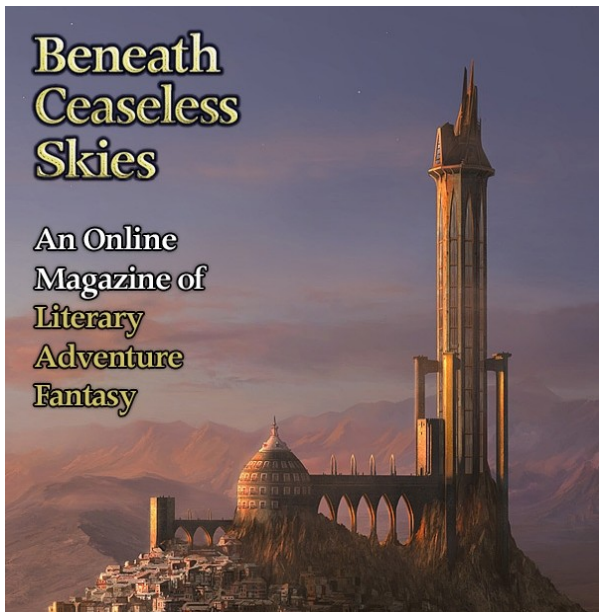


Beneath Ceaseless Skies

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AND BLOW THEM AT THE MOON

by Marie Brennan

Thames Street, London: 25 July, 1605

Henry Garnet's breathing was the only sound inside the room, marking the passage of time like a ragged and desperate clock. Everything else was remote, muffled, the street outside as distant as a foreign land. He knelt with both hands clenched white before him, trembling as his lips shaped the words. *Domine, adjuva me.*

Soundless as those words were, they sent a faint chill rippling across Magrat's skin. But she stayed and watched, because she'd made one mistake already, and didn't want to make a second.

It was hard to know the right path, even after all these years. Once she'd been the grim of Hyde Abbey, and her duties had been simple: she haunted the church—a task that would send most faeries shrieking for safety—and rang the bell on occasion, and knew which dead were destined for Heaven or Hell. But the abbey was gone, along with all the other monasteries, and English Catholicism was reduced to this: priests in disguise, creeping from house to house, saying

Masses in the blind hours of the night for their tiny recusant flocks.

She could have found another home. Occupied some new-built Anglican church, or fought another grim for his established place. Instead she followed the Catholics, and most particularly this man, who was Father Superior to the Jesuits in England.

Henry Garnet could not see her. Magrat doubted he'd appreciate her presence; Jesuits were a passionate lot, their faith enough to try even *her* endurance, and they didn't look kindly on the notion of faeries. And that was her excuse, inasmuch as she had one: it would have been harder to pass unnoticed in the garden. She was no woodland sprite, after all. So she'd stayed indoors, when Garnet invited the distraught Father Tesimond to walk as he confessed, and had therefore missed what Tesimond had said.

Whatever it was, it put Garnet here, on his knees in this cramped little room, tears tracing bright lines down the weary planes of his face.

He never liked coming to London. In some ways it was safer here; a man could easily vanish among the tens of thousands of mortals packed within the city walls. Out in the countryside, the searchers knew which houses were likely to harbour priests, and hunted them relentlessly. But the city was

also the source of that threat: just upriver lay the chambers of Parliament, who passed laws telling England's remaining Catholics the many things they were forbidden to do. Garnet was a gentle soul; he preferred to keep distant from politics, trusting in Providence to vindicate his cause.

That trust had clearly taken a sharp blow today. What had Tesimond *said*? Some new law, perhaps, or the torture and execution of yet another priest—

No. Before they went into the garden, Tesimond said he'd heard someone's confession recently.

"Blood and Bone," Magrat said between her teeth. Garnet was so lost in prayer, he wouldn't have heard her even without the charm that cloaked her presence.

Confession. She'd followed the Catholics for decades, as the various recusant families married one another, bore children, grew to old age or died before they could, and so on to a new cycle. She knew them: the children who learned their catechisms in secret, the wives who concealed priests and then lied to the searchers, and the men.

The men, who chafed at the restrictions of Parliament. Who eagerly anticipated the toleration James would grant once he had claimed the throne of England, and who cursed his name when that toleration proved merely the King's usual

ambivalent diplomacy, careful promises that committed him to nothing.

The men. Some of whom had rebelled with the Earl of Essex four years ago, before old Queen Elizabeth died.

Some of whom might do so again.

A second curse formed on Magrat's lips, but died unspoken as a cold wind brushed over her soul.

Garnet's breathing had stilled, where he knelt upon the floor.

Magrat stared at him, holding her breath in unconscious echo of the priest. He'd done something—*decided* something—

And now he was going to die.

A church grim could taste death, scent it on the air, feel it in the marrow of her bones. Every mortal carried a little bit; death was always a possibility, from accident or disease. But sometimes the possibility grew stronger, closer, when a man stood at a fork in the road, then chose the path that led toward peril.

She could even guess what Garnet had decided. A faerie couldn't shadow Jesuits for years and not learn a few of their ways. Anything said in confession could only be shared with the permission of the penitent: Tesimond had gotten it, but Garnet, she was certain, had not.

However tempted he might be—whatever reason he might have—he could not break the seal of the confessional. That was the conflict that had gripped him since Tesimond left. And the strange peace on his face, as he turned it up toward Heaven, told her what choice he'd made.

He would keep the secret. And because of it, he would die.

Might, Magrat thought, as the priest murmured a conclusion to his prayer, rose, and left the room. *He might die.* At some point in the near future. And that was none of her concern.

But this was what came of following Catholics. It was easy to watch mortals come and go, from the security of a comfortable church; much harder when she lived in the shadows of their lives, seeing their dedication and courage in the face of persecution. Also their flaws, their missteps and mistakes—but that, too, was part of knowing them, and knowing was a dangerous thing.

It was a short step from *knowing* to *liking*. Sometimes even *admiring*. Things no church grim should ever feel.

She should let this go. Her duty was simple: if Henry Garnet died at the hands of the Crown, hung or burnt or drawn and quartered, then his Jesuit brethren would come in secret to witness. And if the eyes of one drifted past the scaffold to the

shadows that lay beyond, she would show him whether his Superior was going to Heaven or to Hell.

Only that, and nothing more.

But she'd left her duty behind in the ruins of Hyde Abbey. Everything she'd done since was choice.

And she liked Father Garnet too much to let him die.

She chose instead to save him from his fate.

* * *

The Onyx Hall, London: 24 August, 1605

It was almost like being in a church again. The long gallery that led toward Magrat's destination was a high, narrow thing, its ceiling a row of pointed arches; add windows of coloured glass, and an altar at one end, and she could imagine Father Garnet saying a Mass here.

At least until the inhabitants stopped him. This was no holy ground, but rather a faerie palace, and its people did not take kindly to prayers.

