife.Cra
mpedhandsandfeetmovedtentatively,

theirownereemittingcriesofpain.Withoutceremony,Kittyremovedthe
gag."Whenyoucanstand,"shesaid,"find

somethingsharpandhelpmeuntietheothers."Shemovedontothenext
magician.

Withintenminutestheroom

w a s f i l l e d w i t h l i m p i n g , s t r e t c h i n g m e n a n d w o m e n ; s o m e s i t t i n g , o t h e r s s t a n d i n g f i r s t o n

o n e f o o t , t h e n o n t h e o t h e r , t r y i n g t o w r i n g t h e p i n s a n d n e e d l e s f r o m t h e i r n u m b a n d s w o l l e n l i m b s . T h e r e w a s n o

c o n v e r s a t i o n ; t h e b o d i e s h a d b e e n f r e e d , b u t t h e m i n d s r e m a i n e d w r a p p e d i n s h o c k a n d d i s b e l i e f . K i t t y w o r k e d s i l e n t l y

o n t h e p e n u l t i m a t e c a p t i v e , a l a r g e g e n t l e m a n s w a t h e d i n n e t t i n g . H e s e e m e d i n e r t ; b l o o

dhadseepedthroughthe

clotharoundhishead.Besideher,thefirstpersonshehadfreed,ayoungwomanwithmousyhair,strugglledwiththe

cordsofthelastmagician.Thisone,coveredinacoarsegrayblanket,wasverymuchalive;herlegskickedbackand

forthwithfuriousimpatience.

Kittypassedthesilverdisc across."Here."

"Thanks."

In moments the swathes of net and blanket had been removed and the two captives lay revealed. One, a woman with

long dark hair hanging over a red and puffy face, sprang instantly to her feet and shrieked with agony as her cramp

kicked in. The other, an immense old man with a badly beaten face, lay still. His eyes were closed; his breathing came

in ragged gasps.

The dark-haired woman leaned back against a wall and massag

edaleg.Shegaveasnarlofpainandfury."Who?

Whoisresponsibleforthis?I'llkillthem.I'lkilthem,Iswearit."

Kittywasbusytalkingtothewomanwithmousyhair."He'sinabadway.'Someoneneedstogethimtoahospital."

"I'lfixit,"thewomansaid.Shelookedaroundtheroom,pickedoutaspottyyouth."George.Canyouoblige?"

"Allright,MissPiper."

"W ai t." T h i s w as K i t t y. W e ar i l y s h e t r i e d t o r i s e, e x t e n d e d a s h ak i n g h an d. "C an y o u h e l p m e u p, p l e as e? T h an k s." S h e

t u r n e d t o f ac e t h e r o o m. "Y o u al l n e e d t o k n o w w h at's h ap p e n e d. T h e s i t u at i o n o u t s i d e may b e... d i ff i c u l t. D e m o n s

h av e b r o k e n l o o s e i n L o n d o n ."

G as p s, o at h s; t h e as s e m b l e d f ac e s r e g i s t e r e d s ag g i n g d i s m ay. Y o u n g an d o l d, t h e y g ap e d at h e r, v u l n e r ab l e an d

u n c o m p r e h e n d i n g. G o n e w as

anyvestigeofmagicianlyassurance—nowtheywerenothingbuthumans,panic-

stricken,leaderless,strippedbare.Kittyheldupahand."Listen,"shesaid,"andI'lltelyou."

"Onemoment."Theblack-hairedwomanreachedoutandclutchedatKitty'sarm."First,whothehellareyow?Idon't

recognizeyourface,or"—shecurledalip—"yourdirtylittleclothes.Idon'tthinkyou'reevenamagician."

"Correct," Kittysnapped. "I'maco mmoner. Butyou'ddo weltoshutupandhearmeouti fyouwanttoavoidbeing

kiled."

Thewoman'seyeswidened. "Howdareyou—?"

"Yes, shutyourtrap, Farrar," amansaid.

Thewomanseemedtochoke; shelookedaroundwildly, butletgoofKitty'sarm.

Thisoneexceptionapart, everyoneintheroomseemedeag

e r , g r a t e f u l e v e n , t o l i s t e n t o
w h a t K i t t y h a d t o s a y .

W h e t h e r i t w a s t h e i r r e s i d u a l
s h o c k t h a t k e p t t h e m q u i e t , o r
w h e t h e r t h e y g l i m p s e d , i n t h
e g r a y - h a i r e d g i r l w i t h t h e

l i n e d a n d w e a r y f a c e , s o m e t h i
n g t h a t c o m m a n d e d u n e q u i v o
c a l r e s p e c t w a s h a r d t o s a y . B u
t t h e y l i s t e n e d w i t h

c o m p l e t e a t t e n t i o n a s K i t t y t
o l d t h e m w h a t h a d h a p p e n e d .

"W h a t a b o u t t h e r e s t o f u s ? " o n e
o f t h e o l d e r m e n s a i d p l a i n t i v
e l y . "T h e r e w e r e a h u n d r e d a t

l e as t s i t t i n g i n t h at

t h e at e r . S u r e l y t h e y h av e n 't al __"

"I'm n o t s u r e , " K i t t y s ai d . "P e r h ap s t h e r e ar e o t h e r r o o ms o f p r i s o n e r s t h at t h e d e m o n s f o r g o t , o r d e c i d e d t o i g n o r e .

Y o u 'l h av e t o s e e . B u t m an y o f y o u ar e d e ad ."

"W h at ab o u t M r . D e v e r e au x ? " a w o m an w h i s p e r e d .

"O r J e s s i c a W h i t w e l l , o r —? "

K i t t y h e l d u p h e r h an d . "I'm s o r r y , b u t I d o n't k n o w . I t h i n k i t l i k e l y t h at m an y o f t h e m o s t s e n i o r m ag i c i an s h av e

b e e n p o s s e s s e d o r k i l l e d ."

"T his o n e h as n't ." T h e d ar k -h ai r e d w o man s p o k e s av ag e l y . "U n t i l t h e y ar e f o u n d , I am t h e s o l e C o u n c i l m e m b e r

r e m ai n i n g . S o I am n o w i n c h ar g e . W e m u s t g e t t o o u r p e n t ac l e s an d c o n j u r e o u r s l av e s . I s h al c o n t ac t m y p o l i c e

w o l v e s f o r t h w i t h . T h e r e n e g ad e d e m o n s w i l b e f o u n d an d d

estroyed."

"Twothings,"Kittysaidquietly."No,three.Thismanmustbeseentofirst.Cananyonepr ovidetransport?"

"Ican."Thespottyyouthbentbesidethelimpbody."Goingtoneedthreeofusforthis.Mr.Johnson,Mr.Vole,can

youlendahand,helpmegethimtoalimo?"Assistancecame;themendeparted,supportingtheinvalidbetween

them.

Aclapofthehands;thedark-hairedwomanwasbythedoor."Tothepentacles!"shecommanded."Notimetowaste!"

Nobodymoved."Ithinkthisladyhadsomethingmoretosay,"anoldermansaid,noddingtowardKitty."Weshould

hearherout,don'tyouthink,Ms.Farrar?Outofcourtesy,ifnothingelse."

Ms.Farrar'slipstwisted."Butshe'snothingbuta—"

"Ihadtwofurtherpointstomake,"Kittysaid.Shefeltveryti

r e d n o w , l i g h t - h e a d e d ; s h e n e e d e d t o s i t d o w n . N o — g e t

a g r i p ; g e t t h e j o b d o n e . " T h e c h i e f d e m o n , N o u d a , i s v e r y t e r r i b l e . I t w o u l d b e s u i c i d e f o r y o u t o a p p r o a c h h i m

w i t h o u t t h e g r e a t e s t p o s s i b l e w e a p o n . A n d t h a t i s a l r e a d y b e i n g d o n e . " S h e l o o k e d a r o u n d t h e s i l e n t g r o u p . " A

m a g i c i a n , a n o t h e r s u r v i v i n g C o u n c i l m e m b e r " — K i t t y c o u l d n o t r e s i s t a s l y g l a n c e a t M s . F a r r a r h e r e — " h a s g o n e t o

m e e t i t . H e u s e s G l a d s t o n e ' s S

t a f f ."

S h e w as o n l y h al f s u r p r i s e d b y t h e s t i f l e d e x c l am at i o n s o f as t o n i s h m e n t . M s . F ar r ar i n p ar t i c u l ar s e e m e d i n c e n s e d .

"B u t M r . D e v e r e au x h as f o r b i d d e n i t ! " s h e c r i e d ."W h o w o u l d d ar e t o —? "

K i t t y s m i l e d . "It i s N at h —-J o h n M an d r ak e . Y o u h ad b e t t e r h o p e h e i s s u c c e s s f u l ."

"M an d rak e!" F ar r ar 's f ac e w as p al e w i t h f u r y . "H e d o e s n't h av e t h e t al e n t ! "

"Thefinalthing I wouldliket
o say," Kittywentonremorse
lessly,"isthatwiththisbein
gso,themostimportantthing

forus—foryou, Ishouldsay; y
ouarethemagicians, youhavet
hepower—istoprovideprot
ectionandguidancefor

thepeople. SinceMakepeace
imprisonedyoual, therehasb
eennoleadership, noonetoe
vacuateareaswherethe

demonsareatlarge. Weriskm
asscasualtieshere, masscasu
alties. Ifwedonotact, manyco
mmonerswilldie."

"Neverbotheredusbefore," ayoungmanmutteredattheback, butgeneralopinionwas againsthim.

"Whatweneedisacrystal," Pipersaid. "Seewheretheydemonsare."

"Orascryingbowl. Wheredotheykeepthemin thisplace?"

"Mustbeone. Comeon."

"Let'sgettothepentacles. Icouldsummonanimp, sendhimoff."

"We'll need more cars. Who here can drive?"

"I can't. My man does that."

"Norme—"

At the door, a harsh, forced cough. Ms. Farrar's face was haggard, her hair tangled and disheveled, her mouth a thin-

lipped slash. White hands pressed hard against the door frame on either side. Her arms were bent, her shoulders

slightly hunched—the posture gave her a faint resemblanc

etoaninvertedbat.Hergazes
patvenom."Notoneof

you,"shesaid,"isanythingbe
tterthanajuniorminister.M
ostofyouarescarcelyeven
that—-justsecretariesand

desk-hands.Yourknowledg
eofmagicispainfulylimited
;yourjudgement,itseems,is
evenworse.Thecommoners

willlookafterthemselves.S
omehaveresilience—nodou
bttheycanrepelafewDeton
ations.Thereare,inanycase,

manyofthem.Wecanafford to

l o s e a f e w . W h at w e c an n ot d o i s s t an d ar o u n d d i t h e r i n g w h i l e o u r c ap i t al i s u n d e r

at t ac k . W h at , w e 'r e g o i n g t o l e av e i t u p t o M an d r ak e ? H o w g o o d a m ag i c i an d o y o u t h i n k h e ? I'm g o i n g f o r m y w o l v e s .

A n y o n e w i t h an y r e m ai n i n g am b i t i o n w i l f o l l o w me ."

S h e p u s h e d h e r s e l f b ac k f r o m t h e d o o r f r ame , an d w i t h o u t a b ac k w ar d g l an c e , s e t o f f d o w n t h e c o r r i d o r . U n e as y

s i l e n c e . A f t e r a p au s e t h r e e o f t h e y o u n g m e n , h e ad s l o w e r e

d,browsscowling,pushedt
heirwaypastKittyand

departed.Severalotherswav
ered,butremained.

Theyoungwomanwithmousy
hairshrugged;sheturnedto
Kitty."We'refolowingyou,
miss...um,sorry,whatis

yourname?"

ClaraBell?LizzieTemple?
"KittyJones,"shesaid.Then
,morefaintly:"Cananyoneget
mesomethingtodrink?"

WhileKittyrested,whilesh

esippedcoolmineralwaterf
romtheCouncil'sownsuppl
yofbottles,thejuniormagic
ians

setaboutttheirwork.Someve
nturedaroundtheWhitehallc
hambers:theyreturnedtrem
blingandwan,withreports

ofbodiespiledinsiderooms
,ofpentaclesslashedandrupt
ured,ofsuchdevastationasn
onehadeverdreamed.

Carnagelikethiswasgeneral
lyvisitedonenemiesatadist
ance.Itwastroublingforthe
magicianstoexperienceit

firsthand.Otherscrepttoth
efrontofthebuildingandpee
redforthintoWhitehal.Buil
dingswereonfire;corpsesl
ay

infulview—whatwasmostun
settlingwastheutterabsenc
eofthepeople.Ordinarily,e
veninthesmalhours,buses

andtaxiscontinuedtopassth
atway,togetherwiththecomi
ngsandgoingsofnightstaffin
theministries,andpatrols

ofpoliceandsoldiers.Them
achineryofgovernment,behe
adedbythetreacheryofMak

e p e ac e an d s u r p r i s e d b y t h e

ap p e ar an c e o f N o u d a, h ad f o r t h e m o m e n t c e as e d al t o g e t h e r .

T h e d e s t r u c t i o n o f t h e p e n t ac l e s w as a s e t b ac k, b u t i t s o o n b e c am e c l e ar t h at t h e f e r o c i t y o f t h e d e m o n s e x c e e d e d

t h e i r e ff i c i e n c y, an d h e r e an d t h e r e c i r c l e s w e r e f o u n d t h at h ad b e e n o v e r l o o k e d an d s p ar e d. A f e w s m al l i mp s s e t

f o r t h o n r e c o n n ai s s an c e; m e an w h i l e, i n a c h am b e r c l o s e t o t h e H al o f S t at u e s, a g i an t c r y

stalball, formerlyemployed

bytheCouncil, waslocatedan
dbroughttotheroomwhereK
ittysat. Themagicianscongr
egated, hushedand

somber. Withoutpreamble, t
hestrongestindividualpres
ent—ajuniorministerfromt
heFisheries—summonedthe

djinnitrappedwithinthebal
. Inringingtonesitwasdirect
edtoitstask: torevealthepos
itionoftherenegade

demons.

T h e b al w e n t s m o k y , d ar k . . . .
E v e r y o n e l e an e d c l o s e r .

L i g h t s w i t h i n t h e c r y s t al ! R e
d an d o r an g e . L e ap i n g f l am e s .

T h e f o c u s c l e ar e d . R ag i n g f i r
e s , n e ar an d f ar ; l an t e r n s am o n
g d ar k t r e e s . In t h e d i s t anc e , a
g i an t h u m p b ac k e d g l o w o f

l i g h t . ..

"T h e G l as s P al ac e , " s o m e o n e
s ai d . "T h at 's S t . J am e s 's P ar k ."

"T h e c o mm o n e r s w e r e d e m o n
s t r at i n g t h e r e ."

"Look!" In the foreground, hundreds of running forms, wheeling, scattering like fish shoals through the trees.

"Why don't they get out?"

