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**DIANE DUANE**



**THE DOOR INTO  
SHADOW**

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**Diane Duane**

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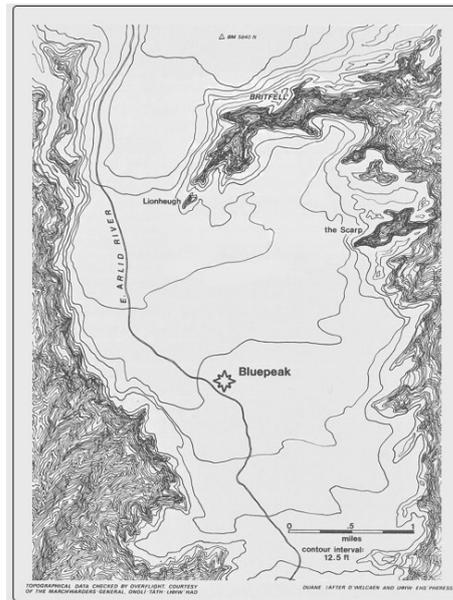
**Edition note:**

*The Door into Shadow* was first published in the U.S. by Bluejay Books in 1984. That edition's text, unchanged except for the substitution of British spellings for American ones, was used for the Corgi / Transworld Books editions of *Shadow* in 1992. For the book's next U.S. edition, published by Meisha Merlin Books in 2001, various minor changes and additions were made to the original text, including the restoration of a small amount of material edited out of the 1984 edition.

This ebook closely follows the 2001 text, with some emendations -- mostly a matter of slight restructuring, rephrasing and polishing: no significant new plot or character material has been added. Future printed editions of *The Door into Shadow* will use this version of the text.

A link to a higher-quality version of the map image following can be found online at [the Door into Shadow ebook page](#) at [DianeDuane.com](#) .

# Map





~~The Wound is healed~~  
by the sword that deals it:

the heart is knit  
by the pain that breaks it:

the life is made whole  
by the death that starts it:

the death is made whole  
by the life that ends it.

*(Hamartics, 186)*

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## PROLOGUE

Four lands hemmed in by mountain and waste and the Sea—those were the Middle Kingdoms: and the greatest of them, Arlen and Darthen, were in peril of destruction. For seven years Arlen's throne had been empty of the royalty needed to keep the land fertile and the people at peace. And Darthen suffered as a result of Arlen's lack, for the Two Lands were bound together by oaths of friendship and by joint maintenance of the royal sorceries that kept their lands safe from the ever-present menace of the Shadow.

In those days there appeared a man with the blue Fire: not just the spark of Flame that every man and woman possesses, but enough to channel and use to change the world around him. His lover was the child of Arlen's last king, heir to his usurped throne. In the Firebearer's relationship to Freelorn, King Ferrant's son, many later suspected the hand of the Goddess—working quietly, as She so often does, so as not to alarm Her old adversary the Shadow.

Her hand seemed visible elsewhere too. Freelorn had taken companions with him into his exile. They lived as outlaws and bandits, stealing what they needed when they had to—though none of their hearts were in it. One of them in particular would certainly have been elsewhere, if she had had a choice. Swordswoman and sorceress, trained in the Silent Precincts and in every other place in the Kingdoms that dealt in the use of the blue Fire that some women bear, Segnbora d'Welcaen tai-Enraesi was a spectacular and expensive failure. She had the Flame in prodigious quantity, and couldn't focus it. On her way home from one more school that could do nothing for her, chance threw her together one night with Freelorn's people. Bitterly frustrated with what seemed a wasted life, desperately needing something useful to do, Segnbora swore fealty that night to the rightful heir of the Arlene throne, and fled with him and his people into the eastern Waste where Freelorn's loved, Herewiss, awaited him.

The children of House tai-Enraesi traditionally had a talent for getting themselves into dangerous situations. There in the Waste, in an ancient pile built by no human hand—a fortress rising gray and bizarre out of the empty land, skewed and blind-walled and ominous—Segnbora started wondering whether even the tai-Enraesi luck would do her any good. There were stories about this place, legends that whispered of soul-eating monsters guarding innumerable doors into Otherwheres. Even the mildest of the tales were gruesome. Fear gripped Segnbora, but her oath gripped her harder. She stayed with Freelorn and his people.

And there in the Hold, fulfilling her fears, the stories she'd heard started coming true—even the one of how nothing good would come out of this terrible place until (ridiculous improbability) a male should focus his Fire.

On the night Herewiss declared his intention to use his newly gained Flame to put Freelorn on the throne of his fathers, Segnbora lay long awake in the dark, considering the old rede that spoke of her family's luck. That luck would run out some day, the rede said, when the last of her line died by his or her own hand, in an hour of ice and darkness. But at last she was sure that the rede had nothing to do with her. She wasn't the last of the tai-Enraesi, and she was about to ride out of here with three good friends, a sometime lover, a prince about to retake his throne, a fire elemental, and the first man in a thousand years to focus his Fire. So maybe, maybe just this once, everything was finally going to

turn out all right....

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Sirronde stared at the Goddess. “Are You saying, then, that You were wrong to make heroes?”  
“Indeed not,” She said. “But I should have warned them— if you save the world too often, it starts to expect it.”

*Tales of the Darthene South,*  
book iv, 29

When she was studying in the Silent Precincts, the Rodmistresses had warned her: if you’re going to look for meaning in a dream, first make sure it’s your own. Any sensitive is most sensitive in her sleep, and others’ dreams can draw you in and fool you. Now, therefore, Segnbora kept quite still and silent so as not to disturb whoever else was dreaming the landscape into which she had stumbled. It wasn’t often, after all, that one was privileged to see the Universe being created.

The Maiden was working, as She always is, while the other two Persons of the Goddess, the Mother and the Eldest, looked on. Young and fair and preoccupied was the Maiden, as She worked elbow-deep in stars and flesh and dirt. She was so delighted with the wild diversity of Her creation that She never noticed the Mother and the Eldest desperately trying to get Her attention. They saw what she did not: the shapeless, lurking hunger that hid in the darkness at the Universe’s borders.

Finally the Maiden, satisfied that Her world was complete, cried out the irrevocable Word that started life running on its own, and sealed the Universe against any subtractions. And the instant She had done so, Death stood up from where it had been hiding, and laughed at Her.

