



*Demon  
& Weather*

*Chico Kidd*

# **Demon Weather**

by Chico Kidd

*“The souls that shall be gathered are seven in number, because seven is a miraculous number. Seven has contained within it one, symbol of unity, and six, symbol of perfection. Seven is the number of life, containing the body’s four elements, spirit, flesh, bone and humour; and the soul’s three elements, passion, desire and reason.*

*“The soul of a venturer shall be gathered by the demon Mastiphal and stored in an amulet of agate. And the guardian of that soul shall be the armoured one.*

*“The soul of a scholar shall be gathered by the demon Bifrons and stored in an amulet of chrysoprase. And the guardian of that soul shall be the executioner.*

*“The soul of a lover shall be gathered by the demon Bitru and stored in an amulet of beryl. And the guardian of that soul shall be the castrator.*

*“The soul of an artist shall be gathered by the demon Belphegor and stored in an amulet of jasper. And the guardian of that soul shall be the destroyer.*

*“The soul of a child shall be gathered by the demon Gaziel and stored in an amulet of malachite. And the guardians of that soul shall be the corruptor.*

*“The soul of a hunter shall be gathered by the demon Malphas and stored in an amulet of jacinth. And the guardian of that soul shall be the night-hag.*

*“The soul of a warrior shall be gathered by the demon Alastor and stored in an amulet of sapphire. And the guardian of that soul shall be the terror that comes by night.”*

From the book of Estêvão Gonçalves

*Não se vence perigo sem perigo*

Danger can't be overcome without danger

Portuguese saying

*Quem tem cu tem medo*

Anyone who has an arse can be afraid

Portuguese saying

## Prologue: House of the Four Winds

Revenge is a dish best eaten cold.

“I still think you should just kill him,” said Teresa Graça Batista, removing her mask and pushing damp hair from her forehead.

Her father, whom she had just comprehensively outfought, copied her example. “No, little one, my way is better. We’ve discussed it a thousand times.”

Teresa scowled at being called *little one*, since she was nearly his height. Moreover, she scorned the épée in favour of the sabre, which women normally do not use. She followed him out of the *salle*. “How can you be sure this piece of... mediæval magic will work?”

“It will work,” replied her father patiently, recapping an argument they had gone through many times. “I have called all the seven demons successfully now. I have bound souls into amulets and released them, with no harm. Vicente’s manuscript has proved its worth before, and I trust it on this.”

“But you know you can’t trust the *demons*,” Teresa pointed out.

He laughed. “Teresa, every sorcerer who ever lived knew he couldn’t trust demons. That’s what *spells* are for.”

She stared morosely out of the window. “I hate Lisbon. I wish we were home in Rio.”

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The leather-bound manuscript was written on vellum. Once, it had been the whitest, smoothest surface a pen could write upon. But now, some four hundred years later and worn by time as well as its two transatlantic voyages, the westward one in a caravel, it had aged to brown and its edges were fraying.

Hoping to preserve it, he had initially smoothed it between sheets of glass to use it. But whole sections of it had flaked away and were lost. Luckily, the passage which interested him was still intact.

Centuries ago, before it went to Brazil and was lost to European cataloguers, it had been known as the *Book of Souls*. Now many scholars dismissed it as legendary. Indeed, most discredited it altogether, with its fanciful recipes for making the perfect man.

Francisco Domingues Batista, late of the city of Rio de Janeiro, examined the manuscript once again, thinking: When Paracelsus and the alchemists of old manufactured homunculi out of their own bodily secretions; when the English *mandinguiero* Roger Bacon made his brazen speaking head and the Qabbalists activated their golems by a spell on a piece of paper; when St Thomas destroyed the automaton Albertus Magnus had made; and Victor Frankenstein stitched together a man from bodies of the dead; each of those manufactured men, every *androides*, was imperfect because it had no soul.

Which was why he intended building himself a construct of souls at the instruction of his forefather’s book. Because when he collected all the souls he needed for *his* perfect man, he needed no artificial body, however formed. For they would combine and enter his own body.

Making him not only perfect, but invincible.

Because Batista had scores to settle.

### 1

Emilia da Silva sat perfectly still by a window that showed a bright scrap of Lisbon behind her head, and felt guilty. She was here in this room with a man who was not her husband, and he was painting her.

What made it worse, perversely, was that it was all perfectly innocent. The artist who was capturing her on canvas was well over seventy, and he was her father-in-law.

Whom she had met for the first time less than a month ago, although Emilia had been married to his son for nineteen years.

They never spoke about what had estranged father and son, but the old man genuinely seemed to enjoy her company. And that of eight-year-old Caterina. On their second meeting, he had asked Emilia diffidently if he could paint her portrait. Her eyes flickered to him, briefly. His eyes were the same incongruous blue as his son’s.

She surreptitiously eased her right leg, crippled since childhood by infantile paralysis, into a more comfortable position, and sighed silently. *Isabella*, her husband’s ship, was due the following morning.

And Emilia, for the first time since they had met, had no idea what she would say to him.

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I know all the ghosts that loiter where *Isabella* has her berth by now. Know them intimately. Four and a half years of coming back to anything breeds familiarity. *Meu Deus*, is it really that long, I thought, appalled. Four and a half years since a demon took out my left eye and left me with the ability to see the dead. That's not something I consider a fair exchange, by the way. Seeing ghosts is far more trouble than it's worth. But you learn to live with it, just like you learn to cope with missing an eye. Or, I imagine, an arm, or a leg. Put that way I suppose I'm lucky, really. No essential bits missing. Hang on to that thought, da Silva.

The ghosts I see are simply shades, echoes of an existence. They drift around where they met their deaths, fading over the years. Shadows of men, women, children, phantoms of ships—every sailor knows that ships have spirits. Voiceless things, aimless, harmless, more like nickelodeon images than anything else. The only criterion seems to be that their deaths were untimely. Which means that there are a hell of a lot of them in Lisbon.

Some are very faint indeed, for there are people who reckon the city was founded by Ulysses himself. And since then, of course, the place has been overrun by any invaders you care to mention, from Romans to Visigoths to Moors. And that's before we even mention the great earthquake. Sixty thousand dead, some say. The Convento do Carmo, open to the sky to this day, is almost too full of ghosts to bear. All those nuns, praying their socks off when the roof fell on them. Which doesn't say a great deal for the power of prayer, if you ask me.

They're no trouble at all, those ghosts. It's when you have to start summoning the real thing from the grave that life starts to get... interesting. And that's why I say that seeing them is, frankly, a pain in the arse. I do *not* like calling them up. Nor do I like being a necromancer, because that's what you are if you speak to the dead. It's too much like slavery for my taste. Because when you summon a ghost, you bind it. It has to do what you tell it. It has to answer your questions—those it can, that is. And I spent too many years having to do one man's bidding to like imposing my will on anyone else. Alive or dead.

But that's what I have to do, sometimes. Having been given a talent, I feel obliged to use it. Obligated, note, not bound—obliged, melodramatic though it sounds, to fight evil. And that's a thought too far for a sober man.

This morning, however, there's another phantom standing on the quayside, bareheaded in the bright sunlight. It made a halo out of his white hair. And if he wasn't, strictly speaking, a ghost, he still came out of a past I thought dead a long time ago. I should know by now, the past never dies. As soon as you start thinking like that, it rears up and bites you in the ankle.

It was my father. There was no mistaking him, even though I hadn't seen him for thirty years. My mind emptied of coherent thought. I couldn't even manage a curse. I simply stared at him for at least a minute without moving. Da Silva, struck dumb. Would you credit it. And then the moment turned, and volition came back, and with it the power of speech.

"Take over here, Mr Ashley," I said shortly to my first mate, and strode off without waiting for a reply. Though I could feel his shock as he stared after me. He is an Englishman, and rather a stickler for politeness. Or, if you care to put it another way, a stiff-necked *filho da puta*. But I normally try not to ruffle his feathers.

My father stared at me. I was fourteen years old when we saw each other last. He's seventy-six now. Thin, almost frail. Stooped, and walking with a cane. White-haired. Beard, neatly trimmed. Thick spectacles magnifying his eyes. He looked me up and down, taking me in. A man taller than he is, now. Greying, too. Clean-shaven. (If I let my beard grow now I'd look like a badger. Besides, they itch.) A patch over my left eye, not completely covering the three-inch scar running from eyebrow to cheekbone.

The differences are fewer than the similarities.

"Luís," he said. Not a question. He knows me as surely as I know him. Must be some kind of instinct, to recognise your kin no matter how many years have passed. His voice, though, was wary, almost tentative.

What could I say? It's been a long time? Too much between us to be that shallow. An abyss, and one not only made of time. "Father." I took a deep breath—unwise, that. Being summer, the harbour was pretty ripe—a step forward, and put my arms round him. He returned the embrace stiffly, and drew back.

"You grew up."

“Grew up, got old,” I said lightly. He snorted, not in amusement.

“I’m old,” he said. “All *you’ve* lost is an eye.”

Well, that’s a point of view. I found my hand on its way to rub the scar, and went instead for the pocket where I keep the small black cheroots I like to smoke. Took one out, and lit it. Always find something to do with your hands when you’re ill-at-ease. My palms were sweating, which irritated me. I wiped them on my trousers.

Couldn’t think of any indirect way to ask the question running round my brain. So I just said, bluntly, “What are you doing here?”

“You broke your mother’s heart when you left, boy,” he said.

“She never had a heart to break,” I retorted.

He frowned. “That’s rather harsh.” I didn’t reply. I wasn’t going to take that back. Not being fourteen years old any more. “She’s dead, Luís.”

Silently, I stared at the screeching seagulls, wheeling and squabbling over detritus in the water, rubbish on the land. Watched the floating ghosts, things of air and mist. Drew in smoke. Felt nothing. Not even a distant emotion. All too long ago: I could barely remember what she looked like. “When?” I asked finally.

“February,” he replied. He put his hands in his pockets and stared downriver. The sunlight broke on the water like gold shattering into straw, the fairy-tale in reverse. *O Mar da Palha*, they call it, the Sea of Straw. Almost made you forget the stink of the harbour. “It was her heart.” So she must have had one, after all, I thought. There’s a surprise. She never showed it.

Again, I had nothing to say. I’m sorry for your loss? Not such a hypocrite. “Do you miss her?” I asked instead. The sun was hot on the back of my neck. I felt moisture starting to gather under my arms.

My father shrugged. “To be honest, not really. She was pretty much involved with the church, the last few years.”

The last *few* years? “She was a religious fanatic thirty years ago,” I pointed out, rubbing my cheekbone. Had him squandering his talent, wasting his life, on altarpieces and the like. Who in the world needs another picture of São António or John the Baptist or the Virgin, blackened by candle-smoke? And I spent *years* on my knees, thanks to her. At least, it felt like it. I took another mouthful of smoke, surprised to find that I was still resentful at the memory. As I hadn’t even *thought* about my mother for months.

“Would you like to come aboard?” I asked, gesturing towards my beautiful barque *Isabella*. Yes, I’m proud of my ship. I suppose I wanted to show her off. Grow up, da Silva.

“You’ve forgotten, then,” he said, a little sadly, patting his middle. “*Mareado*.” The sea was calm as a bowl on a table. But if it disagrees with you, it disagrees with you. And I *had* forgotten. How could I have a father who gets seasick?

“Sorry,” I said, for some strange reason regretting it quite strongly. Odd thing, guilt. If that was what it was. I looked at him, feeling a mixture of emotions I couldn’t untangle, let alone identify. When I left home he would have been two years older than I am now. Too complicated, I thought. I took refuge in smoking and watching the ghosts.

“Met your wife,” my father remarked, unexpectedly. I lifted my eyebrows.

“Emilia?” I said in surprise. He shot me an odd look.

“Testing the water,” he said. Was that a flash of humour? “How’d you get a pretty little thing like that to marry you?”

Killed the man who was going to rape her. What would he say, if I came out with that? Or how about another unpalatable truth: most men aren’t interested in cripples. Think they’re damaged goods. I smiled crookedly.

“Just lucky,” was what I came up with, suddenly wanting very much to be with her, and changed the subject. “Would you like to meet your grandson?” Who would, like his father, have run away to sea. If I hadn’t taken him as a ’prentice on my own ship. Who was now, I realised, the same age as I had been, the last time this man had seen me.

His face brightened. “José? Very much.”

I turned *Isabella*-wards and yelled to the nearest crewman. It was Ortigão, the fellow they all call Don Giovanni. Yes, he does seem to have a girl in every port. Though personally I can't imagine what women see in him. There was a suspicious number of sailors loitering near the rail trying to look busy. I wondered if they knew, too, who it was I was talking to. If it was plain for everyone to see.

"Yes, *sr capitão*?" he shouted back.

"Ask Zé to step ashore, will you?" I switched to English, the lingua franca of the *Isabella*. "And the rest of you, if you haven't got anything better to do I'm sure Mr Ashley can find you something! Now bugger off!"

My father was hiding a smile. I wondered what he was thinking. I learned English from him, partly. But mainly from his mother, my grandmother, who was born in London. That's where the blue eyes came from. Though as a child I had resented those, being teased for being different. I flung the butt of my cheroot into the water, to join all the other rubbish floating there. It fell through the drifting ghost of a drowned woman.

"I'm painting her portrait," he said.

"What?"

"Your wife. I'm painting her portrait."

Zé's arrival saved me having to comment on this extraordinary statement. He is nearly my height now, having shot up in the past six months. Not that I'm particularly tall, but Emilia's only just over five feet. He was looking a little annoyed, which made me smile. He's not like me to look at, but *meu Deus*, he's got the da Silva temperament.

"It's my *watch* in two minutes," he informed me.

"Five," I said. "Zé, this is your grandfather. Sebastião Fernandes da Silva."

His mouth dropped open. He's as speechless as I was. But he recovered rather more quickly than I had, and said with great politeness, "How do you do, sir?"

Stepping forward, my father embraced him with more warmth than he had me. Not surprising really. I didn't blame him. He looked at me over Zé's shoulder before releasing him and said, "Good thing the boy favours his mother." Which made me laugh. Though I don't think he meant only in looks. Then he ruffled Zé's hair, which made me peculiarly jealous, and said, "Do you like being a sailor, then, José?"

"Yes, sir," said Zé, smiling tentatively, but looking at me.

"You like these old sailing ships, then?" said my father.

"She's not *old*," Zé protested. "She's... she's *Isabella*."

From the ship, eight bells sounded, and he grinned in relief. Saved by the bell, as the English say. I raised an eyebrow at him, hiding a smile. If I'd had two eyes I would have winked.

"Better run along and sail her, then," my father said indulgently, and Zé dashed off. *Então*, I thought, that'll be all over *Isabella* in five minutes now. If they hadn't already guessed, that is.

I lit another cheroot and said, "How is Emilia?" He blinked. Good. I could still wrong-foot him, then.

"She's very well. And your little girl." He put his hands back in his pockets. "How did you wind up marrying an *italiana*, then?"

You want the story of my life, do you? I said silently. You won't get it. "I worked for a Venetian ship-owner for nineteen years," I said, giving him the short version. The expurgated version. The version that didn't say, he saw me kill his brother, so he could get me to do just about anything. "Met Emilia there, got married. He left a pile of debts, and we bought *Isabella* off his creditors for next to nothing."

In my mind, very clear, the Venetian's dead face, mouth moving with words he couldn't say. His eyes sliding from yellow to brown as the demon that had animated him, possessed him, withdrew. His blood trickling slowly from his throat when I sliced into it, freeing me from my bondage. My own blood streaming down my face. And the memory of pain. I closed my eye for a second, drew in a deep breath. Let it out. Opened my eye to find my father looking curiously at me. Oh, nice work, da Silva.

"What is it?" he asked, sounding concerned.

"Getting old," I replied, inhaling smoke. I rubbed the scar on my cheekbone, and he stared at my hand.

“You do that a lot,” he observed. “Is it painful?”

Not in the sense you mean. “No,” I said, staring at phantoms. “Not any more.”

“How did it happen? The eye?” I shook my head. Only one person knows what happened that rainy winter night in the Venetian’s palazzo, and that’s Emilia. And that’s the way it stays. No arguments. Half of Venice thinks I murdered him anyway, despite the total lack of evidence. Of a body, to be precise. Which the demon destroyed, not me.

“A fight,” I said, which is the only explanation I ever offer, when pressed. “What are you really doing here?”

He wouldn’t let it go. “A *fight*?” he repeated. “What happened to the other fellow?”

“Old history,” I said dismissively. Get it through your thick head, old man, I’m *not* going to tell you about it!

His shoulders sagged. “You’re not an easy man to talk to.”

Give me a chance, I thought, raising an eyebrow. I’ve only just met you for the first time in thirty years. It tends to limit the conversation. Aloud, I said, “You never used to talk to me very much anyway.”

“No, I suppose not,” he agreed. “Your mother made conversation difficult.”

I took a final drag from my cheroot, contemplated it, and threw it after the first one. “That’s the first time you’ve ever admitted that.”