"Surrounded." Here and there, bursts of magic, corralling the panic-stricken crowds, redirecting them back upon

themselves. Glimpses of fun natural movement on the margins—great bounds and leaps, sudden rushes. Hopping,

prancing figures, human in their shape, inhuman in their gl

e e f u l c ap e r i n g , ac t i v e o n al s i d e s . O n e l o p e d i n t o c l e ar

v i e w b e n e at h a l an t e r n ; i t s p i e d a c l u s t e r o f m e n and w o m e n f l e e i n g i n i t s d i r e c t i o n . It b e n t i t s b ac k , p r e p ar e d t o

s p r i n g —

A s h af t o f w h i t e l i g h t — a t r e m e n d o u s e x p l o s i o n . T h e l o p i n g c r e at u r e v an i s h e d — i n i t s p l ac e a s m o k i n g c r at e r . A f i g u r e

p as s e d b e n e at h t h e l an t e r n o u t o f s i g h t , g o i n g w i t h s t e ad y s t r i d e s ; i t h e l d a l o n g s t af f i n i t s h and .

Kittyplacedhermineralwater carefullyonthefloor."Summonwhatevverdemonsyoucan," shesaid."Ifwe'regoing

todoanygoodatal, that'swherewehavetobe."

35

Ithastobesaid, weworkedwelltogether. Betterthaneitherofusexpected.

Okay, maybeittookalittlewhiletogetthesystemsorted—wehadacoupleofembarrassingmomentswhenour

b o d y d i d t w o t h i n g s at o n c e , b u t w e al w ay s r e c t i f i e d i t s h ar p i s h , s o n o h ar m d o n e .1 A n d o n c e w e g o t i n t o o u r s e v e n-

l e ag u e d s t r i d e , w e r e al y b e g an t o m o t o r , an d t o e n j o y t h e ad v an t ag e s o f o u r i r r e g u l ar c o n d i t i o n .

1. W el , not to m e, anyway, safely encased as I was inside. N athaniel m ayb e g ot a few

unnecessary b ruises, lik e the tim e he went rig ht when I was pointing left, and the S taff b ashed

him on the nose; or when he fired the S

taff during the m iddle of an ex tra-fancy leap, and we

were b lown sideways into a g orse b ush. O r that little incident down at the lak e when he g ot so

ang ry (we were only under water for a m easly four or fiv e seconds, and let' s face it a little

b indweed nev er hurt anyone) . B ut b y and larg e we m anag ed to av oid self-inflicted wounds.

It w as o u r f i r s t s u c c e s s ag ai n s t p o o r o l d N ae r y an t h at r e al y f i r e d u s u p : i t s h o w e d u s w h at w e h ad t o d o ; h o w t o

combinetobesteffect.Westoppedtryingtosecond-guesseachotherandd idabitofdelegation.

Here'showitwent.Nathanielworkedtheboots:ifwehadalongstraightdistancetotravel,hedidthestrides.Once

atourdestination(oneortwosecondslater,generaly—thosebootswereprettysnappy),Itookoverthelegs,imbued

themwithalittleofmytrademarkedvim,andsentusbounding likeanimpala,back,forth,up,down,left,andright,

until anyenemy, and occasional yevenmyself, washopelessly confused.

Meanwhile, Nathaniel retained fulcontrolofhisarms and of Gladstone's Staff; he fired it whenever we came within

range, and since I could anticipatehisintentions, I usually stayed putlongenoughforhim todoso. The only

exception (justified, I feel) was when I was hurrying us out of the path of a Detonation, a Flux, or a Spiraling

Dismemberment. Always best to avoid such things if you wish to retain momentum.2

2. Or indeed your vital organs.

We communicated with pithy, rather monosylabic thoughts: viz. Run, Jump, Where? Left, Up, Duck, etc.3 We didn't

ever quite say Ug, but it was a close-run thing. It was a bit butch and male, and left little room for introspection or

emotional analysis, a factor that fitted in nicely with the business of staying alive, and

alsowithacertainsubdued

detachmentthatnowflooded Nathaniel's mind. Ithadn'tbeen sonoticeableatfirst, when wewerebackwithKitty

(hisheadwasfullofsoftethings, then—half-formed, eager, outward-looking), butafterthatmomentinTrafalgar

Square, whenthewomanhadturnedawayfromhimwithafaceoffearandscorn, itroseupswiftlyandclosedhim

off. Hissoftereemotionswerenewandhesitant—theydidn

't l i k e r e j e c t i o n . N o w t h e y w e r e s e al e d aw ay ; i n t h e i r s t e ad

r e t u r n e d t h e o l d f am i l i ar q u al i t i e s : p r i d e , r e m o t e n e s s , an d s t e e l y d e t e r m i n at i o n . H e w as s t i l c o mm i t t e d t o h i s t as k ,

b u t h e u n d e r t o o k i t i n an at t i t u d e o f v ag u e s e l f -d i s g u s t . N o t h e al t h y , m ay b e , b u t i t h e l p e d h i m f i g h t w e l .

3 . This latter was an ob serv ation I m ade on the edg e of the lak e. N athaniel unfortunately took

it as a com m and, which resulted in our tem porary im m ersion.

A n d f i g h t i n g , n o w , w as w h at w e h ad t o d o .

N ae r y an , d aw d l i n g at t h e s q u ar e , h ad b e e n t h e m o s t t ar d y o f t h e s p i r i t s ; t h e o t h e r s h ad h u r r i e d o n , d r aw n b y t h e

s o u n d an d s m e l o f h u m an b o d i e s , u n d e r t h e C h u r c h i l A r c h an d o u t i n t o t h e d ar k ac r e s o f S t . J am e s 's P ar k . P e r h ap s , i f

t h e c o mm o n e r s h ad n o t b e e n c o n g r e g at e d h e r e i n c o n s i d e r ab l e n u mb e r s , N o u d a's ar m y w o u l d h av e i mm e d i at e l y

d i s p e r s e d ac r o s s t h e c ap i t al

and so 'been far harder to discover and waylay. As it was, the people's protest had been

gathering through the night, emboldened by the government's inertia; now, for the avid spirits, their teeming masses

p r o v i d e d an u n m i s s ab l e t e m p t at i o n .

W h e n w e ar r i v e d , t h e e n t e r t ai n m e n t w as w e l l u n d e r w ay . F ar ac r o s s t h e p ar k t h e s p i r i t s w an d e r e d , c h as i n g h e r d s o f

f l e e i n g h u m an s as t h e w h i m t o o k t h e m . S o m e u s e d m ag i c al at t ac k s ; o t h e r s p r e f e r r e d t o m o v e f o r t h e s ak e o f m o v i n g ,

t r y i n g o u t t h e u n f am i l i ar s t i f f n e s s o f t h e i r l i m b s , r ac i n g ar o u n d t o c u t o f f s c u r r y i n g p r e y . M an y o f t h e d i s t an t t r e e s

w e r e af l am e w i t h c o l o r e d l i g

hts;theairwasamontageoffl
ashes,spinningcordsofsmo
ke,shrillscreams,and

generaloutcry.Behindital,t
hegreatGlassPalacecastillu
minationdownuponthehecti
clawns:acrossitsprojected

slabsoflightthepeopleran,t
hespiritsbounded,thebodi
esfel,thebreathlesshuntwe
nton.

Wepausedunderthearch,atth
egatewaytothepark,takingit
alin.

Chaos,Nathanielthought.It'sC

H AO S .

It' s n othin g to a real battle, I s ai d . Y ou ou g ht to have been at al-Arish, where f or two sq u are m iles the san d d og g ed

red . I g av e h i m a m e n t al p i c t u r e .

L ovely . T han k s f or that. S ee N ou d a?

N o. H ow m an y d em on s are there?

E n ou g h. 4 L et' s g o.

4 . There were prob ab ly forty or so. B ut when entering b attle, a wise warrior

deals with his

enemies one by one.

He tapped his heel; the boots took wing. We launched ourselves into the fray.

Strategy dictated that the spirits did not collectively notice our presence. One by one, we could fell them; facing them

enmasse would be a mite more tricky. Hence rapid-fire attacks and continual movement. Our first objective, close by

onthelawns,wasanafritcloaked inthebodyofanelderlywoman;utteringshrilwhoops,itsentSpasmsricocheting

amongthecrowds.Intwostrides wewererebehindit.TheStaffpulsed.Theafritwasamemory,sighingonthewind.

Weturned,moved...andwerefaroffamongthefairgroundstals,wherethreestrongdjinn,plumplydressedin

humanskin,industriouslytoppledtheSultan'sCastle.Nathanielpointedthestaffandclaimedtheminasinglegreedy

f l as h o f l i g h t . W e l o o k e d , s aw
: u p b y s o m e t r e e s , a r i c k e t y h
y b r i d s t al k i n g a c h i l d — i n t h r
e e s t r i d e s w e h ad h i m i n o u r

s i g h t s . W h i t e f i r e c o n s u m e d
h i m . T h e c h i l d f l e d i n t o t h e d
ar k .

W e n eed help , N at h an i e l t h o u g h
t , f or the p eop le. T hey ' re ru n n in g
rou n d in c irc les.

T hat' s n ot ou r c on — Y ep ; I see them
. G o.

A s t r i d e , a l e ap — w e l an d e d o n
a b an d s t an d r o o f , s p u n r o u n d t
h e c e n t r al p o l e , f i r e d t h e S t af

ffourtimes. Threehybrids

perished;thefourth,alertedbytheothers'deaths,dodged,jumpedback. Itspiedus,sentaSpasm. Thebandstand

shookitselftosplinters,butwehadsomersaultedclear,slidddownatentawningand,beforeourbootstouched

ground,reducedtheculprit'sessencetoatwirlofdwindlingsparks.

Aprickleofregret,aslackeningofdesire. Nathanielhesitated. That... thatwas Helen Malbin

d il I k n o w it was.

S he' s . . .

S he' s been d ead lon g sin c e. Y ou k illed her k iller. S hak e a leg ! T here—by the lak e! T hose c hild ren . Q u ic k —be swif t!

B e s t t o k e e p m o v i n g . B e s t n o t t o t h i n k o f i t . F i g h t o n .5

5 . H ad the b oy b een there alone, without m y prom pting presence, would he hav e acted with

such speed ag ainst the b odies of his fel ow m inisters? D espite their deform ities, their slack

faces and oddly ang led lim b s, I doub t it. H e was a hum an; always, always hum ans g rav itate to

surfaces.

T e n m i n u t e s p as s e d ; w e s t o o d b e n e at h an o ak t r e e i n t h e c e n t e r o f t h e p ar k . T h e r e m ai n s o f t w o d j i n n r o s e s m o k i n g

f r o m t h e e ar t h .

N otic e an y thin g abou t the sp irits? I t h o u g h t . I m ean , what y ou c an see of them .

T he ey es? I c atc h a g low som etim es.

Y es, bu t also the au ras. T hey seem big g er som ehow.

M ean in g what?

I d on ' t k n ow. It' s lik e the hu m an bod ies aren ' t c on tain in g them so wel .

Y ou thin k —

T he sp irits Faq u arl su m m on ed are stron g . P erhap s their f eed in g m ak es them stron g er. If -—

W ait. B y the lak e . . . A n d w e w e r e g o n e .

B ac k an d f o r t h ac r o s s t h e p ar k

wewent,amongthepavilions
andpleasuregrounds,thebo
wersandthewalkways,

wherevermwesawtheflashofp
redatorymovement.Someti
mesthedjinnperceivedusan
dfoughtback;moreoften

weslewthemunawares.Thep
owerofthestaffwasirresist
ible,theseven-leagueboots
carriedusmoreswiftlythan

theenemycouldsee.Nathani
elwascoldandresolute;with
everyminutehecontroledth
eStaffwithgreaterskil.As

f o r m e , w h e t h e r o r n o t i t w as t h e ad r e n al i n e w e s h ar e d , I b e g an t o e n j o y m y s e l f h u g e l y . I s l o w l y aw o k e ag ai n t o t h e

o l d b l o o d l u s t , t o t h e f i e r c e j o y o f c o m b at t h at I'd k n o w n i n e ar l y E g y p t 's w ar s , w h e n t h e u t u k k u o f A s s y r i a m ar c h e d

f r o m t h e d e s e r t s an d t h e g at h e r i n g v u l t u r e s b l o t t e d o u t t h e s k y . It w as t h e l o v e o f s p e e d an d c l e v e r n e s s , o f d e f y i n g

d e at h an d d e al i n g i t ; i t w as t h e l o v e o f c ar r y i n g o u t n e w e x p l o i t s t h at w o u l d b e t o l d an d s u n g ar o u n d t h e c amp f i r e s t i l

thesunwentout.Itwasthelov eofenergyandpower.

Itwaspartof Earth'scorruptio n.Ptolemywouldn'thavebee npleased.

Butitwasagooddealbetterth anbeingapyramidofslime.

Inoticedsomethingandgave amentalprod.Nathanielstop pedwherehewasinthemiddl eofthefieldtogetabetter

look.Westoodawhile,consi dering.Aswestood,weheld theStaffouthorizontally,cl aspedincasualfingers.It

glowedandcrackled;whitesmokedriftedfromtheend.Thegroundbeneathourbootswasblackened,charred.All

aroundusbodieslay,andshoesandcoatsandplacards;beyondthemwereburningtreesandthedeepabyssof

night.

Awayacrossthepark,theglaminglightsofthegreatGlassPalace.Withinit,silhouettedduponthegrass,distant

figuresseemedtomove.Weweretoofarawaytomakeoutan

y d e t ai l s .

N ou d a? Faq u arl?

C ou ld be . . .

W atc h ou t. A w ay t o o u r l e f t , s o m e t h i n g c o m i n g . W e r ai s e d t h e S t af f . P au s e d . O u t f r o m t h e d ar k a m an c am e —h u m an ,

w i t h n e g l i g i b l e au r a. H e w as s h o e l e s s , s h i r t h al f t o r n aw ay . H e s t u m b l e d p as t o n b l o o d i e d f e e t . H e n e v e r l o o k e d at u s .

W hat a m ess, N at h an i e l t h o u g h t .

G ive the p oor blok e a c han c e! H e' s j u st been c hased by f orty d em on s.

N ot him . T h i s . E very thin g .

O h. Y es. Y es, it is.

S o y ou rec k on there were f orty , total?

I d id n ' t say that. A wise warrior—

H ow m an y have we k il ed ?

I d on ' t k n ow. W asn ' t c ou n tin g . T here aren ' t so m an y here n ow, thou g h.

T h e c e n t r al v i s t as o f t h e p ar k

w e r e l ar g e l y e m p t y . It w as as i f an i n v i s i b l e s k i n o r b ar r i e r h ad b e e n p u n c t u r e d , an d t h e

m as s o f f r an t i c m o v e m e n t h ad s u d d e n l y p o u r e d , t h e n e b b e d , aw ay .

N at h an i e l s n i f f e d an d w i p e d h i s n o s e u p o n a s l e e v e . T he G lass P alac e it is, then . W e' re j u st abou t f in ished here.

O n e s t e p , t w o ... u p ac r o s s t h e l aw n s an d i n am o n g s o m e o r n am e n t al h e d g e s , f l o w e r b e d s , p o n d s , an d t i n k l i n g

f o u n t ai n s . N at h an i e l s l o w e d

theboots;wetookstockofou
rsurroundings.