In the normal way of things, she would have been with him. It was the Feast of St. Bartholomew, and the Jesuit was at White Webbs; he and the ladies of his congregation were considering a pilgrimage in secret, to a holy well in Wales. Garnet's fear seemed to have faded. He'd written in vague terms to Rome, saying he feared some violent action against

the King, begging for the new Pope to forbid it; that was all he could do, and apparently he believed it would be enough.

It wouldn't. The death hovering over him proved that. And so Magrat, for the first time in years, abandoned the priest she'd appointed herself to follow, and came here instead.

The gallery ended in a humble door, bronze-bound and low enough that taller fae would have to duck. Magrat pushed it open and stepped through into a place that was very nearly as unchurchlike as it could be.

The first thing she heard was a voice swearing in a thick Cornish accent. "Can't even dig a tunnel straight, ye thickerd—I told you 'twas sloping up, and so it was, right into someone's cellar—"

A scattering of faerie lights and tallow dips lit the wide, low-ceilinged room of the Crow's Head, shedding their uneven glow across the heavy tables and benches. The tavern's few occupants were a motley sort: one stick-boned sprite, giggling quietly amidst empty wineskins; three cloaked figures radiating silence in a shadowy corner; and nearest the door, two knockers, one berating the other without pause for breath.

The tavern's owner, a hob named Hafdean, was busy at work beneath the preserved human head mounted on the far wall. A platform raised him up high enough to wipe down his bar of beer barrels and wine casks; he was smaller than Magrat

by a good foot, and ugly enough to make her goblin features seem plain. He tossed aside his rag as she approached and squinted the wrinkles around his eyes even deeper. “I’ve seen you before. Church grim, female, old-fashioned clothes—Magrat, isn’t it?”

She put one hand defensively to the tattered dress she wore. Old-fashioned? Perhaps so; she’d taken it from the body of a woman refused consecrated burial, before the abbey was destroyed. But this was the Onyx Court; the fae here liked to copy mortal habits, in dress and other things, and Magrat’s usual rags would have gotten her laughed at just the same.

“Yes,” she said, in answer to Hafdean’s question. The hob raised a cup and a questioning eyebrow, but she shook her head. “I didn’t come here to drink. I’m looking for help.”

“It don’t come cheap,” he warned her.

Of course it didn’t. This was what happened when faeries gathered in anything so organised as a court: they whispered and schemed and bartered their favours to one another. And since gold and silver meant little to them, the price of those favours took a different form.

“I’ve bread,” Magrat said. “Baked by a Warwickshire kitchen maid, who was beaten when her mistress learned she was tithing to the fae.” The last loaf was stained with a bloody fingerprint and damp where the maid had cried, bidding

farewell to her faerie friends. Magrat had fought the local sprites to claim that one.

Hafdean nodded. Mortal bread protected against mortal banes, which made it the most precious thing in all the Onyx Hall. These fae lived beneath London itself, and few of them had a church grim's tolerance for church bells. And iron, of course, hurt everyone. "What is it you need?" the hob asked.

"Someone who can look into a mortal's dreams, and read what lies there."

"Whose dreams?"

Magrat winced. But truly, had she expected Hafdean not to ask? Someone would have, sooner or later. "A Jesuit priest's."

His laughter echoed from the tavern rafters, knobbled beams like old black bones. "Not for bread, no; not for the heart of Mab herself. You're mad if you think anyone would try."

Not mad, just desperate. She didn't know who'd confessed to Tesimond, which meant the priests were presently her only sources of information. "I think some Catholic is planning something," she said at last.

Hafdean managed to look down his lumpy nose at her, even though his platform put them at equal height. "I remember more than just your name, Magrat. I remember the first time you came into this tavern. Full of grand statements,

you were, how faeries shouldn't meddle in mortal doings. Now here you are, asking just that, because now you've found something you care about. A *Catholic* something, at that."

Venom dripped from the word. Fae didn't care a rush for the points of doctrine that divided mortals, but they did care about the effects. Catholic rituals had been around a long time; they'd worn channels in the fabric of the world, strengthening their power against faeries. The hot faith of puritans could be just as bad, brute force acting in time's stead, but the Reformation was a good thing in the eyes of many fae.

Particularly those of the Onyx Court. Living as they did beneath dozens of churches, of course they favoured anything that made it easier for them to walk outside.

Magrat didn't want to debate religion with the keeper of the Crow's Head. Instead she used the other obsession of these London fae. "If there's Catholic trouble, it means trouble for everyone. And your Queen doesn't want that, does she?"

Hafdean scowled. Magrat had never seen the Queen of the Onyx Court, but she knew the tales: Lune had sworn to work for the good of England and its people. She even ruled with a mortal man at her side, the symbol of her pledge to live in harmony with his kind.

Secret harmony, of course. Even besotted with love, as rumours claimed, Lune wasn't mad enough to think fae could

announce their presence beneath London and survive. If her subjects wanted to meddle, they had to do so in stealth.

Grudgingly, Hafdean said, “Could be Parliament’s ruffled someone’s feathers. But they’ve been out of session because of plague. Won’t meet again until...” He leaned past Magrat. “Gommuck! When’s Parliament sitting again?”

The knocker who had been complaining when Magrat came in said, “The fifth of November.”

Hafdean jerked one calloused thumb at the mining spirits. “They’d know; they’ve been in and out of Westminster for the last year. Trying to make their own faerie palace over there, if you can believe it; but all they have to show so far is a half-finished tunnel. Ran out of bread, which makes it hard for them to work. If you want help, you could pay them.”

Magrat cast a dubious glance at the pair. “Are they any use?”

Hafdean snorted as if swallowing a laugh as loud as when she’d spoken of Jesuit priests. “They’re the most incompetent knockers in all of Cornwall. Think digging a hole in the ground, with shovels and their bare hands, is the way to build something like this.” Hafdean’s gesture took in not just the Crow’s Head, but everything beyond it: the Onyx Hall, miles of galleries and passages and chambers great and little, all enchanted against iron and faith and the curiosity of mortals.

Well, she didn't need their architectural skills. The knockers looked up hopefully when Magrat approached. They were knobbed things, and well-covered in dirt, but they listened eagerly as she made her offer: bread in exchange for the whereabouts of certain Catholic gentlemen, when they came to London.

Perhaps she couldn't get information from Tesimond or Garnet. But if she found the penitent who made the original confession, she wouldn't have to.

Gommuck puffed out the chest of his filthy doublet and said, "We'll find 'em for you. Anyone you want us to start with?"

Magrat bared her teeth in something like a smile. She knew *exactly* where to start.

"Robert Catesby."

* * *

Westminster Palace, Westminster: 2 September, 1605

Unfortunately, Robin Catesby was the one man they couldn't find.