“Probably,” he said, and looked down at his shoes, embarrassed. They were slightly scuffed, though his suit was neat— admit it, he’s a lot better-groomed than you are, I thought. Dapper, that was the word. I tend to look a bit like a pirate at the best of times, and not only due to the eye-patch. I ran a hand through my hair. It needed cutting. Only I thought of Emilia’s fingers in it, and decided not to bother right away. Unwise speculation, here on the quayside talking to your father. Get your mind due north, da Silva.

“Are you all right?” I asked, putting a hand on his arm. He looked up again, gave me a genuine smile. And answered the question I’d asked earlier, the one I thought I wasn’t going to get a reply to.

“I suppose I came because I’d like to get to know you,” said my father.

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Another old man, in another city. Francisco Domingues Batista. Twenty years ago. An old man— or so I thought at the age of twenty-four— in a towering rage. Blocking my path. Wanting to beat me, by his expression, into a pulp.

Only the fact that we were in a church was preventing him. That, and the priest glowering at him, waiting to celebrate Mass. The Mass for the dead.

“How you have the nerve to come here—!” he snarled in a vicious undertone.

“Your brother was my employer’s agent,” I pointed out. “I was doing business with him.”

“I hold you responsible for his death, da Silva. Don’t think I won’t forget this.” His face was white with anger. I had never seen that particular phenomenon before. Although I once knew an English captain who used to go an interesting sort of puce colour.

“I had nothing to do with it,” I said. “Dona Elvira’s brother killed him.” Which he had. Shot him in the balls and the head and then put a bullet through his own brain. Because he had a mistress. Ironic, really.

He put his mouth next to my ear and hissed, “You put horns on him.”

That, unfortunately, was true.

We all do stupid things at that age. Having an affair with this man’s sister-in-law was one of the more idiotic things I’ve done in my time. Not that thinking with your groin is ever smart.

At twenty-four you also think you are immortal, so I brushed past him and went to find myself a seat.

*Quia peccavi nimis cogitatione, verbo, et opere.* As they say on occasions like these.

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Four hours ago I hadn’t a care in the world. I’d sighted the Torre de Belém and known I was home. Strange how that little white knobbly tower makes your heart lift. Or maybe not so strange. Every Portuguese seafarer since Vasco da Gama has felt that, I suppose. It’s a symbol of *saudade*, nostalgia, yearning— the spirit of fado. We’ve voyaged past it for centuries. Setting out for India, Brazil, Angola, Moçambique, the Indies, the world.

And now I suddenly have a father again. Whether that was a good or a bad thing remained to be seen. Although the simple fact that he was painting a *portrait* had to be a good sign. No more bloody simpering saints that nobody ever looks at. Not that I'm implying people don't go into churches. Plenty of people still do, much good it does them. But who notices the artwork? Unless a painting's by Tintoretto or someone, and even then the only people who come to see it are well-heeled philistines on their Grand Tour. And they cross it off in their Baedecker and move on to the next one. Cynical, da Silva? *Não me diga.*

"Will you walk a little way?" he said diffidently. I nodded. Lit up and fell into step on his left. Felt eyes boring into me from *Isabella*. I ignored them, as I ignored the shades teeming around me. Some places, it's like walking through a fog. A mist of ghosts.

The sun was warm on my back, but not uncomfortably hot. That was something to be thankful for, at least. Wearing an eye-patch in hot weather is having a little humid area of Purgatory all to yourself. And it can get pretty hot in Lisbon. Today, though, there was a breeze off the sea to temper it, and sweat was threatening rather than running.

"Where are you living?" I asked my father.

"Same old place," he said. "What are you seeing?"

That stopped me in my tracks. I stared at him, expelling a lungful of smoke abruptly. "*Desculpe?*"

He looked at me, rather too shrewdly, and said tartly, "I may not have seen you for thirty years, boy, but you've got my blood. I know you. You're seeing something I can't. Do you think I don't remember Tiresias?"

The blind seer. Not the first time that sort of thing's been suggested. But I don't feel particularly oracular. "I can't see the future," I said, taking a drag on my cheroot. "If I could, I'd have known *you* were going to show up."

My father gave a short bark of laughter, but I hadn't deflected him. Yes, I'm his offspring, right enough. "So what is it, then?" he persisted.

I shot him an irritated glance, and kicked at a seagull that had ventured unwisely close. It flapped up into the air, squawking crossly. Messy creatures. Shit-hawks, my third mate, Harris, calls them. An American with a nice turn of phrase. He is also, as it happens, a werewolf. But that's another story.

"Ghosts," I said. "I see ghosts." And started walking again. He kept pace. Didn't seem surprised to learn his son was seeing phantoms. I gave my scar a scratch. Stopped when I caught him watching me.

"There'll be a good reason for that, I imagine," he observed dispassionately. "Does your wife know?"

"I've no secrets from Emilia," I said, knowing it wasn't quite true. But I hadn't ever thought she'd even want to know the details of who I might have slept with before she married me.

The old man had antennae like a bloody great fly, however. He raised a sardonic eyebrow at me like my aged mirror-image, and I thought, is that how I'll look in thirty years? But he made no comment. I dropped the butt of my cheroot, and stepped on it.

Abruptly, he said, "I shouldn't take up any more of your time. If it's all right with you, I'll get on with the portrait tomorrow." I nodded, a little bemused, and he walked away.

Ghosts surged round me. I've never been quite sure whether these faint memories of the living have anything resembling consciousness. Sometimes one will do something that seems to imply intelligence. But it may be just a reflex. Like severed heads. Which should be avoided for some minutes after decapitation. They bite.

But something seems to've agitated the shades this morning. They were like a crowd an elephant has charged through. Milling, regrouping, startled out of normality. And yes, I've seen a crowd after an elephant has done that. It does more damage to flesh and blood than its—psychic equivalent could to something so insubstantial.

Now why did I come up with that image, I asked myself. My back prickled, and I looked around. Come on, nothing's going to happen in broad daylight. But I stayed wary. I've learnt not to ignore feelings like that. Wish I'd brought the knife that usually travels with me, concealed down my back. It's fourteen inches long and contains enough silver to do serious damage to anything uncanny. On the other hand, fourteen inches of razor-sharp steel without any silver content would see off just about anything short of a knight in armour. And you don't see

too many of those, these days.

However, when I'm on board ship it usually lives in my cabin. And even if I'd been capable of thought when I saw my father, I hardly think he posed that much of a threat.

I don't, personally, know any of the quayside shades. One of my crew was killed by a kind of vampire-ghost in Lisbon four years ago, but he actually met his death up by the castle of São Jorge. Yet I know how they usually appear.

Something's definitely put the wind up them. I know I'll find out what soon enough. Depend on it, da Silva.

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About nineteen miles away, a retired sea-captain by the name of Henriques Verdinho was smoking a thoughtful cigarette, recovering from an argument with his wife Paciência. As usual, he had lost. He often thought her parents had been tempting fate by naming her that, for she had never given him any indication of having any patience at all. Her voice had the power and projection of a Galli-Curci, more suited to the operatic stage than the placid home of an ex-sailor. She was also, he knew, rumoured to be a witch, though he had no idea how she had acquired that reputation. That it was because it was true had never occurred to him.

Verdinho, an unusually tall man who looked a little bit like a stork, put his cigarette carefully on the rim of a marble ashtray and sipped at his tea pensively. His bald scalp gave the impression that it was breaking through his thin salt-and-pepper hair in the manner of a mountain peak clearing the clouds surrounding it. He was deeply fond of his wife, but oh dear, she could be vexing.

Never an enthusiastic ship's master, but always a lucky one, he had retired from the sea on his marriage. He was now seventy-three, having fallen for Paciência twenty years before, and the father of nineteen-year-old Luzia. And she was the reason for the fight. The age-old reason of a child romantically involved with someone wildly unsuitable.

Now he sat in his sloping garden above Sintra, looking out to sea. Tall aloe spikes, like giant stalks of upturned hairbrushes, were silhouetted architecturally against the sea. Acanthus leaves huge, glossy, and convoluted enough to send William Morris into ecstasy lined the pavement, their own flower-spikes no slouch in the sculptural stakes, counterpointed by the jagged blood-red constructions of castor-oil plants. Light relief was provided by bushy *mirabilis*, blooms spattered as by an artist's brush with pink and white and yellow, by multi-coloured paper-chains of *bougainvillea* trailing everywhere in extravagant garlands, and swathes of morning-glory, its impossibly blue flowers like drops fallen from the sky.

He sat under the shade of a paper mulberry tree and contemplated the unsuitability, in every possible way, of young Pedro Ortigão for his daughter. Who, to be fair, like all parents, he still thought of as about nine years of age.

That was when he became aware of a curious disturbance out to sea. Or, to be more precise, above it. He narrowed his eyes—his sight was still good enough not to wear spectacles—and peered at it curiously.

Concentrated on one spot over the glinting steel-blue waves, the sky appeared to be *boiling*. It also seemed to be somehow viscous, as if the disturbance were somehow thicker than the surrounding air. Verdinho frowned, and got to his feet, wanting to call for Paciência but reluctant to disturb her after their recent battle. In all his years at sea he had seen nothing like it.

And then the air burst open, and a knight in full armour mounted on a charger burst through with a roar like an immense engine. The noise was so overwhelming and so unnatural that it even overcame the patent impossibility of what he was seeing. He clapped his hands over his ears, dizzy and bewildered, but it did no good at all.

The knight galloped through the air towards Verdinho faster than anything he had ever seen, to halt, steed snorting, above him. The old sailor staggered back, legs weak with a withering terror, and fell to his knees, shaking. His mouth opened and closed, but no words came out.

He could see, closest of all, the horse's hooves. Except that they weren't, precisely, hooves. At least, not any natural horse's: they looked razor-sharp. And they were cloven.

Verdinho, bowels clenching with dread, looked up. If the hooves were frightful, the horse's head was that of

a nightmare. Its eyes were blazing red, and its lips were drawn back from teeth that no horse ever had. They were the teeth of a tiger, sharp as pikes, longer than his hand.

It snorted at him, and charnel breath bloomed from its nostrils. Nausea climbed up his throat. The roaring in his head continued. He tried to close his eyes, but found his trembling terrified gaze drawn higher, to the armoured rider. Who was worse.

Who sat astride the nightmare, arrogant as a prince, beautiful as a woman, crueller than death. The nails on his long hands were talons, the red of clotted blood. His lips were the same colour. His crowned helmet framed a face of frightening perfection, but the pupils of his eyes were black, and when he opened his crimson lips in a smile, his teeth were the same as his steed's. That smile was one to make the soul shrivel.

Leaning over in the saddle, he caught Verdinho's eyes with his own. The captain, all volition gone, staggered to his feet, and the rider seized his chin in an iron grip. Brought their mouths together, and sucked.

In his head, the vicious roaring seemed to burst his brain. Henriques Verdinho's last thought was the shameful realisation that he'd pissed himself.

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I want to talk to Harris. Granted, he can't see ghosts. But he has a wolf's instincts, even in his human shape. And this close to the full moon, they get still stronger.

Won't find him in his cabin. I don't think he's very fond of confined spaces at the best of times. After a short search I found him by the charthouse, leaning on the rail and smoking a cigarette. Looking pretty dour, but that's his habitual expression. Never seen him smile. But then, turning into a wolf every month can't be enjoyable. Mind you, at his age I'd already been married some years, but Harris doesn't stand much chance of that. Unless there is some amenable lady werewolf to be found somewhere. I joined him by the rail, and lit up too. The wind had freshened again and was blowing strongly, dispersing the harbour stink.

"Everything all right, skipper?" he asked, idly.

"I'm not sure," I replied.

Harris looked at me, startled. I gave him a lopsided grin. Da Silva admitting he's in need of help? Must be a first.

"What's up?" He narrowed his eyes. "Ghosts playing up?"

"Something like that," I said. "Something's got 'em stirred up, anyway."

Above, I heard Zé call out, and someone replied: Benjamin, it sounded like. Their voices sounded distant, like something from another life. The Portuguese flag snapped in the freshening breeze. Still can't get used to it in red and green. Harris grew very still. He seemed, all of a sudden, to blend into the background. Like a wolf, I suppose. But how a man over six feet tall with a thatch of flaming red hair can suddenly become unnoticeable is beyond me. Time slowed. Smoking silently, I watched him.

Abruptly, he gave a growl, and shook himself. A palimpsest of something lupine overlaid his features for a second, and then he reverted to Harris once more. It was a reminder he was, after all, only passing for human. But I trust him. Somehow, part of his mind remains Harris when the rest of him is all wolf. I get the impression that's unusual in a werewolf. Not that I'm an expert, having only met the two. Although when one is trying to eat you and another one barges in and spoils its supper, I know which one I'm going to go with.

"There *is* something there," he said slowly, licking his lips as if something tasted bad. "Jesus, skipper— makes my skin crawl." He turned to face me, and his expression was bleaker than I've ever seen it.

"What is it?" I asked. But he shrugged.

"Hell, I dunno," he said. "Feels like— the way something dead smells. You know, when it's been dead for a while. Starting to rot."

Contemplating this unpleasant image, I drew in smoke, then exhaled slowly. "Near? Far?" He shook his head, frustrated.

"Can't tell. Might not even be there now. Just, it's left this stink-feeling behind. Like... I dunno, skipper... the way animals piss to mark their territory, seems to me. Can't explain it any clearer than that."

So the ghosts *had* felt something, in their pallid half-life. Something powerful enough to disturb things that are only a little bit more aware than a photograph.

The thought came back to bother me all afternoon. And the vague sense of unease never went away.

Ship's business took far longer than I liked. It always does. By the time I finally got away all I wanted was a large brandy, a hot bath, and to go to bed with my wife. Well, to tell the truth I'd like those things every evening. But most of the time it's not exactly a practicable wish. Live with it, da Silva.

And when I did get home, it was obvious I wasn't going to get any of my wishes any time soon. Damn it.

For one thing, Emilia was still in her workshop. My wife works as a jeweller as well as handling the ship's business on shore, paperwork not being one of my talents. Her father, who died five years ago, was a silversmith. Since he never remarried after Emilia's mother died, she became his 'prentice as well as his heir. She is more talented than he was, but they don't let women join the silversmiths' guild. Or any other guild, come to that. Their loss.

With Emilia I found Paciência Verdinho, who had been her friend ever since I brought her home to Lisbon. To my home, I should say. Emilia was born and raised in Venice. And I uprooted her as soon as I was able, fleeing that watery, decaying city, never wanting to see it ever again. But even that proved a futile wish.

Emilia's friend, who now lives in Sintra with her husband, is married to a man who was the captain of a vessel on which I was the third mate. Not the Venetian's. Before that. His name is Henriques. Known, inevitably, as The Navigator. But then I went off and got myself entrapped by the Venetian. Had to spend nineteen years with the old bastard. And incidentally, Paciência is a sorceress.

As I entered their heads, both dark, one curly— I think Paciência's ancestors were likely Jews forced to convert— were bent over a tray of polished gemstones. The gas, not long lit, caught highlights from them, hair and jewels. Emilia looked up at me with a tired smile and put her finger to her lips. I was instantly captivated by the curve of her cheek. The swell of her lip. The hollow of her throat. Coming home.

Then Paciência raised her face too. Her eyes were puffed almost shut from tears. That was a shock. You don't think of witches as being that vulnerable. At least, I don't. Having met several, none of whom showed any sign at all of weakness.

"Meu Deus," I said involuntarily, "what's happened?"

"Henriques has had a catalepsy," Emilia explained. "He's in a coma."

"It's no catalepsy," Paciência said fiercely. "His soul's been stolen."

My heart thumped. So now it starts, I thought resignedly. "Who stole it?" I asked, patting pockets in search of a smoke. I was out of them, it seemed. Paciência stared at me, startled. She doesn't know about my odd abilities. She doesn't know how well-acquainted I am with the night. I've encountered creatures that *devour* souls, never mind steal them.

But she was too weary with grief to dissemble. "A demon," she said. And I sighed. Because I've met them, too. I scratched at the scar one had dealt me, absently, and went to stand behind Emilia's chair. Whether for her reassurance or mine, I'm not sure.

"Why?" I asked bluntly. "Who summoned it?" Since they don't come unless they're called. We can be thankful for that, at least. I placed my hands on my wife's shoulders. Felt the fine cotton of her blouse, the tension in her muscles. She leaned her head against my arm, then put her right hand over my left. Her palm was hot.

Paciência glanced at Emilia, then back to me. "What do you know about such things?" Her gaze was fierce. There was a challenge in her voice.

"More than I want to," I replied, raising an eyebrow.

"I don't understand," she said. "Emilia, what—?"

"Dona Paciência," I interrupted. She raised her eyes to me. I tapped my eye-patch. "A demon did this."

She crossed herself. There's no conflict of interest in witches being Christians. At least nominally. Hell, I'm only nominally one myself. I certainly don't believe in ritual. Or prayer. Look where that got those poor bloody Carmelites when the earthquake collapsed their church in on them in mid-prayer.

“Virgin’s bones,” she breathed. Closed her eyes with a sigh, then opened them again. They glittered in the gaslight. “You can stand against them, capitão?”

I nodded, suddenly uncomfortable at her scrutiny. Emilia squeezed my hand. I looked down at the top of her head. Controlled an urge to bury my face in her hair. Time and a place for everything, da Silva. “Can your husband’s soul be recovered?”