TheGlassPalaceroselikeabr
eachingwhalefromthecente
rofthepark,twohundredmet
erslongandahundred

wide.Itwasconstructedalmo
stentirelyofglasspanes,set
amongawebofirongirders.
Themainwalswereregently

soaringcurves;hereandther
eprotrudedsecondarydome
s,crests,minarets,andgable
s.Itwasnothingbutagiant

conservatory,realy,butinst

e ad o f c o n t ai n i n g a f e w m o l d e r i n g t o m at o p l an t s an d a s ac k o f c o m p o s t , i t b o as t e d l i n e s

o f f u l -g r o w n p al m t r e e s , a m an -m ad e s t r e am , ae r i al w al k w ay s , g i f t s h o p s , an d r e f r e s h m e n t b o o t h s , as w e l as al l

m an n e r o f r am s h ac k l e e n t e r t ai n m e n t s .6 T h o u s an d s o f e l e c t r i c l i g h t s h an g i n g f r o m t h e g i r d e r s i l l u m i n at e d t h e ar e a

n i g h t an d d ay . In o r d i n ar y t i m e s i t w as a f av o r i t e p l ac e f o r c o m m o n e r s t o w h i t t l e aw ay t h e i r l i v e s .

6 . These included: b um per cars, roller-sk ating arenas, " R ide-an-im p" m erry-g o-rounds,

M adam e H ouri' s M ystic Tent of P rophecy, a hal of distorting m irrors, B um po the B ear' s G rotto

of Tax iderm y, and the central " O ne W orld E x hib ition" — a series of pathetic stands displaying

the " cultural riches" of each country of the E m pire (m ainly inv olv ing sq uash, yam s, and crudely

painted wooden lov e spoons) . The b il b oards outside proclaim ed the palace as the " Tenth

W onder of the W orld, " which, speak ing as som eone who had a hand in constructing fiv e of the

other nine, I found a little rich.

In t h e p as t I h ad r ar e l y v e n t u r e d n e ar t h e p al ac e , s i n c e i t s i r o n s k e l e t o n m ad e m y e s s e n c e s q u e am i s h . N o w , h o w e v e r ,

p r o t e c t e d w i t h i n N at h an i e l , I h ad n o s u c h w o r r i e s . W e c l i m b e d s o m e s t e p s t o w ar d t h e e as t e r n e n t r an c e . H e r e , t r o p i c al

f e r n s an d p al m t r e e s p r e s s e d t h i c k l y ag ai n s t t h e i n s i d e o f t h

eglass;itwashardtoseebeyo
ndthem.

Faintnoisesechoedfromthe
building.Wedidnotpause,b
utstrodetothewoodendoor
s.Wepushed;thedoors

opened.HoldingtheStaffbe
foreus,westeppedwithin.

Aninstantmugginess:outoft
henight'scold,undertheroo
fofglass,theairwaswarm.An
instantstenchofmagic

too—theafter-plumesofsulp
hurousDetonations.Somew
heretoourright,beyondakn

o t o f t r e e s an d a J ap an e s e

s t y l e s u s h i b ar , c am e s o u n d s o f l am e n t at i o n .

C om m on ers, N at h an i e l t h o u g h t . N eed to g et c lose. S ee who' s g ot them .

T ry the walk way ?

T o o u r l e f t , a s p i r al s t ai r o f i r o n l e d b y r ap i d r e v o l u t i o n s t o a w al k w ay h i g h ab o v e . A n e l e v at e d v an t ag e p o i n t w o u l d

g i v e u s i m m e d i at e ad v an t ag e . W e c r o s s e d s w i f t l y an d s c al e d t h e s t e p s w i t h o u t a s o u n d .

W e r o s e ab o v e t h e s p r e ad i n g

p al m f r o n d s , u p t i g h t ag ai n s t t h e c u r v e o f t h e g r e at g l as s w al , an d c ame o u t u p o n t h e n ar r o w g an t r y , w h i c h e x t e n d e d

l i k e an i r o n t h r e ad t o t h e o p p o s i t e s i d e . N at h an i e l c r o u c h e d l o w ; h e h e l d t h e S t af f h o r i z o n t al ag ai n s t t h e f l o o r . W i t h

s l o w an d c ar e f u l m o v e m e n t s , w e s h u f f l e d o u t ac r o s s t h e v o i d .

It d i d n o t t ak e l o n g b e f o r e w e c o u l d s e e b e y o n d t h e t r e e s t o t h e c e n t e r o f t h e p al ac e , d i r e c t

l y b e l o w t h e h i g h e s t

d o m e s o f s o ar i n g g l as s . H e r e , i n an o p e n s p ac e , w e d g e d b e t w e e n a g au d i l y p ai n t e d m e r r y -g o -r o u n d an d an ar e a o f

p i c n i c t ab l e s , w e s aw a t h r o n g o f h u m an s , p e r h ap s a h u n d r e d s t r o n g , h u d d l e d t o g e t h e r l i k e p e n g u i n s i n a w i n t e r

s t o r m . T h e y w e r e m ar s h al e d b y s e v e n o r e i g h t o f N o u d a's s p i r i t s , w h o s t o o d o n e v e r y s i d e . R u f u s L i m e 's b o d y w as

am o n g t h e i r v e h i c l e s , as w as —I k n e w t h i s f r o m an ag i t at i o n

withinNathaniel's mind—that ofthePrimeMinister

RupertDevereaux. Fromthe authorityoftheirmovements, thespiritsseemedcomfortableintheirhosts.Their auras

had spread far around theoutlines ofthebodies. Itwas notthey, however, who attracted our attention.

Look at Nouda, Nathaniel thought. What' s happened to him?

I had no answer. Upontheroof ofthemerry-go-round, perh

ap s t w e n t y m e t e r s ah e .ad an d as
m an y b e l o w u s , t h e o l d

b o d y o f Q u e n t i n M ak e p e ac e w
as s t an d i n g . W h e n w e 'd l as t s e
t e y e s o n i t , N o u d a h ad b e e n h
av i n g a l i t t l e t r o u b l e

g e t t i n g t o g r i p s w i t h t h e l i m i
t at i o n s o f h i s h o s t . N o w , b e l
at e d l y , h e s e e m e d t o h av e g o t t
h e h an g o f i t . T h e l e g s w e r e

f i r m l y p l an t e d , t h e ar m s l o o s
e l y f o l d e d , t h e c h i n h i g h — h e
h ad t h e e x ac t p o s t u r e o f a s u c c
e s s f u l g e n e r al , m i d -

c amp ai g n .

H e al s o h ad h o r n s .

T h r e e b l ac k o n e s , t o b e e x ac t , p o k i n g f r o m h i s f o r e h e ad at i r r e g u l ar an g l e s . O n e w as l o n g , t h e o t h e r t w o m e r e s t u b s .

A n d t h at w as n 't al l . S o m e k i n d o f d o r s al s p i n e h ad s p l i t t h e b ac k o f h i s s h i r t ; a g r ay - g r e e n f l an g e p r o t r u d e d f r o m h i s

l e f t ar m . T h e f ac e w as w ax y an d i r r e g u l ar , s w o l e n w i t h i n t e r n al p r e s s u r e . T h e e y e s s e e m e d l i v i n g f l ame s .

T hat' s u n ex p ec ted , I t h o u g h t .

H is essen c e is break in g ou t of the bod y . It w as N at h an i e l 's b o u n d l e s s c ap ac i t y f o r s t at i n g t h e o b v i o u s t h at m ad e h i m

s o c h ar m i n g l y h u m an .

A s w e w at c h e d , t h e h o r n s , s p i n e , an d f l an g e s s h r an k b ac k i n t o t h e s k i n , as i f b y a s t e r n e f f o r t o f w i l l . A q u i v e r i n g , a

s h ak i n g : a m o m e n t l at e r t h e y s p r an g b ac k , b i g g e r t h an e v e r . F r o m t h e o p e n m o u t h t h e g r e at v o i c e c am e r o ar i n g . "A h !

T h e d i s c o m f o r t ! I f e e l t h e o l d b u r n i n g ! F aq u ar l ! W here i s F

aq u ar l ? "

H e' s n ot hap p y , N at h an i e l t h o u g h t . H is p ower m u st sim p ly be too g reat. T he f abric of his host is break in g ap art an d

he' s lost its p rotec tion .

C an ' t help that he' s been wolf in g d own hu m an s sin c e he g ot here. T hat m u st have swel ed his essen c e. ... I s u r v e y e d

t h e c o m m o n e r s c o w e r i n g b e l o w h i m . L ook s as if he' s stil hu n g ry too.

T his en d s n ow. A l N at h an i e l 's u

n h ap p i n e s s an d d i s s at i s f ac t i o n h ad c o al e s c e d i n t o c o l d , h ar d f u r y . H i s m i n d w as a

p i e c e o f f l i n t . T hin k we c an p ic k him of f f rom here?

Y es. Aim c aref u l y . W e' ll have on e c han c e on ly . B etter m ak e it a stron g on e.

N o w who' s statin g the obviou s?

W e w e r e s t i l l c r o u c h e d , p e e r i n g t h r o u g h t h e o r n at e i r o n r ai l i n g s t h at b o u n d e d t h e g an t r y . A s N at h an i e l c o m p o s e d

h i m s e l f t o s t an d , I e r e c t e d a p

r e c au t i o n ar y S h i e l d . W h e n t h e s t r i k e w as d o n e , t h e o t h e r s p i r i t s w o u l d n o d o u b t s e e k

r e v e n g e . I s c an n e d t h e p o s s i b i l i t i e s . . . . F i r s t an e v as i v e l e ap , e i t h e r t o t h e p al m t r e e , o r b ac k w ar d o n t o t h e s u s h i b ar

r o o f . T h e n d o w n t o t h e f l o o r . T h e n —

T h at w as e n o u g h f o r w ar d p l an n i n g .

N at h an i e l s t o o d . W e p o i n t e d t h e S t a f f at N o u d a , s p o k e t h e w o r d s —

A t r e m e n d o u s e x p l o s i o n , a s e x p e c t e d .

O n l y , n o t a r o u n d N o u d a , b u t a l a r o u n d u s . M y S h i e l d j u s t a b o u t h e l d f i r m . E v e n s o , w e w e r e b l o w n s i d e w a y s d o w n t h e

g a n t r y a n d t h r o u g h t h e g l a s s w a l l o f t h e p a l a c e i n a s h o w e r o f c r y s t a l f r a g m e n t s , t o g o s p i n n i n g o u t o v e r t h e e n t r a n c e

s t e p s a n d d o w n t o t h e d a r k n e s s o f t h e o r n a m e n t a l g a r d e n s f a r b e l o w . W e l a n d e d h e a v i l y , o u r f a l l o n l y p a r t i a l y

b u f f e r e d b y t h e S h i e l d . T h e S

t af f , t o r n f r o m o u r g r i p , c l att e r e d d i s t an t l y o n t h e p at h .

O u r d u al c o n s c i o u s n e s s w as s h ak e n ap ar t b y t h e i m p ac t ; f o r a f e w s e c o n d s w e v i b r at e d s e p ar at e l y i n a s i n g l e h e ad . A s

w e l ay t h e r e , g r o an i n g i n d e p e n d e n t l y , t h e b o d y o f H o p k i n s c am e d r i f t i n g o u t t h r o u g h t h e s h att e r e d ap e r t u r e h i g h

ab o v e . It f l o at e d d o w n t o t h e s t e p s an d ap p r o ac h e d o n f o o t , at a c al m an d s t e ad y p ac e .

"It 's M an d r ak e , i s n 't i t ? " F aq u ar l s ai d , i n c o n v e r s at i o n al t o

nes."Imustsay,you'reapersistentlittlefelow.Ifyou'd

hadanysense-you'dhavebeenahundredmilesawaybynow.Whatonearth'sgotintoyou?"

Ifheonlyknew;Welayonthesoil,tryinghardtofocus.Slowlyourvisionsteadied,ourinteligencerealigned.

"TheLordNouda,"Faquarlcontinued,"isalittlefractiousatthemomentandneedscarefulhandling.Histemper

wouldnotbeimprovedbybeingstungbyyourtoy."

"S tu n g ? " N at h an i e l c r o ak e d .
"It'l l w i p e h i m o u t ."

"D o y o u r e al l y t h i n k s o ? " T h e
v o i c e w as t i r e d an d am u s e d .

"N o u d a i s g r e at e r t h an y o u c an
g u e s s . H e i s r av e n o u s f o r e n e
r g y ; h e ab s o r b s i t l i k e a s p o n g
e . S e e h o w h e g r o w s

al r e ad y ! H e w o u l d w e l c o m e y
o u r at t ac k an d f e e d o f f i t . I wou
ld h av e l e t y o u t r y i t , b u t I am t i
r e d o f u n n e c e s s ar y

d i s r u p t i o n s . H o w e v e r , i n a
m o m e n t I s h al l t ak e t h e S t af f o
r m y o w n u s e ." H e r ai s e d a l an g

u i d h an d . "S o t h e n ,

f ar e w e l ."

N at h an i e l o p e n e d h i s m o u t h t o s c r e am . I h i j ac k e d i t f o r a b e t t e r p u r p o s e . "H e l l o , F aq u ar l ."

T h e h an d s t ar t e d ; i t s b al e f u l e n e r g i e s r e mai n e d u n r e l e as e d . B e h i n d H o p k i n s 's e y e s , t w i n p o i n t s o f b r i g h t b l u e l i g h t

f l ar e d i n w o n d e r an d c o n f u s i o n . "B ar t i mae u s . . . ? "

"L i t t l e me ."

"How—how...?" Herewasath
ing.Forthefirsttimeinthre
edozencenturiesFaquarlsi
mpregnableassurancewas

shakenbymyarrival.Hewasat
alossforwords."Howcanthi
sbe?Isthisatrick...somevoi
ceprojection...an

ilusion...?"

"Nope.It'smeinhere."

"Itcan'tbe."

"Whoelsewouldknowthetru
thaboutthedeathofGenghis?
Thoselittlepoisonedgrape

s w e s l i p p e d i n t o h i s t e n t

u n d e r t h e n o s e s o f h i s d j i n n . . . ? "7

7 . I won' t g o into this. I t was j ust a little A sian j ob , a long while b ack .

F aq u ar l b l i n k e d ; h e h e s i t at e d . "S o ... It is y o u ."

"M y t u r n t o d e al o u t t h e s u r p r i s e , o l d f r i e n d . A n d I m i g h t j u s t m e n t i o n t h at w h i l e y o u and N o u d a p l ay ar o u n d i n t h e r e ,

m o s t o f y o u r ar m y h as al r e ad y b e e n k i l e d . B y m e ."

AsIspoke,IfeltNathanielsquirming.Hedidn'tlikelying helplessonthegroundâ€”a natural instinctofself-

preservationmadehimdespe ratetogetup.Iqueledhimwit hasinglethought:Wait.