He wasn't the only one to have ridden with Essex in that failed rebellion; his cousin Francis Tresham had been there, too, and Tresham's brother-in-law Lord Monteagle. But Monteagle was too cautious to court danger on his own, and Francis had always followed his cousin's lead, even though

Catesby was the younger by several years. *Everybody* followed Catesby's lead: he inspired without trying, through his reputation for courage, his potent charm, and the blazing light of his faith.

Gommuck and his friend did find another Catholic for her, though, a fellow Magrat knew well. Thomas Percy had leased a house near the knockers' tunnel, within the precinct of Westminster Palace, an edifice nearly as sprawling as the Onyx Hall itself. The choice made sense: Percy had been made a Gentleman Pensioner last year, one of the bodyguards to the King, and there was advantage to being so near the chambers used by Parliament. But when Magrat went, under cover of a glamour and with a piece of bread to protect her, she found someone else living there, a man of Percy's named John Johnson.

Johnson was a tall fellow, red-haired and strong; he looked more a soldier than a servant, and the eye he bent upon Magrat was very warlike indeed, when she asked where Percy could be found. "What do you want with my master?"

Fortunately, she had an answer prepared. The mortal man who ruled the Onyx Court alongside Lune was also a Gentleman Pensioner, in his public life. "I come on the business of Sir Michael Deven," she said.

The glamour disguising her was of an ordinary varlet. Respectable enough, but Johnson's frown deepened. "What business?"

"None of yours," Magrat said, trying to think of a way to question him without being stabbed for her pains. She'd felt it the moment he opened the door: the spectre of death hovered over this man, as over Father Garnet. Which meant Percy had probably fallen under that shadow, too.

"Anything that concerns my master concerns me," Johnson said, crossing his arms. The chamber behind him was dark and cramped, even by the standards of Westminster Palace; she couldn't imagine what Percy would want with it, and certainly he and Johnson could not both live there at once. Not in a style befitting a gentleman's dignity.

The servant saw her looking and shifted to block her view. Magrat wished she'd made her glamour as tall as he was, but did her best with the height she had, matching him glare for glare. "Sir Michael will hear of your interference," she said.

The prospect of a knight's wrath apparently did not trouble Johnson. He shut the door in her face.

In the narrow passage outside, dank with the smell of the nearby Thames, Magrat sighed. Truthfully, she would tell the Queen's consort nothing. Even presuming she could gain access to him, he wouldn't appreciate her free use of his name,

and even if he let *that* pass... the man was a Protestant, and shared Lune's opinions on religion and the fae. Neither of them would help her save a Jesuit priest.

No matter how kind and generous that priest was. No matter how much he desired peace, or wished to be a faithful subject to the King. All they would see was Catholicism, and stamp it out.

Johnson was only a servant; it wasn't worth the cost of having someone delve into his mind. She needed Percy, or better yet, Catesby. And if the knockers couldn't find those two for her, she would have to hunt down people who could.

* * *

Gothurst, Northamptonshire: 17 September, 1605

"His father left behind tremendous debts," Anne Vaux said quietly, walking along the moonlit terrace of Gothurst with her hands clasped at the small of her back. "Poor Francis' inheritance is not at all what he hoped."

She could not possibly have meant the words as an accusation against her hidden listener, but Magrat winced anyway. This was the cost of her absence: she'd missed the death of Francis Tresham's father, and the funeral. If she had a duty in these church-less times, that was it; but she had missed it, because she was chasing this secret instead.

At least she'd found Father Garnet again. The pilgrims had returned from Wales and were dispersing once more to their homes, scattered across the midlands of England. Since the Treshams were in mourning at Rushton, Garnet had come here, to the home of Sir Everard Digby, with his dear companion and protector Anne Vaux.

Mistress Vaux was no fool. She'd concealed Garnet from searchers for ten years and, through her family, was related to half the Catholics in England. She could not see death as Magrat could, but trouble was plain enough to her sharp eyes. "I noticed Robin was not at Rushton to comfort his cousin," she said, as they came to the end of the terrace.

"He is... much occupied with his affairs," Garnet murmured.

Hah, Magrat thought, from her uncomfortable perch in a tree. Jesuits were not permitted to lie outright, but they had many ways of avoiding the truth. That one wasn't even particularly subtle. Catesby *was* planning something.

Mistress Vaux noticed it, too. "Affairs that might explain the horses I saw being gathered at the houses of my cousins and friends? Horses fit for war." She'd come outside without gloves, but Magrat didn't think the twisting of her pale hands was born from cold. "Father... I feared these wild heads had

some scheme in mind, and now you confirm it. I beg you, for Heaven's sake: you must speak to Robin."

"I have," Garnet said, clasping her hands in his own. From another man the gesture might have been intimate, but Magrat understood; Anne was his sister in Christ. Deep as the bond between them ran, it held nothing impure. "You needn't worry, my dear. Robin merely seeks a military commission in Flanders. He's made friends with a soldier named Guy Fawkes—or Guido, as he calls himself, as he's been fighting for Spain. With this peace between England and Spain, 'tis legal enough; Robin's even asked me to write a recommendation for him, to the Archduke."

Magrat missed Anne's response, distracted as she was by the sudden whirl of her thoughts. Flanders? That would never have put Garnet into such desperate prayer. But perhaps she was wrong; it might not have been Catesby's confession that Tesimond heard. She'd just assumed it, because of what the man was like.

Even if his intent *was* for Flanders, it did nothing to help Garnet. And Magrat doubted the story anyway.

As did Mistress Vaux, she saw. "And what of the horses?"

Garnet shook his head. "Perhaps others are planning to go with Robin. They might do better abroad, exercising the heat out of their blood—though I would hate to lose any in war."

He wanted to believe it. They'd held a secret Mass a few hours after midnight, and now, a little while before dawn, the peace of it remained with him. At moments like this, with the practice of his faith fresh and his beloved sister at his side, Henry Garnet was a happy man, and Magrat didn't want anything to darken that.

But a shadow moved across the face of the moon, eclipsing its light, and Anne Vaux shivered when she looked up at it. When her hands slipped free of his and she went two steps away, still looking upward, Garnet said, "Shall we go inside and pray for them?"

For a long moment, Anne did not answer. Then she said, distantly, "No. I had rather hear you sing, Father. I fear we'll have little time for it, soon."

Magrat's own skin tingled at her words. Anne might just mean the end of their pilgrimage, the return to the demands of everyday life, which did not often leave time for Garnet to exercise his fine voice and skill with the lute. But it took on a more ominous cast, because Magrat saw all too clearly the death that still haunted the priest's steps.

It lay some months away yet. But still there. Waiting. To silence forever that delightful voice, the music in those dextrous hands, and chill all the warmth of his heart.

Garnet smiled at his protector. “We will always make time for song. And I will write to Lambeth. If any wild head *does* plan something foolish, I shall persuade Robin to tell me of it.”

