

Legacy

“The world as we know it is standing on the pivotal edge of change! An evolution is taking shape. This is the climb, my friends! The climb up towards the peak of the Industrial Revolution! I say unto thee, we must contribute to thrive. Contribute to the Age of the Machine!”

—Professor Raphael Brooke

The Contract

Sinai Peninsula, Spring, 1636

Thooranu had arrived in the Blue Desert late that evening, but already he'd slain many jackals. After his last kill, he built two fire pits in the sand and gutted the beast. He always ate his final kill, or at least the one that proved hardest to bring down. This particular jackal had been both.

He'd taken the beast bare handed, wrestling the animal until he'd broken its neck. The jackal had gotten in a few good bites, rending deep gashes into his back and crushing sharp teeth through his arm. But the jackal had sensed its attacker was otherworldly and had known it would eventually fail. Nonetheless, that hadn't prevented it from putting up a good fight.

After tossing the lungs, liver, brain, eyes, tongue, balls and heart into a blackened iron cauldron to boil, Thooranu skinned and beheaded the animal, then put the carcass on a skewer to rotate over a second fire.

With most of the work done, he sat and wiped his hands clean. His wounds had already healed. From a rough hessian sack, he brought out a bottle of wine, pulling the cork free with his teeth. He breathed in deeply, the wine's earthy aroma giving clues to its origins. It was old, bottled before his birth. Italian. He poured some into a glass and sipped. It tasted like the beginning of everything.

He leaned back, eying the heavens and the myriad stars, a smile flickering over his lips. Then it vanished. Someone was nearby.

"Mind if I join you?" a male voice asked.

The stranger's abrupt approach startled him, which was difficult to do. It must be the human part of him, he thought. But the stranger could not be human. No mortal could survive this far into the desert without a camel. He wasn't even dressed for the harsh conditions.

The man appeared to be teetering between wealth and poverty. His slashed doublet was a shiny red, embroidered with black skeletons, but his cape was ragged along the hem. The boots were the most sensible thing he was wearing, although they were still too heavy for the day's heat, and a ridiculous hat sat upon his head.

Thooranu breathed deeply, trying to sniff the stranger out. There were many scents. Was he a demon too? A punk? Or perhaps a ghost? Whatever he was, Thooranu sensed no threat.

"Please," he said, gesturing for the stranger to join him.

The flamboyantly dressed man took a seat by one of the fires and poked at it with a shiny black cane. He removed his rabbit fur hat, sporting lively ostrich feathers, and set it down beside him. He was handsome, if a little on the feminine side,

with dark hair, a carefully trimmed mustache and beard, along with a charming smile and perfectly shaped eyes that captured the flickering firelight like jewels.

“You’ve built a couple of nice fires here,” the stranger complimented, stroking his beard. He sniffed the cauldron. “Is there a heart in there? I do rather enjoy a good, tasty heart.”

“Would you care for some?” Thooranu asked.

“I would, indeed, and perhaps a glass of wine? If you don’t mind, that is.”

Thooranu did not, for he could obtain wine anywhere with little effort. He poured his guest a glass that he first manifested with a gesture of his hand from the sand and fire.

“Ah,” the stranger said, accepting the drink. “Thank you kindly. You are a good host.”

The stranger didn’t speak with any accent, as though he belonged to no particular region. Then again, neither did Thooranu.

“I’m Jack Pack,” the man said, extending his hand.

“Thooranu.”

They shook hands then Jack Pack settled back, taking another sip of wine.

“I knew a Thooranu once,” Jack Pack admitted. “He was an incubus.”

“My father.”

“I see.” Jack Pack looked him up and down. “It appears that you took after your mother. Human?”

Thooranu smiled. “I suppose I did. And yes.”

“That’s good for you; for as I said, I’ve met your father, and I wouldn’t curse my worst enemy to inherit his looks.”

Thooranu laughed, for he couldn’t agree more. “And what of you?”

“Oh, I’m no one special, really. Just a wanderer. A lost soul, if you will. I journey around the universe, seeing what’s out there, what trouble I can get myself into, that sort of thing.”