"Ah,youtraitor..." Faquarl had beeninHopkins'sbodyforal ongtime;helickedhislipsju stasahumanmight."I

carenothingforthatlossâ€”th eworldiscrammedwithhum ans,andtherearespiritsenou ghtofilthemal.Butasfor

you... To murder your own kind, to defend your old oppressors... No, it sickens my essence to think of it!" His

hands were clenched; his voice was high with emotion. "We have fought each other many times, Bartimaeus, but

always because of chance, because of our masters' whims. And now, when we are the masters at last, and should

celebrate together, now you choose to carry out this rank betrayal! You, Sakhral-Jinni himself! How can you justify

y o u r ac t i o n s ? "

"M e, t h e t r ai t o r ? " T o b e g i n w i t h, I h ad j u s t b e e n k e e p i n g h i m t al k i n g, w ai t i n g t i l o u r s t r e n g t h r e c o v e r e d f r o m o u r f al,

b u t n o w I w as t o o i n c e n s e d t o t h i n k. M y v o i c e r o s e t o t h e o l d w e n d i g o r o ar t h at e c h o e d t h r o u g h t h e p i n e w o o d s and

k e p t t h e t r i b e s c o w e r i n g i n t h e i r t e e p e e s. "Y ou' re t h e o n e w h o' s t u r n e d h i s b ac k f o r e v e r o n t h e O t h e r P l ac e! H o w m u c h

m o r e o f a t r ai t o r c an y o u b e — t o d e s e r t y o u r h o m e, t o e n c o u r

ag e f e l o w s p i r i t s t o ab an d o n i t f o r e v e r b y b e c o m i n g

s q u at t e r s i n th e s e b ag s o f b o n e s ? A n d f o r w h at ? W h at d o y o u g e t f r o m th i s b e n i g h t e d w as t e l an d ? "

"V e n g e an c e , " F aq u ar l w h i s p e r e d . "V e n g e an c e i s o u r m as t e r h e r e . It k e e p s u s i n th i s w o r l d . It g i v e s u s p u r p o s e ."

" 'P u r p o s e ' i s a hu m an c o n c e p t , " I s ai d q u i e t l y . "W e n e v e r n e e d e d th at b e f o r e . T h i s b o d y o f y o u r s i s n 't j u s t a d i s g u i s e

an y m o r e , i s i t ? It i s n 't j u s t a b

arrieragainstpain. It's whatyou'rebusilybecoming."

Thefirebehindtheeyesflared indignantly, thendwindledsuddenly, grewdul. "Perhapsso, Bartimaeus, perhapso.

.." Thevoicewassoftandwistful; thehandspattedthefrontof

therumpledsuit. "Betweenourselves, Iwilladmittofeelingacertaindiscomfortinthisbodythat Ihadnot

anticipated. Itisnotliketheo

l d s h ar p p ai n w e h av e l o n g w i t h s t o o d ; r at h e r , i t ' s a d u l i t c h t h at n ag s at m e , a

h o l o w n e s s i n s i d e t h at n o am o u n t o f s l au g h t e r c an q u i t e e as e . S o f ar, at an y r at e ." H e g av e a r u e f ul g r i n . " I i n t e n d t o

k e e p t r y i n g ."

" T h at h o l o w n e s s , " I s ai d . " It ' s w h at y o u ' v e l o s t . T h e t i e t o th e O t h e r P l ac e ."

F aq u ar l g az e d at m e . F o r a m o m e n t h e d i d n o t s p e ak . " If t h at i s t r u e , " h e s ai d h e av i l y , " t h e n y o u h av e l o s t i t t o o . Y o u

ar e j u s t as m u c h a s q u at t e r as I, B ar t i m ae u s , c o o p e d u p i n t h at y o u n g m ag i c i an o f y o u r s . W h y d i d y o u d o i t , i f y o u

d e s p i s e t h e n o t i o n as y o u c l ai m ? "

"B e c au s e I h av e a w ay o u t , " I s ai d . "I h av e n 't b u r n e d m y b r i d g e s ."

T h e b l az i n g e y e s n ar r o w e d i n p u z z l e m e n t . "H o w s o ? "

"T h e m ag i c i an s u m m o n e d m e i n . T h e m ag i c i an c an d i s m i s s m e ."

"B u t h i s b r ai n—"

"Is w h o l e . I s h ar e i t w i t h h i m . W h i c h i s t o u g h , ad m i t t e d l y . T h e r e 's n o t mu c h t o g o r o u n d ."

N at h an i e l s p o k e t h e n : "It i s t r u e . W e w o r k t o g e t h e r ."

If F aq u ar l h ad b e e n s u r p r i s e d w h e n I f i r s t s p o k e , h e w as n o w d u mb f o u n d e d . T h e p o s s i b i l i t y s i mp l y h ad n 't o c c u r r e d t o

h i m .

"T h e h u man r e t ai n s h i s i n t e l i

gence?" hemuttered."Whoth enisthemaster?Whichofyou hasdominance?"

"Neitherofus," Isaid.

Nathanielconcurred."Itis an equalbalance."

Faquarlshookhisshead,almos tasifinadmiration."Remark able," hesaid."Asaperversit yitisunique.Oralmostso:

thatbratfromAlexandriayou werealwaysgoingonaboutat onetime,Bartimaeus.He'dh aveapproved,wouldn't

he?" His lipcurledalittle. "Tellme,doyounotfeelsoiled bysuchanintimateassociation?"

"Notparticularly," Isaid. "It's nomoreintimatethanyours, anditsalotlessspermanent. I'mgoinghome."

"Oh,dear. Whatmakesyouthink that?" Faquarlmovedhishand; butI'danticipatedhim. Our longdiscussionhad

givenusachancetorecoverfromthefall;ourenergieswererekindled. Nathaniel'sfingerswerealreadypointedin

his

direction. The green-gray Spasmhit Faquarl's Shield directly; thoughhuninjured, hespunround—his Detonationstruck

theearthwelclear. Meanwhile, Iexercisedourlimbs. Withascatteringofsoil, welaunchedfromtheground, soared

abovethepath, landedrightbesidetheStaff. Nathanielscoopeditup; weturned, quickasastrikingkrait.

Faquarlstoodonthepath, not

d i s t an t , h an d h al f r ai s e d . L i g h
t f r o m t h e G l as s P al ac e c u t ac r
o s s h i m , b l e n d i n g w i t h t h e

s h ad o w . F as t as w e 'd b e e n , h e
w as s t i l l f as t e r . I s o m e t i m e s
w o n d e r i f h e c o u l d h av e g o t u s
i n t h e b ac k , as w e b e n t

b e s i d e t h e S t aff , b e f o r e w e 'd
g o t i t i n o u r h an d . B u t m ay b e o
u r S p as m h ad s h ak e n h i m , p u t h
i m o ff h i s s t r i d e . It 's

d i ff i c u l t t o s ay . F o r a s e c o n d
w e g az e d at e ac h o t h e r .

"Y o u r d i s c o v e r y i s r e m ar k ab
l e , " F aq u ar l s ai d . "B u t i t c o m e

s t o o l at e f o r m e ."

H e m ad e s o m e m o v e m e n t o r o t h e r w i t h h i s f l e s h y b o d y ; I d o n 't r e m e m b e r w h at . I d i d n o t h i n g , b u t I w as c o n s c i o u s o f

t h e b o y 's i m m e d i at e c o m m an d . A s t ab o f p u r e w h i t e l i g h t — i t f ad e d , v an i s h e d , s c o u r e d F aq u ar l f r o m t h e E ar t h .

W e s t o o d al o n e o n t h e p at h b e n e at h t h e p al ac e .

S hak e a leg , t h e b o y t h o u g h t . P eop le are c om in g , an d we' ve g ot a f in al bit of work to d o.

36

Kitty

It was fortunate for Kitty that most of the magicians in her company were from the very lowest ranks, since this

meant that several of them could drive. Limousines were located in the lot beneath Westminster Hal; the Chauffeurs'

Mess provided a choice of keys. By the time six vehicles arrived, revving, in the deserted street outside, Kitty and the

o t h e r s h ad r e t r i e v e d w h at w e
ap o n s t h e y c o u l d , n e g o t i at e d
t h e s u m m o n i n g o f a n u m b e r o f
i m p s , an d w e r e w ai t i n g at

t h e d o o r . W i t h o u t c e r e m o n y ,
t h e y b u n d l e d i n , f o u r t o a c ar ,
an d w i t h t h e d e m o n s h o v e r i n
g i n t h e i r w ak e , p r o c e e d e d i n

p r o c e s s i o n u p t h e r o ad .

T h e y d i d n o t g e t f ar . H al f w ay u
p W h i t e h al l , t h e y f o u n d t h e w
ay b l o c k e d b y r u b b l e f r o m a t o
p p l e d w ar m e m o r i al .

P r o g r e s s w as i m p e d e d ; l ab o r
i o u s l y t h e c o n v o y t u r n e d , r e t

r e at e d t o P ar l i am e n t S q u ar e ,
an d t u r n e d r i g h t t o w ar d S t .

J am e s 's P ar k .

If W h i t e h al h ad b e e n e m p t y , t h
e s t r e e t s t o t h e s o u t h o f t h e p
ar k w e r e an y t h i n g b u t . N o t f ar
ah e ad c am e e x p l o s i o n s ,

r e f l e c t e d l i g h t s , an d t h e s o u
n d o f h o w l i n g w o l v e s . C l o s e
r s t i l l , as i f a h u m an d am h ad b u r
s t , h u n d r e d s o f p e o p l e

s u r g e d f r o m t h e s i d e r o ad s , s
w am p i n g t h e t h o r o u g h f ar e an
d p o u r i n g d o w n t o w ar d t h e l i
m o u s i n e s .

Kittywassittinginthelead
car,besidethedriver.Sudden
fearlurchedinher."Getout!
"shesnapped."Itisn'tsafe!"

Hesawthedanger,switchedo
fftheengine,fumbledwitht
hedoor.Asone,theyleftthe
carsandranforshelter;

secondslaterthecrowdengu
lfedthelimousines,eyeswi
ld,facessetinexpressionso
fterroranddespair.Manyran

straightpast;others,seeing
inthesleekblackvehiclesst
arksymbolsofthemagicians'
rule,lashedoutatthem,

kicking,screaming.Abrick appearedfromnowhere:awindscreensmashed;thecrowd'svoiceroared.

Ms.PipersupportedKitty,whowasshakingwiththeeffortoftheirescape."Thecommoners..."shewhispered.

"They'vegoneinsane...."

"They'rescared,they'reangry."Kittystruggledtogatherherstrength."Lookattheirinjuries.They'veescapedfrom

thepark.Now,arewealpresent?"Asshelookeddownthes

tragglinglineofmagicians,a
thoughtstruckher."Those

ofyouwithimps,getthemun
deryourjackets!"shehissed
."Ifanyonewithresilienceesp
otsthem,you'llbetorn

apart!Ready?Right—comeo
n,we'venotimetowaste."

Withoutdelaytheycontinue
dupthestreetonfoot,keepin
gtothemarginsastheflowofh
umantraffic sweptby.The

firstfewsideroadswerecho
kedwithrushingbodiesandp
rovedimpassable.Littleby l

ittletheydrewneartothe

soundsoffighting.

Aflashoflightinthedarknes s.Silhouettedonabuilding, theoutlineofaman.Greenfir esbilowedalabouthim.The

lightwentout.Inthestreetbe low,asmalnumberofwolves weremassing;theyheardahi ghvoiceshoutingorders,

glimpsedadark-hairedform —

"That'sFarrar,"oneofthemagi cianssaid."She'sgotsomewo

l v e s t o g e t h e r . B u t w h at . . . w h at w as t h at s h ap e ? "

"O n e o f t h e d e m o n s . . ." K i t t y w as l e an i n g w e ar i l y ag ai n s t a w al an d l o o k i n g d o w n a n ar r o w al e y . "T h i s w ay 's c l e ar .

It 'l g e t u s t o t h e p ar k ."

"B u t s h o u l d n 't w e —? "

"N o . T h at 's j u s t a s i d e s h o w . B e s i d e s , I d o n 't t h i n k d e ar M s . F ar r ar w o u l d r e al y wan t o u r h e l p , d o y o u ? "

T h e al l e y l e d , b y c i r c u i t o u s t w i s t s an d t u r n s , t o a q u i e t r o

adrunningalongtheedgeofthepark.Thistheycrossed,

andfromasmaleminence,lookeddownuponthebl ackexpanse.Afewfiresburnedhereandthere—intrees,in

pavilions,inthepagodadownbythelake—butlittlemovementcouldbeseen.AtKitty's suggestion,anumberofimps

weresentaheadtospyoutthel and.Theyreturnedinmoments.

"Terriblebattlehasbeenwag

edhere,"saidthefirst,wringingitswebbedhands."Atintervalsthegroundiscrispand

charred.Magicaleffusionshangoverthegroundlikefog.Butthebattlehasceasedeverywhere,saveinoneplace."

"Manyhumanshaveperished,"saidthesecond,goggle-eyesblinkingontheirstalks."Theirbodieslielikefalen

leaves.Someliewounded;theycryforhelp.Afewotherswanderwithoutpurpose.Butmosthavefled.Theparkis

emptyofcrowds,saveinone place."

"Thegreatspiritsarelikewise gone," saidthethird,flapping itsgauzywings."Theirspiledessence hangsamidthe

echoesoftheirscreams.Afew survivorshavefledacross thecity.Butnoneremaininthe park,saveinoneplace."

"Andwhat," Kittyasked,tapping herfootgently,"isthatplace?"

Wordlesslythethreeimpsturnedandpointedupattheligh

tsofthegreatGlassPalace.

Kittynodded."Whydidn'tyousayso?Allright,let'sgo."

Fortenhardandsilentminutestheywalkedacrossthebl ackenedground.Kittywentslowly,forciblycompletinge ach

stepagainstttheshrillprotestsofherbody.Inthehourssinceherreturn,herstrengthhaddrippedbacksteadily.

Evenso,shelongedtorest.Sheknewshewasreachingtheendofherendurance.

Theimps'reportshadbeenpithy,buttheimplicationofthemwasclear,andfittedinwiththeglimpseinthecrystal.

NathanielandBartimaeushadbeenhere:itwastheywhohadclearedtheparkandenabledmanyofthepeopleto

escape.Perhaps—thehopeswelledinsideherwitheachstep—perhapstheywouldsooncompletetheprocess:

perhapsshewouldseethemcomingtowardherintriumph,withagroupofgratefulcommonersintheirtrain.Surely,

withtheStaff,itwasonlyamatteroftime....

Butwhiletherewasanydoubt,shecouldnotholdback.Shecouldnotleavethem.AthernecktheAmuletof

Samarkandbouncedgentlywitheachfalteringstep.

Fiveminutespassed.Kitty's eyesgrewheavy.Suddenlythe eyblinkedalert.

"Whatwasthat?"

"Magicalblast,"Ms.Piperwhispered."Bytheeasternentr

ance."

Theykeptwalking.

Fourminuteslater,withthepalaceloomingoverthem,theyenteredtheornamentalgardens.Astheydidso,the

groundshook;apiercingwhitelightflashedduponthepathbeforethebuilding.Thecompanystoppeddead,

waited.Thelightwasnotrepeated.Nervousnesscrackledbetweenthemlikeanelectriccharge.

Kitty's eyes strained in the dark. The glow from the palace cast the night into even greater shadow. It was hard to be

sure.... But—yes—there upon the path, a figure standing. As she watched, it moved and was silhouetted against the

glass.

Kitty hesitated just a moment. Then she stumbled forward, caling.

Nathaniel

At the sound of the voice Nath

anielstoppeddead. Itbarelye
vencarriedtohisbrain, what
withhisearsbuzzingfrom

ahundredDetonationsandwi
ththevibrationsofthethirst
yStaffhummingnearathand, b
utthelittlecaldidwhat

althedemonsacrossthepark h
adfailedtodo: itsethisheartr
acing.