She had locked the doors of the world, and locked Death inside it. Slowly it would suck the Universe dry of life, and She could not prevent it. Nor could She prevent Death’s darkness from casting shadows sideways from Her light—rogue aspects of Her, darksides, bent on destroying more swiftly what was already doomed. Grief-stricken, the Maiden took counsel with Her other selves to find some way to combat Death. Among Them, They invented first the heart’s love, and then the body’s—lying down together in the manner of woman with woman, and becoming with child.

The Maiden, becoming the Mother now, brought forth twins—sons, or daughters, or daughter and son; the ambiguity of the dream made the Firstborn seem all of these at once. Swiftly They grew and discovered love in Their Mother’s arms—then turned to one another and discovered it anew. But in the midst of Their bliss, surrounded by the blue Fire that was Their Mother’s gift and Their pride, the Death stood up again. It entered one of the Lovers and taught that one jealousy.

The shadowed Lover slew the innocent One—and in the same act destroyed Its own Fire, which had been bound by love to the Other’s. Cursing, the Dark Lover fled raging into the outer darkness, where It would reenact Its murder and loss and bereavement for as long as the Universe should last. It was not a Lover anymore, but the Shadow.

In the dream Segnbora wept, having known all along what was going to happen, and that mortals would be reenacting this tragedy in their own lives forever. The dream broke, then, and gradually reformed as an image in water does after a stone is thrown in.

She saw a scene skewed sideways, as if her head rested on someone’s shoulder. Much of the great room where she stood was dark, but in her hand—which had become a man’s—she held a core blinding white light, wreathed all about with flames as blue as summer sky. *Herewiss*, she realized.

*Last night.*

—His weariness was so terrible he could barely stand. He had banished the hralcins, the soul-eaters, yet he was too tired to exult in the focus he had forged—the unfinished sword he would call Khávrinen. He was the first man in a thousand years to focus the Fire, and he knew what difficulties lay ahead. The Shadow would not long tolerate him, or any man who enjoyed the Power It had cast away. It would deal with him quickly, before the Goddess had time, through him, to consolidate newly regained ground.

*We must move more quickly,* the dream said. *For look what the Shadow has planned!* Segnborra shuddered in her sleep at the sight of a whole valley suddenly buried under mountains that had formerly stood above it. *Dead,* a voice said soundlessly. *She's dead.* Snow whirled wildly down onto battlefield under the mountains' shadow, where something heaved as if trying to take terrible shape, and the snow turned red as soon as it fell, while monsters gnawed the dead. Elsewhere a wave of blackness came rolling down out of murky heights, crashed down onto a leaping, threatening fire, and smothered it.

The air was thick with the feel of ancient sorceries falling apart, fraying. Grass forgot how to grow. Grain rotted on the stalk and fruit on the bough. Plague downed beasts and people alike, leaving their blackened corpses to lie splitting in the sun. Even the scavenger birds sickened and died of what they ate. It was happening already, happening *now*. The royal magics were failing. If they weakened enough to let the Shadow fully into this world, into Bluepeak, this outcome was inevitable, irreversible.

The soundless voice of the dream spoke urgently. *Freelorn must quickly see to the Royal Bindings. This is the work for which he was made; he's the Lion's Child, heir to Arlen. Go with him, Herewiss, in the full of your Power. Use the Fire to the utmost. He'll need all the help you can give.*

*But I just got the Fire,* Herewiss said, terrified. *It takes time to master it!*

*There is no time. What must be done needs doing now. The Other is coming!*

And she could feel it, that throbbing of hatred in the background, getting stronger by the minute. The sky grew dark, and the snow blasted about them, in that place to which they would have to go to reinforce the Royal Bindings. Herewiss's Fire, for so long a blaze within him, was going faint under a blanket of oppressive power. Just in front of him, Freelorn started to stand up. The whole dream focused then on the sight of Freelorn's back, with a three-barbed, razor-sharp Reaver arrow standing out of it.

Sagging, Lorn sank back slowly against Herewiss. Then a deeper darkness fell, and the two of them stood before a Door in which burned the stars that would never go out. Freelorn, his face in shadow, was pulling his hand gently out of Herewiss's grasp, turning away toward death's Door...

*No!*

*Do what you must to come to the full of your Power. There's no time!* Her voice was almost frightened. Herewiss had never believed She could sound that way.

*But if I do—and we get there—then Lorn—*

*It must not be prevented.*

*But—*

*You must not attempt to prevent it!*

*I—*

*Hurry!*

*NO!!*

The scream tore through her own throat as she sat bolt upright in the bedroll, sweating—still

seeing against the darkness the long ruinous fall of an entire mountain, still hearing the crash of it, first note in a song of disaster.

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In the great main hall of the old Hold, people fumbled frantically for their swords—the memory of the hralcins' sudden arrival the night before was very fresh. The fire in the firepit rose up too, putting several broad curves of flame over the edge and leaning anxiously out to see what was the matter. As a fire elemental, Sunspark had not had much experience with fear, but after last night it was apparently taking no chances.

Segnbora lifted a hand to her pounding head and found that she was holding her sword, Charriselm. Evidently she had drawn it while still half sleeping. Beside her in the bedroll, blond Lang was still blanket-wrapped, but nevertheless he had found his graceknife in a hurry. Lying propped on one elbow with the knife in one hand, he blinked at her like an anxious owl. A few feet away, big swarthy Dritt and lanky Moris were sitting up back to back, looking as panicked as Segnbora felt. On the other side of the firepit, Harald was attempting simultaneously to string his bow and brush the brown hair out of his eyes. All of these looked at Segnbora as if they thought she was crazy.

“A bad dream?” Lang said.

She nodded, sliding Charriselm back into its sheath and looking across the room toward the firepit and the bedrolls laid down there.

Herewiss was sitting up, bracing himself with one hand, rubbing his eyes with the other. He took the hand away from his face, and Segnbora was shocked to see his terrified expression. Lorn was holding Herewiss tight and peering worriedly into his face. Under other circumstances it could have been a touching and humorous sight—the little, dark-mustachioed, fierce-eyed man comforting someone who, judged by his slim hard build and well-muscled shoulders, might have been the village blacksmith.