“Sounds a bit like me,” Thooranu said, looking up again at the star-glittered sky. “Have you ever visited the outer planes?”

The wanderer shrugged. “Sure, a few times. The worlds beyond are interesting enough, but not like this one. Even the best miss the little things that complete this world. I like it here more than most places.”

Thooranu nodded. “I concur.”

They sat in silence like old friends. Steam curled up from the cauldron. Thooranu glanced at the stranger. Jack Pack had made an impression on him. He hoped the man wouldn’t take his leave too soon. It had been a while since he’d had any company.

Thooranu noticed a coil of braided hair pinned by a jeweled brooch onto Jack Pack’s doublet. “Whose hair is that?”

Jack Pack raised the braid and looked at it, a smile forming. “It was a gift. It’s Guinevere’s hair. Fascinating creature.”

“Lancelot’s Guinevere?”

“The very same. Those two were a good example of how fun mortals are to toy with.”

“Oh?”

“Indeed.” A shrug. “It passes the time.”

“How so?”

“Many years ago, a Trickster, a Dökkálfar and an Adlet beast made a bet on who could find a certain relic that had been hidden; the Holy Grail.”

Thooranu’s eyes narrowed. “The Grail, huh?”

“Yes, yes, I know; we’ve all heard stories about the fruitless quests to find it. Not many know how the whole thing got started, though. It’s a story wrapped within a story.”

“All right.”

“Contrary to what many believe, the Grail started out as nothing more than a fallen star. A servant of the Fisher King found it and brought the stone to an artisan, who carved it into a dish. The humble servant then brought the dish to the Fisher King. The king declared the dish to be a grail and kept it for many years until he could no longer carry on with his duties as king. As his kingdom fell into ruin, the Grail passed on to Joseph of Arimathea, who had it made into a cup; and shortly thereafter, it became known as the *Holy* Grail after Christ’s crucifixion. Later, the elderly and dying Joseph passed it on to Elaine of Corbenic, and she became the Grail’s keeper.”

Jack Pack stared into the fire, a wistful look on his face. “Elaine of Corbenic fell in love with poor ole Lancelot. To get him to sleep with her, she twice tricked him into thinking she was Guinevere. She even gave birth to his child, one Galahad by name. When Guinevere discovered this, she cursed Lancelot and he went mad with grief.”

“I know the story,” Thooranu said. “Later, Elaine finds Lancelot in shambles in her garden. To cure him of his insanity, she lets him drink from the Grail.”

“Indeed. Rumors of that spread. In order for Elaine and Lancelot to have a life together without being badgered by those wanting the Grail, Elaine handed it over to a holy court, who hid it away.”

“And that’s when the Trickster, the elf, and the beast bet on who could find it first?”

“They made the bet long before any of this happened. Each of them was aware of the relic, and when the three attended the funeral of the Fisher King, it became a conversation piece. They knew the Grail would eventually be lost, as most relics are, and decided that when it was, they would race to find. The challenge was, however, that they only use mortals in their search.”

“Interesting,” Thooranu admitted. “I am intrigued. What happened?”

“When he became a young man, Galahad went to King Arthur, offering to serve him. So, the king put him to the test.”

“The old sword in the stone, eh?”

“Indeed, another legend. Now, here is the reason the stories cross paths. A wizard came to Arthur years before and showed him the stone, which was nothing more than a simple boulder by a river. The wizard then presented a sword made from steel that had come from another world. The hilt was wrapped in the hide of a creature that no longer existed, and set inside the pommel was a jewel that once resided far within the earth’s heart. The wizard claimed the sword had come from God.” Jack Pack took a deep draught of his wine, sighing in appreciation of the vintage.

“The wizard sheathed the sword in the stone and said that only the worthiest knight would be able to pull it free, and that knight would serve Arthur well. Arthur, believing that the sword was indeed a holy relic, held an annual ceremony to find that worthy. Once a year, knights would come to pull the sword free. Legend of the sword spread throughout the lands. No one, however, could get the sword out, and after a while, Arthur stopped holding the ceremony.”