“While his body lives,” she replied bleakly. “But as to how— I don’t know. I came to look for an amulet. I find,” her voice faltered, “I am afraid.”

All the hairs on the base of my neck prickled. My hands tightened on Emilia’s shoulders. “Have you found an amulet?”

“No,” she whispered, staring down at the tray of gems. “No stone has enough power. No charm. My power is leaching away.”

“That’s just fear and grief talking,” said my wife consolingly to her, leaning forward slightly. Though she didn’t sound convinced. Paciência’s words, on the other hand, had the certainty of augury. Ice trickled down my spine.

“All I can think of,” the sorceress said, “is a line from a lost book. I don’t even know what it means, or what it may be part of.”

“What is it?” I asked. Even the gathering shadows in the room’s corners, now, seemed to harbour portents. Emilia captured my other hand, crossing her arms over her breast.

“It says, *The first soul shall be that of a venturer, and it shall be gathered by the demon Mastiphal.*” I felt Emilia shiver. The *first* soul. How many more would there be?

“And the demon?”

“Mastiphal? A prince of hell. That’s all I know of him.”

“What is this book?” Emilia enquired.

“It was called *The Book of Souls*. It was last heard of in Lisbon in about 1500. Over four hundred years ago. I’ve seen it quoted, but I don’t recall where.” Her face, stripped by emotion, looked as it would look in twenty years, lined, all hollows and shadows. “I may not know why his soul was taken, but I know two things. The demon must have been bound by someone, otherwise it would have devoured it. And the soul must be stored somewhere.”

Emilia released my hands and leaned her head back so it rested against my chest. It was a weary gesture. “Luís, would Fr Pereira know about this book?” I stroked her hair. Wishing Paciência would leave. Not much chance of that any time soon, unfortunately.

“He might,” I said thoughtfully.

“A priest?” said Paciência.

“An unusual priest,” I told her. Who knows, among other things, that holy water has more uses than you might think. And why I carry the kind of knife I do. I sighed inwardly. Domesticity will have to wait a bit longer, it seems. Outside, it was full dark now. But I didn’t think Fr Pereira would refuse to see me at any time. Given what he has witnessed.

She was looking down at the gemstones again. Idly stirring her hand in the box. After a while she picked one up, a banded oval stone that gleamed dully in the warm light. “Agate,” she said thoughtfully, caressing it with her thumb. “Soothes the mind, so they say. And brings victory.” But victory over whom, I wondered. Or what.

“I sold one like that a couple of weeks ago,” said Emilia. “Take it, Paciência, if you like. If you think you can use it.”

“Sold one?” the sorceress repeated. “For what?”

“Oh, you’d make a brooch out of it, I suppose,” my wife said. “She bought seven stones, so I assumed she was a jeweller herself.”

“Or a witch,” I said before I could stop myself, dropping my hand to her shoulder again. Paciência’s head snapped up, her eyes blazing. The air in the room suddenly seemed charged with her intensity. Whoa! I thought.

Back off, da Silva. But it wasn't my foot-in-mouth that had roused her, apparently. Good. Getting on the wrong side of a sorceress is never a good idea.

"What were the other stones, Emilia?" she asked urgently.

"Oh— let me see." She stroked my fingers in an absent-minded kind of way. "A sapphire, that was the most expensive. Very dark blue, from Ceylon. Chrysophase. Black jasper. Green beryl, from Brazil, that was. Jacinth, a nice red. And Siberian malachite." We both looked at Paciência expectantly. But she shook her head, frowning.

"They could all make strong amulets," she said. "Individually. But I don't know why anyone would use that combination, particularly. They're not especially... complementary." Holding the stone, she pressed it to her brow and closed her eyes. After a moment she gave a weak smile. "I must go. Afonso will be thinking I've been kidnapped. Unless he's given me up and gone to get drunk in some bar. Did you know Henriques bought a motor-car?" Emilia shook her head. "Of course the thing is totally impracticable. It doesn't even *fit* in the streets up here."

I offered her my arm. "Let me walk you to it, Dona Paciência."

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Father Carlos Pereira makes me feel tall. There aren't that many men who do. In Lisbon, anyway, I seem to be about the same height as nearly everyone I meet. Well, yes, that's what *average* means, da Silva. He would also make the *average* hippopotamus look quite slender. However, appearances are deceptive. As I well know. With me, people don't look past the eye-patch. And, I suppose, the scar. Which is not nice to look at, even partly covered. But if people take you for dangerous, they're also likely to take you for stupid. That can be a distinct advantage, sometimes.

Anyway, Fr Pereira's one of the most intelligent men I've ever met. And he has a totally open mind, which is pretty incredible in a priest. Mind you, given what was happening when I first met him, he needed one. Either that, or ignore the evidence in front of him. The people with their throats ripped out, in that case.

I found him on his knees having a pray, oblivious to the world. Stood to one side, arms folded, to let him finish. Just because I don't believe in prayer doesn't mean it might not work for someone more devout. I wouldn't be surprised if Fr Pereira does talk directly to God. Me, I haven't even been to confession for twenty-four years.

Having finished his little chat with the Almighty, he crossed himself and got slowly to his feet, massaging the small of his back as he did so. Obviously he knew someone was there, because he turned immediately. And smiled. He always looks genuinely pleased to see me. And, of course, I have to believe he is. It'd be churlish not to.

"Well, look what the cat dragged in," he exclaimed, and shook my hand vigorously. I don't mind this at all. I think he's entitled. The second time I met him I passed out in front of him and he had to douse me with holy water. You get injured by anything supernatural and it festers within minutes. Hurts like the devil, too. As if human flesh literally can't bear their touch. Holy water, however, at least the stuff that Fr Pereira has blessed, gets rid of the infection almost instantly. Unfortunately I didn't know this when the demon took out my eye. I was delirious for days.

"It's good to see you, too," I said, scratching my cheekbone.

"I suppose it's too much to hope that you've come to confession?" he suggested, mischievously.

I snorted. Stuck my hands in my pockets. "You know me better than that. Anyway, I don't suppose you've got a week to spare."

"If you ever feel you can, my son, I'll put aside a week specially for you," he said seriously. Making me suddenly uncomfortable. He sensed it, and patted my arm. "You know I'll never press you on that. What can I do for you, my gladiator?" This being a reference to my knife, which he insists in calling a *gladius* after the Roman short sword.

"I came to pick your brains, Father," I said, suddenly wondering whether any of my father's work hung in here. I pushed the irrelevant thought aside. Time enough for that later. "In your scholarly capacity."

His ears pricked up. "Ah?"

“Have you ever heard of a manuscript called *The Book of Souls*?”

Fr Pereira looked startled. I suppose any other priest would have blanched, crossed himself ostentatiously and staggered back in horror. “It’s a grimoire,” he said.

“Yes, I thought it might be,” I remarked, raising an eyebrow. “Do you know anything else about it?” He looked closely at me.

“Yes, surprisingly,” he replied, “since it’s not been seen for half a millennium, and a lot of people think it never existed at all. Let me see now. It was supposedly written by a monk named Estêvão Gonçalves, which was almost certainly a pseudonym, in around 1490. Yes, my child, what can I do for you?” This to a tall veiled woman, who shook her head slightly and knelt to pray. Fr Pereira watched her for a minute, a curious look on his face.

“What is it?” I asked quietly. He shook his head.

“Nothing... I don’t recognise the lady, that’s all. Come outside, Luís. It’s too stuffy in here tonight.” Which was true. The candles were radiating banks of heat like small furnaces. But it was pretty obvious what his real reason was. I agreed, of course. So I followed him down the nave. Our steps echoed hollowly.

Outside, the moonlight was very bright, painting everything uncompromisingly in black and white. The front of the church was covered in precarious-looking scaffolding. Builders’ debris lay in an untidy heap, and a tarpaulin had been carelessly draped over a small pile of bricks. Above, the moon’s round face made me think, momentarily, of Harris. I took a deep breath, enjoying the air. You wouldn’t call it fresh. Not if you spend most of your time at sea. But it’s better than breathing incense and candle smoke and the memory of sweating congregations that seem to soak into the walls. I sat down on the wall and lit a cheroot. Why stand when you can take the weight off your feet? Getting old, that’s what it is.

“Go on,” I said to Fr Pereira. He put his hands behind his back, which made him look like a plump old crow. His beak of a nose reinforced the resemblance.

“Yes. The story goes that Gonçalves was excommunicated and all copies of the book ordered destroyed, but that one, or more than one, actually survived. There’s a very strong tradition that one copy went to Brazil with a member of Cabral’s crew. Though I don’t suppose it survived very long in that climate, if that’s the case.” He frowned. “Why do you want to know about this?”

“You know me, Father,” I said, taking a long breath of smoke and expelling it with enjoyment. “I’m just a superstitious sailor.”

“Don’t you be disingenuous with me,” he said sternly, but he was smiling.

“Well, it’s like this,” I began, and told him about Henriques Verdinho. And what his wife remembered.

“The soul of a venturer,” Fr Pereira repeated, thoughtfully. “Is he a venturer?”

“All sailors are,” I said, shrugging my shoulders.

“It rings a bell, Luís. It definitely rings a bell.” He paced along the stair, then back again. “I’m going to need to consult my library. Can you bear with me for a few minutes?”

“Of course,” I said. I was quite happy perched on the wall. Small pleasures.

“I’ll be back in a moment,” he said, and bustled back through the black rectangle of the postern door.

Left to myself—a luxury I rarely enjoy—I stared idly across the narrow square. It was thick, of course, with ghosts. But these days I almost don’t notice them. Strange, when I think how distracting I found them at first. Just proves you can get used to anything, given time. I lifted my eye-patch and let the cool air circulate. A welcome relief.

I had finished one cheroot, and was contemplating lighting a second, when Fr Pereira reappeared.

“Everything all right, Father?” I asked. He had a small frown on his face.

“Oh yes,” he said. “Did you see that young woman come out?” I shook my head. “Well, never mind. Come along, come along!”

Smiling to myself, I let him hurry me down the steps and presently turned into a narrow alleyway that suddenly opened into a tiny courtyard. It was so crammed with plants in pots that negotiating a passage through without leaving a trail of broken earthenware in my wake was quite difficult. A large black cat, however, was accom-

plishing it effortlessly, so a da Silva ought to be able to manage.

Having steered my way successfully through the shoals, he ushered me through a venerable-looking door. To my eye it looked far older than the buildings around it. Not that I'm an expert. My knowledge of timber is purely nautical.

Once inside the door, I stopped, amazed. The tall interior was illuminated, to my astonishment, by electricity. Three stories above my head I saw the beams of a roof. The bright light turned shuttered windows on three levels into flat black mirrors. All that remained of the building's floors were three balconies encircling the central space. A system of long wheeled ladders allowed access to them. The four walls were entirely lined with books. It was, I admit, impressive.

"Meu Deus," I said at last.

"Welcome to the library of São Rafael," said Fr Pereira. With an understandable flourish. "One of the city's better-kept secrets."

"São Rafael?"

"The church which had that name was destroyed in the earthquake," he explained. "But this collection was begun in the fifteenth century."

"How in God's name do you know where anything is?" I wondered.

"Seek and ye shall find," said Fr Pereira gnomically. "'Knock, and it shall be opened unto you. I put my trust in God, who tells me that the volume I want is—'" He stared around, like a dog casting for a scent, then pointed at one of the ladders. "Up there."

I raised my eyebrows. The left one pulled on the scar that bisected it. Very well organised, I thought, amused. Ladders need to be scaled, and here's a *marinheiro* at hand to do it for you. Oh well. I won't see forty again, but I can still climb a mast. So a little wooden ladder? *Uma canja*. Or, as the English say, piece of cake. "Right," I said. "Where?"

"Go up to the second storey," he directed. Still a little bemused by the sheer scale of the library, I did as he said.

"Now what?" I called down.

"Get off the ladder. Third shelf up to your left, look for a book with a red and tan leather spine." I stepped onto the balcony, seeing my reflection for an instant in one of the windows, a bit like a ghost itself. Unexpectedly unsettling. I turned to the shelves.

Sure enough, there was the volume he described. I pulled it from the shelf suspiciously, and opened it at random, expecting some dense indecipherable Latin text. But it was in Portuguese. Still pretty dense and indecipherable, however. The title page bore a Latin name, though. I raised my voice. "It says *Mappa Mundi*."

"It's a metaphor," he called back. "That's the book." I tucked it under my arm and climbed back down. It was warm and stuffy in the library, though less so than in the church, and I was sweating lightly.

Fr Pereira took the book from me and put it carefully on the table in the centre of the room. A faint ghost sat there, some forgotten scholar who had died at his work.

"What do you mean, it's a metaphor?" I asked.

Opening it with rather more care than I had employed, he explained, "A map of the world, in other words, the human spirit and the quest for understanding. This was published in 1572 —same year as the *Lusíadas*, incidentally. So while Camões was writing the story of the explorers, this author was summarising the state of our knowledge. Of course *this* isn't literature, but it doesn't pretend to be."

It was more than I wanted to know, frankly. I don't want literary criticism at ten o'clock at night. Fr Pereira leafed gently through the closely-printed pages. They made a noise like leaves in the wind. "And you think there's material from the *Book of Souls* in there?"

"I'm sure of it," he said. "Yes, here we are. Ah, they quote the original. How's your mediæval Latin?"

"Mediæval," I said gravely. He laughed.

"I'll read it to you, then. Here's the author: *Another recipe for perfection, from the Book of Souls, stated that*

the souls of a venturer, a scholar, a lover, an artist, a child, a hunter and a warrior, needed to be stored in amulets of, respectively, agate, chrysophase, beryl, jasper, malachite, jacinth and sapphire. Magical formulæ for achieving this begin, 'The first soul shall be the soul of a venturer. It shall be gathered by the demon Mastiphal and stored in an amulet of agate. And that shall be a noble soul. And the guardian of that soul shall be the armoured one. And the soul of a venturer may only be...' And now a page is missing!" he exclaimed in outrage.

But I was hearing only the litany of stones. Agate, chrysophase, beryl, jasper, malachite, jacinth and sapphire. Those were the same that Emilia had sold two weeks before. Seven stones, seven souls.

"What does it mean, a recipe for perfection?" I asked. It made little sense to me. But then magic rarely does. Even when people point out I'm doing it myself. Or perhaps especially then.

Fr Pereira looked solemn. "If it weren't for these rather specific instructions, we might take it for another metaphor, that the perfect man should embody characteristics of all of those. But sending demons to *gather* the souls—and you say Sr Verdinho is in a coma—?" I nodded, but he wasn't looking at me. I'm not sure where he was looking, what he saw. After a moment he shook himself, and smiled. "Ah, wool-gathering," he said apologetically. Which I doubted.

I scratched my scar, more because I wanted a smoke than because it was itching. "Can the souls be freed?"

"Everything bound can be released," said Fr Pereira, with reassuring certainty. And I knew it for truth. Knew it, because I've achieved it. From both sides. "Go home, Luís. I need to look further. You need to go home to your wife."

A sudden pang reminded me that I did. I was still reluctant to leave him. But what could I do? I speak a number of languages well. Read some of them a little less well. Of Latin, though, despite my mother's efforts and schemes, I don't have a priest's knowledge. And, frankly, I haven't the patience to pore over musty old tomes.

Surprised by a sudden yawn, I patted his shoulder, said, "You're right, Father," and left the tall, strange, book-inhabited building.

His voice drifted after me: "I'll speak to you tomorrow."

Once outside, I negotiated the flowerpots before pausing to light a cheroot. And all of a sudden, crawling along my spine, a sense of danger.

Missing an eye is a distinct disadvantage when you need all-round vision. I turned my head from side to side, increasing my pace along the alley. Came out into the small square in front of the church. The steps leading to its big studded doors swept up to my left. Everything was very quiet. Not even a dog barking, not a cat stirring. Jumping at shadows, da Silva? I don't think so. The shadows are minding their own business.

The sense of menace increased, and I unsheathed the knife from down my back. Its solid weight in my left hand was reassuring. It hadn't taken me long to learn how a left-handed man can compensate for lacking his left eye. Basically, you attack first.

But as yet there was no sign of anything to attack. Yet the threat I felt was almost palpable. My shoulders felt tight with its potential, and the hairs at the back of my neck were prickling. There was *something* there. I was sure of it.

I stood in the centre of the square like a gladiator in the arena awaiting his opponent. Heard my heart pounding as if I'd been running. Wiped a trickle of sweat from my face. Looked all round, turning in a slow circle. Still nothing.

And then the church's postern door opened, and an armoured figure came charging down the steps. I thought, bemusedly ...from the church? What would come clattering down a stone stair to kill me? Which was obviously what it had in mind.

There was little time to take it in. The figure was taller than me—no surprise there, then—armoured partly in plate, partly in mail. The helmet it wore was closed, barring the eyes. Which gave it about as much peripheral vision as I have. That was a plus. Though why it would disadvantage itself I had no idea.

The strange knight's sword was raised over its head. As it flashed down, moonlight caught it. I realised it was the real Roman gladius, twenty-two inches long, three pounds in weight. It would shatter my knife if I tried to

parry with it. And I would probably break my knuckles if I attempted to hit the armoured figure. That was probably the reason for the helmet, then.