“Are you all right? What happened?”

“It was a dream,” Herewiss said, his voice anguished.

“Shh, it’s all right.”

“No, it’s not.” Herewiss rubbed his eyes again, then glanced around him with frightened determination. He started searching in the blankets for his clothes. “We’ve got to go.”

“What?”

“We have to hurry!” Herewiss grabbed one bunched-up blanket and impatiently shook it. A sword fell out and clattered to the floor—a hand-and-a-half broadsword of gray steel that would have seemed of ordinary make except for the odd blue sheen about it. Herewiss snatched it up, and at his touch his Power ran down the blade: blinding blue Fire, twisting and flurrying about in bright reflection of his distress.

“It was—there was—the mountain fell down, just like that! And there were thousands of Fyrd, and bigger monsters too—and a wave came down over everything, and Sunspark went out—”

(I did *not*!)

“Loved, slow down so I can understand what the Dark you’re talking about—”

“So much for a whole night’s sleep,” Lang muttered under his breath. Putting his knife away under the rolled-up cloak that was serving them as pillow, he lay down again. “Wake me up when they’re finished?”

“If necessary,” Segnbora said, rubbing his shoulder absently. The gesture was more for her comfort than for his. Her underhearing was wide awake, bringing her the hot coppery blood-taste of Herewiss’s fright as if it were her own.

Herewiss had yanked a shirt out of the blankets and was struggling into it, while in his lap

Khávriinen kept on blazing like a torch. “It’s angry as anything,” he was saying. “And It’s going to work the worst mischief It can, by putting pressure on the Royal Bindings that have been keeping It in check.” He started feeling around for his britches. “For seven years no one’s reinforced the Arlene halves of those bindings, and they’re wearing thin—”

Freelorn glanced away from Herewiss. Segnbora put her hands behind her head and leaned back, closing her eyes and bracing herself against the gut-punch of grief and anger she knew would come from Lorn. When his father had died on the throne, and the Minister of the Exchequer, Cillmod, had taken the opportunity to seize power, Freelorn had fled for his life with a price on his head. Now Lorn would wonder again whether staying in Arlen to see to the Bindings, and possibly getting killed as a result, might not have been the more noble course. This was an old midnight pain that Segnbora had come to know as well as the arthritis in Harald’s right knee, or Dritt’s self-consciousness about his weight. While no Precinct-trained sensitive could have helped underhearing her surroundings as Segnbora did, that was the gift she would have been happiest to lose when she gave up her studies. She had enough trouble dealing with her own pains.

“Lorn, enough,” Herewiss said, catching Freelorn’s anguish too. “The fact remains that if the Shadow leans Its full strength against the Bluepeak bindings, we’re done for. The Kingdoms will founder. I saw the southern passes full of Reaver armies. And the plains full of Fyrd. There were storms and earthquakes, and where the earth opened a whole town fell in. And that cliff at Bluepeak—” Herewiss broke off.

Freelorn, still holding him close, looked puzzled. “But it was just a dream!”

“Oh no,” Herewiss said, shaking his head emphatically. “I saw.”

“He’s dreaming true,” Segnbora said.

Freelorn’s frightened eyes flicked to her. “He’s focused now,” she said. “It’s one of the first things that happens...”

“What about the cliff?” Freelorn said to Herewiss.

Herewiss closed his eyes and sagged back on his heels, looking tired. “It was snowing—”

“A month and a half before Midsummer’s? You call that dreaming true?”

With a great effort Segnbora held her face still as Herewiss saw again that image of Freelorn turning away from him, away from love and life toward death. “Lorn,” Herewiss said. “I was shown a lot of things. I don’t know what they all meant. I don’t think most of them have happened yet. But some of them will, unless they’re prevented.” He swallowed hard. “I have to assist in the process. I was given all this Power. Now it has to be used, fully, and I won’t be able to take my time about its mastery, either.”

Freelorn looked askance at his loved, getting an idea and not liking it. “But what other way is there, but to work into your Power slowly?”

“The Morrowfane, Lorn.”

Freelorn looked grim. “I’ve read a little about that,” he said, and this was likely a great understatement, for among the responsibilities of a throne prince of Arlen was the curatorship of the Virendir, the Arlene royal library, which dwelt at length on such subjects. “Everything I’ve seen suggests you can’t go up there without coming down changed—”

(What’s the problem with that?) Sunspark said from the firepit. The reaction was understandable; change was a fire elemental’s chief delight. (Just yesterday Herewiss changed—quite a bit—and you didn’t mind.)

Lorn glanced with annoyance at Sunspark as the elemental radiated smugness at him. Freelorn’s discovery that Sunspark had also come to be a loved of Herewiss’s during the time spent forging

Khávrinen had left him with reactions that were complex, and far from settled.

—“I don’t mean shapechanges,” Lorn said with exaggerated patience. “Soul-changes. Great alterations in personality. Madness, or types of sanity that human beings don’t usually survive.”

“The change needn’t be harmful,” Herewiss put in. “Remember, the place is a great repository Flame. All the legends agree on that. Those who climb the Fane are given what’s needed to do what they must do in a life.”

“Then why do so few people go up it?”

“For one thing, you need focused Fire, and enough of it to keep the Power of the place from blasting you,” Herewiss explained. “For another, so few people *want* what they need. . . . Lorn, listen. This is *necessary*. It’s part of getting you back on your throne. If we don’t get to Bluepeak by Midyear’s Eve, so that you can aid in restoring the bindings, there won’t be a country left for you to rule.”

“But I was never Initiated into the Mysteries. If I had been, we wouldn’t have these problems—I’d be King, and that slimy bastard Cillmod would be out looking for other employment.”

“True, but you know the royal rites, don’t you? You have to do it.”

“Who says?”

“Who do you think?” Herewiss said, very gently. “When you dream true, Who do you think sends the dream?”

Lorn held very still, and most of the fierceness faded out of his eyes. “There’s another problem. You know the money I removed from the Arlene treasury in Osta? Well, Bluepeak’s in Arlen too. Cillmod’s probably annoyed about that missing money, and if we go back to Arlen so soon, and he finds out about it. . . .”

Herewiss said nothing.