“Then one day, Sir Galahad showed up,” Thooranu surmised.

“Yes, but he wasn’t a knight then, not until he pulled the sword free.”

“What made him worthy?”

“Ah-ah, wait,” Jack Pack said, wagging his finger. “The king proclaimed that Galahad would become one of the Knights of the Round Table. Shortly afterwards, Arthur had a vision about the Grail and ordered a search for it. The king sent three knights: Galahad of course, Sir Bors, and Sir Perceval. The Trickster, the elf, and the Adlet beast had to choose which of the knights would find the Grail. Whoever’s knight found the relic would win the wager. The elf chose Sir Perceval; the Adlet beast chose Sir Bors, and the Trickster chose Galahad.”

“How did they determine who got which knight?” Thooranu inquired.

“They went by rank. The Trickster was a god, you see, and being the most powerful, he chose first. The Dökkálfar went next and then the Adlet beast.”

Thooranu nodded. It made sense.

Jack Pack continued. “The knights went on with their quest and spent years searching. Then one day, the Trickster became distressed when Sir Bors saved Galahad’s life. To show his gratitude, Galahad traded the sword he’d pulled from the stone with Bors.”

Thooranu leaned over to pour more wine into his guest’s glass. “So what? After the sword had proven Galahad to Arthur, what other purpose did the thing serve?”

“Don’t be impatient,” Jack Pack said, holding out his glass until it was full. “The Trickster needed the sword returned to Galahad and he found an opportunity for that to happen. After some time apart, the knights reunited when they came across Perceval’s sister. She brought them to a ship bound for the Wasteland. When they landed, they continued on their journey together. On the way, the Trickster came to them, masquerading as a holy man and said that in order for them to cross the Wasteland, they first needed the blessing of the sick lady. They went to the sick lady’s castle, where

the custom was for one of her choosing to drink her blood from a silver dish.” Jack Pack paused for a moment, savoring more of the fragrant wine.

“What the knights did not know was that anyone who drank the blood would die. The woman chose Bors. Perceval’s sister, who was aware of this custom, offered to drink the blood in his stead. The sick lady allowed it, and when the sister drank, the lady revealed that Perceval’s sister would die and that Bors now owed her for her sacrifice. Bors took it upon himself to uphold the dying sister’s request to be brought back to the city of Sarras. The sick lady then said that because he had allowed this to happen—even though he’d been unaware of the fatal consequences—he no longer was deemed worthy to hold onto the sword from the stone. Guilt drove him to give the sword back to Galahad.”

“You’re saying this Trickster had a hand in her death?” Thooranu asked, amazed. “How could he do that? Did he make a bargain with the Fates?”

“He didn’t. Only if the Fates are absent from their realm can the laws of death and life be changed.

However, the Trickster was one of the gifted few who had the ability to bend rules.”

“I see. If that is so, then why kill Perceval’s sister? Why not let Bors drink the blood?”

“It would have suited the Trickster just fine except that Bors might have been buried with the sword that had been given to him. It was customary for knights to be buried with their swords and shields. The Trickster had to make certain Galahad got his sword back.”

“What if the sick lady hadn’t chosen Bors?”

“She didn’t *choose* at all. The Trickster had made a deal with her.”

“And the sister couldn’t just warn Bors?”

“They had been forbidden to leave until a sacrifice was made—a payment, if you will. Until then, they were bound within the castle walls forever.”

Thooranu nodded cautiously and gestured for Jack to continue.

“The sword was returned to its rightful owner and Bors left to take Perceval’s sister’s body back to her homeland,” Jack Pack went on, “leaving only Galahad and Perceval to continue the search for the Grail. After years of adventures, the pair finally came to the court of King Pellés and his son, Eliazar. These two holy men were the Grail’s keepers. They told the knights that only a blessed man, a man of pure heart, could see the Holy Grail. Galahad presented the sword he had pulled from the stone.”

“Wait, I thought it was the Sword of David, the one given to him on the ship of faith.”