Magrat almost missed it, in the preposterousness of thinking that man would be persuaded to anything. Garnet had, quite casually, given her the answer she’d been seeking all this time: where Robin Catesby could be found.

If either the priest or the gentlewoman remarked on the sudden shaking of a nearby tree, Magrat did not hear it, for she was already gone.

* * *

Lambeth: 2 October, 1605

At first she thought it was Thomas Percy all over again. Magrat found the house Catesby was renting, but he wasn’t there. She recognised the gentleman who was, though: Robert Keyes, another Catholic, and another man beneath the shadow of death.

How far did it *reach*?

Any doubts she had were erased when Keyes received a visitor from across the river. Percy’s man Johnson came by one afternoon, and Magrat, listening from the roof above, heard Keyes call him Guido. This, then, was the soldier Garnet had mentioned, Guido Fawkes. Whatever he was doing in

Westminster, hiding under a false name, it had nothing to do with military commissions in Flanders.

So she stayed, trusting that her quarry would come to her eventually. It wasn't pleasant waiting; she'd spent enough bread paying Gommuck and his friend Scalliock, and protecting herself on the trip to Northamptonshire and back, that she couldn't afford to eat any now. As it stood, she could either pay someone to read dreams, or hoard the remainder to use once she had her answers; she could not do both. Fortunately Lambeth, across the Thames from Westminster, was thinly settled enough that she could mostly avoid iron—and it would be a sorry day indeed when a church bell knocked a grim unconscious.

She waited, and her patience was repaid. Robert Catesby rode in shortly after noon on the second of October, just as the light changed.

Gommuck and Scalliock had babbled about this, when she gave them their payment; something about asking the Queen and her consort for permission to try a charm on their tunnel during an upcoming eclipse of the sun. But she'd clean forgotten, even after that night at Gothurst. Magrat was watching the street from behind the house's chimney, leaning out every time a rider approached; and so intent was she upon

her target that it took her a moment to realise the sun's light was growing dim.

It seemed to split Catesby in two, the man and his shadow—and not the shadow he cast upon the ground. A church grim could gaze upon the souls of the dead and know whether they were destined for Heaven or Hell; now, in these peculiar moments of eclipse, it was as if that sight applied also to the living. She saw the bright Catesby of glory, tall and strong, the man whose cousins and friends looked to him for hope; while Father Garnet might be content to wait for Providence to rescue the Catholics of England, this man would forge Providence with his own hands and the white-hot fire of his faith. But she also saw the Catesby of shadow, whose desperate devotion to that cause respected no boundaries, not even those of Christian decency. *That* man would endanger not just himself but everyone around him, as he flung himself from the precipice of chance.

She was right. He stood at the heart of it. This was the mortality Magrat had sensed around the others; if they died, it would be because of Robert Catesby, and whatever madness he planned.

The light brightened once more. If Catesby had even noticed the eclipse, he gave no sign. He dismounted, then led his horse around to the back, calling out quietly for Keyes.

Magrat, shaking off her paralysis, scrambled forward until she hung perilously over the roof's edge; but the two men inside spoke too quietly to overhear.

And she couldn't approach. Not without bread. Forget Jesuits; the passionate faith blazing in Catesby now was worse than any priest. He could burn away a charm of concealment without so much as a word, just by the thoughts that possessed his mind. There would be no reading his dreams, not for the heart of Mab herself.

Magrat pulled back, her stomach churning even from that brief encounter, and withdrew to a stack of firewood a safe distance away. Keyes was too close to Catesby, with passionate faith of his own. What she needed was someone less devout, someone trustworthy enough to share Catesby's secrets, but unreliable enough to betray what he knew.

She thought of the interwoven trees of Catholic families in the midlands, and a fierce smile curved her lipless mouth.

She needed Francis Tresham.

* * *

Clerkenwell, London: 24 October, 1605

She finally ran him to ground in Clerkenwell, after chasing him halfway to Northamptonshire and back. Tresham had been in the city, but gone home to fetch his mother and unmarried sisters, bringing them down to London.

It made little sense. His family was all in mourning still for his father. Why bring them to the city, where death's grip slowly tightened around all the men of his circle?

Of course he could not sense that death; but he knew his cousin was up to some mischief. Magrat was sure of it the moment she crawled through his window and heard him tossing in his sleep.

She took care to move silently. Tresham was not alone, when she pulled back the bedcurtains; his wife was a dark, unmoving lump at his side. But her husband's thrashing did not wake her, nor the moans and whimpers that issued from his throat, and so Magrat decided to proceed. She might not get another chance.

Closing her eyes, Magrat summoned the image in her mind.

She'd decided, after much internal debate, to leave Tresham's dreams untouched; it did her no good to spend all her remaining bread on knowing his mind, only to have no way to act on the knowledge after. And what if Catesby had *not* confided in him? Deception was cheaper, and worth trying first.

When the illusion of her glamour was in place, Magrat hissed, "*Francis.*"

Tresham jerked as if at a gunshot. But memory served her well: he was a poor sleeper, easily caught on the boundary between dreaming and waking. That was where he hung when he opened his eyes and saw the figure of his cousin, standing at the foot of his bed.

“Robin,” Tresham mumbled, somnolence slurring the word. “What—”

“You were screaming, Francis,” Magrat said. “Why?” Her mimicry of Catesby’s posture and manner of speaking was imperfect, but the more nightmarish this encounter, the better. Poor Tresham—there was no uncertainty in the darkness that marked him. This man *would* die, and soon. No matter who won: the Catesby of glory, or the Catesby of shadow.

Tresham’s eyes were open, staring; he’d drawn his knees up, like a child, until he hunched against the pillow. Next to him, his wife breathed quietly on. “‘Tis damnable, Robin—we’ll be damned for it—”

“Damned for what? What are we going to do?”

Too direct. His throat worked convulsively. “Wait, Robin, please. At least until we know what they’ll do. To strike on the first day—perhaps ‘twill not be so bad as you fear—”

Who? What first day? Magrat gritted her teeth, searching for a better tactic. “We *do* know, Francis. I’ve told you before: this is the only way.”

“At least let me warn Will. And Ned.” Tresham clutched at the blanket, as if trying to rein in a runaway horse.

Will—that was likely William Parker, Lord Monteaule, husband to Francis’ sister. Which made Ned Edward, Lord Stourton. Another brother-in-law. “What warning would you give them?”

“To stay away!” It had the sound of a shout, strangled down to a bare whisper. “They mustn’t be there when the King comes.”

The King. Two lords—the first day—

Tresham was talking about Parliament, which James would reconvene in less than a fortnight. On the fifth of November.

Thoughts flashed through her head, of rebellion, prisoners, hostages. Magrat had to try the words three times before they would come out. “And what of the King?”

His shoulders drew inward: a small boy, cringing under the harsh gaze of the cousin he’d adored since childhood. “I’ll do as you bid me, Robin. No matter how far it goes.”