I dodged its first slashing blow quite easily, skipping out of the way, but I couldn't fight this thing with my knife. It was too well-armoured. And it knew exactly what it was doing with that sword, as well. The next stroke it aimed nearly parted my hair as I ducked away from it. My foot slipped on something and I fell to one knee, banging it painfully. Had to roll away quickly from another blow which smashed a burst of sparks from the pavement.

Cursing at the pain shooting from my knee, I bounced back upright, still clutching my knife uselessly. I wondered if I could trip my opponent, but its footwork looked a bit too fancy. It moved like a matador.

And that gave me an idea. Backing rapidly to avoid a punching stroke that would have spitted me, I raced up the steps in front of the church. Towards the builders' gear and the pile of bricks draped in tarpaulin. The armoured figure followed me warily, obviously not liking the idea that I'd gone to higher ground. I could hear its panting breath.

I gave an experimental slash with my knife, and it stopped just out of reach. Which gave me time to whip the tarpaulin off the bricks and fling it over my antagonist's head and shoulders. Followed that with a solid sole of the boot in the middle of the breastplate. It overbalanced and tumbled down the steps with a clatter like a pile of scrap metal toppling over. But never let go of the sword. Damnation.

My knee protested as I gave chase. It felt as if I'd broken it. I jumped the last three steps, making sure I landed on the other foot, and trod hard on its sword-hand. Still swathed in the tarpaulin, it lashed at me with its foot. I wanted to give it a good kicking myself, but didn't fancy fractured toes. Instead I bent and wrenched the sword out of its hand with the sincere hope that eleven stone of da Silva stamping on it had done some lasting damage.

It rolled over, grabbed my ankle with its other hand. I went down on my bruised knee, swearing. The armoured figure scrambled to its feet, flung the tarpaulin at me, and took off. Showing an impressive turn of speed for something carrying that much metal. I thought about pursuing it but decided not to bother. I might have caught it, and I'm not that much of an idiot.

I sat on the bottom step to catch my breath, my knife across my lap. Rubbed my knee. Lit a cheroot and drew the smoke in gratefully. Eased my eye-patch away from the humidity beneath it. On second thoughts, there was no-one to see, so I pushed it up to my forehead temporarily and examined the blade I had wrenched from my attacker. A formidable thing. Ancient design, modern steel, and sharp as blazes. I could have shaved with it.

Questions seethed in my mind. Why the Roman *gladius*? How had it come out of the church, if it was evil? And if it wasn't, why attack me?

Deciding I was too tired to think about any of these things, I wrapped the sword in a piece cut from the tarpaulin and walked— or rather limped— wearily home.

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## 2

Father Carlos Pereira, in the tall library of São Rafael which was one of the city's true roots, burned the midnight oil. Or, in this case, the midnight electricity, a rare and strange thing. Not in the city's commercial centre, true; here, though, an odd extravagance. But a sensible one, given the flammable contents of the building.

Searching a mental catalogue, his mind was in a semi-trance. Drifting. Seek and ye shall find, as he had said to Luís da Silva. Who did not yet understand, as Fr Pereira did, that Lisbon is a city of many layers. As indeed are all cities. The present reality lies lightly over many other layers, or perhaps it is the other way round. Layers, not only of history, but of legend: Ulysses' city of Olisippi is, in that sense, as real as the Romans' Felicitas Julia. And they may leak into each other. Thin veils may rise, but they may also be penetrated.

Yet in every city there are a few constants that stay the same through all the layers. Not always the obvious ones. The Torre de Belém anchors Lisbon in time, as does the castle of São Jorge. But churches rarely perform this function. As with a human fanatic, an excess of belief weakens stability, destroys balance. Knowledge, however, strengthens them, which is why this library is such a potent place. And why the world faltered when the great library of Alexandria was burned by the Christians, and plunged into the Dark Ages.

Some people, too, as he knew well, are strong in this way. Just as some seem fated to destabilise the world. Again, many of these are neither great leaders nor famous men. Although Fr Pereira— along with a great number of others— believed the German Kaiser to be one of the great disruptors.

He was also almost convinced that Luís da Silva was one of their counterparts.

Although he really knew very little about the one-eyed captain, his instincts were rarely wrong. Da Silva's persistent avoidance of the confessional notwithstanding, Fr Pereira believed him to be a man of the light. Whatever lay in his past. However much he even doubted God. Why else would he feel he had a duty to fight evil?

And that was one of the reasons Fr Pereira was worried by the *Book of Souls*'s spell. For how could you create a perfect man from nothing— from souls who might be young, old, good, evil; disruptors or stabilisers? Saints— or monsters?

We men can never leave anything alone, he mused. We always have to meddle. He leafed through the book in front of him, concern making him absent-minded, and frowned as he recognised a passage he had already read.

Something else had disturbed him. The air felt tight, as if a thunderstorm loomed. He could almost feel it crackling around him. Pressure mounted in his ears, and he swallowed, bursting the bubbles. His face was damp with sweat.

Then there came a knock at the door, and he nearly jumped out of his skin. "You silly old fool," he admonished himself, and heaved his tired body to his feet. It was late, but scholars and antiquarians often kept odd hours.

He did not recognise the man outside the door, but that was not unusual, either. His visitor was a tall man, with Castilian features and the lean look of an ascetic. Grey hair tapered to a widow's peak on his furrowed brow, and old-fashioned eyeglasses hung on a ribbon round his neck. But there was, on a second glance, something sensual about his patrician face, as if he were really less of a scholar than a voluptuary. But of what kind was unguessable.

"Good evening," said this visitor, urbanely. There was something strange about his voice. It was resonant, but in some indefinable way almost *too* resonant. As though it echoed through more than one of the layers of time.

Fr Pereira was visited by an almost overwhelming urge to deny the man entry. There was nothing of logic in it. It was pure primal instinct that came surging up, all the way from a race-memory when his forefathers were peasants, huddling together for comfort in the dark which terrified them. He touched his crucifix surreptitiously for reassurance. Did his visitor flinch? Fr Pereira couldn't be sure.

"Please forgive me," he said to the stranger, covering a feigned yawn with his hand and too aware that he was absolutely no good at dissembling, "I'm dreadfully tired. Could you possibly come back in the morning?"

"I'm afraid that would not be convenient," said his visitor, implacably, and this time there was definitely something in his voice that put the priest in mind of hollow echoing pits. Fr Pereira found his knees were trem-

bling, and clutched at the doorframe to steady himself. This is a demon, he thought. Real. Here. Now.

“Then I’m sorry,” he said, keeping his own voice level with an effort, “but I can’t invite you in just now.” He met the other’s gaze, and wished he hadn’t. His pupils were black, the shiny black of space, with the same sense of void in them. Legions whirled within their depths, like a universe of spinning stars.

The stranger’s plump lips thinned into the beginning of a smile, then stretched further open. And further. And, impossibly, further still, revealing a mouthful of teeth like broken bottles. At the same time his face moved, distorting, as if its very bones were changing shape under the skin, beneath the flesh, and its colour mottled, darkened.

Fr Pereira, appalled, crossed himself. “*Dominus illuminata mea,*” he said, “*et salus mea, quem timebo?*” The Lord is the source of my light and my safety, so whom shall I fear? “Who are you?” he demanded.

There was nothing remotely human about the visitor’s head, now. It reminded him of nothing so much as a beast’s that had been roasted on the fire. The terrible eyes were lidless, the lips blackened and cracked. Auto-da-fé, he thought. But the voice was the same. “That which you must fear,” it said. “But a name you cannot know.” Since names are powerful beyond measure.

“And you cannot pass this threshold without an invitation,” he countered. His voice was still steady, though he was shaking as with an ague.

It mocked him. “But you must leave, sooner or later. At the very least, you must sleep, and your little soul will lie naked and open. Even if you lurk within these walls, your weak old body will tire and wear out.” Laughter, high and hateful, echoed in his head.

He found he was clutching his crucifix so hard it had left an imprint on his palm. Knowing its words for truth, still he pushed himself away from the doorframe and slammed the door in the demon’s face.

But he could still hear it laughing.

Knowing, then, that he did not have much time, he sat down once more at the table and began to write in hurried but neat script.

“There may be another copy of the *Mappa Mundi*, but I have no knowledge of it; other scholars might. The missing pages are the best hope. There may be a way of using the incomplete book to locate them, if the meta-physicists are right when they say that incomplete things strive to be whole again.

“I may not be able to speak to you again. I have faced down a demon once tonight, but I suspect I will not be able to do so a second time. If this gatherer of souls wants a priest’s soul next, in the end I cannot prevent it.

“*Dominus vobiscum.* May God be with you.”

Folding the paper, he wrote da Silva’s name on it; and, as an afterthought, added the captain’s address.

Then he knelt, and started to pray.

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I woke late the following morning. Beside me, a warm, Emilia-shaped hollow, full of the scent of her. Nothing to linger for, then. Although I moved into the space she’d occupied. Just because it was there.

And then, of course, it all came back to me.

Muttering a curse, I pushed the bedcovers off and admired the bruise on my right knee. Colourful. Strange how I hadn’t noticed it last night. My head felt muzzy, as if I’d slept too long. Get yourself moving, da Silva.

The morning was bright and clear. The sky, the washed high blue that heralds a hot day. Shaving, I suddenly remembered the sword I had brought home with me. To tell the truth, I half-expected it to have vanished. But, when I went to look, it was still there.

This was puzzling. In fact, the whole episode was puzzling. Having slept on the problem, though, the conclusion was inescapable. No harm had come to me from touching the sword. It hadn’t disappeared with the morning sun. Its owner had come out of the church. Therefore my attacker hadn’t been supernatural at all, but human.

Which raised, of course, a whole new series of questions. I hefted the *gladius* thoughtfully. It was a butcher’s weapon. No finesse about it. Apart from being razor-sharp, it was a pretty weighty thing. Three pounds doesn’t sound like a lot, but it’s not like picking up a bag of potatoes. The weight distribution makes it seem a lot heav-

ier. Although the thing was extremely well-balanced. I had to admit I liked the way it fit my hand.

“Damn it,” I said softly. Dangerous thoughts. I don’t go armed because I want to but because I have to. Ha. I don’t see ghosts because I want to, either, but there’s not a lot I can do about that. I wrapped the blade in the tarpaulin again and put it in the bottom of the wardrobe.

I needed to go back to the library again. Needed to know what, if anything, Fr Pereira had found out. Because there was more to this than met the eye, so to speak. I don’t believe in coincidences.

But first things first. And since Emilia was already up, that meant coffee. Black. And strong enough to stand your spoon up in.

Emilia, however, was trying to coax Caterina to eat her breakfast. With little success, and that little turned to none when I turned up. Caterina launched herself at me like a small cannonball, crying “Papa!” and grabbed me round the middle. I picked her up.

“Ouf, you’re heavy. Your mother’s been feeding you on stones,” I said. She giggled.

“Has not,” she said, burying her head in my neck. Emilia, trying to look exasperated, sighed. Rolled her eyes heavenwards.

“Stones,” she muttered. “Can’t even get the child to eat fruit.” I sat down, wriggling child on my lap. Felt like a sackful of puppies.

“Coffee?” I asked plaintively.

Some time later, Emilia said to me, “Are you going back?”

“Yes,” I said, a little absently. The room was quiet now, bereft of Caterina. I had finished my coffee and was having a smoke. And looking at a half-completed portrait of my wife.

It really was remarkably good. I hadn’t known the old man was that talented. It made me regret the waste of his gift even more.

“He usually comes round at about ten, if you want to wait.”

Too much ambivalence. I’m still not sure how to feel about my father. I shook my head.

“I think I need to talk to Fr Pereira as soon as I can,” I said. “I need to find out what’s going on.”

She looked at me thoughtfully. He had caught the look in her eyes exactly. That grave contemplative expression, and the slight smile that curved her lips. I was hit by a sudden pang of envy that he was able to sit and look at her for hours at a time. Grow up, da Silva.

“What *is* going on?” she asked. “This... collecting of souls.”

“I don’t know.” I stubbed out my cheroot. Looked at her again, reluctant to leave. Got to my feet. “But it’s not a coincidence. I don’t—”

“—believe in coincidences,” she finished for me. I grinned. She knows me very well, that’s for sure.

“I won’t be long. I hope.”

“Luís,” said my wife. “Be careful.”

“I’m always careful,” I said, and kissed her. She kissed back. Soft mouth, soft lips. Usual reaction. I went on kissing her. But I had to leave. Ah well.

The sky hadn’t lied. It’s going to be hot later. Already uncomfortably warm. We wear far too many clothes, and why? What’s the purpose of a tie, or a waistcoat? Not that I was wearing a waistcoat. And I refuse to put on a stiff collar unless meeting clients. Who probably aren’t fooled anyway, so I don’t know why I bother.

My knee hurt, but not too much. All in all, I suppose I got off lightly from my nocturnal encounter. Unfortunately the first thing I had to do was climb a flight of steep steps. Lisbon is built on hills. Seven hills, like Rome, they say. If you ask me it’s more like seventy. Or so it seems, sometimes. Today was one of those occasions.

When I finally arrived at the church, though— I wasn’t hurrying— Fr Pereira was nowhere to be found. Instead a nervous young priest who barely looked old enough to shave was apparently in charge. If he calls me “my son”, I thought, I’ll burst out laughing.

“Where’s Fr Pereira?” I asked him. I must have been looking exceptionally villainous, because he flinched

back from me. That's right, da Silva, put the wind up the curate. Nice work. At least the boy didn't cross himself.

"I don't know, *senhor*," he said, staring at me worriedly, as if he thought I might bite. "No-one's seen him since last night."

Last night. My heart gave a sudden jump. I had left him alone in the library. Unprotected. Though of course he would have sworn he had God's protection. I wasn't sure how much that was worth, now. Good and evil seem more evenly matched than scripture would have us believe. Sometimes, the devil prevails.

I was pretty sure I could find the alley that led to the library. Damn it, I can navigate a ship. But after a quarter of an hour I was beginning to have doubts. I might have expected a place like that to have some kind of mechanism to keep unwanted visitors away. But not to the extent of excluding me. That's downright insulting.

Eventually I found it, by the simple trick of not looking too closely. I'd returned to the church once more, feeling hot and cross and sweaty. Stopped to light a cheroot, and began to walk aimlessly in the first direction that took my fancy.

And then I saw the ghost of a bearded man in a turban loitering in the air, and headed purposefully for it. I followed him because he had the look of a scholar, and I had a hunch that the library of São Rafael had never been open only to seekers after Christian truths.

Ghosts don't stray very far from the place where they died, however, and scholars don't often die on their way to and from the library. But as I had half-suspected, there were more. All with something about them that made me think of academics. Or maybe that's the wrong word. Magi, perhaps: wise men.

And there was the alley I remembered from the night before. I grinned in relief, and blew out a satisfied mouthful of smoke. And this time I took care to fix the way in my memory before turning into its narrow mouth. Instantly the heat of the sun faded, and I was enveloped by a sort of cool almost-dusk, roofed above by a ribbon of blue sky. The sun would never reach into it. Not wide enough. The chill of stone was a welcome relief, drying the sweat on my face. I pushed the eye-patch up to my forehead, not anticipating meeting anyone. Because even as I had turned into it, I had a strong urge not to notice it, to think of it as of no consequence. And I was looking for it. I knew it was there.

Torn between the urge to hurry and the urge to be careful, I walked quickly along the narrow way. Last night's black cat, a real monster of a beast, a demi-puma, barred the alley at its far end. It miaowed at me loudly, twining itself round my ankles as I stepped over it, but didn't seem motivated to stop me.

In daylight the small courtyard and the secret library seemed much as they had by night. Well, apart from its not being dark, of course. Deceptive is what I mean. It looked like any tall, old building that had managed to survive the earthquake. You couldn't tell from the shuttered windows that the inside was any different from any of its neighbours. Which towered mute, enclosed, with that indefinable air of vacancy that uninhabited buildings have. I didn't have to knock at their faded doors or peer in between their peeling shutters to know that they had stood empty for a long time. The only bright colours in the tiny square were the potted geraniums, the exact colours of the new flag. Their musty, slightly unpleasant scent the only smell.

Repositioning my eye-patch, I deposited the butt of my cheroot in one of the flower-pots and turned the handle of the library's ancient oaken door. It moved smoothly on its hinges, admitting me willingly enough. Apparently I was still welcome here. Inside, the harsh electric lighting still shone, starker than the summer sun. Papers lay scattered on the floor round the table. And Fr Pereira was slumped over a book, breathing in a high harsh rattle.

For one relieved moment I thought, he's asleep. But I knew it was a false hope. Who do you think you're fooling, da Silva? His mouth was slack and open, a small puddle of saliva on the table. I felt his forehead, his pulse. I shook his shoulder. Couldn't wake him. As with Paciência's husband, so with the priest.

I sighed, looking at his bulk. Thinking of the heat of the day. He must weigh eighteen stone, I thought sourly. Thanks a lot. All right, I could lift him, but he was entirely the wrong shape to carry easily. Why not call for help? Because I wasn't entirely sure I could find the place again.

Or that I would be allowed in.

