

cabin.

“Raiella, Kira—where is Jeff? I must know at once!”

“Why, I’m not sure...Raiella do you know?”

“Yes,” Raiella said very slowly.

“Then tell me, for gods’ sake!”

“He should not have gone. It will be her death.”

“He’s at Bettig’s?”

“Yes. Again I say...”

Gaereth trotted into the cabin buckling his belt.

“You don’t know what you are saying, Raiella. Carl, show me the way.”

Carl leaped up the ladder with Gaereth right behind. The men landed on the pier in a flying jump and pounded toward the waterfront as fast as they could run.

“I will not be left out of this!”

Kira sprinted into the passageway and reappeared in a moment clutching her sword. She tore up the ladder and raced after the men.

“Oh, gods and demons!”

After hesitating for a period, Raiella was gone as well.

“Will you join us in the sitting room?” Margithi waited for a reply for some time before saying, “It is not good to be alone for long periods. Will you not leave the bedroom and join us?”

“No.”

“What is it that compels you to remain?”

“I am waiting.”

Margithi frowned worriedly. Zimma had been doing so well.

“What are you waiting for?”

After a period, Zimma said in a small voice, “To be called.”

Clutching her hands together to keep them from shaking, Margithi moved closer to Zimma.

“You have learned, and given up anger as a tool of

justification. Why now? Is this your choice?”

“I don’t know. I will be called. Please...please tell Jeffrey that I am so sorry to leave him.”

“Who has called you? Tell me, Zimma.”

“I was asleep, and...and he said he would come for me.” Zimma shivered. “Must it be so frightening to leave this world, Margithi?”

Stark fear tore at Margithi.

“No! This is not right! This is not part of the Way. Bettig!”

At the urgent cry, Bettig rushed up the stairs and into Zimma’s bedroom.

“What is amiss?”

“You must...”

The candles guttered briefly and went out leaving the room dark except for a vague red glow. Yet it was more than darkness, for it had form and seemed to ooze from the walls. Margithi threw her arms around Zimma.

“You cannot have her! I will not let you have her!”

Margithi was thrown to the floor like a cast off rag doll and rolled into a table, upsetting it. Deep croaking laughter shook the walls.

“And now, Zimma, you will be my slut and know the glory of power. Then will your anger come to full flame and destroy this puny man who would have you!”

The laughter rose until chairs reeled to the floor and spun about from the force.

A purple mist gathered and settled onto Zimma like an obscene jellyfish, lighting the room with a sickening glow. She seemed to fade and her eyes closed.

Terrified as never before in life, Bettig was about to hurl herself at the purple globe when a note of exquisite beauty floated in through an open window. It was a musical note but far more, for it had substance and drifted about the room to linger in luminescent pastels. Ascending in solo obbligato, note followed note in a progression that filled the room with music and light; spoke not only of joy, but to life.

The purple mist whirled into long tentacles that struck out at the shining orbs, but they danced like butterflies and were unharmed. The music grew stronger; was inside the house; then on the stairs. Now the tentacles took on substance and lashed out to send furniture crashing into walls. Bettig dived to the floor and desperately tried to pull Margithi to safety, but there was no haven. The music stopped and the door flew open. Jeff stepped into the room.

Celidar was gripped in his left hand, Berold shone silver in his right. Raising the sword, Jeff said in a deep voice, "By my hand was your servant slain. By my hand shall you also die. The Lady Zimma is mine forever."

All was silent. Slowly, darkness congealed to form the shape of a monstrous black gargoyle that took up half of the room. The demon's features were those of a deformed pig with the curving horns of a goat jutting from its head. Flames belched from its mouth with each breath, filling the room with the stench of sulfur and rotting flesh.

"You! You who would be a Power! Now shall I know revenge!"

The door slammed shut.

An orange ball of fire shot toward Jeff like an arrow, trailing fire. Faster than human sinew could respond, Berold moved to oppose. The ball was met and sent back as a streak of white energy that tore a hole through blackness. The demon bellowed fury and pain in a blast of sound that flung Jeff against the door. He scrambled up and advanced as a mighty fist rose to crush him.

Thrusting high, Jeff impaled the fist but it came down with such force that he was smashed to the floor. Man and demon screamed and writhed about in pain. The demon lord spewed words of filth that set clothing to smoldering and a chair on fire, but he could not shake free of Berold. Nearly unconscious from the pain, Jeff released Celidar and gripped the sword with both hands as he was flung from side to side.

"Noleg Velon! Open, I say!"

With a splintering crash, the door dissolved into small fragments and Gaereth strode into the room. Carl quickly followed, saw Margithi lying in a heap, and rushed to kneel by her side.