Tresham’s wife was stirring; Magrat didn’t dare stay. She moved swiftly to Francis’ side, looming over him. “Then I bid you be silent. Or you will suffer for it.” And she let her glamour slip, revealing the horror of her goblin face beneath.

He screamed and flinched back. In that instant, Magrat vanished into the shadows; then, while Tresham's wife thrashed into wakefulness, she slipped through the window and closed the shutters behind her. Let him think it just a nightmare, brought on by his fear.

Fear born of a very real cause.

"I'll do as you bid me, Robin. No matter how far it goes."

She could guess at how far. Not for nothing would Catesby have gathered such men around him: staunch Catholics, good swordsmen, and soldiers like Guido Fawkes. And he would lead them to salvation, or into Hell itself.

This was the secret Father Garnet knew, and could divulge to no one. Robert Catesby would strike at the King during the opening of Parliament. How he expected that to do any good, Magrat couldn't guess; whether they threatened James, or took him prisoner, or—her stomach curdled—*killed* him, it could only poison everyone's hearts against the Catholics. But she'd seen that bright aura during the eclipse; somehow, there was the chance of glory.

And also the chance of disaster. The black hand of death stood ready to take them all. If Magrat wanted any Catholics to emerge from this unscathed, let alone one Jesuit priest, she had to take steps toward that end *now*.

* * *

Hoxton, London: 26 October, 1605

My Lord out of the love I beare to some of youere frends I have a caer of youer preservacion therfor I would advyse yowe as yowe tender youer lyf to devys some excuse to shift of youer attendance at this parleament for god and man hathe concurred to punishe the wickednes of this tyme and thinke not slightlye of this advertisement but retyere youre self into youre contri wheare yowe maye expect the event in safti....

A few rambling lines, written in Magrat's best handwriting. Too little, and yet too much; anyone who could be proven to have known of this plot in advance would be in a great deal of danger. But it was the best she could think to do. Garnet would need a protector, someone who could hide him or even spirit him out of England; Mistress Vaux would not be enough. And so Magrat lurked in the shadows, trying to muster the nerve to approach Lord Monteagle's house.

He, at least, was likely to survive whatever came next—so long as he stayed clear of it.

Hesitation turned out to be useful policy. A man was approaching along the street, a servant she recognised from her previous visit to Monteagle's house. Before fear could trap her, Magrat hurried out into the street.

The servant stopped, warily, one hand hovering as if to draw a knife. Magrat had disguised herself in a tall man's seeming and a cloak; too late, it occurred to her that she looked like a cutpurse.

She spread her hands wide as she approached, displaying the letter she held. "A message for your master," she said in a low voice once she drew near. They were alone on the street, at least for the moment, and in principle there was nothing wrong with delivering a letter; but fear had half stolen her voice.

She offered the folded paper. The servant eyed it, still wary. "From whom?"

"A friend," Magrat said. Still he hesitated, until she said, "*Take it, man. 'Tis only a letter, and meant to do him good.*"

He snatched it with a quick hand, keeping as much distance as he could. Magrat said nothing, and neither did the servant; he merely jerked his head in a quick nod and continued on his way. And she let out a long, ragged breath, hoping her meddling would pass unnoticed.

When five figures melted into view around her, she knew it had not.

Magrat whirled, seeking an exit that wasn't there; any of the five would grab her before she got far. The goblins were unfamiliar, a barguest and a thrumpin, but she recognised the

other pair: Gommuck and Scalliock. And the fifth, to her surprise, was a mortal man.

He appeared young, but some of that was a lie; just as she could feel the shadow of death's hand, so too could she feel its absence. A touch of faerie kept age from this man. He might be years older than the thirty or so he appeared to claim. His doublet was as dark as his carefully-trimmed beard; the dull colour helped the charm that had hidden him and the others. But it was cut of good cloth, with decorative stitching unnecessary to its purpose, and the sword at his hip marked him a gentleman.

In quiet, measured tones, the man said, "What was in that letter?"

"I don't have to tell you that," Magrat said, even though she suspected she did.

The goblins were drawing closer behind her. The man, not blinking, said, "I am Sir Michael Deven, and you have spent enough time in the Onyx Hall to know what that means. I ask you again: what is the content of your letter to Montegale?"

Thrusting her chin belligerently forward, Magrat told the Queen's consort, "I warned him away from Parliament next week."

"Why?"

He asked as if he didn't know the answer, but Magrat had heard far too much about the Queen's spies to believe it. In which case, why not tell the truth? They'd have it from her, one way or another.

"Because Francis Tresham wanted it," she said. "To keep him safe. I have letters for the others, too—Stourton, Northumberland, all the rest of the Catholic peers, or the ones sympathetic to them. It'll be better if they aren't there."

With every nerve drawn tight as a bowstring, Magrat was alert to the smallest movements: the shift in the barguest's weight, the indrawn breath of the knockers, and the curling of Deven's left hand into a fist. His right hand remained loose, ready for the hilt of his sword. "So you knew of this," he said flatly. "You knew, and chose to warn the Catholic peers—but not to warn *me*."

Gommuck started to say something, but Magrat gave him no chance; her anger broke loose, like a dam giving way without warning. "Why should I?" she demanded. "I've smelt the death around these men. Can you say honestly that you wouldn't kill them, or tell the King's men and let *them* do it instead? They've a right to make their grievances heard. It pleased James well enough to pretend he would be a friend to Catholics before he came to the throne, but now that he's King in England it pleases him to forget he ever said anything.

Patience hasn't gotten them any toleration. I've watched Father Garnet pray for it for years, on his knees to the Almighty *begging* for their freedom, but that has gotten them *nothing*. Maybe this won't, either, but at least they're trying something!"

Deven's nostrils flared, and one foot slid forward into a fighting stance. For a moment Magrat believed he would snatch out his blade and stab her right there in the Hoxton street. Instead he said, through his teeth, "You're a church grim. Tell me: how many of the dead would go to Heaven, and how many to Hell?"

"Dead?" Magrat blinked, not understanding. Unless he had a church grim in his service, she didn't know how he could be aware of that. "Catesby's men? I won't know until they've died—"

"Not Catesby's men," Deven spat. "The King. The Queen. Prince Henry, and Prince Charles, all the Lords Temporal and Spiritual and the House of Commons besides, and everyone else unfortunate enough to be within half a mile of Westminster Palace on the fifth of November, when the gunpowder blows. How many souls to Heaven, and how many to Hell, for the freedom of your Catholics?"

Magrat's eyes burned dry, their lids fixed as if pinned open. Nothing would move, not even her lungs, as Deven

recited that litany of horror. When at last she gained command of her tongue, only one word emerged. “Gunpowder?”