If he was the second victim of the soul collector—and the second *was* a scholar's soul, according to the *Mappa Mundi* book—it was imperative to find out what he had discovered. If anything. I gathered up his notes, scanning them rapidly for any clue he might have left.

One of the papers was addressed to me. A chill washed over me, and I glanced round quickly. Nothing. I picked up the *Mappa Mundi* volume. It just fit in my pocket. Fr Pereira's notes went into another. Then I looked at the priest's squat unconscious form, rather wanting to spit in disgust. I could have lifted his skinny young curate in one hand. But what I was going to have to carry was Fr Pereira.

Well, da Silva, nobody ever promised things were going to be easy.

As I suspected, the most awkward part was getting him balanced. I got him over my shoulder without much difficulty, having lifted dead weights before. But it was like carrying a sack of meal. My knee protested as I straightened. The first few steps were the worst, and then I got the hang of it.

As soon as I got outside with my burden, I heard the door close softly behind me with a snick! as of a lock engaging. Wondered briefly if I'd ever be admitted again. I'm going to bring the book back, damn it, I said silently.

The things you get yourself into, da Silva, I thought with a sigh. Fighting demons, raising the dead, shooting werewolves. And now carting a comatose priest the size of a hippopotamus about as the mercury climbed to eighty-five degrees. Even in the cool confined alley the sweat was pouring off me.

Despite the heat, people came running the minute I emerged from the mouth of the alleyway, sensing excitement. A talent humans have. I eased Fr Pereira's unconscious bulk carefully to the ground, and wiped my hot perspiring face with my sleeve. And was instantly surrounded by a crowd, all clamouring at the tops of their voices.

"What happened?" "Is he dead?" "Where did you find him?" "What's the matter with him?" "Someone's murdered the priest!"

"Nobody's murdered anyone," I yelled at this last. They'll be on to the apocalypse next. "Somebody fetch a doctor."

Now the crowd parted to allow Fr Pereira's young deputy through. He crossed himself, knelt swiftly beside the older priest, and started to pray. A fat lot of good that is, I thought in disgust. I stood up, wiped sweat away again, and lit a cheroot.

And found myself face-to-face with a gape-mouthed Zé. "What happened to the priest?" he asked.

"Catalepsy," I said, falling back on Henriques Verdinho's physician's explanation. Stuck a finger under my eye-patch in a vain attempt to wipe away the accumulated moisture there. "What are you doing here, Zézinho?"

Fr Pereira, meanwhile, was carefully rolled onto a stretcher. Two men grumbled at his weight. I looked at them sourly.

"Mama sent me," said Zé, staring at his feet in embarrassment. "She said you'd been gone for too long, and she was worried."

I combed my fingers through my damp hair. That's not like Emilia. Does she worry about me when I'm thousands of miles from home, from land? I suppose she must, at that. I thought of a lot of things to say. None suitable to air in front of my son. In the end I just squeezed his shoulder. "Well, I'd better come and reassure her."

We walked in companionable silence for a while. Then Zé said, "Sr Harris told me to tell you something."

Harris. I trusted his instincts. What was wrong? "What?" I asked, trying to sound unconcerned. Not sure I succeeded.

"It doesn't make much sense. It's full moon, remember." Yes, he knows about Harris. Is as grateful to Harris as I am. It's a long story.

"Zé, he turns into a wolf. Not an idiot."

He scratched his cheekbone in unconscious imitation of my habit, and said, "He said to tell you, he smelt the same smell last night."

"Ah." I breathed out slowly and bared my teeth. So Harris was sensing the soul-collection, was he? That could prove useful. You need all the help you can get when you're dealing with this sort of thing.

I touched the book in my pocket, and hoped that Paciência knew enough to help, because she was the only witch I knew. Apart from Tatiana Dimitrova, of course, but she was in London. And there I hoped she would stay.

Emilia, however, had to disappoint me about her friend. She looked up from a design she was sketching, a tendril of hair falling over her brow. I pushed it back with one finger, tucking it behind her ear, but it fell forward again.

“She’s only a hedge-witch, Luís. Potions and simples. She may not know how to do it.” Well, I might have known, I thought. Although it’d be nice, just once in a while, to find a straightforward solution to a problem. She squeezed my hand. “I’ll ask her, though,” she went on. “Perhaps it’s only a simple charm.”

“Ask her?” I said absently, transfixed by the tiny laughter lines she was getting at the corners of her eyes.

“You know what her husband’s like,” she reminded me. “He likes to be *modern*. A twentieth-century man. They have a telephone.”

Ten minutes later, she reported that Paciência was on her way. By motor-car. A little amused, I thanked Henriques Verdinho’s passion for the new-fangled. He may dismiss me as hopelessly old-fashioned, still sailing with wind and tide, but his own brand of stubbornness was helping now. Helping him, I hoped. Because I needed all the help I can get. I may feel a duty to fight evil, but I never claimed I could do it all on my own. It comes down to that often enough, anyway. And isn’t *that* a surprise.

“What did she say?” I asked.

“She sounded relieved,” Emilia said. “I think she *can* do it.”

Paciência, when she turned up, might have been an entirely different woman from yesterday’s tearful frightened visitor. Bright-eyed and animated. She read Fr Pereira’s letter carefully, nodding her head. Kept shooting me curious glances, though.

At last she asked, “Did you kill it, the demon that took your eye?” I nodded. Though it wasn’t strictly true. I *had* defeated it, though.

Emilia looked at me, perhaps remembering, as I was, that night. The teeming rain sluicing the blood from my face. Hearing my footsteps outside. A sudden jolt of alarm—there’s something wrong, what’s happened? I shook myself, putting the thought away. The memory of pain. Silence stretched between the three of us.

Then Emilia said, “Can you do this... spell?” snapping the tension, and I exhaled sharply. Hadn’t known I was holding my breath. I lit a cheroot without really thinking about it, and breathed in the smoke gratefully.

“Yes, of course,” said the witch impatiently. “It’s only a simple finding charm. People want me to find things all the time. If it’s not lost earrings, it’s lost bags and lost walking-sticks. It’s a pity there isn’t one for lost virginity,” she added tartly, and I gave a surprised bark of laughter. “May I see the book?”

I pointed to it. She picked it up, leafed through it curiously.

“Who tore the pages out?” Emilia wondered.

“We’ll find out,” said Paciência, confidently, putting her fingers to her throat and pulling something on a chain from round her neck. It had been concealed beneath her high-necked blouse. The pendant was a white milky stone.

Eyeing it curiously, Emilia asked, “What is that stone? It’s not a moonstone or an opal. I don’t recognise it at all.”

“It’s called galactides, milkstone,” the witch said. “Please, don’t smoke,” she went on. I stubbed the cheroot out obediently. “And don’t speak, or you’ll distract the spirit.”

“Spirit?” I repeated, more sharply than I’d intended. As in ghost? Because I don’t need you to talk to them. I can do it myself, thank you very much.

“The spirit of the stone.” She dangled the pendant above the book, and closed her eyes. I exchanged a glance with Emilia, who looked quizzical. I don’t know what I looked like. Irritated, probably. For God’s sake, I was thinking, she’ll whip out a ouija board next. Paciência’s lips began to move in silent recitation. And the pendant began to swing in a circle. Then, in a perfectly conversational tone, she said, “The mender of time.” And then, “The rock of ages.” Then she was silent for a while, though the stone continued to spin. It made a very slight

whirring sound, like a clock preparing to strike. “A scent of poppies,” said the witch. “A dog in a manger.” The pendant stopped dead. Paciência opened her eyes, and blinked.

“What does all that mean?” I asked, somewhat peremptorily. Gnostic utterances are all very well. But when I want answers, they’re no bloody good at all. I prefer a more direct route, preferably without the classical riddle-game. All right, I’m impatient. I admit it.

“May I have a glass of water?” Paciência asked, and I stood up to fetch her one. Had one myself while I was at it. When I returned, Emilia had written down the four phrases, and the witch was looking relieved.

“Good,” she said. “That’s simple enough. Oh, obrigada.” She drained the glass in one draught, put it down on the table.

“Simple,” I repeated.

“Oh yes.” She tapped the paper with her forefinger. And proceeded to explain. “It always does this. The mender of time, that’ll be a clock repairer. The rock of ages, somewhere near the castle. A scent of poppies, an opium smoker. And a dog in a manger, someone who doesn’t know what he has but wants to hang onto it.”

If the Sphinx had tried its blasted riddles out on me, I would have beaten the hell out of it. At least ghosts give straightforward answers, however distasteful I find summoning the damn things. But this?

“A clock repairer somewhere near the castle?” I repeated. “Can you be a bit more specific?” Since the castle covers rather a lot of ground. Every defender since the Romans has dug in enthusiastically up there, extending fortifications in all directions. Not that there’s much left standing now. And somewhere near, to me, doesn’t mean right on top of. It could mean, say, a quarter-mile or so in any direction.

Paciência smiled and held her pendant out to me. “It’ll lead you.” I raised an eyebrow at her, sceptical, but took the chain from her hand. Immediately I felt a tug, not from the thing directly but in my mind. Well I’m damned, I thought. It does work. I made to slip the pendant in my pocket, but she stopped me. “You need to keep it in contact with your skin,” she said. “Putting it round your neck is easiest.”

I had shed my jacket on my return, together with the tyranny of collar and tie. Feeling some kind of dim disloyalty to Emilia, I slipped the chain over my head and let the milky-white stone hang inside my shirt. Its unaccustomed weight felt strange. I looked towards Emilia, who gave me an encouraging smile. That same strand of hair had fallen across her brow again. I wished I had the leisure to push it back.

The tugging was quite insistent. I had to fight it just to pause to get my knife and resume my jacket. As I came downstairs Zé, who had apparently decided to spend his shore leave harassing me, popped out looking hopeful.

“Where are you going?” he asked curiously. I stopped, lit a cheroot.

“Haven’t you got anything better to do?” I enquired. Zé shook his head, unrepentant. “Then go and ask your mother to find you something.” He shot me a mutinous look. I recognised the expression, hid a smile. In my mind, the tugging grew more insistent.

“But I—”

“No, you can’t come with me,” I said. He looked mulishly at me, then finally realised arguing wouldn’t get him anywhere, and stomped off. I sighed, and went out once more into the heat of the day.

Except that it wasn’t. How did that happen? I looked at the sky, startled to find the sun gone behind long streaks of red cloud to the west. How long had we sat while Paciência worked her spell? That’s one of the reasons I don’t trust magic. No. Its practitioners are the reason. But I need *this* witch. Live with it, da Silva.

There was bustle in the streets and alleys now, as people who preferred to hide from the afternoon heat woke up and resumed their business. Dark interiors yawned behind newly-opened doorways. Cooking aromas began to drift on the air, more substantial than the floating ghosts. I wished I’d thought to have a drink before leaving. Thought of stopping briefly at a bar. But the spell still led me on. I heard a snatch of fado from somewhere, a woman’s voice almost harsh with saudade: *Meu amor é marinheiro, e mora no alto mar...*

Perhaps twenty-five minutes later, I found what I was looking for. In that it was a shop with a window full of dusty clocks and it was near the castle. Could hardly have been closer, in fact: Looking straight up, ruined battlements loomed. However, the sleek young Chinaman seated outside on a wicker chair smoking a cigarette did-

n't look in the least fuddled by opium. So maybe the scent of poppies was as metaphorical as the *Mappa Mundi* volume. Damnation.

Paciência's pendant, having done its work, was utterly quiet now. I pretended an interest in the clocks in the window. When I figured I had stood there long enough to make him vaguely curious, I said casually in the Mandarin dialect, "I hear you are a collector of documents, as well as a mender of clocks."

My accent is bad. I sound like what I am, a Portuguese speaking Mandarin. But that's usually enough to catch the most complacent Chinese off-guard. Although after that they find it highly amusing.

"What kind of documents are you interested in?" he asked. His accent came from Hong Kong. Not, as you might expect, Macau.

Still contemplating the clocks, I lit a cheroot. Blew smoke out. "That depends on what kind you have," I said.

"Pages from many books," he replied in an undertone. "For a price."

I scratched my cheekbone. Stayed where I was. Didn't look at him. "Is it possible to see these... pages?"

He was standing beside me, now. I could see both our reflections in the glass. "In what year were you born?" he asked.

"In the year of the dragon," I replied, exhaling smoke. Which made me, I suppose, a fire-breathing dragon.

"Come inside," said the Chinaman. "I am called the Faithful Dog by some people." The dog in the manger? I wondered. "Though my name is John Yeoh." The English name, John. Hong Kong, for sure.

Standing by the door, he gestured for me to precede him into the dim sandalwood-scented interior. I heard the door close behind me. Fools rush in, I thought, with a grin to myself that was more than a little forced.

Because I hadn't the remotest idea what the hell I was doing. But then, that goes for most ventures of this sort. I went nearly forty years of my life before I started seeing ghosts. Twenty-five of them on ships. I know the ways of the ocean better than I could ever hope to navigate in this world of shadows. And frankly I'd rather be battling a hundred-foot sea or a force ten gale. Or both. Unfortunately, I don't have much of a choice.

John Yeoh lit the gas, then took his place, like a shopkeeper, behind the counter. Stared at me. I returned his gaze. Heard a drawer open. And then there was a gun in his hand.

Oh *merda*, I thought. And to think I nearly brought Zé. I held my hands out in front of me, palms forward.

"Who the hell are you?" he demanded.

"Just a...ship's captain," I said. "My name's da Silva." I weighed up the distance between us. Too far.

"Don't try anything," he warned. Ah well, it was worth the thought. "How did you hear about me?"

Now that was a tricky one to answer. I ran through several replies in my mind. Discarded them all. Eventually decided on the truth. If he didn't believe me, he didn't believe me. I just hoped he wouldn't shoot me.

"A witch told me," I said. Take it or leave it.

He frowned. But not, I thought, in disbelief. Or was that wishful thinking? A trickle of sweat ran down from my temple. Time crawled by.

"What do you know of witches?" he asked at last. The gun still pointed at me, unwavering. It was difficult to look away from that round black hole. I kept very still. Don't want him to get nervous. *Get nervous, da Silva?*

"Quite a lot." I took a deep breath. "Can you point that somewhere else?"

His eyes never left me. "I don't think so. Why have you come?"

There's nothing like someone pointing a gun at you to get at the truth. "I'm looking for some pages from a book called the *Mappa Mundi*."

"Why?"

I wanted to shout with frustration. Kept my voice level with an effort. "To learn how to retrieve stolen souls, Mr Yeoh. My friends' souls."

"Stolen souls," he repeated, staring hard at me. What was he seeing? Or trying to see? After another couple of centuries, he replaced the gun in its drawer. I breathed out silently, badly in need of a smoke. Wanting, as well, to get the sweat out from under my eye-patch. I settled for wiping a hand over my face. It was better than nothing. "Would you recognise this... manuscript, if you saw it?"

Though I wasn't at all sure, I said "Yes." Wondering why he had suddenly decided to trust me. If he had.

"I will show you the documents," he said slowly. "I do not guarantee that I'll sell any of them to you."

"Very well," I said, wiping the sweat off my face. Having no other choice. Wishing, to make things easier for a change, that the next soul to be gathered was the soul of a thief. Why else would he be so suspicious?

"Are you armed?" he asked.

"Of course I am," I retorted. "But if you want me to trust you, you'll have to trust me." He smiled slightly. Which I took for agreement.

"You are a very strange man, Captain," he said. Yes, and he could talk. "But yes, I believe I *can* trust you." Well, thank you, I thought, grinning mirthlessly. Or nearly. It was almost funny. The guardian of secrets even Fr Pereira didn't know, a nervous Chinaman who had no idea what he had stolen.

Yeoh reached under the counter again, and I heard a click. What he had released was a tall display cabinet which swung out from the wall, revealing a flight of steps leading downwards. He stooped, picked up an oil-lamp, lit it. Reminded me I wanted a smoke. Better not. No sudden movements, da Silva.

Musty air flowed up from the depths. I descended the steep stair carefully. I'm not fond of enclosed underground spaces. Being the exact opposite of a sailor's preferred environment. And also, of course, usually housing something unpleasant.

This cellar, however, was roomy, dry and clean. Dozens of box files stood on shelves. Mother of God, I thought, how long has he been collecting this stuff? He *looks* younger than me. I stared at him, scratched my eyebrow.

"What language is your book?" he asked.

"Portuguese," I replied, still transfixed by the sheer size of the collection. He indicated one section with a wave of his hand, for all the world like a librarian. Three boxes with "português" written on their sides.

"Go ahead," said Yeoh.

Of course, the pages were in the third box. By then I was sure that Paciência's spell was a worthless piece of mumbo-jumbo. And then I recognised the passage.

*"...released by a venturer. Against the armoured one, only the invulnerable may stand." The armoured one? I thought suddenly, remembering my antagonist of the previous night. "The second soul shall be the soul of a scholar. It shall be gathered by the demon Bifrons and stored in an amulet of chrysopease. And that shall be a noble soul. And the guardian of that soul shall be the executioner. And the soul of a scholar may only be released by a scholar. Against the executioner, only the dead may stand..."*

"You have found what you seek?"

"Yes," I replied. "May I buy it from you?"

He looked at me expressionlessly. "What if I said no?"