After a moment or two, Freelorn shrugged. “Oh, what the Dark! If the Reavers and the Shadow are going to come down on Arlen, Cillmod hardly matters. I suppose I have no choice anyway. I swore that damn Oath when I was little. ‘Darthen’s House and Arlen’s Hall—’”

“—share their feast and share their fall,” Herewiss finished. “If Arlen goes, so does Darthen. And after them Steldin, North Arlen, the Brightwood. . . .”

Freelorn laughed, but without merriment. “Why am I even worried about Cillmod? The Shadow’s a far greater danger. It can’t afford to leave you alive now. You’re the embodiment of the old days before the Catastrophe, when males had the Power. The time of Its decline. . . .”

Herewiss shook his head and smiled, an expression more of grim agreement than of reassurance. “We’ll both be careful,” he said. “That is, if you’re coming with me?”

Reaching down, Freelorn gently freed one of Herewiss’s hands from Khávrinen’s hilt, and held the hand between his own. “No more dividing our forces,” he said. “From now until it’s done, we go together.”

Herewiss held his peace and didn’t change expression. Segnbora had to drop her eyes, seeing again that image of one hand that let go of another’s, the face that turned away.

All at once Freelorn was thumping on the floor for attention. “Listen, people—”

Segnbora nudged Lang. He rolled over under his covers. “Whatever you say, Lorn, I’ll do it,” he said, and pulled the blanket back over his head.

“There’s a man who takes his oaths a little too seriously,” Freelorn said with a grimace of affectionate disgust. “On his own head be it. But for the rest of you—I can’t in good conscience ask you to go on this trip. The Shadow—”

“The Shadow can go swive with sheep for all I care,” Moris said with one of his slow grins. “I

haven't come this far with you to stop now."

"Me either," Harald said, stubbornly folding his huge bear's arms.

"You're not listening," Freelorn said, in great earnest. "Your oaths are a matter of friendship and I love you for them. But it's not just Cillmod we're playing with now. It's the Shadow. Your *souls* are at stake—"

"The things that were in here last night ate souls too," Dritt said calmly, putting his chin down on his arms. "Herewiss did for *them* all right."

(I helped,) said the voiceless voice from the firepit. Eyes looked out of the flames at the company, then came to rest with calm interest on Freelorn. (I'm coming too.)

The building rumble of irritation in the room, combined with so much unspoken affection, was making Segnbora's head ache; the walls of this place, opaque to thought, bounced the emotions back and forth until the undersenses were deafened by echoes.

"Look," she said, shaking free of her own blankets. "If we've got to get an early start in the morning—" She glanced at Herewiss. "—it *can* wait until morning?"

"I suppose so," he said.

"Good. Then I want some sleep." She went over to Freelorn in her shift, drawing Charriselm again as she came, and offered him the blade's hilt about an inch from his nose, while giving Lorn a look suggesting that perhaps that was where she meant to insert it. "You swore on this, on *all* our blades, that your lordship would be between us and the Shadow while we wielded them in your service. You want to take that oath back?"

Lorn glared up at her, fierce eyes going fiercer, "No! Are you crazy? What makes you think I'd \_\_\_"

"What makes you think *we* would?"

Freelorn held absolutely still. His anger churned wildly for a moment, then fell off, leaving reluctant acceptance in its place.

Segnbora shoved Charriselm back into its sheath. "Good night, Lorn," she said, and padded back to her bedroll, taking care not to smile until her back was turned.

Sunspark pulled itself back down into the firepit as people settled themselves again. Soon the darkness of the hall held no sound but Harald's cloak-muffled snoring.

It took Segnbora a little while to get enough of the blankets unwrapped from around Lang to cover herself. That done, she lay on her back for a long while, gazing up at the smoke-shaft in the ceiling, through which a few unfamiliar stars shone. Her underhearing, sharpened by all the excitement, brought her the faint dream-touched emotions of those falling asleep, and the physical sensations of those asleep already: breathing, the slide of muscles, muted pulse-thunder.

*It's a gift*, she told herself for the thousandth time. *Appreciate it*. Truth, however, reared its head. The talent was a nuisance. If her Fire was focused, as Herewiss's was, she wouldn't be having this problem. ...*If*. Segnbora exhaled sharply at her useless obsession with what she couldn't have. Her Flame wasn't focused. It never would be, and she had given up. Other things had become more important now. Oaths, for example.

It seemed like a long time ago. *All of a month*, she thought—a busy month full of desperate rides, escapes, sorcery, terror, wonder. All started by a chance meeting in a smelly alley, when she had stumbled on a dark fierce little man losing a swordfight to the crude but powerful axework of a Royal Steldene guard. The small man looked as if he was about to be split like kindling. She had intervened. The guardsman never saw the shadow who stepped in from behind.

Over the course of the evening, she found she had rescued family; though the tai-Enraesi were

only a small poor cadet branch of the Darthene royal line, and strangers to court, the Oath of Lion and Eagle was binding on them too, and a king's son of Arlen was therefore a brother.

The relationship got more complex with time, however. On the road Segnbora had shared herself with Freelorn, as she sometimes did with the others, for delight or consolation. But before that, more importantly, came friendship, and the oaths. *Before Maiden and Bride and Mother I swear it, before the Lovers in Their power, and in the Dark One's despite: My sword will be between you and the Shadow until you pass the Door into Starlight.*

She exhaled quietly. Her determination was set.

*There has to be a way.*

*There has to.*

*You're not going to get him...*

\*\*\*

After a while, as she lay at last near the brink of sleep, Segnbora sensed something shining. She opened one eye. Across the room sat a form sculpted of darkness and deep blue radiance—Herewiss, cross-legged, shoulders hunched wearily as he gazed down at the sleeping Freelorn. Across his lap lay his sword, wrapped about with curling flames the color of a twilight burning low.

She lay unmoving, regarding him. Eventually the thought came, tasting as if it had been soaked in tears and wrung out. (You know, don't you.)

(Yes.) She felt sorrow still, and now a touch of embarrassment. (Sorry. You know how it is with dreams.)

(No matter. I've been in a few others' dreams myself.)

(The scales are even, then.)

He nodded. Herewiss didn't look up, but his attention was fixed so intensely upon her that no stare could have been more discomfiting.