Gommuck shifted his weight, looking up at the Queen’s consort, but Deven was staring at Magrat, his gaze suddenly unreadable. The knocker said, “Beneath the House of Lords. We found it, Scalliock and I did, when we went back to our tunnel; the storeroom we’d broken into is filled with barrels of powder. That man Fawkes is keeping watch on it.”

It still didn’t make sense. Deven subsided, slowly, his sword-hand falling loose once more. After a moment, he said, “You didn’t know.”

“I’ll do as you bid me, Robin. No matter how far it goes.”

“We’ll be damned for it—”

Knowledge that clawed at Francis Tresham in nightmares, and put Father Garnet in an agony of indecision, contemplating the breaking of his sacred obligation. A plan that had brought death to breathe down the necks of Catholic gentleman all over London. She’d looked for it near Fawkes, and Catesby, and the rest of their circle—but not the King, nor his lords and members of Parliament.

She still could barely speak. “Lord Monteagle—”

Deven’s brief exhalation was almost more a cough than a laugh. “Will preserve his own hide, no doubt. And not by

staying away. He'll show that letter to Salisbury before the night is out."

Salisbury. A hideously familiar name, to anyone in the world of English Catholicism: Secretary of State to the King—which was to say his spymaster—and a devoted general for the Protestant cause. "He can't," Magrat said; her voice was working at last. "If he does—Tresham, Catesby, all the rest, they'll be *killed*. Salisbury detests Catholics; he'll do *anything* to strike at them. If Monteagle hands him my letter, and he finds out about the plot—"

"You think he doesn't already know?"

It stopped her short. Deven passed a weary hand over his brow. "He'd be a poor spymaster if this took him by surprise. But her Majesty and I have also been following the trail, and thanks to these goodly knockers we've been able to supply him—secretly—with the information he lacked."

Magrat felt suddenly like a mouse, permitted to run about because the cat knows it can't escape. There was little comfort in discovering she had other mice for company. "Then why let it go on?" she asked, unable to keep her anguish hidden. "Why not arrest them and be done with it?"

Deven looked past her and nodded; she heard the goblins back off a few steps. "To find the edges of the web," he said. "We didn't know about Tresham. Salisbury wants the whole

conspiracy, down to the last man.” He paused, and his expression softened into a pity that choked Magrat. “You’re right that they will likely die. For the atrocity they planned, there can be no other answer. The one consolation I can offer is this: I will do what I can to make certain only the guilty are punished. Not all Catholics deserve Salisbury’s hate.”

She wanted to lash out at him, bury her clawed hand in his throat; she didn’t want his pity, or his aid. But a memory burned within her heart, of the moment she had stepped into the tangle of this conspiracy, and the reason.

“Father Garnet,” she said, addressing the hard-packed dirt of the street because it was easier than facing Deven. “He isn’t part of it. He knew—but from a confession, so he couldn’t tell anyone. Do you understand? He *couldn’t*.” No matter how terrible the secret. His duty was to God before the King.

After a moment, Deven asked, “Did he conspire with the others?”

“No.” His gentle soul could never have stooped to such horrors.

“Then I will do my best.” Deven paused again, then said, “We are done here. I leave you with this command: *warn them not*. Any of them. For now you are free, but if you cross our work, I will not be so generous a second time.”

Then his footsteps retreated down the street, followed by the two goblins. Magrat heard Gommuck mumble something that sounded like a thick Cornish apology, and then she was alone.

* * *

But I will delve one yard below their mines,
And blowe them at the Moone.

— William Shakespeare

Hamlet III.iv.208-9

* * *

The Tower of London: 2 May, 1606

Moving like the puppet he'd briefly become, the gaoler unlocked the door to Father Garnet's cell and let the visitor in.

Anguish and hope warred in the priest's brow when he looked up. The long months of his imprisonment had worn away at him, carving deep lines where only wrinkles had been before, but for a heartbeat something like happiness lightened his face. And Magrat, calling on every memory of every movement she'd ever seen Anne Vaux make, rushed forward to embrace him.

"My dear sister," Garnet whispered into her shoulder, the words breaking as he spoke them. "I heard you were imprisoned here, too—"

And so Mistress Vaux was, taken by force when stratagems failed to catch her. She still languished in her own cell, elsewhere in the Tower; Magrat could do nothing for her. This visit was dangerous enough, no matter what glamour disguised her, what charm held the gaoler bound.

She dug her fingers into Garnet's back. Thirty years following the man, and this was the first time she'd touched him. But she couldn't linger, however much she wanted to. "We haven't much time," she said, mimicking Anne's manner of speaking. She'd spent days practicing it. "I've bribed the gaoler. Come with me, and we'll spirit you out of the Tower."

Garnet stilled, then pulled away. Then the distance between them grew: he was retreating, first one step, then another. "What?"

Magrat gritted her teeth before she could remember not to. "Freedom. In a few hours they'll come to take you to your execution; you must escape before they can."

Thirteen men lay dead already, the men who had planned the deed and tried to carry it out: Sir Everard Digby, Robert Wintour, John Grant, and Catesby's servant Thomas Bates; Tom Wintour, Ambrose Rookwood, Robert Keyes, and Guido Fawkes, all hung and drawn and quartered. Four others had escaped that fate by dying in a desperate stand at Holbeach: Jack Wright and his brother Kit, Thomas Percy, and Robin

Catesby, who had brought them all to this end. Francis Tresham had screamed away the final days of his life months ago, dying of illness here in the Tower before Salisbury could put him to trial. And tomorrow, Garnet would become the fourteenth.

But this was Deven's gift to her, apology for his failure to stop Salisbury. The King's spymaster knew full well that Garnet had not planned the Gunpowder Treason, as they were calling it; but that did not matter. Garnet had *known*, and not warned anyone. And he was a Jesuit, which Salisbury hated above all else. So this man, who loved music and abhorred violence, had been painted as the architect of the plot, and would die as such.

"Why do you hesitate?" Magrat demanded, seeing Garnet retreat another step.

He stared at her, the unblinking gaze of a prey animal brought to bay. "Because you are not Anne Vaux."

It froze Magrat where she stood. Then she forced a laugh. "What? Father—"

"Who are you?" he demanded. "Did Salisbury scour all England for a woman who looked enough of a Vaux to deceive me? But why do you try to lure me away, when I am already condemned—what is there to gain? I can only be executed once."

An unbroken stream of curses flowed through Magrat's head. She shouldn't have chosen Anne—but Salisbury and his men had practiced deceptions on Garnet before; the only person she could be sure of him trusting was his beloved sister in Christ. Yet that was also the one person he knew too well for her to counterfeit.

They faced off at nearly the full length of his cell, now; Garnet's back was against the wall. What could she do? Magrat thought briefly of changing her glamour—counterfeit an angel, claim she'd come to bring him salvation. The bread now protecting her meant she could speak of God as much as she wanted, without fear of destroying the illusion. But if she couldn't imitate a mortal woman well enough to persuade him, she doubted she could make a convincing angel. And the attempt alone would be an insult.