Oh, God, I thought, he wants to play games. My heart sank. Heaven preserve us from people who want to play games. The Venetian was a great one for that. Drawing things out until I wanted to beat him senseless. Baiting me. Enjoying the fact that I knew very well that *any* reaction from me would land me in the cosy confines of an Italian gaol. Or worse. But then, there *are* worse things to lose than your life, although I didn't know it at the time.

But Yeoh wasn't the Venetian. Hadn't had anything like that amount of practice. I could cope with him.

"Then I'd go," I said blandly. He held up one hand.

"Captain, I'll give you the pages you want on one condition."

"What condition?"

"You tell me what your demon's mark means."

"My—" I touched a finger to my cheekbone. "You mean this?"

"Of course, what else?"

What it means. Entirely too much. I sighed. Gave him the short answer. "It means I see ghosts, Mr Yeoh."

"And what else?" he demanded. A peculiar intensity had crept into his voice. "Can you raise the dead? Are you a necromancer, Captain da Silva?"

I did not like the way this conversation was going. “I can speak to the dead,” I said harshly. “When necessary. And then I let them return to their graves.”

“Oh, take the pages and go, Captain,” he cried out, and I almost flinched at the anguish in his tone.

“What is it?” I asked. He had closed his eyes. His shoulders drooped.

“Not one of you can help me,” he muttered. “You come, you find your precious pages, you tell me you can do nothing. And then you go. What use is western magic?”

Go, da Silva. Do as he says. But I couldn’t. I have grown, it seems, altruism. Who would’ve thought it.

“Tell me what you want.” I’m going to regret this, I know. He raised his eyes.

“I was a sailor, like you,” he said softly. “I had been married only two years when I left Hong Kong for good. I told my wife I would wait for her here. She was bringing my son to join me. Their ship went down off Ceylon. And I wait. And wait. And wait.”

A chill went down my spine. “How long have you waited?” I asked.

“A hundred and fifty-nine years,” said John Yeoh, and something clenched at my heart. Dear God.

Complications. Oh, that’s all I want. “Listen to me,” I said. “I can only raise the dead where their bodies lie. Have you tried to sail to the place where the ship went down?”

“I can’t travel. I can’t leave this city,” he muttered. “I’m more than half a ghost myself. Except that I don’t remember dying.”

I put my hand out and grasped his wrist. If he had been a ghost, I wouldn’t have been able to do that. “You’re not a ghost,” I told him. “You put a geas on yourself when you promised to wait for your wife.” He had bound himself. *Meu Deus*, I realised I’d do it myself. I *would* do it. The thought of losing Emilia... couldn’t be borne. “Listen,” I said again, “if I get through this, if I free my friends’ souls, I’ll think of a way to help you.” Don’t make promises you can’t keep, da Silva. But I would keep this one.

“Captain, I believe you,” said John Yeoh. “Now, take your manuscript.”

Any satisfaction I might have felt at recovering the missing pages turned to dust and ashes at the thought of Yeoh’s lonely vigil. I understood it. Married two years. Apart for an eternity. Every time I part from Emilia is a little death. But I’ve always come back to her, so far. We both know the risks. We live with them. John Yeoh’s wife, though— and a baby— would not. And they were the ones drowned. The same could happen to me. Any voyage could be my last, and I would never return to Emilia. I suddenly appreciated the possibility of her anxiety, and regretted my impatient thoughts earlier in the day.

And now I had put a geas on myself, as well. I needed a drink, but passed by the first bar because I heard a woman singing fado inside. Songs of love and loss were not what I wanted to hear at that moment.

In fact what I really felt like doing was getting drunk. But in the end all I had were two glasses of rather rough aguardente that I could have used to strip paint with. Smoked until my mouth felt like the bottom of *Isabella’s* hold. And then I went home.

Nothing’s ever simple. Damn it.

To my relief, *Paciência* had taken her leave. *Família* da Silva had its supper together, the first time for months. Although *Caterina*, allowed to stay up, spent more time pushing her food round her plate than eating it.

“Don’t you want that?” asked *Zé* at last. She shook her head, and he swapped plates with her and demolished her supper on top of his own. “Is there any more?”

“Were you that hungry at his age?” Emilia asked me.

“Yes,” I said, “and I didn’t have a little sister to give me extras.”

By the time Emilia and I had a chance to talk, I’d rather have forgotten the whole thing until the morning. But that wasn’t really an option. Unfortunately.

I thought she looked tired, so I carried her to the settee and found her a footstool. Then I sat down next to her and put my arm round her. Told her the story of John Yeoh’s endless wait.

“The poor man,” she said, resting her head into my shoulder and closing her eyes. I pushed straying strands of hair off her face. “Perhaps the book will have something helpful.”

“Maybe.” I wasn’t particularly keen on the idea of consulting it any further than I had to. It might not, itself, have been a grimoire, but it certainly quoted from the damned things. That felt like a step I didn’t want to take. A boundary I didn’t want to cross. As if I haven’t already crossed enough. Who are you trying to fool, da Silva? I picked up the missing pages and flipped through them. Then put them back in the *Mappa Mundi*.

Emilia took the book off my lap and turned it round so she could read the completed passage. I took the opportunity of having a free hand to light a cheroot. Eye-patch off, arm around my wife, a smoke and a glass of good *vinho tinto*. Would have been perfect except for the small matter of people having their souls stolen. And holding Emilia was entirely too distracting to concentrate on things like that. I brought my mind back to the book, sternly.

*‘The first soul shall be the soul of a venturer. It shall be gathered by the demon Mastiphal and stored in an amulet of agate. And that shall be a noble soul. And the guardian of that soul shall be the armoured one. And the soul of a venturer may only be released by a venturer. Against the armoured one, only the invulnerable may stand.’*

So far, so cryptic. But how could the soul be released? I scanned the page, and then the rest of the restored ones. Nothing. The book, damn it, told us everything but that. No, I realised. It didn’t include any instructions about the gathering or the storing, either. Maybe the *Book of Souls* did. But the *Mappa Mundi* didn’t.

“So now what?” Emilia asked. Well, right now I wanted to kiss her neck. And maybe unbutton her blouse a little. You don’t always get what you want, though.

“The woman who bought the jewels,” I said determinedly, stubbing out my cheroot in the ashtray. “Did you get an address?”

“No, she paid in cash and took the stones with her.”

“What did she look like?”

“Oh, very striking,” said Emilia. “Tall, five-ten or eleven. Expensive clothes, from Paris if I’m any judge. Too... strong-featured to be pretty. And Brazilian, I’m almost sure.”

That surprised me, though I don’t know why it should. “Well, a giantess from Brazil should be easy to find,” I said.

“Do you think she’s the one? Collecting souls?”

“She bought the stones. So she must have a copy of this *Book of Souls*. All I have to do is find a way to get hold of it.”

“And find her,” she pointed out.

“Yes. That first.”

Emilia reached up and put a hand against my face. “I know you say you always are. But be especially careful. She steals souls.”

I covered her hand with mine. “I know,” I said. “If I promise to be careful, will you promise not to worry?”

“Not in this lifetime,” she said softly.

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“You see that girl?” The other two men, an Italian called Angelotti and a tall African who went by the name of Benjamin— although that was mainly because most of the crew couldn’t pronounce his real name— obediently looked in the direction indicated. More to ogle the girl than to do what Ortigão said, true. She was worth looking at, though. Tall and slender with a mass of curly black hair. “She’s waiting for me.”

“Not a chance,” said Angelotti. Benjamin merely laughed derisively.

Ortigão treated his crewmates to a rude gesture, and flashed his teeth at them. “And that’s all you know,” he said. Raising his voice, he called, “Luzia.” She turned. A brilliant smile lit up her face, and she waved to him.

“Poor girl,” said Benjamin, judiciously. “And she so pretty, too.”

“What do you mean, poor girl?” Ortigão demanded, in an indignant tone.

Deadpan, Benjamin said, “Man, she obviously insane.” Angelotti snorted with laughter.

“Oh, you can take the piss all you like,” said Ortigão smugly, smoothing his hair. “But I don’t see anyone waiting for either of you.” And he sauntered off.

“There goes a man with a girl in every port,” Angelotti said ruefully. “Do *you* know what they see in him?” Benjamin shrugged. “No, on account of I ain’t got tits.”

Angelotti spat into the water and leaned on the rail, glumly contemplating the unfathomability of women, until Harris came and told them in conversational tones to shift their asses before he put a bomb under them.

“Miserable bastard,” muttered Angelotti, mutinously. “Don’t he ever smile?”

“It his time of the month,” Benjamin said, earning another cackle from the Italian. It was commonly, if tacitly, acknowledged that Harris turned into a wolf at the full moon. Mostly, the crew was perversely proud of this fact.

“Hush up,” Angelotti hissed, knowing how acute the third mate’s hearing was, “he’ll hear you.” But Harris’s attention, he saw, had gone into a kind of *listening* pose, For just a minute, he thought the American was, literally, miles away.

Harris, however, was staring closely at the woman, who was now embracing Ortigão with singular enthusiasm.

*Something’s wrong. I look at her and she’s just a pretty girl. Then I look again and it’s like something rotten. I can smell something foul, down deep inside my soul. If I have a soul anymore. That’s three times now. I gotta talk to the skipper. He sighed. But now I gotta get below, before that goddamn sun goes all the way down.*

*Or perhaps I oughta follow them.*

Warning pain lanced through him, catching him off-guard as it always did. Harris winced, and trotted to his cabin. But this time he did not, as was his usual habit, fasten the restraining collar round his neck. Nor did he lock the door.

Then the agonising change began, like having all his bones shattered with sledgehammers. Something that was neither Harris nor wolf writhed on the cabin floor for an interminable time, and then coalesced into lupine form.

He never knew how long the process took, was always surprised that his wolf-self comprehended the concept of time at all. But he thought Ortigão and his girl— or the thing that purported to be his girl— would not have gone far.

Sensory overload, as always, disoriented him for a good few seconds, the sense of sight now negligible but hearing and scent bursting with the brightness and clamour of the sun. Panting, he waited for things to steady, and then loped off in pursuit of the lovers.

It didn’t take him long to find them, since they had merely gravitated to the nearest secluded spot they could find. Harris, as wolf, observed them dispassionately through the scent of arousal, wet noises of lips and tongues, and harsh breathing, but Ed Harris would probably have been a little shocked. This was, supposedly, a young lady of good family whom Ortigão was pawing, and more than pawing.

For a few moments he was inclined to doubt his earlier ideas, sensing nothing of the rottenness which had alerted him. But then he caught it, masked by other odours but unmistakable: a scent like old blood, of rotting flesh. A smell which was also, in some indefinable way, unclean. It made him feel soiled.

Harris-wolf let his perceptions expand, not an ability he could ever explain either in lupine or in human form. His hackles rose, and a growl formed in his throat; he bared his teeth, the wolf’s reaction to danger. He skulked back into the shadows that hid him from human eyes, disbelieving what his senses showed him.

The woman’s real shape wasn’t remotely human. He could feel it, as an aura: something monstrous, something predatory. Now it seemed feline, pard-like; now winged like an eagle. The beating of those wings would raise gales in the great void, the unfathomable abyss that lies behind all human fears. Would make a wind blow to strike terror into the heart of any sailor. It was the trade which drove Vanderdecken’s haunted ship, the storm that sent vessels out beyond the winds of the world into unknown seas, never to return.

How could Ortigão not sense it? How could any man be sunk so far in lust as to ignore the fact that his soul was in peril?

Snarling a threat, Harris-wolf tried to move closer. And found himself quite unable to move. It was not fear

that transfixed him, but some kind of terrible paralysis that rooted him to the spot as the aura of the thing that wore Luzia Verdinho's image *swelled* like the huge slow building of a monstrous wave. With a growl, he strained against the force in desperation, but it was too strong. The wolf was helpless in front of a predator far greater than himself.

He did not need sight to perceive it. It bruised his senses like a buffeting wind, growing brutally huge, bulging and pulsating. Somewhere in its centre, a thing that was neither woman in form, nor leopard, nor eagle, put out from its maw a long thin spike and thrust it through Pedro Ortigão's chest. The point emerged from his back with a wet sucking sound, and his body convulsed once. Harris-wolf smelt the stink of voided bowels. It was such a human odour that it served to anchor him somehow, as the force which had held the young man upright dissipated, letting its victim fall to the ground.

Sure that Ortigão was dead, Harris cautiously tried to move. Found he could. He approached the body, and sniffed it; then sneezed in perplexity. Not only was the sailor still alive and breathing, if stertorously, but there was no scent of blood anywhere on him. Puzzled, he backed away.

As wolf, Harris did not entertain vocalised thoughts in his mind, but an impression of his captain was urgently there. He knew, though, that he would have to wait until he regained human shape before acting on that. For now, he could at least drag the unfortunate Ortigão's unconscious body back to *Isabella*. If the doctor was sober the boy might even get some medical treatment. On the other hand, O'Rourke would probably attempt to treat him anyway, not a hopeful prospect.

Seizing Ortigão's collar between his teeth, he began to pull him across the cobblestones.

The sailor's collar felt dry and nasty in his mouth, making him salivate in reaction. There was also the memory of a taint about him, the spoor of the thing that had attacked him. The echo of its foulness drifted on the air, unseen, unsensed by people with only normal perceptions. And pulling the dead weight was awkward. He had to stop twice and rest, panting, crouching nervously in the moonlight, wary of being seen. Humans, he knew from having been one—and still, of course, passing for one most of the time—tended to shoot first and ask questions later. If at all. The fact that any bullet he took was unlikely to be a silver one was not any great comfort. The lead kind still hurt like the devil.

On the other hand, as da Silva had observed, he knew how to make himself difficult to notice, and anyone glancing in his direction might only see shadows and moonlight. He made *Isabella*'s mooring without incident, and barked gruffly (feeling this rather beneath his lupine dignity) to attract the attention of a seaman who was smoking by the rail and singing quietly to himself. He did not need his expanded senses to identify the sailor as Benjamin, because the latter's curiously sweet tenor voice was unmistakable.

"What's up?" called the tall crewman softly.

"Or'iga'." Harris's wolf-mouth and throat were not designed for human speech. "Si-ch," he added by way of explanation.

"Right," Benjamin's voice floated back.

Satisfied, Harris-wolf padded off into the night, the urge to hunt upon him. Even if all he found was the odd rat, which he would regret when he regained his human form. It was better than chaining himself in his cabin.

Benjamin could have lifted Ortigão with ease, but declined to soil his clothes. Instead he enlisted the aid of a crewmate, a lanky Liverpudlian known as Tiny Jim for some unknown reason. Since he was neither tiny, nor had he been christened James. Together they rigged up a canvas stretcher and lugged the unconscious man to the doctor's cabin.

O'Rourke was already very redolent of alcohol, but his hands were steady. No-one aboard, including the captain, had ever seen him *appear* at all drunk. But Benjamin reckoned he was about ninety per cent proof.

He was not pleased at the intrusion.

"Jaysus, what's the stink?" he demanded in the stage-Irish accent he sometimes affected. "Who's been taking a bath in the bloody bilges?" He looked at his patient more closely. "Mary, mother o' God, could ye not have cleaned him up, now?"

“It ain’t my job,” said Tiny Jim succinctly, then jerked his head at Benjamin and added, “and it ain’t his watch.”

“Well, get one o’ the bloody ’prentices to do it!” O’Rourke snapped, rather hoping that Zé would get landed with this unpleasant duty. Something deep down in his republican soul resented the captain’s having employed his son on board, though nobody could ever have accused da Silva of nepotism. Wanting to keep an eye on the boy, yes. Favoritism, no.

It fell to Felipe, *Isabella’s* other ’prentice, therefore, who chalked up another reason for disliking the ship’s doctor. But even clean and laid on his bunk, Ortigão defied all O’Rourke’s attempts to rouse him and lay there snoring like a hog, his face the colour of ash.

In the morning, Harris woke in his cabin, lying naked on the floor, with a foul taste in his mouth. *Goddamn rats.* He lit a cigarette to take the taint away, and struggled into his clothes. The world’s worst hangover hammered in his head. *And I didn’t even take a drink.* All his muscles felt stretched, and his joints ached. Hips, knees, neck, clicked as he dressed, painfully. *Wonder if werewolves get arthritis? Don’t suppose one’s ever lived long enough to find out.* He peered at his face in the mirror and grimaced at his reflection, seeing as usual after a wolf-night, about three days’ growth of beard. At other times it was slow to appear.

He went to beg hot water from João, *Isabella’s* cook, and bumped into Benjamin, who was lurking outside his cabin.

“The doctor, he say Pedro have a seizure,” the African said, stepping back from the mate’s glowering expression. It was common knowledge among the crew that Harris was always like a bear with a sore head on his mornings-after. Or, of course, in his case, a wolf with a sore head. Either way, not to be messed with.

*Does he think I’m gonna bite him? Yeah, probably. I might, at that.*

“That’s just doctor-talk for ‘I don’t know squat’,” growled Harris. *Makes two of us. What the hell was that thing that attacked him? Come to that, what the hell did it do to him? What did it want? Will it come back for someone else?* Benjamin flinched away from the memory in his eyes, looking warily at him.