“That’s one version of the story, but it’s not true. It was really the sword that proved his salt to King Arthur. The Trickster won the contest the moment Galahad showed the king and his son the sword.”

“What?” Thooranu said. “How is that?”

“It was rather simple, actually,” Jack Pack said with a mischievous smirk. “It was the Trickster who had come to King Arthur with the sword. The wizard presented the sword that he, himself, had forged. In telling the lie that it had come from God, it helped to get the tale out into the world, where it was eventually brought to the attention of the holy court.”

“Why go through the trouble with the sword?”

“Well, because of the love affair between Lancelot and Guinevere, Arthur was reluctant to allow the son of the man who stole his woman’s heart to join his circle of knights. The sword convinced the King that Galahad was the knight he needed.”

“Why did the Trickster want Galahad to be chosen to look for the Grail? Wouldn’t any knight do?”

“No. Even with the sword, no mere human could be allowed to see the Grail, which had become much more than a fallen star. The sword was designed to release itself from the stone only by someone with a special bloodline, which Galahad had.”

“Did this Trickster have a hand in Galahad’s birth?” Thooranu asked, sensing a deeper history to this god’s involvement.

“Very good guess, young man,” the wanderer praised. “He most certainly did. To win the bet, the Trickster needed a mortal with an edge over the other two knights. He decided to use the love that Elaine had for Lancelot as a means to bring forth said mortal. He’d portrayed himself as a servant girl and told Elaine that if she wanted Lancelot to lay with her, she needed to give him wine and to wear a certain ring. The wine and ring were utterly useless, merely a ruse that gave her the confidence to go forth with the plan. It was the Trickster who’d led Lancelot to believe that it was Guinevere he was laying with. When their son was born, the Trickster made the sword and presented it to King Arthur.”

“The Trickster was pulling the strings the entire time? Why?”

“To win the bet, my boy.”

Thooranu snorted. “Not much of a challenge if he was going to cheat.”

“Oh, but it was. The bet wasn’t just about winning; it was a way for the Trickster to test his scheming skills, and what better way to do that than with a fixed wager?”

“Huh. So Galahad saw the Grail for himself. What happened then?”

“Not much; he died.”

“And who gave Arthur the vision?”

Jack Pack smiled. “The Trickster, of course.”

“And the Dökkálfar and the Adlet beast never suspected?”

“*That* was the real challenge, being able to do all of that trickery without getting caught.”

“You mean all that backstabbing, it seems.”

The wanderer shrugged. “No one said the Trickster was honest.”

Thooranu raised his glass, and gave a wry smile. “Well played.”

They both drank.

“Who gave you Guinevere’s hair?” Thooranu asked.

“The Trickster. It was the only thing he requested of her when she asked him to convince Elaine to kill herself, which wasn’t hard seeing how she was utterly heartbroken. Lancelot never stopped loving Guinevere, you know.”

“So you met the Trickster?”

“I did, indeed.” Jack Pack took a long drink of wine and turned to Thooranu. “Now, let’s have some of that heart.”

They spoke for hours on many topics: the places they’d seen, women they’d seduced, and mischievous deeds committed. Several bottles of wine and one jackal later, they were conversing on matters that Thooranu had never discussed with anyone. As the sun began to rise over the sandy hills, Jack Pack told him that he was going to explore the moons of Jupiter and invited him along.

For the next few years, the two were inseparable. They traveled together, sharing adventures that Thooranu hoped would never end. He felt he’d found a true friend in Jack Pack.

One hot spring’s day in Greece, they were enjoying coffee at a café when Jack Pack offered a proposal. “Have you ever thought about running a business?”

“Pardon?” Thooranu said, setting his cup on its saucer. “A business?”

“I’ve been flirting with the idea for quite some time now. I was once an architect, you know.”

“An architect?” he chuckled. “Why?”

“Sometimes I like to grow roots. It’s a change of pace. I like to keep myself busy, and what better way than running a business, eh?”

Thooranu’s curiosity was piqued. He had never tried such an endeavor. “What sort of business?”