(You understand what you're getting into?) he said. (It may not be just Lorn heading for that Door. Probably me too. Maybe all of us will have to die so the Kingdoms can go on living.)

(Those who defeat the Shadow,) Segnbora said silently, (usually die of it. It's in all the stories.)

(Defeat!) Now he raised his head. His look was pained at first, then incredulous.

(I love him too,) she said.

(You're as crazy as the rest of us,) Herewiss said. The thought was sour, but there was a thread of amusement on it like the bright edge of a knife. He threw her a quick image of herself as she had been the night before, when the air in the hall had been full of the stink of hralcins. As the monsters had come shambling across the floor toward them she had stood frozen on the brink of panic, unable to do even the smallest sorcery. All she'd been able to do was stand shaking before the advance of the screaming horrors, and make blinding light—a byproduct of her blocked Fire—until even that guttered out, exhausted.

Segnbora bit the inside of her cheek, pained by the image regardless of the compassion of Herewiss's viewpoint. (What we're facing,) he said, (is the father of those things, and worse—the Maker of Enmities, the engenderer of the shadows at the bottoms of our hearts, Who can overturn the world in fire and storm. You have some new defense that you've come up with since last night? A strategy sufficient to stop a being so powerful that to be rid of it the Goddess Herself can only let the Universe run down and die?) The irony was gentle, but it was there.

(I plan to win,) Segnbora said at last. (What are you going to do?)

He looked across the room at her for a while, still not moving. (I'm glad you're here,) he said finally. (I can't tell *him* about this—) ~~A quick thought, a flicker of the shape of an arrowhead, passed between them. (I hope you won't either.)~~

Segnbora shook her head.

Herewiss straightened, laid Khávrinen aside. Away from its source, the Fire in the blade died down to the merest glow. Only in his hands did a little Flame remain burning. Looking down at Freelorn, Herewiss absently began to pour it from hand to hand. Like burning water it flowed, the essence of life, the stuff of shapechanges and mastery of elements and magics of the heart, the Goddess's gift to the Lovers and to humankind: the Power that founded the world, that the Shadow had lost and caused men to lose.

*And there's nothing It hates more,* Segnbora thought to herself. *Though love probably comes close.*

She closed her eyes to the light of Herewiss's hands, shuddered, and went to sleep.

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...ere the Dark could sprede so far as to kyll all Powre and thought... there fled to Lake Rilthor that was holie, the men and womyn gretest of Fire aft that time. And of theyre greate might and Powyre, that those whoo came after the Darke should learn agayn the wrekinges of those auncient daies, those Wommen and Men did drive their Flame down intoo the mount at the Lak's heart; and adyed there, that Fyre might bee spared from the Darrk for those to comm after. Therefore it ys called Morrow-fane.

*(Of the Dayes of Travaile, ms. xix, in rr'Virendir, Prydon)*

...they say that after the Error, there the Maiden lay down in love with Her other Selves, celebrating the Great Marriage. In the joy of that sharing, the Fire with which She creates flowed forth and sank deep in earth and stone, so that to this day the Fane burns with it. And those who dare to climb the Fane share in that first Sharing themselves, becoming Her Lovers as well: and as in that first sharing, their need is filled, and new life is given them...

*Book of Places of Power, ch. 3*

It is the Heart of the World: there is no other.

*(d'Elthed, Reflections in the Silent Precincts, 6)*

In the long west-reaching shadow of the glittering gray walls that rose a hundred fathoms high, fourteen figures stood: seven riders, and six horses, and a creature that looked like a blood-bay stallion, but wasn't. Dawn was barely over, and the morning was still cool. The vast expanse of the Waste all around—sand and rubble and salt pans—was sharp and bright in the crisp air. But behind them the Hold from which they had departed wavered and shimmered uncannily, as if in the heat of noon.

"Be glad to be out of here," Lang muttered from beside Segnbora.

She nodded, yanking absently at her mare Steelsheen's reins to keep her from biting Lang's dapple-gray, Gyrfalcon. The Hold unnerved Segnbora too. The Old People from whom the humans of the Middle Kingdoms were said to be descended had wrought with their Fire on an awesome scale. Within those slick and jointless towering walls, odd buildings reared up—skewed towers, blind of windows; stairs that started in midair and went nowhere; steps staggered in such a way as to suggest that the builders, or those who used the building, had more legs than humans; more rooms inside the inner buildings than their outer walls could possibly contain.

And worst of all, or best, the place was full of doors—entrances into other worlds. There were also gateways to other places in this world, and doors into areas not even classifiable as worlds or places. People could go out those doors and return. People, or things, could come in them, as the hralcins had. Segnbora shivered.

"You sure you can pull this off?" Freelorn was saying nervously to Herewiss.

"Mmmph," Herewiss said. He was standing with Khávrinen unsheathed, and seemed to be minutely examining a patch of empty air three feet in front of him. The Fire that ran down from his hand flooded the length of Khávrinen, leaping out from it in quick tongues that stretched out and snapped back, reflecting his concentration.

Behind Herewiss, Sunspark extended its magnificent head to nibble teasingly at the sleeve of Freelorn's surcoat, leaving singed places where it bit. (You have to be careful, doing worldgating inside a world,) it said, sounding smug. (Don't distract him.)

Freelorn smacked the elemental's nose away and got a scorched hand for his pains. "He could have used one of the doors in the Hold. Now he's got to use his Flame—"

(It's simpler doing it yourself,) Sunspark said. It knew about such things, having been a traveler among worlds before love had bound it to Herewiss's service. (And more reliable. Those doors are complex...it would have taken quite a while to figure them out. Don't complain.)

"I'm *not*."

Segnbora restrained an urge toward amusement. Sunspark had done perhaps more than any of them to save all their lives two nights before, holding the hralcins off until Herewiss could break through into his Flame. It had done so specifically because it knew Herewiss loved Freelorn, and would have been in anguish if he died. But Sunspark seemed determined not to admit its motives to Lorn—from caution, or for the sake of sheer devilry, it was impossible to tell.

Herewiss stood scowling at the air he had been examining, or whatever lay beyond it. It was dangerous, this business of opening doors to go from one place to another. Gates, when opened, tended to tear as wide as they could. A person doing a wreaking had to maintain complete control, or risk ending up in a world that looked exactly like the one he wanted to journey in, but with minor differences—a differing past or future, say, or familiar people missing.