Throughoutthebattlehehad
movedwithdemonicspeed
anddefficiency, avoidingdeat
hwithoutmucheffortand

exerting, throughtheStaff, d

e s t r u c t i v e e n e r g i e s g r e at e r t h an m an y d j i n n p o s s e s s e d . It w as an e x p e r i e n c e t h at h ad

b e e n d e s i r e d b y m o s t m ag i c i an s t h r o u g h t h e c e n t u r i e s , an d c e r t ai n l y b y N at h an i e l h i m s e l f i n i d l e d ay d r e ams . It w as

t h e f e e l i n g o f c o n s u mm at e s u p e r i o r i t y , t h e d e l i g h t o f p o w e r w i e l d e d w i t h o u t p e r i l . H e d an c e d b e n e at h t h e d ar k n i g h t

s k y , s m i t i n g d o w n h i s e n e mi e s . An d y e t , w i t h al h i s n i mb l e n e s s an d g u i l e , w i t h al t h e ad r e nal i n e p u mp i n g t h r o u g h

him, deepinsidehewascurio
uslyinert. Hefeltaloof, disc
onnected, andalone. Ifhishat
redforthedemonsthathe

hadkiledwasdulandalmostm
atter-of-fact, sowashissymp
athyforthepeoplewhoseliv
eshesaved. Thewoman

inTrafalgarSquarehadshown
whathecouldexpectfromthe
m. Theywouldregardhimwit
hfearanddistaste, and

rightlyso. Hewasamagician.
Itwasthankstohimandhiskin
dthatLondonwasinflames.

Pridespurredhimon—that, andthedjinnitalkinginsideh ishead. Yes, hewouldseekto endthedestruction. Butafte r

that... Actionswereonethin g, expectationsanother. Heh adnoideawhathewoulddo.

Andthen, onthepathoutsidet hegreatGlassPalace—

Thedjinni'sthoughtdriftedt hroughhismind. That's Kitty's voice, that is.

Iknow. Youthink Idon't know?

It' s j u st, y ou ' ve g on e al , lim p an d heavy . L ik e wet c ard board . T hou g ht y ou ' d had a seiz u re ou t of f ear.

It' s n ot f ear.

S o y ou say . Y ou r heart' s g oin g lik e the c lap p ers. E eu c h, an d y ou ' ve g on e a bit sweaty . S u re it isn ' t a f ever?

Q u ite su re. N ow will y ou shu t u p ?

N at h an i e l w at c h e d h e r c o m i n g s l o w l y t h r o u g h t h e g ar d e n . A c r o s s t h e s e v e n p l an e s h e r au r a l i t t h e g r o u n d l i k e d ay . A

g r o u p o f p e o p l e s t r ag g l e d c l

osebehind.

"Kitty."

"Nathaniel."

Theylookedateachother.Thenhismouthopenedwithawrenchingnoisesomethinglikeabelch."Andme!Don't

forgetme!"Nathanielsworeandclampedhismouthtightshut.

Kittygrinned."Helo,Bartimaeus."

Anentirelyunconnectedang

ersuddenlyrosewithinNathaniel.Hefrownedather."IthoughtItoldyounottocome

withus.You'retooweak.It'stoodangerous."

"Sincewhenhaveleverlistenedtoyou?What'sthesituation?"

Nathaniel'smouthopenedofitsownaccord;Bartimaeusspoke."We'vedestroyedmostofNouda'sarmy,buthe

himselfisstilatlarge.Inthere"—Nathaniel'sthumbjerkedbackoverhisshoulder—"wit

hsevenotherspiritsand

maybeahundredcommoners.Andwe're—"

"Abouttodealwithhim," Nathanielfinished.

"—inserioustrouble," thedjinnisaid.

Kittyblinked."Sorry,which...?"

NathanielshiftedtheStaff;thinbandsofenergypulsedandcrackledaroundhishand.Heft eltasurgeofjoyful

impatience—hewoulddestroyNouda,rescuethecommoners,andreturntoKitty.Beyondthat,everythingcouldwait.

Butthedjinniwascuttingacrosshisthoughts,speakingurgentlytoKitty."Noudaisgrowinginstrengthalthetime.

He'snotreactingliketheothers.Hemaynotbeassusceptibletotheotherstaffaswethought."

Nathanielinterruptedangrily."Whatdoyoumean?It'llbefine."

"That's not what Faquarl said."

"Oh, and you believed him."

"Faquarl didn't tend to lie. That wasn't his style."

"No, his style was trying to kill us dead—" Nathaniel broke off. He had caught sight of a ring of silent listeners,

watching him seemingly argue with himself. Among several magicians that he recognized was his personal assistant.

He cleared his throat. "Hello, Piper."

"H e l l o , s i r ."

K i t t y h e l d u p a h and . "B ar t i m
ae u s —t h e r e ar e m an y p r i s o n e
r s i n t h e r e and w e h av e l i t t l e t i
m e . D o w e h av e an y

al t e r n at i v e t o t h e S t aff ? "

"N o . U n l e s s t h i s c r o w d i s al m
ag i c i an s o f t h e t h i r t e e n t h l e v
e l ."

"R i g h t . T h e n w e 'v e g o t t o g o f
o r i t , b e t t e r o r w o r s e . N at h an
i e l , " K i t t y s ai d , "y o u 'l h av e t o
d o w h at y o u c an . If y o u d e al

w i t h t h e d e m o n s , w e 'l l e v ac u

atethecommoners.Whereare they?"

"Closeby.'Inthecenterofthe palace." Inthepastherpresen cedisconcertedhim;nowitf illedhimwithrenewed

purposeandself-belief.Hes pokeswiftly,withhisoldaut hority."Piper,whenyougeti nside,you'llseeapathrunnin g

totherightbetweenthepalm s.Itleadsbehindthecarousel toanopenarea.That'swhereth edemonsandthe

captivesare. Ifyouwaitdown thatpath, incover, I'lattackfr omtheoppositeside. Whent hedemonsfolowme, try

toleadtheprisonersoutand asfaraw ayaspossible. Anyon ewithimps, usethemtohelpy ou. Isthatclear?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Kitty—youshouldw aitoutside."

"Ishould, butIwon't. I'vegott heAmulet, remember?"

Nathanielknewbetterthanto

argue. He turned toward the entrance to the palace."Absolute silence when we're in. I'll

give you a minute to get into positions."

He held open the door. One by one, with wide eyes and pale, strained faces, the company of magicians stooped past

and disappeared up the path. Several were accompanied by their imps, who wore identical. expressions of unease.

Last to go through was Kitty. She paused for a moment on the

s t e p .

"W e l d o n e , " s h e w h i s p e r e d , g e s t u r i n g b a c k t o w a r d t h e e m p t y p a r k . "Y o u a n d B a r t i m a e u s . I s h o u l d h a v e s a i d ."

N a t h a n i e l g r i n n e d a t h e r . Im p a t i e n c e t u g g e d w i t h i n h i m . T h e S t a f f s a n g . "It's a l m o s t o v e r , " h e s a i d s o f t l y . "G o o n .

A f t e r y o u ."

T h e d o o r s h u t q u i e t l y b e h i n d t h e m .

Bartimaeus

T h e r e ar e t i m e s w h e n e v e n a n e ar o m n i p o t e n t d j i n n i k n o w s t o k e e p h i s m o u t h s h u t , an d t h i s w as o n e o f t h e m . I

w o u l d n't h av e g o t an y w h e r e .

T r o u b l e w as , n e i t h e r o f t h e m w as i n a m o o d t o l i s t e n t o m y d o u b t s . F o r o n e t h i n g t h e y s m e l l e d s u c c e s s t o o s t r o n g l y :

h i m w i t h t h e S t a f f h e l d c as u al y i n h i s h an d ; h e r w i t h t h e A m u l e t w ar m ag ai n s t h e r b r e as t . S u c h t r i n k e t s b r e e d

c o n f i d e n c e . An d b e s i d e s , t h e y'd d o n e t o o m u c h al r e ad y t o i

magineanystumblesnow.

Butthemainproblemwasthe waytheyplayedoffeachother. Simplyput,theirmutualpresencespurrede achother

on.TrappedasIwasinsideNathaniel,Icouldcertainlyseehowthegirlinspiredhim.lPerhapsIcan'tvouchforKitty

somuch,butinmyvastexperience,strongcharactersoftheirsorttendtogravitatetogether.Pridehasaparttoplay

initandotheremotionstoo. Neitherwishestofail;eachr

e d o u b l e s t h e i r e f f o r t s t o i m p r e s s . T h i n g s g e t d o n e — b u t n o t

al w ay s t h e r i g h t t h i n g s , o r n o t al w ay s t h e t h i n g s e x p e c t e d .2 A n d t h e r e 's n o t m u c h y o u c an d o t o s t o p i t .

1. Too rig ht I could. I t was as if she' d trig g ered an internal one-m an b and, all K lax ons, b el s,

and pennywhistles, with enthusiastic cym b als strapped b etween his k nees. The noise was

d ea f en i n g .

2 . That' s how it was with N efertiti and A k henaton, of course. O ne m om ent it was ling ering

look s and assig nations b y the crocodile enclosure; nex t it was tearing up the state relig ion and

m ov ing E g ypt' s capital 6 0 m iles into the desert. O ne thing j ust led to another.

It h as t o b e s ai d , h o w e v e r , t h at i n t h e p r e s e n t i n s t an c e t h e r e r e al y wasn ' t an y v i ab l e al t e r n at i v e t o N at h an i e l 's p l an .

N o u d a w as f ar t o o p o w e r f u l f o r t h e (r at h e r l ac k l u s t e r) r e m n ant s o f t h e g o v e r n m e n t t o d e

s t r o y . S o t h e S t af f was t h e

o n l y o p t i o n . B u t F aq u ar l 's p h r as e r an g u n e as i l y i n m y m i n d : H e wou ld welc om e y ou r attac k an d f eed of f it. An d c al

m e p e s s i m i s t i c , b u t t h at s t r u c k m e as a m i t e o m i n o u s .3

3 . F aq uarl wasn' t a sly old eq uiv ocator lik e Tchue; he prided him self on b lunt speak ing . M ind

you, he d i d hav e a weak ness for b oasting . I f you b eliev ed al his stories, you' d hav e thoug ht

him responsib le for m ost of the worlds

m aj or landm ark s as well as b eing adv iser and confidant

to al the notab le m ag icians. This, as I once rem ark ed to S olom on, was a q uite ridiculous claim .

B u t i t w as t o o l at e t o w o r r y ab o u t t h at n o w . T h e S t af f h ad f l at t e n e d c i t i e s . W i t h l u c k , i t w o u l d s t an d u s i n g o o d s t e ad .

K i t t y an d h e r r ag t ag c o m p an y w e n t o n e w ay t h r o u g h t h e p al m s ; N at h an i e l an d I w e n t t h e o t h e r . W e i g n o r e d t h e s t ai r s

t h i s t i m e , k e p t t o g r o u n d l e v e l . A w ay t o o u r r i g h t w e h e ar d r

o ar s an d s c r e am s . S o t h at w as al r i g h t : N o u d a h ad n 't

g o n e an y w h e r e .

W hat' s the p lan ? M y t h o u g h t f l i t t e d t h r o u g h N at h an i e l 's m i n d .

W e n eed to d raw N ou d a of f , g et him away f rom the c om m on ers bef ore we attac k . H ow c an we d o that?

I rec om m en d g oad in g . G oad in g u su al y work s.

I' ll leave that u p to y ou .

T he other sp irits n eed to be d ealt with

too, I t h o u g h t . B ef ore or af ter?

B ef ore. O r they ' ll k ill the c om m on ers.

Y ou c on trol the S taf f . I' ll k eep u s m ovin g . I warn y ou , we' re g oin g to have to be p retty m obile f or this.

H e m ad e a d i s m i s s i v e g e s t u r e . I c an c op e with a f ew leap s an d bou n d s.

R ead y , then ?

T he others wil be in p osition . Y es, let' s g —O ooooh—

I h ad n 't t r i e d f l y i n g u p t o n o w ,

s i n c e i t t o o k a l o t o f e n e r g y , b u t t h i s w as t h e b i g o n e , t h i s w as w h e r e e v e r y t h i n g

c o u n t e d . A n d F aq u ar l h ad s e e m e d t o m an ag e i t w e l e n o u g h . S o w i t h o u t f u r t h e r ad o , I l i f t e d u s o f f t h e p at h , u p b e s i d e

t h e p al m s . F o r a n as t y m o m e n t I t h o u g h t t h e b o y w as g o i n g t o d r o p t h e S t aff . F o r an e v e n n as t i e r m o m e n t I t h o u g h t

h e w as g o i n g t o b e s i c k . B u t h e h e l d o n t o o n e an d h e l d i n t h e o t h e r .

W hat' s the m atter with y ou ?

N ever . . . n ever f lown bef ore.

T his is n othin g . Y ou shou ld try loop in g the loop on a c arp et. T hat wou ld r e al l y m ak e y ou g reen . 4 O k ay , en em y ' s

c om in g in sig ht. S taf f at the read y . . .

4 . I t was an odd historical fact that the B ritish m ag icians had no interest in m ag ical flying ,

b eing inclined (wisely, it m ust b e said) to trust to m echanical m eans instead. B ut other cultures

had no q ualm s ab out fusing dj inn with

inanim ate ob j ects: the P ersians went in for carpets;

certain down-at-heel E uropeans went b y m ortar and pestle.V enturesom e C hinese m ag icians

ev en tried their hand at riding c l o u d s .

W e s o ar e d u p o v e r t h e p al m t r e e s . E l e c t r i c l i g h t s s h o n e d o w n u p o n u s . A l ar o u n d s t r e t c h e d t h e g r e at g l as s d o m e ;

b e y o n d i t w as t h e g r e at e r d o m e o f n i g h t . A n d t h e r e ah e ad —t h e o p e n s p ac e , w i t h h u d d l e d p r i s o n e r s an d s p i r i t g u ar d s

muchasbefore.Perhapsther ewereslightlyfewerprisoner sthistime;itwashardtotell .Butsurprisinglylittlehad

changed.Thereasonforthisst oodwrithingontheroofoft hecarousel.

PoorNoudawashavinga terribletimewithhishost.Make peace'sbodyjustwasn'tupto scratch.Fromalmostevery

surface,protuberancesofon esortoranotherwerezealous lypoking,carvingtheclothe storibbons.Therewere

horns,spines,wedges,flanges,wings,tentacles,andpolypsofadozenhues.Otherbulgesremainedbeneaththe

skin,deformingitintoripplingcrestsandvalleys,sothatthehumancontourswerealmostentirelyblurred.Theold

legshadbeenjoinedbythreeothers,ofvaryingstagesofdevelopment.Onearmseemedtohavegainedasecond

elbowjoint—itswungtoandfroincomplexagitation.Thefacewascontortedlikeapufferfish's.Smalbarbs

e x t e n d e d f r o m t h e c h e e k s .5 T h e e y e s h ad d i s ap p e ar e d i n g o u t s o f f l ame .

5 . N .B . I ' m stil talk ing ab out the face here.