“I was thinking of a tavern and brothel.”

“Where?”

“Here, in Athens. I’ve already picked out a place.”

Thooranu leaned back in his chair. “A brothel, eh?” he said, rubbing his chin.

“We’ll only employ the finest women,” Jack Pack added slyly.

Both the human and incubus side of Thooranu liked that idea and he grinned. “Where is it?”

Jack Pack took him to an abandoned brick building in Piraeus. Fragments of pottery lay everywhere, and a couple of amphora stood against one wall.

“It used to be a warehouse,” Jack Pack explained, walking farther inside. “Until last year, when the owner committed suicide after he lost two of his ships.”

Thooranu imagined how it might be, not as the hollow forgotten place it now was, but as a fully stocked tavern, filled with people drinking and singing. He smelled cigar smoke and heard music. There would be blood on his face from a fight. Once in a while, he’d sneak off with one of the whores for a good fucking. Seeing everything so clearly got him excited. What did he have to lose?

“What say you?” Jack Pack asked. “Are you game?”

“Sure. Why the hell not. We can just walk away from it when we’re bored.”

“Ah,” Jack Pack said, coming back. “That is so, but we need a signed contract for the building.”

Thooranu’s eyebrows knitted together. “Why?”

“To make it legal, of course.” He reached into his inside coat pocket.

“I don’t understand. It isn’t as if it matters if we lose money. I sure as hell don’t care. Why sign a contract?”

“As you pointed out, we can leave the business anytime we wish. The contract is simply a formality to the owner of the property. It’s meaningless to us, but the mortal I leased the building from needs it.” Jack Pack brought out a rolled up piece of paper. “Have a look and see.”

Thooranu took the paper and unrolled it. He had never read a legal document before. The single sheet was indeed a lease for the building, the price paid for it each month, and other legal jargon that bored him. Jack’s name was already scrawled in black.

“How come you’ve already signed it?”

“I want it,” Jack Pack said. “Do you?”

Thooranu thought on that for a moment, then turned his eyes back to the contract and to the blank line next to Jack’s signature.

“You can sign it later, if you want,” Jack said. “I don’t want us to be late for the matinee.”

Seven against Thebes. Thooranu had nearly forgotten about the play. He checked his pocket watch. It was already one-twenty-three.

“Got a pen?” he asked.

Jack Pack smirked and handed over a quill. Thooranu took it and carefully signed his name. Instantly he felt woozy, suddenly weak.

“What is it?” Jack asked.

“I’m not sure,” he muttered, almost falling, catching himself against a support beam at the last second. “I feel off somehow.”

“Oh?” Jack crossed his arms. “Do you feel a bit hollow, as if you’ve just lost something?”

Thooranu did not like the tone in his friend’s voice. Nevertheless, what Jack Pack had said captured his attention. Something was terribly wrong. He felt a sense of loss.

“What have you done?” he asked fretfully.

“It’s not what *I’ve* done, per se; it’s what you just did.”

“What?”

“Look at the contract.”

Thooranu did so—immediately—as if obeying Jack Pack’s command. He read the contract again, only it wasn’t a deed to the ownership of the building they stood in, but a deed to ownership of *him!* Thooranu’s name was printed before a statement that he had surrendered his freedom to whoever’s name was on the deed. The other name was none other than Jack Pack.

“I . . . I don’t understand,” Thooranu stammered. “This isn’t what I just read.”

Jack Pack began jumping up and down, clapping his hands while laughing. “I got you! I did it! I caught a demon!”

Reeling from what was happening, Thooranu shifted his wide eyes up to him. “Why have you done this?”

“Why?” Jack Pack said, stopping his excited jumping. “Because I wanted to. Because I’ve never done it before. You’re my property now, for an entire year. Until the contract expires.”

Thooranu’s face was stone. He looked at Jack Pack through slitted eyes. When the deed finally expired, he would tear his betrayer to bits.

“Oh, but you won’t,” Jack Pack said, catching his thoughts. “All I need to do is sign my name again.”