Segnbora was not happy that one man was trying to pull off a gating by himself, and in such an unprotected place. All her previous experiences with worldgates had been in the Silent Precincts, where safe-wreakings bound every leaf or blade of grass about the Forest Altars. Always there had been ten or twenty senior Rodmistresses on call to assist if there was trouble, and never had a gate been held open long enough for so many to pass through. She hoped Herewiss knew what he was doing.

Herewiss didn't move, but from where Khávrinen's point rested against the ground, a sudden runnel of blue Fire uncoiled like a snake and shot out across the sand. It put down swift roots to anchor itself, then leaped upward into the air. The atmosphere prickled with ruthlessly constrained Power as the line of blue light described a doorway as tall as Herewiss and twice as wide. When the frame was complete the Fire ran back along its doorsill and reached upward again, this time branching out like ivy on an unseen trellis, filling the doorway with a network that steadily grew more complex. In a few breaths' time the door became one solid, pulsing panel of blue.

Sweat stood on Herewiss's face. "Now," he said, still unmoving.

The blue winked out, all but the outline. From beyond the door a wet-smelling wind struck out and smote them all in the face. Lake Rilthor, their destination, lay in the lowlands, a thousand feet closer to sea level than the Waste. Through the door Segnbora saw green grass, and a soft rolling meadow leading down toward a silver-hazed lake, within which a hill was half-hidden.

"Go on," Herewiss said, and his voice sounded strained. "Don't take all day."

They led their horses through as quickly as they could, though not as quickly as they wanted to, for without exception the horses tried to put their heads down to graze as soon as they passed the doorway, and had to be pulled onward to let the others through. At last Segnbora was able to pull the reluctant Steelsheen through after the others. She was followed closely by Herewiss and Sunspark, behind whom the door winked out with a very audible slam of sealed-in air.

Segnbora turned to compliment Herewiss and found him half-collapsed over Sunspark's back, with Freelorn supporting him anxiously from one side. He looked like a man who had just run a race; his breath went in and out in great racking gasps, and his face was going gray.

"I thought there'd be no more backlash once you got your Fire!" Freelorn said.

Herewiss rolled his head from side to side on the saddle, unable for several moments to find enough breath to reply. "Different," he said, "different problem," and started to cough.

Freelorn pounded his back ineffectually while Segnbora and the others looked on. When the

coughing subsided, Herewiss rested his head on the saddle again, still gasping. “—open too wide,” he said.

“What? The gate?”

“No. Me.”

Confused, Freelorn looked at Segnbora. “Do you know what he’s talking about?”

She nodded. “In a worldgating, the gate isn’t really the physical shape you see. The gate is in your mind—the ‘door’ shape is just a physical expression of When you open a gate, you’re actually throwing your soul wide open. Anything can get out. And anything can get in. It’s not pleasant.”

“I don’t know about you people, but I can hardly hear,” Dritt said rather loudly.

“Swallow,” Herewiss said. “Your ears’ll pop.” At last, his strength returning, he looked around with satisfaction. “You’re better than I am with distances, Lorn. How far from Lake Rilthor would you say we are?”

Freelorn shaded his eyes, looking first at the Sun to orient himself. “It’s a little higher—”

“Of course. We’re sixty leagues west.”

Freelorn looked southwest toward the lake, and to the mist-girdled peak rising from its waters.

“Four miles, I’d say.”

“That’s about what I wanted,” Herewiss said, pleased. “Not bad for a first gating.”

“It’s so quiet,” Harald said, looking around suspiciously.

“It’s a holy place,” said Moris, unruffled and matter-of-fact as always.

Segnbora looked around at the silent green country, agreeing, opening out her undersenses to the affect of this place. Like most fanes or groves or great altars, the Morrowfane made you feel that Someone was watching—Someone who would only speak using the heart’s own voice. Yet the feeling here was less personified, more remote, than any she’d experienced before. Above everything hung a waiting silence, as when the hawk sails high and no bird sings. Below the silence was a slow, steady throbbing of incalculable power, as if the world’s heart beat nearby. A ruthless intuned benevolence slept at the center of Lake Rilthor, and slept lightly. It was no wonder that there wasn’t a town or a farm or even a sheepfold for miles around.

—It was not a smell, or a feeling, or a vision precisely, that started to creep up on her. Segnbora stood up straight, glancing around at the others. None of them sensed what she had. Herewiss and Freelorn were leaning against Lorn’s dun, Blackmane, together, speaking quietly; Moris and Dritt had walked off a little way to look southwest at the Fane; Lang was rubbing down the perpetually sweaty Gyrfalcon; Harald was seeing to yellow-coated Swallow’s cinches. Sunspark had disappeared on some mysterious errand of its own.

She turned and looked east, her hand dropping to Charriselm’s hilt. There it was again, another flash of othersight—vague and odd, focus bizarrely rounded, colors all awry. And smell too, acrid, terrible, enraging. *That’s familiar, I know that—*

*Then* the memory found her: that one time in the Precincts when the novices, carefully supervised, were allowed to shapechange and feel what a beast’s body was like. “Herewiss!” Segnbora said, turning to him in alarm.

He put his head up to the wind, gazing eastward as she had, but saw nothing.

“You just did a wrecking,” she said. “You may still be overloaded. *Taste it!*”

Herewiss closed his eyes and reached out his undersenses. Segnbora did too, standing swaying in the long grass, and caught the impression again, stronger this time. Now there was something even more unnerving added to the flash of skewed viewpoint: *thought*, stunted and twisted and bizarre, but *thought*. And it was all of hate.

The mind she touched bounded above the whipping grass for a moment. It saw forms on the horizon, the source of a maddening stench.

She heard a cough, opened her eyes to see Herewiss choking as he tried to speak. His empathy must have been more profound than hers, for the remembered shape of the runner's throat was keeping the words from getting out. "Fyrd!" he croaked at last, and pushed away from Blackmane, hurriedly unsheathing Khávrinen.

Segnbora's eyes widened. "But that was thinking! Fyrd are Shadow-twisted, but they're just beasts. They don't *think!*"

"My move's been anticipated," Herewiss said bitterly. He swung Khávrinen sideways, whipping a great brilliance of Fire angrily down the blade. "Our enemy's a step ahead of me. And mocking us!"