T h e m o u t h , w h i c h n o w s w e p t r o u n d f r o m e ar t o e ar , l e t o u t a p i t e o u s r o ar i n g . "T h e p ai n o f i t ! A l ar o u n d m e i s t h e

p i n c h o f i r o n ! B r i n g F aq u ar l h e r e ! B r i n g h i m h e r e b e f o r e m e . H i s ad v i c e h as b e e n m o s t — ah ! —m ost u n s at i s f ac t o r y . I

w i s h t o r e p r i m an d h i m ."

T h e s p i r i t i n t h e b o d y o f R u p e r t D e v e r e a u x s p o k e c r i n g - i n g l y f r o m b e l o w . " W e d o n o t k n o w w h e r e F a q u a r l i s , L o r d

N o u d a . H e a p p e a r s t o h a v e d e p a r t e d . "

" B u t I g a v e t h e s t r i c t e s t i n s t r u c t i o n s — h e i s — a h ! — t o a t t e n d m e w h i l e I f e e d ! O h — t h e r e i s s u c h a n a c h e i n s i d e m y

b e l y — a v o i d t h a t m u s t b e q u e n c h e d . B o l i b , C a s p a r — b r i n g m e a n o t h e r b r a c e o f h u m a n s , t h a t I m i g h t d i s t r a c t

m y s e l f . "

It was at this moment that Nathaniel and I, flying down from on high, with the air buffeting against us and our coat

billowing in our wake, shot three spirits with a triple blast. We did it so fast, so precisely, that the human stremb ling

nearby scarcely noticed they had gone.

The other spirits looked up. The ceiling lights dazzled them: their irretorts went wide, arcing out harmlessly beneath the

glass. We swooped low. The Staff flared, once, twice—another two hybrids vanished. A turn—so sharp that Nathaniel

was, for an instant, horizontal in the air; a sudden gut-churning drop as a Disembowelment flittered overhead.

Another shot—this one missed the target. Caspar, the spirit with the unenviable fate of occupying Rufus Lime, had

himself taken to the air. He climbed towards us, firing Detonations. We banked, flew behi

ndaknotoftrees;aswe

emergedabovethem,theirc
anopyburstintolividflames
.Belowus,thehumanswereres
uddenlypossessedbypanic;

theysplitinmyriaddirectio
ns.Outofthecornerofourey
ewesawKittyandthemagici
ansbreakingfromthetrees.

Uponthe roofofthecarousel
Noudawasswayingfromside
tosideinsomeannoyance."W
hatisthisintrusion?Who

besetsus?"

W e f l e w p as t at a c h e e k y d i s t an c e . "B ar t i m ae u s h e r e ! " I c al e d . "R e m e m b e r m e ? "

A s u d d e n t w i s t h i g h t o w ar d t h e d o m e ; R u p e r t D e v e r e au x 's b o d y h ad r i s e n t o m e e t u s —b l u e f i r e g u s t e d f r o m h i s

h an d s . N at h an i e l 's t h o u g h t p r o t r u d e d . T H AT was y ou r g oad in g ? "R e m e m b e r m e ? " I c ou ld d o better than that.

I c an ' t g oad p rop erly when I' m . . . c on c en tratin g on som ethin g else. W e h ad r i s e n al m o s t t o t h e c e i l i n g g l as s ; w e s aw

s t ar s g l i n t i n g p e ac e f u l y , f ar
aw ay . T h e n I d r o p p e d u s v e r t i
c al l y , l i k e a s t o n e . D e v e r e au
x 's S p as m s h at t e r e d t h e p an e

ab o v e ; i t ar c e d o u t i n t o t h e n i
g h t . N at h an i e l f i r e d t h e S t aff :
i t c au g h t D e v e r e au x a g l an c i n
g b l o w u p o n t h e l e g s ,

s e t t i n g t h e m af l ame .T u m b l i n
g an d f l ai l i n g , h e s p i r al e d d o
w n i n a t r ai l o f s m o k e , p l u n g e
d i n t o t h e M y s t i c T e n t o f

P r o p h e c y an d e x p l o d e d i n a b
u r s t o f i r i d e s c e n t l i g h t .

W here' s L im e? N at h an i e l t h o u g

h t . C an ' t see him .

D on ' t k n ow. L ook at N ou d a. H e' s ou r p roblem n ow.

W h e t h e r o r n o t s p u r r e d t o ac t i o n b y m y c o r u s c at i n g w i t , o r s i m p l y t h r o u g h d i s p l e as u r e at s e e i n g t h e r e m n an t s o f h i s

ar m y s l ai n , N o u d a h ad s u d d e n l y e x e r t e d h i m s e l f . G r e at g r e e n w i n g s e r u p t e d f r o m h i s b ac k . S l o w l y at f i r s t , l ab o r i n g

u n d e r t h e d i s ad v an t ag e s o f h i s g r o t e s q u e as y m m e t r y , h e s t u m b l e d t o t h e l i p o f t h e c ar o u s e l r o o f , h e s i t at e d l i k e a

f l e d g l i n g o n i t s m ai d e n f l i g h t , t h e n s t e p p e d o f f . T h e m i g h t y w i n g s b e at o n c e —t o o l at e . H e 'd al r e ad y l an d e d s p r e ad -

e ag l e d o n t h e g r o u n d .

G et him , I s ai d . G et him N O W

W e d r o p p e d d o w n as f as t as I c o u l d m an ag e i t , N at h an i e l 's j aw c l amp e d t i g h t s h u t w i t h t h e s p e e d o f t h e d e s c e n t . A s

w e p l u m m e t e d , N at h an i e l l e s s e n e d t h e c o n s t r ai n t s u p o n t h e e n t i t i e s o f t h e S t aff , o p e n e d i t up as m u c h as h e d ar e d .

Theirenergieserupted,lanc
eddownuponthewrigglingb
odyinaflowerofflight.

Keep it going, I said. Keep it goin
g. Don't leave any thing to chanc e.

Iknow. I'm doing it.

Ourdescentslowed,slowed
. We hovered in mid air. Belo
w, a milky-white infernorag
ed: Noud a and the carouselw
ere

deepwithinit. Heat plumedo
utward, cracked the glass onn
earbypanes, burned the air ar
oundus. I erected a small

S h i e l d t o d e f l e c t t h e f u l f e r o c i t y . T h e v i b r a t i o n s o f t h e S t a f f g r e w g r e a t e r , r a n u p o u r a r m a n d s h o o k w i t h i n o u r s k u l .

W hat d o y ou thin k ? t h e b o y t h o u g h t . E n ou g h?

M u st be . . . N o, p lay saf e. A little lon g er.

I c an ' t hold it f or m u c h—Ah!

I'd s e e n t h e s h ad o w r i s i n g , s e n s e d t h e m o v e m e n t i n t h e ai r . I'd f l u n g u s as i d e . B u t t h e D e t o n at i o n c au g h t u s , b r o k e

m y S h i e l d ap ar t , s t r u c k u s o n t

h e s i d e e v e n as w e s p u n aw ay .
T h e b o y c r i e d o u t and I c r i e d
w i t h h i m—f o r t h e f i r s t and

o n l y t i m e I s h ar e d a h u man 's p
ai n . S o m e t h i n g i n t h e f e e l i n g
—p e r h ap s i t w as t h e d u l i mmo
b i l i t y o f t h e f l e s h , t h e w ay

i t j u s t s at t h e r e , ac c e p t i n g t h e
w o u n d—m ad e p an i c r i p p l e t h
r o u g h m y e s s e n c e . T h e b o y 's
m i n d t e e t e r e d o n t h e e d g e

o f c o n s c i o u s n e s s . H i s f i n g e
r s l o o s e n e d o n t h e S t a f f ; i t s e
n e r g i e s d i e d b ac k . I g r i p p e d i
t h ar d e r , s p u n i t r o u n d , s e n t

w h i t e f i r e l as h i n g b e n e at h t h e d o m e , t o c u t s t r ai g h t t h r o u g h t h e p u r s u i n g b o d y o f R u f u s L i m e . T h e h al v e s d r o p p e d

s e p ar at e l y t o e ar t h . I s e al e d t h e S t aff s e c u r e l y . W e l an d e d aw k w ar d l y am i d a c l u m p o f p al m s an d p o t p l an t s .

T h e b o y w as b u s y f ai n t i n g . O u r e y e s w e r e c l o s i n g . I f o r c e d t h e m o p e n , an d s e t m y e s s e n c e t i n g l i n g t h r o u g h h i s

s y s t e m . W AK E U P .

H e s t i r r e d . " M y s i d e . . . "

D on ' t look at it. W e' re al rig ht.

An d N ou d a?

W el . . . that' s n ot so g ood . A c r o s s t h e o p e n s p ac e , b e y o n d a n u m b e r o f s c att e r e d p i c n i c t ab l e s an d l i tt e r b i n s , t h e

e ar t h w as b r o k e n , b l i s t e r e d . W h e r e o n c e t h e k i d d i e s r o d e t h e c ar o u s e l , a s m o k i n g c r at e r s p l i t t h e e ar t h . A n d i n t h at

s m o k e , s o m e t h i n g b i g an d s h ap e l e s s r o ar e d an d s t u m b l e d , c al i n g o u t m y n ame .

"B ar t i m ae u s ! I o r d e r y o u , c o m

e h e r e ! I m u s t c h as t i s e y o u f o r y o u r i m p u d e n c e ! "

It n o l o n g e r l o o k e d an y t h i n g m u c h l i k e a m an .

"S e e h o w m y s t r e n g t h g r o w s , B ar t i m ae u s , d e s p i t e m y p ai n ! S e e h o w I s h r u g o f f t h i s p at h e t i c c o at o f f l e s h ! "

B artim aeu s ... m y sid e . . . I c an ' t f eel it.

It' s f i n e . D on ' t worry abou t it.

Y ou ' re c on c ealin g som ethin g . . . T hat thou g ht—what was it?

N othin g . I was thin k in g we have to g et u p ; g et away .

"W h e r e are y o u , B ar t i m ae u s ? " t h e g r e at v o i c e c al l e d . "I s h al l ad d y o u t o m y s e l f . It i s an h o n o r ! "

M y sid e f eels n u m b . . . I c an ' t—

R elax . I' l see if I c an f ly u s ou t.

N o, wait. W hat abou t . . . N ou d a?

H e' s a big boy ; he c an f ly him self if he wan ts to. N ow—

W e c an 't , B artim aeu s. N ot if he' s—

H e' l k eep . ' W e' re g oin g .

N O .

I t r i e d t o e x e r t m y e n e r g i e s t o f l y , b u t t h e b o y w as ac t i v e l y r e s i s t i n g — t h e m u s c l e s t e n s e d , h i s w i l w r e s t l e d w i t h m y

o w n . W e h al f r o s e , c r as h e d b ac k d o w n am o n g t h e f e r n s , e n d e d u p l e an i n g ag ai n s t a t r e e . O n e ad v an t ag e o f t h i s : i t

c o n c e al e d u s f r o m t h e m an y e y e s o f N o u d a , n o w a s q u att i n g b l ac k n e s s t h at s c u t t l e d o n t h e c r at e r 's l i p .

Y ou i d i o t , N athan iel. L et m e tak e over.

T here isn ' t an y p oin t.

W hat d o y ou —?

Is there? I read y ou r m in d . J u st n ow.

O h . . . that. L ook , I' m n o m ed ic . Forg et it. I c ou ld be wron g .

B u t y ou ' re n ot, are y ou ? T el m e the tru th f or on c e.

A s u r r e p t i t i o u s r u s t l i n g i n t h e l e av e s . I t u r n e d o u r h e ad , g r at e f u l f o r t h e o p p o r t u n i t y t o

c h an g e t h e s u b j e c t . "T h i s 'l

c h e e r u s u p , " I s ai d h e ar t i l y .
"H e r e 's K i t t y ."

Nathaniel

H e r h ai r w as m at t e d an d d i s o r
d e r e d . O n e s i d e o f h e r f ac e w
as s c r at c h e d . B u t N at h an i e l w
as r e l i e v e d t o s e e t h at s h e

s e e m e d o t h e r w i s e u n h ar m e d
. O n c e ag ai n h i s r e l i e f r e v e al e
d i t s e l f as an g e r . "W h at ar e y ou
d o i n g b ac k ? " h e h i s s e d .

"G e t aw ay ."

Ascowl."We'vegotthecommonersclear," shewhispered.

"Anditwasnosmaltask.Checkoutwhatoneofthemdidtome." Shepointedatthescratch. "Nicebitofthanksthat

is.Anyway,Ihadtocomebacktoseehowyouwere...doing...." Hereyesdroppedtorestonnathaniel'sside;they

widened."Whatthehel?"

"AccordingtoBartimaeus," Nathanielsaidblandly,"it'snothingtoworryabout."

Shebentclose."Oh,God.Can youwalk?We'vegottogetyou out."

"Notyet."Afterthefirstpain, thenumbnessshadspreadfast. Nathanielfeltalittlelight-h eaded,butprovidedhe

remainedstill,leaningagain stthetree,hisdiscomfortw asminimal.Hismindwascle ar,oratleastitwouldhavebeen

hadthedjinninotbeenmessi ngwithhisthoughts,tryingt oblockoutknowledgeofhis injury,tryingtoinfluencehi

s

decisions. He spoke quickly. "Kitty—the attack with the Staff failed. The thing's too strong. I tried it at maximum

controllable power, but it wasn't enough. Nouda absorbed the energy."

"Well, then." She bit her lip. "We get you out. Then we think again."

"Bartimaeus," he said. "What will happen if we leave Nouda now? Speak honestly."

Thedjinni'sanswerwasdelay
edbyacolossalcrashingandr
endingsoundfromsomewhe
rebehindthem."Intime,"

Bartimaeussaid,speakingthr
oughNathaniel'smouth,"Nou
dawilbecomeboredwiththe
manifolddelightsofthe

'OneWorldExhibition.'Hew
illturnhisattentiontothere
stofLondon.Hewilfeedonit
speople,andsoswelinsize

andpower;thisgrowthwilfu
rtherstimulatehishungerun
tileitherthecityliesbarren
,orheburssts.Thathonest

enoughforyou?"

"Kitty," Nathaniel said. "Ihave tostoptheDemonnow."

"Butyoucan't. Youjustsaidso. Evenatfullpower, theStaffailed."

"Maximumcontrollablepower, Isaid. There'sonewayofgettingmoreenergyfromit, andthat'sbyremoving

Gladstone'ssafeguards—thespelsthatbindtheStaff. All—no, wait, letmefinish—alitspowerwouldbeunleashedin

onefelswoop." Hesmiledather. "Ithinkthatmightgive Noudapause."

Thegirlshookherhead. "Idon'tbuyit. Who'stosayitwon'tjustmakehimevenstronger? Now, Bartimaeus; can't

you—?"

"Thereisoneotherfactortobetakenintotheequation," Nathanielsaid. Withsomedifficulty, heliftedtheStaffand

gesturedtowardtheroof. "What'sthisbuildingmadeof?"

"Glass."

"And..."

"Ah," thedjinni'svoicecutin atonce."Youknow,reluctant as Iamtosayit,hemightactual yhaveapointthere."

"Iron," Nathaniel said."Iron. AndNouda,beingaspirit,is notprotectedagainstit.Ifthe Staffisbroken,andital

comescrashingdownonhim. ..Whatdoyouthink,Bartimaeus?"

"Itmightwork.Butthere'son

e s m al f l aw ."