Thooranu was still holding the contact. He tried to rip it to shreds, but his arms locked up. No matter how hard he struggled, he couldn’t tear up the piece of paper.

“You’re not allowed to do that,” Jack Pack said with a wagging finger. “If you read on, you’ll see why. Also, if the deed is destroyed, you will be forced to destroy yourself in the most painful way that a demon can die.”

Thooranu lowered the paper. His whole body was numb with shock. “How did you do this?”

“Well, first I needed to gain your trust,” Jack Pack said, taking the paper from Thooranu’s hand. “Then, when the time came, I drew this deed up and put an illusion over it that kept you from seeing the real meaning.”

“An illusion?”

Jack Pack winked. “Yes, just like Elaine and Lancelot.”

“Fiend! *You’re* the Trickster!”

“Indeed. And I have succeeded in my scheme.”

Being a demon, emotions usually didn’t penetrate Thooranu’s cerebral cortex. Yet the human side of him felt the sting of betrayal that this *thing*, this petty god, had inflicted upon him.

The Trickster lost his smile. He leaned in closer, his face now only inches from the demon’s.

“I have you, Thooranu, you’re mine. Until I sell you to the highest bidder.”

Chapter One

Mother of Craft

Spring, 1843

Mother of Craft's garden smelled like new life in the fresh afternoon air, growing everything from local to exotic plants; from peas to poppies, orchids to onions, daisies to dwarf apples. The plot was vibrant with a variety of colors, an Eden overlooking the sea. Her garden was a place where life began. And sometimes where it ended.

Tarquin Norwich rode up the lane toward the modest cottage. For years, he had come to Mother of Craft, seeking guidance. Today, he'd come with a special request.

He dismounted. The roan was shiny with sweat. He started for the front door when he spied Mother of Craft on her knees, at work amongst the flowers. She didn't greet him, continuing to weed. Norwich was allergic to pollen, a fact she knew, and no doubt was why she was waiting for him in the garden. She smirked as he approached, as if she sensed his discomfort.

"Mother of Craft," he said, clearing his throat loudly.

"I'm not deaf, Tarquin Norwich," she retorted, pulling weeds from amongst the chamomile.

Norwich sighed, then sneezed. "Mother of Craft, *please*." His tone hardened.

She rose and examined him. Norwich's eyes were red and glossy, like freshly spilled blood. But despite his sniffing and heavy breathing, he stood arrow straight, head high like a proud, albeit sick, lion.

"Let's go inside," she said, heading for the back door, a bouquet of white chamomile in her hand. "The water will be boiling by now."

As she knew he would, he hurried to follow.

Her home felt like an ancient memory, an echo of a past life. A few glass plated daguerreotypes of her and her daughter hung on the dark blue wall, along with oil paintings of forested landscapes and abstracts of cities. Twisted vines cradled glass lamps in their green fingers. Inside, living plants thrived, nurtured by the low glow of the lamp's light.

Norwich hung his coat and hat on a rack, then went to the kitchen and sat at his usual chair. It was the most inviting room in the small cottage. Freshly baked biscuits sat within a small wicker basket, giving it a homey aroma. Through a wide window above the counter was a view of an endless ocean.

While she removed her sun hat and loosened the ribbon around her long red hair, Norwich took out a handkerchief and blew his nose.

“Tell me, Tarquin,” Mother of Craft said, tearing flower pedals from their stems, dropping them into a small bowl, “what is it you seek?”

“The Toymaker,” he said, his voice clear now. “Can you help me find him?”

“Indigo Peachtree, eh? Has he gone missing?”

“Yes,” Norwich admitted. “In truth, he escaped from me last night.”

The iron kettle hanging over the range began to whistle sharply. It was sculpted like a short twisted tree with roots snaking its body, with a branch for a handle. It was half covered by small tesserae with tea-leaves painted on. She dumped the bowl of petals into a matching teapot, then grabbed the kettle with a cloth and poured in the steaming water. She smiled wistfully, breathing the heady aroma as she stirred the brew.