Segnbora understood. At Bluepeak, long ago, the Shadow had driven that first terrible breed of thinking Fyrd down from the mountain country into the Kingdoms. Far more dangerous than the first noxious things it had twisted out of the beasts of ancient days, these Fyrd had the cunning of warriors. It had taken the Transformation, in which Earn and Healhra burned away their very forms and their mortality, to exterminate that breed. And now, for Herewiss's sake, here they were again—

Steel scraped out of sheaths all around as movement became visible in the high grass to the east. Segnbora's under-senses brought her more and more clearly the experience of their hungry rage. The hunters knew their quarry was human, and hated them for it. They were coming to do murder.

"Dammit," Herewiss muttered, "Sunspark, where are you when I need you?!" But no answering thought came, and Herewiss hefted Khávrinen grimly. Only two days forged, and already the sword would be tasting blood

There was little time to prepare. One moment the dark backs were jolting closer and closer through the tall grass; the next, with a wave of grunts and screeches, the Fyrd were upon them. Segnbora found herself holding her blade too high to guard against a maw that was suddenly springing at her throat. She threw herself sideways. Jaws went *snick!* the air above where she had been. She hit the ground, rolled, found her footing, sprang up again. The maw hit the turf where she'd rolled. For a moment it tore the ground with teeth and talons, its hunched back to her. That was all she needed. Choosing her spot Segnbora swung Charriselm up, sliced down through thick flesh to the shock of bone. The maw writhed and screamed once, its half-severed head flopping into the grass. She paid it no more heed, simply whipped the blood off Charriselm and swung around to find another foe. There were certain to be plenty—

—More maws, five or six of them, broad and round with piggish, wicked eyes; several keplian, horse-looking things with carnivores' teeth and three razory toes on each forefoot; other shapes less identifiable. The standard Fyrd varieties had been twisted yet further away from the animals they had anciently been. Segnbora forgot about specifics and dove away from the spring of one maw, took another one across the chest with a two-handed stroke and was knocked down by its momentum. *Move, move, as long as you're moving you're safe!* she could hear her old sword-instructor Shíhan shouting at her as she scrambled back to her feet.

Off to her left she heard Steelsheen scream in defiance and crash into a Fyrd; a skull crunched, crushed by hooves. At the same time Segnbora got a pinwheeling glimpse of Khávrinen jerking up in Herewiss's hands after a downstroke. A half-seen form came at her low and sideways—Segnbora chopped at it, a poorly aimed blow that slid off hard smooth plates. Hissing, the nadder's gigantic serpent-head rose up before her, then struck. She danced desperately aside, swung scythe-style at it and chopped off the head at the neck.

Segnbora turned away and looked around. Khávrinen struck downward again, and as it struck

both Herewiss and the keplian he had killed moaned aloud. The Fire wavering about those parts of the blade not yet obscured illuminated Herewiss's face. *Tears?* Segnbora thought, though not entirely in surprise. Khávrinen was more of a symbol than a weapon, and Herewiss was no killer—

Steelsheen trampled another maw, and Moris nailed the last one to the ground with a two-handed straight-down thrust. Finally everyone was standing still, panting, sagging, wiping blood out of their eyes.

“More coming!” Segnbora said, wanting to moan out loud at the feeling of yet another of those hot, hating minds heading their way from the north. The source was still a hundred yards away, but showing much more of itself above the grass than had the other Fyrd. Segnbora recognized it, and her heart constricted in terror. She'd never seen one of these, but if the stories of the creatures' endurance were true, this one could afford to take its time.

“Oh Goddess,” whispered Freelorn from beside her. “A deathjaw!”

“With the Fire,” Herewiss said between gasps, “possibly—” He lifted Khávrinen again, but there was no great hope in the gesture. Deathjaws were so fearsome that there was only one way to successfully hunt them: stake out a human being as bait, and hide a Rodmistress close by to do a brainburn when the thing got close enough. *We've got plenty of bait, thought, but he doesn't know how to do a brainburn, or he'd have done it by now.*

The shambling form was closer. “Run for it,” Herewiss said, sounding very calm.

Everyone hesitated. “I mean it,” Herewiss shouted, “what are you waiting for?”

Lang turned, and Moris, and Harald, but they were slow about retreating. Freelorn didn't move from beside Herewiss. Herewiss's glance darted sidewise to him. “Lorn—!”

“Big, isn't it,” Freelorn said. His eyes were wide with fear, but his voice was as steady as if he was discussing a draft horse.

“Lorn—!”

“Shut up, Dusty,” Freelorn said. “Do whatever you're going to do to that thing. I'll watch your back”

Segnbora stepped up behind them as they set themselves. “I don't know how to burn,” Herewiss said to Segnbora, without looking at her. “The eye, though, that's possible—”

—Put a longsword into that little eye and hope to hit the brain? Segnbora didn't dare laugh at the idea. The deathjaw was close—shaggy-coated, brindled, the size of three Darthene lions. Shiny black talons gleamed on its great catlike paws. The deathjaw opened its mouth just a little, showing two of its three lines of fangs above and below. Then it finally began to run, its face wrinkling into a horrible mask.

Herewiss swung Khávrinen up with elbows locked and let it charge—his only option, for running was as hopeless as a slash-and-cut duel would be. *The blade into the eye, she heard him thinking, and Fire down the blade, enough to blast the brain dead. I hope—*

He never had a chance. While still twenty feet away the deathjaw screamed horribly as fire suddenly bloomed about it, eating inward through flesh and muscle and sinew quick as a gasp. The still-moving skeleton burned incandescent for a moment more before the swirling flames blasted bones to powder, then ate that too. The deathjaw was gone before its death shrieks faded.

And Sunspark appeared—a brief bright coalescence like a meteor changing its mind in midexplosion, steadying down to the horse-shape again. It came pacing over to Herewiss and Freelorn and Segnbora, exuding a feeling of great pleasure, its mane and tail burning merrily as holiday bonfires. (You called for me?) it said to Herewiss, who was gasping with deferred terror.

He gulped for breath. “I believe I did,” Herewiss said.

Sunspark looked at Freelorn with an expression of good-natured wickedness and said nothing.