K i t t y m ad e a f ac e . "E x ac t l y . H o w d o y o u b r e ak t h e S t af f w i t h o u t b e i n g h ar m e d ? A n d w h at ab o u t t h e r o o f -f al ? "

N at h an i e l s t r e t c h e d ; h i s n e c k f e l t c o l d an d s t i f f . "L e av e t h at t o m e . W e 'l l b e al r i g h t ."

S h e l o o k e d at h i m . "O k ay . . . F i n e . I'l d o t h i s w i t h y o u ."

"N o , y o u w o n 't . B ar t i m ae u s 's p r o t e c t i v e S h i e l d s w o n 't e x t e n d t o y o u as w e l . W il t h e y , B ar t i m ae u s ? "

"Urn...no."

"We'll beallright," Nathaniels aid again. His minddrifted a little; he felt the djinni prompting him. "Look," he said,

"I've got seven-league boots on. We'll catch you up. Just get out now and keep on running."

"Nathaniel..."

"Better go, Kitty. No uda will leave the palace soon, and the chance wil be gone."

Kitty stamped her foot. "No way. I'm not going to allow this."

Herdefiancewarmedhim.Hegrinnedather."Listen—I'mthemagician.You'rethecommoner.I'mtheonewho

ordersyouabout,remember?"

Shescowled."Sureyou'lbeabletousetheboots?"

"Ofcourse.Noproblem."

"SoI'llseeyoubothoutside?Promise?"

"Yes."

"Yes.Now—go."

Sheturnedslowly,withreluctance;thenspunbacktohim,graspingatherneck."TheAmulet!It'lkeepyousafe!"

Shehelditout,spinningonitschain.Thejadestonegleamedsoftly.

Nathanielfeltagreatwearinesss."No.Thatwon'tbeanygoodforme."

Tinyglintsoflightshoneinthecornersofhereyes."Why—whynot?"

"Because,"Bartimaeus'svoicebrokein,"it'ssopowerfula

c h ar m . It m i g h t ab s o r b t o o m u c h o f t h e S t aff's e n e r g y an d

e n ab l e N o u d a t o e s c ap e . T h e b e s t t h i n g y o u c an d o i s t ak e i t , an d w e ar i t , an d g o n o w ." H i s v o i c e e c h o e d s i l e n t l y i n

N at h an i e l 's h e ad . H ow' s that?

N ot bad .

H e l o o k e d at K i t t y . S h e h ad h al t e d w i t h t h e A m u l e t o u t s t r e t c h e d ; h e r e y e s s e ar c h e d N at h an i e l 's f ac e . H e s aw h e r au r a

s h i n i n g al ab o u t t h e m , p i c k i n g o u t e v e r y t h i n g i n c l e ar , u n b

lemishedddetail—thetreebark,theveinsuponthel eaves,

thestonesandgrassaboutthei rfeet.Hefelthimselfbathed withinit.Hiswearinessdep arted.

Hepushedhimselfawayfrom thetree,tappedtheStaffupo nthegground.Itflaredintoli fe."Seeyoulater,Kitty," he

said.

ShelowereedtheAmuletarou ndherneckandsmiled."Seey ou.Youtoo,Bartimaeus."

"G o o d -b y e ."

T h e n s h e w as g o n e am o n g t h e t r e e s , aw ay t o w ar d t h e e as t e r n e n t r anc e , an d N at h an i e l w as t u r n i n g aw ay f r o m h e r ,

f e e l i n g t h e d j i n n i 's e n e r g y s u p p o r t i n g h i s , t u r n i n g t o l o o k ac r o s s t h e g r e at e x p an s e at w h e r e t h e m o n s t r o s i t y s h am b l e d

i n i t s l o n e l i n e s s , t e ar i n g an d s u n d e r i n g an d c r y i n g o u t f o r f o o d .

W hat d o y ou thin k , B artim aeu s? h e t h o u g h t . D o we g o f or it?

I su p p ose we m ig ht as wel . G ot n othin g better to d o.

E x ac tly .

Kitty

K i t t y w as al m o s t at t h e e n t r an c e w h e n s h e h e ar d t h e s o u n d o f a v o i c e r ai s e d l o u d b e h i n d h e r , i n a t o n e o f i m p e r i o u s

c o m m an d . T h e an s w e r i n g r o ar t h e d e m o n g av e m ad e t h e g r av e l r at t l e ac r o s s t h e p at h an d s e t t h e g l as s p an e s

s h i v e r i n g i n t h e d o m e . T h e n s h e w as s h o v i n g o p e n t h e d o o r

and falingoutintothecoldnight air.

Herlegsshookwiththeeffort;herarmswereasweakandineffectualasinadream.Downthestepsshewentand

awaythroughtheornamentalgarden,stumblingthroughtiledsoil,veeringwildlyroundlowhedges,untilshereached

theopenexpanseofpark.

Thelightfromthegreat Glass Palaceshoneonherback;shesawhershadowstretchingout

ah e ad o f h e r u p o n t h e

i l u m i n at e d g r as s . A w ay , aw ay ... i f s h e c o u l d g e t b e y o n d t h e l i g h t s , i n t o t h e d ar k n e s s , p e r h ap s t h e n s h e w o u l d r e s t .

S h e d r o v e h e r s e l f o n , s l o w i n g al t h e w h i l e , as h e r b r e at h i n g b e c ame e v e r s h al o w e r an d h e r m u s c l e s e v e r m o r e

l ab o r e d , u n t i l f i n al y , d e s p i t e h e r f u r y an d d e s p e r at i o n , s h e c ame t o a l i m p i n g h al t .

A t t h at s ame m o m e n t s h e w as c o n s c i o u s o f a n o i s e , o f a d u l l b u l b o f s o u n d t h at s e e m e d al m

o s t t o s w al l o w i t s e l f,

f l ar i n g an d s u b s i d i n g o n t h e i n s t an t. T h e g r as s s h e s t o o d o n r o s e an d f e l i n a l i t t l e t r e m o r t h at p as s e d aw ay i n t o t h e

d ar k. K i t t y t u r n e d t o w ar d t h e G l as s P al ac e, s i n k i n g t o h e r k n e e s; s h e w as j u s t i n t i m e t o s e e i t s o r an g e g l o w e at e n

f r o m w i t h i n b y a d az z l i n g s w e l o f w h i t e n e s s, w h i c h r o s e u p an d o u t w ar d, t h r o u g h t h e m ar g i n s o f t h e d o m e, s h at t e r i n g

e ac h an d e v e r y p an e o f g l as s s o t h at t h e s h ar d s e x p l o d e d i n t o

thenight.Thewhitenesshid thepalace;itstreamedon

acrossthеornamentalgardens,ateawaytheremainingdistanceandengulfedKitty,knockingherbackwardwithits

force.TheAmuletofSamarkandfelhardagainstherface;dimlyshesawitglowing,drawingintheragingenergies.

Alaboutherwasafearfulrushing.Alabouther,grassburned.

Then,withequalsuddenness,thebuffetingceased,theair

w as r aw an d s t i l .

K i t t y o p e n e d h e r e y e s ; w i t h s o m e d i f f i c u l t y , s h e p r o p p e d h e r s e l f u p o n h e r e l b o w s .

It w as v e r y d ar k . S o m e w h e r e , at an u n k n o w n d i s t anc e , a g r e at f i r e w as b u r n i n g , o r an g e r e d . O u t l i n e d ag ai n s t i t w as a

c o m p l e x m e s s o f m e t al , t w i s t i n g , b e n d i n g , f r ag i l e as a n e t o f w i r e . A s s h e w at c h e d , i t c r u m p l e d i n u p o n i t s e l f , g r o w i n g

d e n s e an d d ar k l y p ac k e d . W i t h t h e f ai n t e s t o f s i g h s , i t s u b s

i d e d i n t o t h e f l a m e s , - w h i c h r o s e u p t o m e e t i t , l i c k e d

ag ai n s t t h e s k y an d g r ad u al y f e l l b ac k .

K i t t y l ay t h e r e , w at c h i n g . B y an d b y t i n y f l e c k s o f g l as s c am e t u m b l i n g s i l e n t l y o u t o f t h e n i g h t . W i t h i n m i n u t e s t h e

e ar t h w as g l i t t e r i n g l i k e f r o s t .

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A t n i n e - t h i r t y i n t h e m o r n i n g , p r e c i s e l y t w o d ays an d f i v e h o u r s af t e r t h e e x p l o s i o n i n S t

. J am e s 's P ar k , t h e In t e r i m

C o u n c i l o f t h e B r i t i s h g o v e r n m e n t g at h e r e d f o r an e m e r g e n c y m e e t i n g . T h e y o c c u p i e d a p l e as an t c o m m i t t e e r o o m i n

t h e M i n i s t r y o f E m p l o y m e n t , w h i c h h ad b e e n l ar g e l y u n d am ag e d b y t h e W h i t e h al f i r e s . P al e s u n l i g h t f i l t e r e d t h r o u g h

t h e w i n d o w s ; t e a , c o f f e e , an d s w e e t b i s c u i t s w e r e i n s u b s t an t i al s u p p l y . M s . R e b e c c a P i p e r , w h o p r e s i d e d , d i r e c t e d

proceedingswithcrispeffi
ciency.Certainmatterswere
immediatelyattendedto:the
provisionoffundsforthecar
e

andtreatmentoftheinjured,
andtheannexationoftwomili
taryhospitalsforthesamepur
pose.Asubsidiary

committee,withdirectacce
sstotheTreasury,wasthenes
tablishedtobeginrestoratio
nworkonthecitycenter.

NextcameissuesofSecurity
.Ajuniorministergavehisre
port.Fourdemonhybridswe

r e k n o w n t o b e s t i l l at l ar g e ;

al h ad b e e n d r i v e n f r o m t h e u r
b an ar e as i n t o r u r al z o n e s b e y
o n d . Im p s k e p t t r ac k o f t h e i r w
an d e r i n g an d w e n t ah e ad

t o o r g an i z e e v ac u at i o n s w h e r
e n e c e s s ar y . S o o n e x p e d i t i o
n ar y f o r c e s w o u l d b e as s e m b l
e d t o r e m o v e t h e t h r e at . T h i s

r e s p o n s e w as c o m p l i c at e d b y
t h e n e ar t o t al d e s t r u c t i o n o f t
h e N i g h t P o l i c e an d t h e d i s ap
p e ar an c e , p r e s u m e d d e at h , o f

i t s l e ad e r , M s . F ar r ar . T h e j u n
i o r m i n i s t e r h o p e d t h at a n e w

,fullyhuman,policeforcemi
ghtpresentlybeestablished
,

andrequestedauthoritytobe
ginrecruitment,idealyfrom
amongthecommoners.

Atthisthecommoners'repre
sentativesinterruptedthedi
scussiontodemandresoluti
onofanequalyimportant

issue—thereturnofthetroo
psfromAmerica.Theycited,
assupportfortheirposition
,theimminentlikelihoodof

rebelionsamongtheoccupie

dstatesofEurope,andthestr
ongpossibilityofrenewed
attacksonLondon.Theyhint
ed

thatfailuretoaccedetotheirr
equestwouldresultinwides
preadstrikesandrioting,wh
ichwouldhittheinterim

governmenthard.Theirairof
grimtruculencearousedthe
passionsofseveralmagician
s,whohadtobephysicaly

restrained.Ms.Piper,bangi
nghergavelrepeatedlyupont
hetable,restoredorderonly
withthehelpofthecting

Secretary, Mr. Harold Button. He added his voice to the commoners' cause, giving, at length, several historical

examples where falteringempires had been saved by their loyal troops.

After heated debate Ms. Piper put the issue to a vote. By a tight margin, authority was given to order the withdrawal

of troops from America. At this the commoners' representatives asked for a recess, that they might give the news to

thepeoplewaitinginthestreetoutside.Permissionwasgiven;theInterimCouncildisbanded,andMr.Buttonordered

himselfmoretea.

Kitty,whohadwatchedalthisfromachairbesidethewindow,stirredandescapedintothecorridor.Theheatof

variantopinions-hadgivenherabeadache.

ShehaddeclinedMs.Piper'soffer,thepreviousmorning,ofaseatamongtheCouncil.

Quiteapartfromthe

strangenessofthenotion,of sittingwithmagicians as an equal,sheknewshedidnothave theenergyrequired.Ifthe

endlessdebatesshe'dwitnes sedbackattheFrogInnwereany thingtogoby,anyonewishi ngtotakepartinamore

opensystemofgovernmentw ouldneedqualitiesofsupre mepatienceandendurance.

Kitty,forthepresent,hadne itherofthesein greatsupply. ButshedidputforwardMr.B

utton's name, as a surviving

magician with a broader view of things than many. Through her contacts at The Frog she was also able to suggest

several prominent commoners whose presence might give the Interim Council more validity. After that she had

requested a private room, and retired for sleep.

Late in the afternoon she had woken and made her way back to St. James's Park. She pushed through the temporary

b ar r i c ad e s an d e n t e r e d t h e d e
ad z o n e , w h e r e p u r p l e t h r e ad
s o f r e s i d u al m ag i c h u n g ab o v
e a v as t c i r c l e o f h ar d , b l ac k

g r o u n d , c r i s p as b u r n e d c ar p
e t . G l as s c r u n c h e d b e n e at h h e
r s h o e s . T h e ai r w as f o u l . O n l
y w i t h t h e A m u l e t h e l d t i g h t l
y

i n h e r h an d c o u l d K i t t y f e e l e n
t i r e l y s afe .

A t t h e c e n t e r o f t h e z o n e t h e r
e m n an t s o f t h e p al ac e h u l k e d d
ar k an d t an g l e d ag ai n s t t h e au t u
m n l i g h t . A f e w s p u r s o f

ironprotruded;mostwerem
oldedtogetherinacomplex
weft,likegiantbrambles—c
hokedandimpassable.Magic
al

vaporsclunglowaboutthem,
motionless,asiffusedtoeart
h.Theiracridtaintmade Kitty
cough.

Shestoodtherequietlyforat
ime.

"Somuchforyourpromises,"
shesaidatlast.

Noanswerssoundedfromthe
ruins.Nothingstirred.Kitt

ydidnotlinger.Withslowst
eps,shereturnedtothelivin
g

world.

Atoneo'clock,whentheCou
ncilbrokeforitslunchtimer
ecess,Ms.Piperwentinsear
chofKitty.Shediscoveredh
er

sittingaloneintheministryl
ibrary,intermittentlyflick
ingthroughanatlasandstarin
gintospace.

Themagicianfloppeddowno
pposite,herfaceheavywithv

exation."Thosedelegatesare beingquiteimpossible,"she

cried."Impossible!Notcontentwithforcingthroughthe Americanmotion,bytacticstantamounttoblackmail,they

havejustinformedmethatthey nowobjecttoususingimps forsurveilanceoftheports. Thoughitismanifestlyin

thenationalinterest!Theysayit'contravenestherightsof ftheworkersthere,'whatever thatmightmean."Shegave

alittlepout."Itisblatantpost

uring!Mr.Buttonhasjustthr
ownabunatthem."

Kittyshrugged."Security'si
mportant,butso'sthetrustof
thepeople.Spies,vigilance
spheres—allthat'sgoingto

havetochange.Asfarasthepo
rtsgo,you'lljusthavetoargu
eitoutwiththem,Isuppose."