Flame shot from the demon lord's gaping maw in a whistling roar. He gave a tremendous wrench that jerked Berold free and flung Jeff across the room to fetch up against an overturned sofa. Green fluid leaked from the sword wound to fall as luminescent drops that hissed as they struck wood. Clutching his wounded hand, the demon concentrated on Gaereth. Their wills met and locked together.

"Silmon golanth! I will have your name!"

The gargoyle shape flowed together then reformed.

"You are strong, mortal, but take the name of a demon lord?"

Cruel laughter ripped tapestries from the walls.

Gaereth cried out in pain as he felt the full brunt of a will fueled by the fires of hate that had no ending. Forced to his knees, Gaereth called out, "Num enos solates! Gather to me now, keepers of light!"

Bright phosphorescent sparkles settled on Gaereth like a swarm of fireflies. Features glowing with a white corona, Gaereth rose from his knees and roared, "Silmon golanth!"

Stomping his foot through the floor, the demon lord bellowed a counter spell. Kira burst into the room and saw Gaereth begin to crumple. She had never seen a demon, but was not entirely surprised to confront one. They were, she knew, there.

Given to action without undue submission to thought, Kira nevertheless understood in a flash that her sword was useless. Berold lay nearby, and she also understood that it was not. Scooping it up, she uttered the ululating war cry of Zomar and launched her body at the demon, sword first.

Totally focused on Gaereth, the demon lord never saw her coming.

Kira struck the demon like a thrown spear. Berold

disappeared up to the hilt in a flash of white light. Violet plasma shot from the demon's chest like molten lava, and thunder rocked the house. On his feet again, Jeff raced in and snatched Kira from the floor before the plasma could burn her.

Contorting his body into shape after shape, the demon shattered windows and tore out an entire wall in his agony. Roof beams thundered into the room, and it seemed the entire house must come down. Giving Kira to Carl, Jeff danced from side to side, saw an opening, and leaped in to grab Zimma before she fell to the ground two stories below.

He shouted to Gaereth, "Let's get everyone out of here."

"I have to stay. This isn't over yet. Get them out, including yourself."

"No way!"

The flow of violet lava slowed to a trickle and stopped. The repulsive pig's head turned to Gaereth and jaws gaped wide to emit such a howl of fury that those in the room staggered backward. The demon lurched forward with an outstretched hand the size of a basketball. He was about to pluck Gaereth from the floor like a ripe pear when a single note sounded as if struck from a perfect crystal. Such was the tonal purity that every mortal froze to better listen.

Jerking his arm back, the demon lord recoiled in fear.

A white and gold-flecked whirlwind rushed into the room from the starry night sky. A mighty yet gentle voice seemed to fill the world.

"You have twice brought evil to a land that is not yours. Inform your master the pact is broken. Go."

One tremendous thunderclap, and the demon vaporized to nothing. Berold clattered to the floor, and then there was no sound except that of weeping.

In the center of the room, Jeff kneeled beside Zimma. Anguished sobs shook his body, and giant tears splashed onto her face.

"Oh gods, I was too late. She's dead."

Carl left Margithi to see if he could revive Zimma. He got within a few feet and was stopped cold as if hitting a wall. Crying out with the force of his effort, he fought to break through but could not.

Suddenly, actinic fire snapped and crackled around Jeff and Zimma. One second they were there, the next second they seemed to roll up from the floor like a window shade and were gone. The barrier disappeared, and Carl lurched forward. He was so stunned that he knelt to feel around the floor to make sure. He wasn't blind, the floor was empty; they were truly gone.

Cold, it was so cold. Jeff drifted in a semi-conscious state that permitted nothing more than vague awareness. His eyes wandered around a dimly lit room filled with shadows. What seemed to be a bank of blinking lights attracted his attention and interest, but it was so dark there was no way of telling what the lights represented. There seemed to be a familiar smell from years ago in the air. Maybe synthetics.

He forced his head to one side and was surprised in a detached way to find Zimma lying beside him on a padded table. The effort to turn his head proved too much and he drifted off. As he faded out Jeff heard a distant whine and booming clang, then all was darkness again.

A tousled mop of red hair suddenly appeared above a bed of tall grass. Sitting up, Zimma raised her arms to stretch and luxuriate in warm sunlight. Clasping knees, she gazed at her surroundings and laughed.

“How beautiful! Am I dreaming?”

She was sitting on a gentle hillside carpeted with spring flowers. A large creek chuckled along a stony bed at the foot of the hill. Seemingly in no hurry, the creek wound through groves of slender trees and well-tended fields that were