"I'm not Mistress Vaux," she blurted, as if he did not know already. "I'm sorry I lied. But I *am* here to rescue you. Please, we must go, *now*."

Garnet's jaw hardened. "Not until I know who you are."

Blood and Bone. If only she'd brought a will-o'-the-wisp to lure him. Desperate, Magrat reached for words, and found herself holding nothing but the truth.

"I'm a friend," she said quietly. "One who's followed you for years, in secret. I warned Mistress Vaux when the searchers

were coming; I scared them away from your hiding-places. Hyde Abbey was once my home, but 'tis gone now, and so I've made my home with you: with the Catholics of England, and the priests who serve them. Because that's what I'm supposed to *do*. You are my church—you and your people. So I haunt you, and I know whether your dead are going to Heaven or to Hell, but I don't want to know that for you. I don't want to see your death. Please, I *beg* you, come with me, and you'll be safe."

There was still the tiniest flicker of hope. The slimmest chance, that his end might not be waiting for him with the morning's light.

His mouth had fallen open during her speech. Into the ensuing silence, Father Garnet whispered, "What are you?"

Magrat's mouth trembled, and she felt a hot pricking in her eyes. "I can't show you. My face—you'll think me evil. Just let me do this thing for you."

"Let you save me." Garnet's breath came out in a ragged, voiceless gust. "Some ancient ghost that haunts my steps, and you say you can take me from the Tower."

"Yes."

He closed his eyes, and she felt the faith gather within him, pressing against the protection that armoured her. Not an

attack, a prayer to drive her back; just a fire within, giving him strength.

“No.”

The word made no sense.

Garnet opened his eyes once more, and terrifying peace dwelt within them. “I could have saved myself many times before now. All I had to do was tell of Robin’s plan. Salisbury, I know, does not understand, and perhaps you do not either—but an understanding came to me, when I prayed for guidance after hearing Father Tesimond’s confession.

“I have long said that I trust in divine Providence to vindicate our cause here in England. We men may do all that we can, but in the end, we rise or fall by the grace of God alone. I therefore looked to my duty, and it was clear, however agonizing it might be: I could not betray Robin’s sacred confidence, imparted under the seal of the confessional. I did what I could to stop him, short of breaking that seal. I thought I had succeeded. But ‘twas not enough.” He spread his hands, made pale and thin by his long confinement. “Thus I am here.”

Magrat stared. “You’ll stay and let them execute you. Because you think that is *God’s will*.”

“Yes.”

Frustration strangled her first attempt to answer. The second was better: “’Tis *Salisbury’s* will, Father. And he’s not God. You needn’t let him kill you!”

“You can rescue a person from the Tower?”

“Did you not hear me say it?”

“Then rescue Anne Vaux,” Garnet said. “She is blameless, and held prisoner only to strike at me. If you are the friend you claim, then do me this favour, and I will bless you to the angels, whatever unhallowed spirit you may be.”

Her breath came in short, desperate gasps, as if she were trying to hold in something that threatened to break free. He *couldn’t* stay—they were going to draw and quarter him—

But he’d kept silent for months, when a few words might have saved him, and other men besides. Because that was what his faith required. He would hardly abandon it now, simply to preserve his own skin. That inner fire was the only strength he had anymore.

Rescuing Anne Vaux tonight would be impossible; they’d charmed the wrong gaolers for that. But Magrat would see it done, if she had to sell herself into Deven’s service forever. And one more thing, before Garnet was gone.

“I’ll bring her to you in the morning,” she promised, past the hardness in her throat. “In truth this time; not me in disguise. So you may see her one last time.”

A broken smile found its way onto the condemned man's face. "Thank you. May the Lord bless and keep you, my friend."

His benediction broke harmlessly against the protection of mortal bread, but the words still struck something deep within. The stone corridor outside wavered and swam in Magrat's vision as she left the cell and heard the gaoler lock the door behind her. The pricking in her eyes grew to unbearable heat, and then scalding lines tracked down her face.

No church grim should ever weep for the dead. But Magrat was a grim without a home, for the man who had given her one would be martyred tomorrow, for reasons she did not—could not—understand.

It was not duty, but choice. Alone in the harsh confines of the Tower, Magrat wept for Father Garnet.

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Marie Brennan is an anthropologist and folklorist who shamelessly pillages her academic fields for material. Her short stories have sold to more than a dozen venues, including Talebones, On Spec, and Intergalactic Medicine Show. Three

of her stories have [appeared previously in Beneath Ceaseless Skies](#), and one of those, "Driftwood," is also in the [BCS](#) anthology [The Best of BCS, Year One](#). "And Blow Them at The Moon" is set in the same world as her series of historical fantasy novels centering on the faerie court of London: [Midnight Never Come](#), [In Ashes Lie](#), and [A Star Shall Fall](#), due out in September.

Beneath
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Skies

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WINECASK BELLIES AND OWL WINGS

by Liz Coleman

The king of the city gave me a ruby one night. He left it on my pillow, in the hollow he'd made as his head arched back in ecstasy. A perfectly smooth ruby the size of a duck egg.

What would I do with it? I rolled it in my palm, let it ride over the ridges of my fingers. It wanted to move, to travel. I peered into the bloodlight in its round belly. It wanted to see, to illuminate.

So I made a horse. I made bones of iron and a mane of silk. Tendons of rubber from the king's caravans. I gave it a belly made from a wine vat. Around this I wrapped a skin of black and brown velvet—brindled bars such as no horse had, but that would make a cage to contain its life. And in the right-hand socket in its silken face, I placed the ruby.

I would ride this horse to freedom, away from my prison to the wastes where I'd fly with my sisters on owl wings.

The horse sprang to life. It shook its head and tossed its mane. It snuffled as I gave it grapes to eat. My horse would eat the flesh of ancient gods, not the chaff of the field.

But then my horse whinnied in fear. She turned in circles, unable to see her left side. So frantic did she become that I had to still her with a gesture, and take the life of her ruby eye from her.

When the king came to me again, eager for the joys in my silken lair, I thanked him for his gift and demanded another exactly like it. I refused to touch him until he swore, on his own blood spilled on my limestone tiles, that he would find me a ruby as clear and as large and as smooth as the first.

Three seasons passed, and I did not see the king. But when the first snows fell and were rapidly melted away, he came to me with head bowed and hands bare.

“I have found such a ruby as you desire,” he said. “But it lies in the castle of my neighbor. I haven’t the coin to buy it, and my people, my lands, couldn’t handle a war. By your magic, my love, can you steal it away?”

I took him to my bed that night, in gratitude for his heartfelt attempt, but also because the magic that bound me required it.

Midnight came, and wind tore through the cave as I washed my silken face and hung it to dry. Storms whipped the land as I cleaned the stiffness of pleasuring a king from the long pale gloves of my hands. He slept in my bed, sweet and ignorant.