"Areyousurewecan'tpersuad
eyoutotakepart?"Ms.Pipers
aid."Youwouldbeaperfecti
ntermediarybetweenus

andthemore...extremefacti
ons."

"Sorry," Kittysaid. "I'mtired. I'djustgetstroppy. You'dbe packingmeofftotheTowerby nightfal."

"Ihardlythinkso!" Ms. Piper seemedsuddenlythoughtful. "Mindyou, someofthosedelegates... Theideais

tempting..." Sheshookherhead. "WhatamIsaying? Sothen, Ms. Jones, Iseeyouhaveanatlasout. Doesthis

indicateyourplans?"

"Idon'tknow," Kittysaidslowly. "Ithink, maybe, whenthi

n g s c al m d o w n a l i t t l e o n t h e C o n t i n e n t , I'l l g o ab r o ad f o r a

w h i l e . I'v e g o t a f r i e n d t o v i s i t i n B r u g e s , an d af t e r t h at I'd l i k e t o t r av e l a b i t , s e e t h e w o r l d . I h o p e i t w i l h e l p me

r e g ai n m y h e al t h ." S h e p u r s e d h e r l i p s ; l o o k e d t o w ar d t h e w i n d o w . "P e r h ap s I'l g o t o E g y p t . I'v e h e ar d a l o t ab o u t i t .

I d o n't k n o w . It al d e p e n d s ."

"Y o u w o u l d n't c ar e t o c o n t i n u e y o u r m ag i c al s t u d i e s h e r e ? Mr . B u t t o n s p e ak s h i g h l y o f y o u r ap t i t u d e , an d w e h av e a

conspicuouslackoftalentin thegovernment.Wecouldrecommendsometutors."

Kittyshuttheatlascover;spiralsofdustroseupanddrifted inthelight."Youareverykind,butthatdoor'sclosedto

menow.Mystudieswerealwaysdirectedtowardsummoningoneparticular..." Shepaused."Ihadoneparticular

objectiveinmind.Andtwonightsagonathanielaccomplishedit forme.Inalhonesty,Iwouldn'tknowhowtofollow

o n f r o m t h at ."

T h e r e w as s i l e n c e i n t h e r o o m . A l at o n c e M s . P i p e r l o o k e d at h e r w at c h and g av e a l i t t l e c r y . "R e c e s s i s al m o s t o v e r !

I m u s t g o . H e av e n k n o w s w h e t h e r w e c an m ak e an y h e ad w ay t h i s af t e r n o o n ." S h e s i g h e d h e av i l y as s h e s t o o d . "M s .

J o n e s , af t e r a s i n g l e m o r n i n g I am al r e ad y c l o s e t o t h r o t t l i n g t h e c o m m o n e r s ' e n t i r e d e l e g at i o n . A s i n g l e m o r n i n g ! A n d

w e ar e b ar e l y s t ar t e d . T h e o u t l

ookcouldhardlybeworse.Ir
ealydon'tbelievewesha lbe
ableto cooperateatal."

Kittysmiledandsatbackinhe
rchair."Keeptrying,"shesai
d."It'spossible.Noteasy,but
it'spossible.You'lbe

surprisedwhatyoumanageto
achieve."

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Dyingwasthesimplepart.Ou
rmainproblemwascatchingN
ouda'sattention.

Westood,thetwoofus,inour

s i n g l e b o d y , d i r e c t l y b e n e a t
h t h e m i d d l e m o s t d o m e . T h i s
w as t h e p l ac e t o l u r e h i m t o ,

t h e e p i c e n t e r , t h e p l ac e o f m
ax i m u m i r o n . B u t N o u d a w as t
o o b i g , t o o n o i s y , t o o c o n f u s
e d an d d e s o l at e t o b e e as i l y

l u r e d . B ac k an d f o r t h h e l u r c h
e d o n h i s m e s s o f l i m b s , t r amp
l i n g s t all s an d k i d d i e s ' r i d e s
an d s t u ff i n g t r e e s at r an d o m

i n t o h i s g ap i n g m o u t h . H e u n d
e r t o o k t h i s s e r i o u s w o r k w i t
h ad m i r ab l e c o n v i c t i o n , an d n
o n e o f h i s e y e s w e r e t u r n e d

o u r w ay .

F l y i n g w as o u t f o r u s n o w . E v e n b o u n d i n g w o u l d b e a s t r e t c h . It t o o k m o s t o f m y r e m ai n i n g e n e r g i e s t o k e e p t h e b o y

u p r i g h t . L e f t t o h i s o w n d e v i c e s , h e 'd h av e c r u m p l e d t o t h e f l o o r .

S o w e s t o p p e d w h e r e w e w e r e , an d s h o u t e d i n s t e ad . O r at l e as t I d i d , w i t h t h e k i n d o f c r y t h at t r i g g e r s T i b e t an

av al an c h e s .1 "N o u d a! It i s I, B ar t i m ae u s , S ak h r al -J i n n i , N 'g o r s o t h e M i g h t y an d t h e S e r p e n

t o f S i l v e r P l u m e s ! I h av e

f o u g h t a t h o u s an d b at t l e s an d w o n t h e m al l ! I h av e d e s t r o y e d f ar g r e at e r e n t i t i e s t h an y o u ! R am u t h r a f l e d b e f o r e m y

maj e s t y . T c h u e c o w e r e d i n a c r ac k i n t h e e ar t h . H o e p o t h e T h u n d e r S n ak e i n g e s t e d h i s o w n t ai l an d s o s w al l o w e d

h i m s e l f r at h e r t h an t as t e m y f u r y ! S o t h e n , I c h al e n g e y o u n o w . C o m e f ac e m e ! "

1. W hen shouted from N ep a l . T ha t ' s how loud it was.

N o an s w e r . N o u d a w as b u s i l y m u n c h i n g o n s o m e o f t h e e x h i b i t s i n t h e G r o t t o o f T ax i d e r m y . T h e b o y v e n t u r e d a

t e n t at i v e t h o u g h t . D oes that c ou n t as a g oad ? It was essen tially straig htf orward boastin g , wasn ' t it?

L isten , a g oad ' s an y thin g that p rovok es or in c ites an en em y , an d — O h, look , it d id n ' t work , d id it? W e' re ru n n in g ou t

of tim e. An other f ew step s an d he' ll break ou tsid e.

L et m e have ag o. T h e b o y c l e ar e d h i s t h r o at ."C u r s e d d e m o n !

Y o u h av e m e t y o u r e n d ! T h e S h i v e r i n g F i r e aw ai t s y o u ! I

s h al l s p r e ad y o u r v i l e e s s e n c e ac r o s s t h i s h al l i k e . . . u m , l i k e m ar g ar i n e , a v e r y t h i c k l ay e r o f i t . . . ." H e h e s i t at e d .

Y e-es . . . I' m n ot su re he' l p ic k u p on that an alog y . N ever m in d , k eep g oin g .

"C u r s e d d e m o n —atten d to m e ! " T h e p i t y o f i t w as t h at t h e b o y's v o i c e w as d e s p e r at e l y f ai n t an d g r o w i n g f ai n t e r . I

c o u l d b ar e l y h e ar i t , l e t al o n e N o u d a. B u t h e f i n i s h e d u p w i t

h a v e r y e f f e c t i v e e x t r a, n a m e l y a b o l t o f f e r e e f r o m t h e

S t a f f t h at j ab b e d N o u d a s h ar p l y i n t h e r e ar . T h e g r e at s p i r i t r e s p o n d e d w i t h a r o ar ; h e r o s e up , l i m b s t w i t c h i n g , b u l b

e y e s q u e s t i n g . A l at o n c e h e s aw u s an d s e n t m u l t i p l e b o l t s c r as h i n g al l ar o u n d . H i s ai m w as l o u s y . O n e o r t w o l an d e d

a f e w m e t e r s d i s t an t , b u t w e s t o o d f i r m . W e d i d n o t b u d g e .

T h e g r e at v o i c e : "B ar t i m ae u s ! I see y o u . . . ."

Theboywhispersedsomethinginreply,tooweaktohear.ButIreadhismind,spoketheword sforhim."No!Iam

Nathaniel!Iamyourmaster!Iamyourdeath!"

Anotherburstofwhiteenergypricked Nouda'sessence.Hehurledastuffedbearasideandturnedinponderous

wrath.Hecamecrawlingtowardus—acolossalshadow,alientothisworld,sunderedfromtheother,blockingoutthe

l i g h t .

N ow t h at 's what y ou c all a p rop er g oad , N at h an i e l t h o u g h t .

Y eah, it wasn ' t bad . R ig ht, wait till he' s on top of u s, then we break the S taf f .

T he lon g er it tak es, the better. K itty —

S he' ll g et ou t, d on ' t worry .

T h e b o y s ' s t r e n g t h w as f ai l i n g , b u t h i s r e s o l u t i o n w as u n d au n t e d . I f e l t h i m s u m m o n h i s r e m ai n i n g p o w e r s . S t e ad i l y ,

calmly,mutteringunderhisb
reath,heloosedthebondsre
strainingGladstone's Staffu
ntil,allatonce,thehopesof

theentitiestrappedinsidew
ererraised:theypushed,strai
ned,pressedagainstttherem
ainingloopsofmagic,

desperatetobefree.Without
myassistance,Nathanielcoul
dnothavecontroledthem—th
eywouldhaveinstantly

brokenthrough.ButNoudaw
asnotyetwherewewantedhi
m.IheldtheStaffinplace.Th
erewasnothingnowtodo

b u t w ai t .

A c c o r d i n g t o s o me , 2 h e r o i c
d e at h s ar e ad m i r ab l e t h i n g s .
I'v e n e v e r b e e n c o n v i n c e d b y
t h i s ar g u m e n t , m ai n l y b e c aus
e ,

n o m att e r h o w c o o l , s t y l i s h , c
o mp o s e d , u n f l ap p ab l e , m an l
y , o r d e f i an t y o u ar e , att h e e n d
o f t h e d ay y o u 'r e al s o d e ad .

W h i c h i s a l i t t l e t o o p e r m an e
n t f o r m y l i k i n g . I'v e m ad e a l o
n g and s u c c e s s f u l c ar e e r o u t o
f r u n n i n g aw ay att h e

d e c i s i v e mo m e n t , and i t w as

w i t h s o m e c o n s i d e r a b l e r e g r e t , as N o u d a b o r e d o w n u p o n u s , i n t h at s o ar i n g t o m b o f i r o n

an d g l as s , t h at I r e al i z e d I d i d n 't ac t u al y h av e t h i s f al l b ac k o p t i o n . I w as b o u n d t o t h e b o y , e s s e n c e t o f l e s h . W e w e r e

g o i n g o u t t o g e t h e r .

2 . G eneral y those who don' t hav e to do it. P oliticians and writers spring to m ind.

T h e n e ar e s t I'd e v e r c o m e t o t h i s d u b i o u s l as t -s t an d b u s i n e s s b e f o r e w as w i t h P t o l e m y — i n f ac t , h e 'd o n l y p r e v e n t e d i t

w i t h h i s f i n al i n t e r v e n t i o n . I s u p p o s e , i f m y o l d m as t e r c o u l d h av e s e e n m e n o w , h e 'd p r o b ab l y h av e ap p r o v e d . It w as

r i g h t u p h i s s t r e e t , t h i s : y o u k n o w —h u m an an d d j i n n i u n i t e d , w o r k i n g t o g e t h e r as o n e , e t c , e t c . T r o u b l e w as , w e 'd

t ak e n i t al a b i t t o o l i t e r al y .

B artim aeu s . . . T h e t h o u g h t w as v e r y f ai n t .

Y es?

Y ou ' ve been a g ood servan t. . . .

W h at d o y o u say t o s o m e t h i n g l i k e t h i s ? I m e an , w i t h d e at h b e ar i n g d o w n an d a 5 , 0 0 0 -y e ar c ar e e r o f i n c o m p ar ab l e

ac c o m p l i s h m e n t ab o u t t o h i t t h e f an ? T h e ap p r o p r i at e r e s p o n s e , f r an k l y , i s s o m e s o r t o f r u d e g e s t u r e , f o l o w e d u p b y

t h e l o u d e s t o f r as p b e r r i e s , b u t ag ai n I w as s t y m i e d — b e i n g in h i s b o d y m ad e t h e l o g i s t i c s t o o c u m b e r s o m e t o b o t h e r

w i t h .3 S o , w e ar i l y , w i s h i n g w e h ad s o m e k i n d o f m au d l i n s o u n d t r ac k , I p l ay e d al o n g . W el , u m , y ou ' ve been j u st

d an d y too.

3 . W el , try g iv ing yourself a rude g esture. I t j ust doesn' t work , does it?

I d id n ' t say y ou were p erf ec t . . .

W hat?

Far f rom it. L et' s f ac e it, y ou ' ve g en erally m an ag ed to c oc k thin g s u p .

W H AT ? T he b l o o d y c h e e k ! In s u l t s , at a t i m e l i k e t h i s ! W i t h d e at h b e ar i n g d o w n , e t c . I as k y o u . I r o l e d u p m y

m e t ap h o r i c al s l e e v e s . W el ,

sin c e we' re d oin g som e straig ht talk in g , let m e tell y ou , bu d d y —

W hic h is why I' m d ism issin g y ou rig ht n ow.

E h? B u t I h ad n 't m i s h e ar d . I k n e w I h ad n 't . I c o u l d r e ad h i s m i n d .

D on ' t tak e it the wron g way . . . H i s t h o u g h t w as f r ag m e n t e d , f l e e t i n g , b u t h i s m o u t h w as al r e ad y m u m b l i n g t h e s p e l .

It' s j u st that . . . we' ve g ot to break the S taf f at the rig ht m om en t here. Y ou ' re hold in g it in c hec k . B u t I c an ' t rely on

y ou f or som ethin g as im p ortan t as this. Y ou ' re bou n d to m ess it u p som ehow. B est thin g is . . . best thin g is to

d ism iss y ou . T hat' ll trig g er the S taf f au tom atic ally . T hen I k n o w it' l be d on e p rop erly . H e d r i f t e d . H e w as h av i n g

t r o u b l e k e e p i n g aw ak e n o w — t h e e n e r g y w as d r ai n i n g u n h i n d e r e d f r o m h i s s i d e —b u t w i t h a f i n al e f f o r t o f w i l , h e k e p t

s p e ak i n g t h e n e c e s s ar y w o r d s .

N athan iel—

S ay hel o to K itty f or m e.

T h e n N o u d a w as u p o n u s . M o u t h s o p e n e d , t e n t ac l e s s l as h e d d o w n . N at h an i e l f i n i s h e d t h e D i s m i s s al . I w e n t . T h e S t aff

b r o k e .

A t y p i c al m as t e r . R i g h t t o t h e e n d , h e d i d n ' t g i v e m e a c h anc e t o g e t a w o r d i n e d g e w ays . W h i c h i s a p i t y , b e c aus e at

t h at l as t m o m e n t I ' d h av e l i k e d t o t e l l h i m w h at I t h o u g h t o f h i m . M i n d y o u , s i n c e i n t h at s p l i t s e c o n d w e w e r e , t o al

intentsandpurposes,oneand the same, I rather think he knew anyway.