“We need to tell the captain,” he suggested.

“Yeah, I know. I’m on it,” Harris reassured him.

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Harris at my door. Something’s wrong. Oh yes, as if you didn’t know that already, da Silva. Moreover, Harris, the morning after a night spent *changed*: shaved, neat, alert. Serious, even. But then he always looks serious. Me, I look debauched. I know, because I’d just been about to have a shave myself. Hadn’t got as far as lather when he arrived. Hadn’t even, to be honest, got around to brushing my increasingly annoying hair. I rubbed my chin, pointlessly. Lit a cheroot, and stuffed my hands in my pockets.

“What’s happened?” I asked, a bit grimly. And the minute he said Ortigão’s name, I knew.

*The third soul shall be the soul of a lover.* God. The collector had three, already. I sighed, scratched at my eyebrow in frustration. And I’ve still got no idea how to free them. Or even, come to that, how to *find* them.

10.400

## 3

Harris loomed in the parlour. He's good at that, being about the size of a young bear. He's as ill-at-ease as a wild animal, too, twisting his cap in his hands. I think I make him slightly nervous, which is odd if you look at the size of him compared to me. But then, he has seen me blow a werewolf's brains out. One which he'd knocked off me himself. I made him sit down so he didn't dwarf the room quite so much.

"You saw what happened?" I asked him.

"Saw, ain't quite the right word," he said. "Witnessed it, yeah. It... sucked something right outa him. Then just left him lying there. Like it ate the fruit and left the peel behind, I guess." He looked down at his hands. "It was the same kind of dirty stink as the other times. You reckon it's done it before? 'Cause I do."

I looked at him thoughtfully. Knew I could trust him. Didn't know whether it was fair to involve him. Or, on the other hand, whether it was fair not to. Since I've known all three victims so far. "It's not the same thing, Harris," I told him. "It's been a different one each time. And they're stealing souls."

"Stealing," he repeated. "You mean, they can be gotten back?"

"In theory."

"What's stealing 'em?"

"Demons," I said. He grimaced, obviously not liking the idea. Então, neither do I.

"What's going on, skipper?" he asked. As if I'm some kind of an oracle. Of course, I could tell him about the gatherer of souls, but not the how or the why. Why would someone want to manufacture a perfect man? I thought uncomfortably of the Russian witch, Tatiana Dimitrova, who had made herself a golem for a servant. And, I suspected, more than a servant. But that wasn't a thought I wanted to pursue.

It *had* been a woman who bought the stones, though. Another witch? Meu Deus, I thought, how many of them are there in Lisbon?

"Someone," I said slowly, after taking a final drag from my cheroot and grinding the end out in an ashtray, "someone wants to collect seven souls."

"For God's sake, why?" he demanded. I sighed. I was going to have to tell him. So what? You knew that all along, da Silva.

"Give me five minutes, Harris," I said. Had to shave, at least. "I'll come back to *Isabella* with you." Without breakfast. Ah well. I can pick up a *bica* on the way. An injection of caffeine always helps.

Emilia looked round in alarm, hairbrush stilled in her hand, as I interrupted her toilette. "What is it?" Catching my reflection in her mirror, I realised why she looked concerned. Attempted to look less forbidding.

"Don't worry," I said, trying for a reassuring tone. Perched beside her on the long padded seat. She put out her forefinger and touched the scar on my cheekbone. Somehow, when she does that, it's pleasant. I put my hand over hers.

"It's happened again, hasn't it?"

"Yes. One of the crew."

"I'm sorry."

I moved her hand so I could kiss her fingers. "I have to go."

"Who was it?" she asked.

"A lad called Ortigão." Emilia grew still. "What?"

"Is his Christian name Pedro?"

"Yes, why?"

"He's Paciência's daughter's boyfriend."

Damn. Should I tell her? I squeezed her hand. "Then Paciência should put her foot down," I said. "Because he really does have a girl in every port."

She seemed unsurprised. "I'll tell her." Her other hand went into my hair. "Did you have a girl in every port, Luís?"

"No," I said. It was only ever Emilia. Mostly.

“Really?” she said with a smile, tugging my hair. “I thought you had one in Rio, before we got married.”

Rio, I thought. A chill went through me. And not at Emilia’s intuition, either. At the thought of a Brazilian woman, buying gems for amulets. Collecting souls?

“How old was the woman who bought the stones from you?” Yet Tatiana Dimitrova had said three years ago: All your other lovers are dead... Was Dona Elvira dead?

“Twenty-eight, thirty, maybe— What, Luís?”

The past. Like I said, it doesn’t die. Just when you think you’ve caulked and sealed against it, back it comes, seeping through the cracks you didn’t know you’d left. And then you start to go down. This woman was too young, thank God. But I knew, with a sinking certainty, that the past has come back to haunt me. Again.

A bit distractedly, I said, “Revenge.” Her brother had said it himself. *Don’t think I’ll forget, da Silva*. How old would he be, now? Seventy, seventy-five? The woman could be his daughter, then: Elvira’s niece. I hadn’t known she had one. Hell, I hadn’t known until the day of the funeral that her husband had a brother. Let alone one who would let his grievance stew for twenty years.

“What are you talking about?” Emilia said. I looked at her a little ruefully. A little shamefacedly. Bite the bullet, da Silva.

“I did have an affair in Rio,” I said. “And now I think her brother’s come after me.”

“After all this time?” Bless you, Emilia. No recriminations. She didn’t even let go of my hand. “Do you think he’d go to so much trouble?”

I thought about Francisco Domingues Batista, the last time I had seen him. The only time I had seen him. “Yes,” I said slowly. “I think he would.”

Emilia put her arms round me. I reciprocated. Then she said, “So don’t ever think I’m worrying too much again.”

We sat without speaking for a moment. Until I couldn’t put it off any longer. I disengaged reluctantly, and stood up. “Harris will think I’ve run away.”

In fact, Harris was entertaining Zé. Well, *entertaining* is stretching it a bit, perhaps. I don’t know what they were talking about. Zé’s grin was a little too fixed, and he leapt to his feet like a stag when I came through the door. I raised an eyebrow at him.

“Ready, Harris?” I enquired.

“Sure, skipper,” he said, lumbering out of his chair.

Zé was hovering by the door. Obviously torn between the instinct of civility and the desire to make himself scarce. He looked from me to Harris and back again.

“Go on, then, before I cancel your shore leave,” I told him, trying not to smile. He didn’t need telling twice, although he remembered to be polite. Just about.

“*Adeus*, Sr Harris,” he said, smartly, and was gone.

Harris listened to my narrative without comment. Even when I was done, he only remarked, “Things sure do happen around you, skipper.”

I didn’t reply. It’s usually the English who think that a conversation can usefully consist of stating the blindingly obvious. Which is not to say that I never do it myself, of course. Just not all the time. I went on smoking, watching the quick and the dead we passed on the narrow ways. A few hovering ghosts. Women hanging out their washing, like an arcane signalling system. Cats and dogs, the former searching for spots in the sun as it rose high enough, and haughtily ignoring the latter. Children running here and there, lost in their own worlds. Some of them were ghosts, too.

Things, as Harris called them, that have happened to me before were different. They weren’t instigated by someone who had a personal grudge against me. Apart from the Venetian, of course, and he was dead by then. On the whole they haven’t required me to think very much, either. Not like this, which was turning into a kind of odyssey. Hunt the grimoire. Find the grimoire, to be more precise. Not that I even knew where to start. Ah well. At least I admit my shortcomings.

“The first thing to do is find that woman,” I said.

“I guess I could track her,” Harris offered. I looked at him, startled, furious at myself for not thinking of it. *Meu Deus*, of course he could. Anything else under your nose that you’ve managed to miss, *da Silva*?

“Don’t you need her scent?”

“She’s been in your wife’s workroom,” he said. “I can pick her out. That is, if your good lady don’t mind having a... wolf in there.”

“She knows about you,” I pointed out.

“Yeah, maybe, but she ain’t never seen me changed.” He had a point. Two hundred-plus pounds of werewolf is rather a shock the first time you see it. And the second. And— well, you get the idea. You don’t, precisely, ever get used to it.

“Well, let’s say she knows you won’t bite her,” I said.

“Hah,” said Harris. I think it was a laugh. It was difficult to tell, because it didn’t sound very amused and he didn’t smile. But then he never does. So that might have been the *Harrisian* equivalent of hysteria, for all I knew.

“Y’know, skipper,” he went on thoughtfully, as if an idea had just struck him, “I kinda think I might have seen her already.”

“You do?” I asked, giving my eyebrow a scratch and watching the ghost of an enormously fat man who had probably died from the heat on a day like today. It was barely ten in the morning but I was already starting to sweat.

“Tall, dark... yeah, I know. Not much to go on. But now I think about it, I reckon she was watching *Isabella*.”

“When was this?”

“Yesterday,” Harris said. “I guess I didn’t really take a lot of notice, but I musta seen her half a dozen times during the day.”

Who was she? I was only guessing at *Dona Elvira*’s niece. *Batista* was probably fifty back then, maybe more. Plenty of men become fathers at fifty. On the other hand, perhaps the woman was his wife. Women of thirty have been known to marry men of seventy. Though in those cases, she’s probably more interested in the size of his wallet. And if he thinks anything else, he’s deluding himself. Which men do, all of the time.

My rather fruitless speculations were interrupted by someone calling my name. I turned to see, without much surprise— more with resignation— another old acquaintance from Rio. Bring them all on, I thought. The more the merrier.

This man had nothing to do with *Batista*, though. He brought back other memories, for I had met him on the *Venetian*’s business. He was an antiquarian, a book collector with a reputation for being able to find rare volumes. An Englishman, long resident in Brazil, by the name of *Montague Pierce*. The *Venetian* had sent me to his shop while I was in Rio on other business for him. To ask whether *Pierce* had, or could get, certain books. Books which I now know were grimoires. In those days, though, I didn’t know much about magic. Not that I do now, really. But it hadn’t taken me long to guess that was how he saw me kill his brother.

Twenty years on, *Pierce*’s fair hair and beard showed little grey. So there is an advantage. Put up with sunburn all your life and you can go grey without anyone noticing. But for a few more lines in his face, a little extra gauntness, he still looked like a bleached grandee. And he still spoke Portuguese like an Englishman.

“It is you, *da Silva*. I wasn’t sure.” He extended a hand, and I shook it. “And a captain now. Been in the wars, I see.”

“*Pierce*,” I said. Introduced *Harris* (in English), who nodded politely enough. I lit a cheroot and looked curiously at the antiquarian. A living ghost among all the dead around him. Which he couldn’t see, of course.

“What brings you to Lisbon?” I asked.

“Oh, it’s a long story,” he said dismissively. Then smiled. “But an interesting one, if you have half an hour.”

Of course it was no coincidence. “As a matter of fact, *Pierce*, I could use the services of an antiquarian,” I said, and pulled out my watch. “I have some ship’s business to attend to, but let’s meet later. One o’clock?”

“By all means,” he said, looking rather startled. Perhaps he hadn’t expected me to take his bait. If that’s what it was. “Ah... where’s a good place to meet? Or even eat?”

“There’s a place called São Salvador,” that I tend to patronise. I told him how to find it.

“I’ll see you later, then,” he said, and we shook hands again.

What the hell was he doing here? I wondered. I’d find out soon enough. But it’s too damned convenient, and I don’t like it. I don’t like the feeling that events were being manipulated. That *I* was being manipulated. I shrugged. Ah well. Nothing I could do about it now. Play the cards you’re dealt, da Silva. Pierce might be able to help. Might even be willing to help. I wiped sweat off my face.

“Skipper,” said Harris suddenly, and I whirled round at the urgency in his voice, hand automatically reaching towards my knife.

“What?”

“That woman, I’ve just seen her.”

“Where?” I snapped. He started to run. I swore, and followed. He’s got longer legs than me. But he’s also carrying a lot more weight, so I kept up well enough. We rounded a corner a minute later and I saw, just slipping out of sight, not the woman I had expected, but something that moved very much like the armoured figure I fought two nights ago. I put on a spurt of speed I didn’t know I had, and gave chase, but it was no good.

Harris caught me up a moment later as I stood trying to get my breath back. Sailors don’t do a lot of running. Well, there isn’t much call for it on board ship. Not to mention no room for it, either. So I was pretty much puffed, red-faced and sweating like a stevedore. Swearing like one, too. I’d have liked to get some answers out of that character.

“Athletic kinda female,” panted Harris, coming to a halt like a steam-engine.

I nodded, and lit a cheroot, wishing I could continue in pursuit. But right now I had other matters to attend to. Getting Ortigão somewhere he could be looked after. Finding out if anyone else had seen— or felt— anything. And so on.

Of course, it all took much longer than I anticipated. Doesn’t everything? Consequently it was twenty past one when I finally managed to get to my rendezvous with Pierce. Half-expecting to find he’d got fed up with waiting and disappeared. But no, there he was, keeping a bottle of wine warm. With two glasses. Seated at a table jammed into a corner under a huge tiled *azulejo* mural of a caravel in blue and white. I fought my way to join him. The place was noisy, hot, smoke-filled. Smelled of garlic, fish frying, tobacco. It was, in a word, alive. I slid into the chair next to Pierce and lit up. Poured myself a glass of wine. He followed suit.

“So, what are you doing in Lisbon?” I asked him again. A waiter put a plate of *amêijoas* in front of him, and I interrupted myself to order some grilled octopus.

“Well,” said Pierce when the waiter had gone, sampling a clam, “you remember back in ninety-two when your boss wanted to know if I could get some books for him?” I nodded. Thinking ruefully of myself at twenty-four. When you think you’re going to live for ever. I shook the uneasy memories away and took a mouthful of wine. Pierce wrinkled his nose, as if he’d found something bad. Saw my quizzical look, and smiled briefly. “No, there’s nothing wrong with the food! I was remembering some of the books he wanted. Nasty books. Not the sort of thing I’d normally want to touch, you know.”

“Grimoires,” I supplied, and he looked up from his plate, surprised. I raised an eyebrow at him. Enigmatic, da Silva. Yes, well. Got to maintain appearances.

“Yes,” he agreed. “Fairly obscure, some of them. And one I had never even heard of, which intrigued me.”

All of a sudden I wanted to laugh. I drank some more wine instead. Then I pointed my cheroot at him and said, “Don’t tell me. Something called the *Book of Souls*. By a monk whose name I can’t remember.”

Pierce’s mouth dropped open, and he closed it quickly. Followed up by stuffing some more clams into it. “How on earth did you hear about the *Book of Souls*?”

“That’s also a long story,” I said, scratching thoughtfully at my cheekbone. “You tell me yours, and I’ll tell you mine.”

He laughed shortly. "I spent the next twenty years looking for it," he said. "Della Quercia offered me a fortune for it, if I could find a copy."

"He's dead," I pointed out, watching him eat. Thinking about demons. Then, and now.

"I know," Pierce said. "But I thought that if he was willing to pay that much for it, someone else would. And I was right."

"You have a buyer?" The waiter brought my *polvos*. I pointed at the wine bottle, and he nodded before bustling off. "How much did he offer?" I asked Pierce, draining my glass.

"Two and a half thousand American dollars," he replied, downing half his own wine in one swallow. "Nearly a thousand guineas in English money. And that's twice as much as Della Quercia offered me."

"Mother of God!" I exclaimed, staring at him.

"Yes," said Pierce, with a thin smile, and returned his attention to his plate. I did likewise, stunned by the amount of money. After a moment, he went on. "I eventually managed to discover that the tradition that brought the book to Brazil with a member of Cabral's crew was correct. The man's name was Vicente Batista."

He divided the remains of the wine between our glasses. The waiter brought a replacement bottle and removed the empty one. I stubbed out my cheroot.

"So it did survive," I remarked, forking up a couple of small octopuses.

"Only partially," Pierce said. "The general opinion seems to be that it's been quite badly damaged. Which would push the price down, of course." Was his motive purely monetary, I wondered. Or did he want the book, as I did, for another reason?

"And you think the book's in Lisbon?" I asked.

"Yes. As soon as I realised Sr Domingues Batista must have it, I tried to contact him. Only to find that he'd left for Lisbon two days earlier."

"What makes you think he has it with him?"

The Englishman finished his plateful and looked at me, eyebrows elevated. "Because it's worth a lot of money," he said. "Now all I have to do is find him."

I know a wolf that can do that for you, I thought, hiding a smile and taking another mouthful of wine. "And what makes you think that Batista can be persuaded to part with this book? If he knows how much it's worth."

"Oh, I'm not too concerned about that. Not when my— customer is willing to pay that much. Every man has his price," he added, resorting to cliché. I wondered if that was really true. I had paid mine, but that hadn't been in money.

"You haven't told me why this book is worth so much. Or why some people think it is." Which is the same thing, really.

"For its spells, of course," said Pierce. "If you believe that sort of thing."

"Do you?" I asked. He laughed, self-consciously.

"Yes, I suppose so. They're supposed to be more powerful than any 'that was or will be'. For instance, some people believe that if anyone succeeded in working a spell called 'the perfect man' could quite literally have the power to rule the world."

Fork halfway to my mouth, I said, idiotically, "What?"