—“Thank you,” Freelorn said, courteous enough; but there was a touch of grudge in his voice.

Sunspark snorted. (Gratitude! Next time I’ll choose my moment with more care. A little later, say.)

“Choose the moment—!”

(So that you’ll appreciate me more.)

“You mean you *watched* those things attack us and you didn’t—!”

“Lorn, enough,” Herewiss said. “It doesn’t think the way you do. Luckily for us. Loved,” he said to the elemental, “did you notice any other wildlife in these parts while you were having breakfast?”

(Singers,) it said, looking to the northwest. (The ones with fur.)

“Wolves? Perfect.” Herewiss glanced down at Khávrinen, which blazed just long enough to burn the blood off itself. “We won’t be climbing the Fane until sunset, since a Summoning there works best at twilight. But damned if I’m going to put up with any more Fyrd in the meantime. I’ll go have a word with the wolves and see if I can work something out. Now, how do I manage this—”

He frowned, closed his eyes. Fire swirled outward from Khávrinen, hiding both sword and wielder. The pillar of brilliance shrank as it swirled, and sank close to the ground. When the blue Flame died away it left behind a handsome cream-white wolf with orange-brown points and downturned blue eyes.

(Not bad,) Sunspark said, (for a beginner.)

Herewiss grinned a wolf-grin. (Stay close till I get back, loved, just in case the Fyrd try again. I won’t be long.)

The wolf bounded away through the long grass. Watching him go, Segnbora dug down in her belt-pouch for a square of clean soft cloth, with which she began cleaning off Charriselm’s blade. When she’d finished, she looked thoughtfully at the Fane. It seemed to gaze back, calm and blind and patient, waiting for something. *Fyrd so close to this place—that’s unheard of. All the rules are changing.*

*But after this, nothing is going to be the way it was. Not even me.*

“You going to stand there all day?” someone shouted at her. Freelorn and the others were in the saddle, getting ready to ride down to the Fane. Segnbora swung up into Steelsheen’s saddle and went after them.

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Somewhat later she sat with her back against the trunk of an old rowan tree near the lakeshore, watching the long shadows of men, horses and trees drown in slow dusk. The Fane, half a mile away across Rilthor’s water, shone golden as a legend where its heights still caught the sunset. The mirroring water lay still in the breathless evening, the mountain’s burning image broken only by the wakes of gray songswans gliding by. *It’s really more a hill than a mountain,* Segnbora thought, stretching. The Fane was no more than half a mile wide at the base, broad at the bottom and flat at the top, stippled roughly with brush and scrub pine. *Nothing so spectacular...except for what you can’t see.*

And it was the unseen which all day had kept their camp so abnormally quiet. Freelorn had spent most of the afternoon pacing and frowning until Herewiss returned from his parley with the wolves, reporting success and a throat sore from much howling. Now he sat under a nearby alder, meditating, with Khávrinen flaming in his lap. For a long while Herewiss hadn’t moved, gazing across at the Fane.

with an expression half wonder and half fear, while Freelorn took to pacing again. Harald and Moris had been keeping so close to one another that one might have thought they had been lovers for only a week or so, rather than years. Dritt and Lang had become obsessive about caring for their horses, and the otherwise fearless Lang had been looking over his shoulder a great deal. Even Sunspark, in its horse-shape, had been cribbing quietly at an elm tree, leaving small scorched places bitten out of the bark.

Segnbora laughed at herself then, a mere breath of merriment. *And look at me. All the time I've spent on the trail, a hunted woman—and look what kind of watch I'm keeping. My back turned to open country, where Goddess knows what could be coming up from behind—and me sitting here staring at this silly hill as if it's going to jump out of the water and come after me!* Yet that silent, remote benevolence kept watching her, kept waiting.

In the distance a clear melodious sound, like the night finding its voice, rose up—joined a moment later in the long note by another voice wavering downward a third, and yet another, higher by a fourth. The unsettling harmony sent a delighted shiver down her spine. The wolves were on post as their rearguard, singing to while away the watch.

*The Goddess's dogs*, Segnbora thought. It was the old affectionate name for them, the votaries who sang to Her mirror, the Moon, through all its phases, silent only when She was dark and dangerous. *Where the Moon tonight?* Segnbora wondered, glancing upward. It hadn't yet risen. But she was distracted, as always, with the sight of the first few stars pointing through the twilight, and the memory they always recalled.

*How old was I?* Segnbora wondered, though wondering was vain. Very small, she'd been—small enough to still be wearing a shift instead of a kilt, but large enough to push open the front door of the old house at Asfahaeg and escape at bedtime. She'd gone out into the dark, unsure just what she was looking for—then had glanced up and found something, a marvel. Not just sunset, or dusk, or dark, but a sky burning with lights, every one solitary and glorious; and she knew, small as she was, that somehow or other she and those lights were intimately connected.

Now Segnbora knew them as stars, knew their names, knew about the Dragons who had come from among them, and about the Goddess Who had made them. But the wonder had never left her: the desire to get closer to those lights that called her—and, eventually, closer to the One Who had made the stars. When the Rodmistresses tested her at the age of three and found the Fire, she'd been overjoyed. Everybody knew that when you had the Flame, you got to talk to Her more often than most.

But years of study had failed her. School after school had been unable to provide her with a focus strong enough to channel the huge outflow of her Power—and so there had been no breakthrough, and no truedreams in which the Goddess walked. After much bitter time Segnbora had admitted the truth to herself, that she was never going to focus. She might as well give up sorcery and lore and Flame and all the other timewasting for something useful, as her father had always said.

And, having given up, so it was that she'd met the Goddess at last. She was good enough with Charriselm to go looking for a job as a guard. She found one, in a little Steldene town called Madeil—and found Freelorn in the mucky alley behind the tavern there. Later, fleeing from an old keep in which the aroused Steldenese had besieged them, the group had come across a little fieldstone inn on the border between Steldin and the Waste. It had seemed strange at the time that there should have been an inn out there at the very edge of human habitation, but the innkeeper had put them all at ease. Finding that they were short of money, she offered to share herself with one of Freelorn's people to settle the scot. A common enough arrangement, and Segnbora had won the draw for the privilege.

It had been a sweet evening. The innkeeper had been fair, but there was more to her beauty than

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