“No,” she said, pouring the tea into a cup.

“No?” he exclaimed, his face reddening. He slapped his hand down on the table.

“Don’t you be hitting anything that belongs to me, Tarquin Norwich!” she admonished fiercely.

Although her anger was feigned, it was enough to put him in his place.

Norwich was deemed an important man. He was also power hungry, ambitious, cruel, and deadly. Mother of Craft helped him because he played a vital role in her plans.

Norwich’s face softened and he looked away, not meeting her gaze. He cleared his throat as if to say something, but no words were forthcoming.

“I don’t know where to find Indigo Peachtree,” Mother of Craft said. It was a lie, but he could not know that. She placed the teacup down before him. “But”— she hesitated, relishing the little torment it gave him— “there are those who do.”

Norwich leaned over his cup, wafting the steam up with his hands, breathing deeply. He spoke in a casual tone that barely masked his profound interest. “And who might they be?”

“The Landcross brothers.”

Norwich sat bolt upright.

“Landcross,” he gasped. “How can that be?”

“The two have crossed paths with Indigo.”

“I see,” Norwich said, nodding solemnly. He took a sip of tea. “Do you know how to find them? Either, I don’t care which.”

The sun vanished behind a mass of grey clouds, a warning of oncoming rain. Mother of Craft lit candles inside several yellowing glass lanterns that she placed upon the table. “Not just one, but *both* of them.”

“I only need one,” he replied, taking a biscuit from the basket. “The one who will best cooperate, that is.”

“You’ll find both will cooperate in their own way,” she said.

“Why do I need both?” He chewed the soft biscuit, letting its sweet taste lighten his mood.

“The oldest knows where to find the Toymaker. However, the younger knows where to find an important item you seek.”

She looked him in the eye, but he turned away. Her unusual violet eyes unnerved him.

“The journal?” Norwich asked in a whisper. “He knows where it is?”

“Indeed. As well as the masks. You’ll need those, too, Tarquin. Do not misjudge their importance.”

Norwich could not hide his excitement. “And you can locate them?”

“Yes, I believe I can.”

She left the kitchen with the teacup in hand, walking over to a bookshelf in the other room. “They’re many miles distant, but not for long.” She stopped in front of a map of England painted on a burlap canvas that hung on the wall like a ragged curtain.

“Are they together?” Norwich asked.

“No,” she said, planting her finger on the map. “One is here.”

He stood up and came over to her. “Bristol? It’ll take me a week to get there and back.”

“That’s why you’ll wait a week until he arrives here,” Mother of Craft said, sliding her finger down to the forest area of Ampfield. “On this road, at Pagan Tree Dressing Church, you’ll be able to capture him when he and his gang of highwaymen try to rob you.”

“Which brother is it?”

“The oldest.”

“Right,” he huffed. “Where’s the other one?”

She sipped her tea, then turned to face him. Just mentioning the younger brother boiled her blood. The years she’d invested in that boy! It kept her awake at nights.

“He’s in France, on his way to Le Havre. You’ll find him in an inn by the sea.”

“How is it that you can tell me exactly where those two are, but not Peachtree?” His tone conveyed more than simply suspicion; there was a threat there too.

“The brothers were touched by the supernatural many years ago, and that allows me—and any good witch or warlock—to sense them. I have an insight into their futures.”

What she told him was only half of the truth. Indeed, the Landcross brothers had the cloak of craft over them. Like most enchanters, she was able to look into the kaleidoscope of someone’s future and see the many different outcomes in their life. Contrary to what many believed, there was no such thing as destiny, only random acts that kept the future constantly shifting. Consequently, one’s future could not be told in a single path. The only certainty was death, the time of which was determined before birth.

Mother of Craft was a talented witch. Like most with magical blessings, she did not need a lot of paraphernalia to use her power. It simply resided within her like a vital organ.

And she didn’t mind the term witch. She was who she was, and she had no quarrel with that. After all, she had let herself die in order to become an enchantress.

“How will I know him?” Norwich asked. “The one in France.”