Dawn stretched its fingers into my cave and brushed the throat of the sleeping king. Light touched black runes on his skin, runes he couldn't read but wore because his father had, and his father before that. Runes that burned me and bound me.

“Bring me a child,” I told him as he stirred awake and smiled sleepily at me. “One of your own blood, still a babe unspeaking. Then I shall have my ruby, and you shall have my eternal love.”

I watched him ride away down the scrubby wilderness path, the plume of dust rising in their wake a golden beacon in the dawn. Between scattered boulders, the daisies nodded in the breeze—my cheery jailers. Little grew out here but them, and they grew in any season, through drought and flood. The morning star gleamed, and swallows swooped over the land, gulping insects shaken loose by the king. I used to fly as free as they, unbound by the stones of this cave.

Three hundred years past, a now long-gone sorcerer-king lured me to this cave with the promise of his daughter's soul. She was a mother like myself, and I knew that devouring her would make me weep but would satiate me for weeks. But when I arrived, she held me off with stories of her children. Though I knew I would hear her tales echoing in my heart when her soul was in my belly, the passion in her eyes, the

clasping of her hands, the scratches on her wrist from her daughter's kitten—these would all be lost. So I enjoyed them while her father poured a ring of holy oil around the hill.

Daisies grew along the line that bound me. The final tale the daughter told me before I devoured her was of her toddling son stalking grasshoppers through daisies. I would take him, I thought, when next I hungered. But I was imprisoned before I could, and now the daisies watched me with eyes as dark as his mother's.

Years passed, and generations. The sorcerer-king taught his son, who taught his son, and they all came to torment me and use me. But the arts and knowledge were lost. A king overthrown, a nephew crowned, ignorance reigned but the runes were worn, because after all, is that not what a king wore? They never knew the true purpose was to guard a soul against my hunger and bind me to their command.

And so I was raped by ignorance.

But my horse, my magic horse.... Made with the love of my captor, I could ride it past the daisies and be free once more.

The baby he brought me was his daughter, his very own daughter, birthed by his lesser wife on the night of a tawny moon. I nursed her on the breeze from my teats and teethed her on locusts. I plucked out her hair and replaced it with willow. I peeled off her skin and replaced it with the surface of

a sun-reflecting pond. I gave her an eagle's eye and a bat's ear. I showed her how to ride the wind and I named her for the long lost princess who lured me to my doom.

From me, she learned astronomy and numbers and reading and other things no man would have her know. I taught her to bake bread and butcher deer. I taught her seduction, and told her to trust no man, for men would only chain her.

And when she grew to an age when her womanhood budded, when she knew it was a treasure but had yet to find it, I sent her away. She rode the wind into the city and learned the ways of mankind. The king told me she bought a pig in the foreign market and slaughtered it herself in the palace courtyard. They feared my foster daughter, my beloved foster daughter.

But the king loved her as he loved me. Every week now, he came to me, longing for my embrace. Soon, he came every day. Outside, his men grumbled as they camped by the daisy line. He came to me when he should be minding his lands, they said. He spoiled his daughter, his unholy witchy child, when he should be training his son for kingdom. The runes, they said, it was the runes that ruined a once noble family. They needed a king who would not carry the marks of sorcery so boldly.

Oh, how their anger pleased me.

Any day, my child would fly to the neighboring land to steal the ruby. The city would overthrow their worthless king and enthrone one without runes to guard him. I would leap the daisies and burn the city.

My revenge, my daughter, bring me my revenge.

When she came to me, she was a woman—a mother, she said.

“I went to the city of the ruby king,” she said. “I rode the wind through palace windows and bound the guards with my willow hair. With just a kiss, the youngest guard opened the treasury, and we explored the riches together.”

And she held forth the stone, the twin of my horse’s eye. A golden eagle claw clasped it on the hilt of an iron knife. She pulled it from the silken folds of her robe, which she bared to show the black runes inscribed in the water-smooth skin around her heart.

“I love my father,” she said. “And I love my daughter, and I love the sweet innocent guard who gave me that daughter and who died because of my seduction. As I fled the city, they threw him from the walls, and I saw the blood flowing from his blinded eyes. It stains the sand even now.”

“But you’re free,” I said, “without the will of man chaining your heart. And your daughter will be free, and we will all fly with the wind in the wastelands.”

She brandished the knife in the style that I had taught her. “But you do not love! Who will I love in the wasteland? I love my city, and I love the mothers whose children your sisters devour.”

“Every child I take, I love,” I said. “As I love you, more than anything.” My heart, my breaking heart straining against its chains. Would that I could curse all men for turning my daughter against me.

I tore off my face to blast her with wind. The skin of my lifeless horse blew away; the bones twisted aside. My daughter staggered back, but her willow hair bent, and her water skin rippled and carried its own malleable power. She rode my wind in the vortex of the cave, looping back upon me to drive the knife into my broken heart. She shattered the chains, and rent my skin.

Now, I rage over the cities. I see my daughter nursing her fleshbound child in the house of an unfallen king. The city calls her a whore, but she loves too much, and she does not care.

And I blow and I rage.

I touch the blood-stained sand around a city's walls and curse the hearts of men. Yet I am but a storm, and my rage will pass by. My silken skin is gone, no flesh can hold me. I hunger and I hunger, but no babe will fill my belly. My sisters fly on their owl wings and weep for me. My envy rains upon them and

they hide from me in olive trees. For I am but the wind, the wind that flies through shattered hearts.

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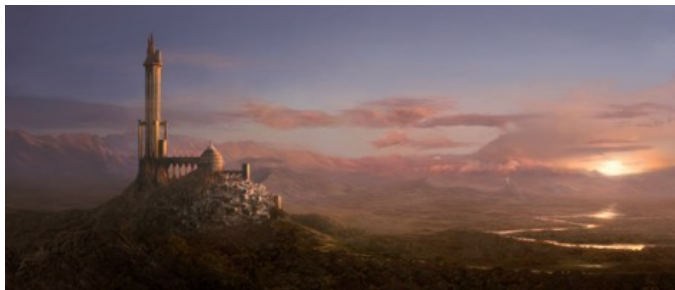
Liz Coleman lives in the Pacific Northwest and works at a printing press, surrounded by wooden cases of dusty metal type. "Winecask Bellis and Owl Wings" is her first publication.

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COVER ART

“Spring Sunset,” by Andreas Rocha



Andreas Rocha lives in Lisbon, Portugal, with his wife. He studied architecture, but after college his main occupation veered from architecture towards digital painting, something he had done during college as a hobby. He has been working freelance for three years now, doing conceptual and finished illustrations, matte paintings, and 3D architectural visualizations. See more of his work, including a movie version of “Spring Sunset,” at www.andreasrocha.com.

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