“He has a scar across his throat. This is common knowledge so he will try to hide it, concealed under an old scarf. He also wears a Greek coin on a chain around his neck; a stater. When you find him, he’ll be eating soup.”

“Eating soup?”

She nodded.

“Is he not in Le Havre now?” Norwich asked with a dash of impatience in his tone.

“No, Calais. He arrived after a narrow escape from the royal guards. He will be heading south to Le Havre.”

She went back to the kitchen and poured herself more tea. He followed slowly, with a last lingering look at the map.

“These are the closest locations the brothers will be to you. Try not to be so impatient. Let them draw themselves in on their own.” She turned her eyes up to him. “Besides, do you not have business at your summer estate?”

His look betrayed his thoughts as he frowned. “Ah, yes. I do, indeed.”

Norwich drained his last drops of tea, and Mother of Craft poured more for him. “Another shipment coming in, yes?”

He snorted. “I confide too much in you.”

He was obviously feeling better now.

“And for good reason,” she replied. “If you had not confided in me about what Indigo told you, I could not have explained what I knew—and the power that could be gained from what he has. You’re crossing dangerous ground, dove, and you need all the help you can get.”

“I’ll be fine.”

She raised her chin. “Just in case, I will give you something.”

She headed to the spice rack, with him following closely. She could feel his strength whenever he was near, and not just his physical might. His willpower was an unbreakable force. His stony grey eyes matched his salt and pepper hair, set within a majestic warrior’s face. Physically, he was a handsome man, yet he was a hardened soul who had not even mourned the death of his lovely wife when she’d taken her own life.

But, however strong, Tarquin Norwich was only an automaton, a mindless machine for her to use.

She took a small, pink vial from the rack. She popped the tiny cork and poured out the fine anise seeds. She moved over to the counter near the window and lifted the lid of the largest of the matryoshka nesting dolls lining the wall. From it, she brought out a round, midnight blue jar. After twisting the cap off, she poured what looked to be black oil into the vial. She pressed the cork back and placed the pink container in front of Norwich. “Use it well.”

Norwich picked it up, studying it, his face scrunching in distaste. “What is this?”

“Demon’s blood.”

He laughed, thinking it a joke. But when she didn’t join him, he fell silent.

“Mix this into something when you use it. It’ll be easier for the individual to drink it if they don’t know what it is. Afterwards you’ll have complete control.”

He nodded. “The color of the bottle makes me half believe it’s a love potion.”

She snorted. “*That* doesn’t exist. Otherwise, I would have sold you some to use on your wife.”

He grimaced and placed his cup on the counter. “I must go. It’s a long ride to Southampton.” He set a coin purse down next to his teacup and headed for the coat rack.

“One more thing,” Mother of Craft said, paying no mind to the purse. “It would be best to send all three of your children out to find the brothers.”

Norwich turned to her as he donned his coat. “Archie? He’s a weak imbecile. Useless on all fronts. And Clover? She’s a ten-year-old girl. Just as useless.”

“Trust me,” she said earnestly. “You’ll need them. And if you think so poorly of them, send them after the easiest one to catch.”

He didn’t seem convinced, yet she knew that his trust in her would outweigh his doubt.

She saw him out and watched him ride down the lane through the sprinkling rain. As she did every time he’d come to seek guidance, she thought it was funny that he never asked if he would succeed in his plan. It wasn’t fear that kept him from inquiring. Tarquin Norwich simply had too much damn self-confidence. A flaw, for that blinding buoyancy would be his undoing. Vela, Mother of Craft’s daughter, emerged from the woods in time to see him leave. She carried two limp, dangling hares. The mirror image of Mother of Craft, but at only eleven, she still had a lot of growing to do. She also shared some of her father’s features, like his wild heart and slender build. Mother of Craft had to admit she missed him sometimes.

“Was that Norwich again?” Vela asked.

“Aye.”

“What did he want this time?”

“He wants many things, as most men do. None of which concern you.”

“Yes, Mother.”

“I will say this, child,” she added. “This may well be the last you’ll ever see of him.”