Pierce grimaced. "Of course," he said, "there's a drawback. You understand all this is purely theoretical?" I nodded, since he seemed to expect some kind of response and I had my mouth full. "There's a school of thought which believes a spell that powerful would upset the equilibrium. That it would be an act so unnatural it could destroy the world's balance."

Despite the heat, I felt as if someone had tipped ice water down my back. "Meaning what, precisely?"

"Well, chaos, you know. I mean, I'm guessing— but I suppose, earthquakes. Tidal waves. War, famine. Unprecedented destruction."

"And after that?"

"There is no after that."

Apocalypse.

Finding my mouth was dry, I finished the wine in my glass. Refilled it. Refilled Pierce's too. He watched me, a slight frown on his face. He didn't know, of course. I had to tell him.

"Pierce, he's working the spell. He's already gathered three of the souls."

The antiquarian's pale face turned even whiter. When he reached for his glass, his hand was shaking. "He has to be stopped."

And there you have it: the Englishman at moments of crisis. Reverting to type, and stating the bloody obvious.

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Leaving the skinny tall tilted house with its mismatched windows and tile-patched facade which he was beginning, despite himself, to think of as a second home. Sebastião Fernandes da Silva returned Emilia's wave and set off into the maze that was the Alfama. He walked with a spring in his step despite seventy-six years and sciatica: he was almost happy. He had suddenly acquired a family. Painting Emilia made him happy. Entertaining Caterina made him happy, if a little exhausted. José—Zé—confused him a little, but then the boy was fourteen years old, and so that was only to be expected.

Thinking of his son, though, dredged up such a mixture of emotions that he almost wished he hadn't gone down to the quayside to meet *Isabella*. Try as he might, he couldn't feel any connection to the stranger Luís da Silva now was. Could those thirty years ever be bridged? He didn't know. Wasn't even sure his son wanted to try. Though he himself regretted those lost years with a bitter, nostalgic ache.

What made it worse, not better, was that he knew and understood why Luís had run away to sea.

María. His wife. His late wife. Now with God, where he presumed she wanted to be. Whom he had jokingly called Santa María when they were much younger, before the joke became too painfully real. Who had never in her entire life taken pleasure in anything, her Christianity being more of the mortification-of-the-flesh variety than the praise-God-for-all-our-blessings kind. She was a penniless aristocrat's daughter who had married an up-and-coming artist and turned him into a kind of ecclesiastical interior decorator.

And his son saw ghosts: what was he to make of that?

Sunk in his thoughts, old regrets, new faint growths of hope, the old man failed to notice his follower.

It looked like a young girl, fifteen or sixteen perhaps. You wouldn't have taken her for a whore: she was too modestly dressed, though her clothes appeared old and much-mended. Her bare feet were dirty, but her plain peasant face was clean. She didn't have the look of a beggar or—quite—of a gypsy. Her neat movements were like those of a dancer, graceful, precise. Perhaps, seeing her stealthy pursuit of the old man, you might have thought her a pickpocket. But she was not seeking to steal from him. At least, not at that moment. And not anything so mundane as money.

Skipping nimbly past him, she slipped a coin into his jacket pocket, and tripped off without his even having noticed her. He was too lost inside himself.

Marked, the old man continued on his way home.

All of a sudden, he felt uneasy, and glanced around, but saw nothing that might have triggered an awareness of danger. But it was if, between one heartbeat and the next, the world had changed. From something familiar into something threatening. A drop of sweat trickled down his temple: he mopped it absently with his handkerchief.

The sense of being watched, when he was no longer being watched—at least, not by anything he was capable of seeing—stayed with him all the way home like the heat of the sun beating on his head even through his hat, souring the day for him.

As he put his key in the front door, he saw the corner of a paper poking out from the letterbox. Some kind of handbill, he supposed. Probably political. He opened the door, and pulled it out, leaving a corner of the page stuck in the flap, caught by the spring.

Shutting the door behind him, he stared at the paper in perplexity. It seemed to have been torn out of a book, and showed, inexplicably, a crude woodcut of a man trudging along a road by the light of the moon. This walk-

er was being pursued by a demonic figure, depicted in unusually foul detail. Under the picture were the words, in English, “And turns no more his head.”

Offended as much by the draughtsmanship as by the subject matter, he crumpled the page in his hand and threw it into the wastepaper bin.

Behind him in the empty hall, something laughed.

He whirled round. Nothing. Of course, nothing. The palms of his hands were wet. Sweat crawled in his hair. Angrily, he called his housekeeper’s name, though fully aware that she would not be there at this time of day. His voice seemed to echo strangely in the hallway.

And then, again, the laughter. This time, he thought it came from upstairs. He felt his heart pounding, his breath coming short. Though he had no history of heart disease, the idea crossed his mind. He was, after all, seventy-six years old. So, too old to be starting at shadows. Of which there were none. It was broad daylight.

Deliberately, he calmed his breathing. Did not mount the stairs, but walked, instead, into what had once been the parlour but was now inhabited by canvases and sweet with the redolence of linseed oil, the sharpness of turpentine: the scent of a painterly vinaigrette.

This was his home ground. Here, he had the advantage.

Or so he told himself.

Shutting the door, he turned round slowly. In the centre of the room stood a young girl with a strangely sweet smile, a street-urchin by the look of her, holding a device that looked a bit like an orrery.

Disarmed, he forgot to be scared for a moment. Until he looked into her eyes. “Who are you?” he asked, shuddering at what he saw there.

“My name is not important,” she replied, in a hollow reverberating voice which struck a chill into him. It held the stench of the tomb and the dread of dying inherent in its timbre. “But it is written on the coin in your pocket.”

But there was no coin— oh. He drew it out, but could not read the strange script. Tried to put it down, but it adhered to his hand in some foul sticky way. He found his knees were shaking.

“What is that you’re holding?” he whispered.

She moved a small lever on the side of the device, and the thing that was not an orrery began to rotate. It made a strange low whirring sound with echoes so deep that he felt a jarring deep down in his bones.

“A machine for gathering souls,” said the demon.

And gathered his, into the maelstrom it produced.

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As wolf, I have to admit Harris is impressive. He makes a lot of wolf. In my *house* he was even more ill-at-ease than in his human shape. I watched him snuffling at Emilia’s workbench and wondered whether this would work. And what the hell I was going to do if it did. His eyes gleamed yellow in the gaslight, almost like gemstones themselves.

Then he stopped his restless padding and grew still. I felt my scalp prickle with anticipation, and stuck a finger under my eye-patch to clear out some of the moisture. It had been a sweltering day, and now it was a hot night.

“Go’ i’, ski’er,” he said indistinctly.

“You’re sure?” Stupid question. He jerked his head. A nod, I presumed. “All right, let’s go.”

The moon rode above us, huge. Everything was black and white. I followed the werewolf through the narrow sloping alleys, and not a soul we passed took a blind bit of notice. Perhaps we looked like a man taking his dog for a walk. Yes, sure, and I’m the President of Portugal. Harris stands as high as my waist.

And he had felt another demon, that day. Has Batista got four now?

He loped down a flight of steps, trailing ghosts like smoke, leaving me behind. Now, of course, he hasn’t got longer legs than me. Just twice as many. “Slow down,” I called urgently. He stopped at the bottom, impatient. Looked up at me with his big yellow eyes. Blinked once.

Two men came out of an opening in the wall and walked straight past him. Came up the steps, talking in

undertones, and walked straight past me. I gaped. Harris's wolf-jaws seemed to grin, and I shut my mouth with a snap and ran down the rest of the steps, understanding at last that we were both hidden from casual sight by whatever "don't-look-at-me" power he possessed. Ghosts drifted past, unconcerned, but then I'm not sure most of them are aware enough to see the living anyway. The recent dead sometimes react to people they know, but that's usually it. Though they have proved useful, in the past.

Leaving the Alfama, we passed into the Baixa, which they say was rebuilt to be earthquake-proof. I'd rather not have had that thought. It reminded me a little too much of Montague Pierce's terrifying words.

I hadn't told Pierce about the mystery woman. Nor that I intended to track her with the aid of a werewolf. There are times when it's better to keep your mouth shut. However, I *had* told him that I thought I could locate Batista. Just not how.

There were more people around here, out in search of food or drink or less innocent things. But all of them passed by without a second glance. A useful talent, this. Especially so close to the Rossio. Which is always crowded.

The wolf-Harris moved through the night as if it was his element, and it parted like the Red Sea for Moses. I merely followed in his wake, thinking about how most werewolf folklore was just plain wrong. Apart from his size and reddish fur, Harris looks just like a normal wolf, not some kind of human-lupine blend. And no, you can't identify one in human form by the eyebrows. The unfortunate Ortigão's eyebrows meet in the middle, and he's certainly not a werewolf. A wolf, yes, granted. Just ask any woman he's met.

Most important of all— at least to me— you don't change into a werewolf if all one of them does is bite you. I know, because I've been bitten by one. Admittedly I did wash the bite with holy water a few minutes later. But I was more worried about getting rabies from it. Anyway, I don't turn furry at full moon. I think Emilia would've noticed.

We started going uphill again. I guessed we were heading for the Bairro Alto, and wondered to myself whether anyone would notice a werewolf on the funicular. Though I imagined we wouldn't actually be taking the funicular this evening. Great news, another hill to climb.

Cities at night are quite different from their daytime counterpart. They shed their facades and fill up with different crowds. Their noises are different, their smells. Their sights, too, but after dark you have to rely more on your other senses. Much as Harris, as wolf, has to. You have to adapt. Because if you can't, you're done for. Night-time makes were-creatures of us all.

We came to the earthquake-ruined Convento do Carmo and its thronging phantoms. Harris stopped, so suddenly I almost ran into him. "What is it?" I asked softly.

He rolled his eyes at me. If I can give a wolf a human expression, he looked frustrated. Then he blew out a breath: *fff!* and said "'oro'd."

"Followed?" I interpreted. He nodded, grimly. The Largo do Carmo was empty. I took out my knife anyway. Nervous, da Silva? Well, yes, but it's always better to be prepared. Harris started to walk again, a little more slowly this time. I kept pace with him, nerves tingling.

And then there was a gunshot. I ducked instinctively, heard the whine of the bullet, heard it smack into the wall beside me. It had damn nearly taken off my ear. "Run!" I barked at Harris, taking to my heels. The shot was followed by a second, and the wolf gave a yelping scream and I actually saw a spray of blood fly up from his haunch as he staggered to one side with the force of it. I swore in alarm, but he scrambled up and limped after me as I slid round a corner. Put my knife away and took out my own gun. Where had the shots come from?

I knelt beside Harris, who had collapsed. Put my hand on the wolf's heaving side. We were in deep shadow, and apparently out of sight of the sniper. Since he wasn't shooting any more. Well observed, da Silva. "Can you walk?" I whispered.

The wolf grunted in pain. "D'n-no."

Oh, thank you very much, I thought. Now I'm going to have to carry the werewolf. As if it's not bad enough toting heavyweight priests about. Harris turned his wolf-head and snapped at the wound. Narrowly missing my

hand, which I had just moved to wipe sweat off my face. “Hey!” I said, indignantly.

But we can’t sit here till the sniper comes to find us. I got cautiously to my feet. My knee was beginning to protest a bit. I paid it the compliment of a wince, then ignored it. Inched to the corner and peered cautiously round. Nothing. Good. I peered at the wall until I spotted the mark the first bullet had made, and looked up at the building it must have come from. Its name, by the door on painted tiles, was *A Casa dos Quatro Ventos*, House of the Four Winds. All its windows shuttered, now. No way of telling know whether they have been all along. I moved back round the corner, out of sight. Just in case.

There’s nothing like being shot at to heighten your senses. I could hear Harris breathing. Hell, I could hear my heart beating. And then I could hear footsteps. I backed to the wall and raised my gun. My hand was slippery with sweat. “Play dead,” I said to Harris.

The footsteps turned themselves into a stealthy shadow, and the shadow became John Yeoh. “Don’t shoot, senhor capitão,” he said, in Portuguese.

“Why not?” I snapped back. “Someone’s shooting at me.”

“I think they’ve stopped,” he said drily.

“For now.” I squatted beside Harris and switched to English. “Harris, I’m going to get you on your feet. You have to try and walk, d’you hear me?” He growled and swished his tail. I took that for a yes. All right, I would have to trust John Yeoh. I put my gun back in my pocket and hoisted the wounded werewolf to his feet.

“If you can get your... friend to walk,” said Yeoh, also in English, “I know someone nearby who can treat his wound for him.”

“I’ll take you up on that,” I said grimly. The werewolf limped a couple of steps. I pulled out a cheroot, much-needed, and lit it gratefully. I hadn’t wanted to mess up the trail Harris was following with the smell of smoke. “Let’s go, people.”

Nothing stirred as we passed by the House of the Four Winds, not even one wind. Harris hobbled rapidly enough on three legs, but kept bumping into me. Being bumped into by over two hundred pounds of werewolf, not an enjoyable experience.

“Down here,” said Yeoh presently, and turned left. Trailing creepers almost obscured the door he stopped at. They made a whispering sound, although there was no hint of a breeze. He knocked, a complicated pattern like a signal. The door opened quietly. Apparently of its own accord. No light spilled out. “Go in,” he said. I felt a curious little shiver as I passed the threshold. But nothing yelled *Danger!* at me. There was a soft click as the door closed, and the air took on a curious, almost chill, dead quality.

As my sight grew used to the dimness, I realised that there was something insubstantial about the room behind the door. As if it was made out of dust or moonlight: something that may strike you as ephemeral, but is, in fact, eternal. But still no sense of unease. Whatever it was, was— neutral. And welcomingly cool on that hot night. Harris growled, a basso rumbling deep in his chest. I rubbed my eyebrow.

“Where are we?” I asked. Yeoh looked at me curiously. As if he was surprised I noticed anything out of the ordinary. But he gave me a straightforward answer. Well, sort of.

“In a pocket of time,” he said. I raised an eyebrow at him, but made no further comment. I thought I almost understood what he meant. Time was, after all, his trade. Even if had also become, somewhere along the line, his curse.

There was a ghost seated at the table, I now saw. Whether it had been there all along, I had no idea. But it was not the voiceless shade that would be hovering where it met its death. It was a summoned ghost, in appearance as solid as flesh.

It was the old scholar whose shade I had seen outside the library of São Rafael. *Meu Deus*, I thought, it’s like a web. Intersecting lines. Are all the people I know, all the people I meet, all the ghosts I see, connected to each other? I looked round at Harris, and found he had flopped down on the floor. A long pink tongue lolled out of the wolf’s mouth, and he was panting harshly. Dried blood matted his fur, but the bullet-wound was still leaking.

“You said you could do something to help him,” I said to Yeoh. But it was the old man’s ghost who answered.

“And so we can, with your help, senhor capitão,” he said. Though how he knew how to call me that I had no idea. I was wearing a plain dark jacket and trousers. Nothing to identify me. “Allow me to introduce myself. My name is... Isaiah. I was— I am— an apothecary, a surgeon. I was murdered by a mob in the year fifteen hundred and six. A Christian mob,” he added, unnecessarily. “They burned my body in the Rossio.”

Don't look at me like that, I thought. I'm not even sure I *am* a Christian any more, except nominally. If I ever really was one. “Is that your real name?” I asked.

“No, of course not,” he replied with a smile. But who had summoned him? Whoever it was would have had to know his name. “Now if you could lift your wolf onto the table, we'll see what we can do for him.”

All very well for him to say. He didn't have to do the lifting. I squatted down. “Harris,” I said, “we need to get you onto the table.”

He struggled to his feet, but it was obviously hurting him quite a lot. I sighed, got my arms round the wolf's body, and heaved him up with an effort. The old scholar peered at the wound, and I saw him flinch.

“The ball is silver,” he said, and for a moment I didn't know what he was talking about. And then it stuck me. It was fairly obvious when you thought about it. Of course, I realised, flintlocks or whatever they had in his time didn't fire bullets. “You will have to help me extract it before I can treat the wound.”

“Me?” I exclaimed, and simultaneously the werewolf gave a growl that said quite plainly, I'm not having you poking round in there. And that went for both of us.

Isaiah, amusement showing on his long face, said, “Tell your wolf not to worry. I am going to use a charm, not surgery.” I relayed this. Harris looked, I thought, unconvinced. “Listen,” the old man went on, “all of us here, save you, capitão, live a half-life. We cannot touch silver. You will have to do it. It is quite simple. All you need to do is place your hand over the wound, but be careful not to touch the wolf's flesh.”

I did as he said, feeling heat radiate off the werewolf's body. Isaiah began to chant his charm in a language I didn't know. Hebrew, I presumed. After a moment there was an implosion, like a powerful inhalation of air, and I felt something violently *sucked* out of the wound. It hit my palm hard enough to sting, and I instinctively closed my hand around it and jerked it away. Opened my fingers to see a silver bullet, streaked with blood. Who had known enough to be prepared with silver ammunition?

The werewolf's blood would give me a rash until I got the chance to wash my hand with holy water. But for now I merely wrapped the bullet in my handkerchief and stuffed it in my pocket. Yawned, abruptly tired. Scratched my suddenly itching scar as I watched Isaiah sewing up the wound.

“How is it you can do that?” I asked, curiously. “I've never encountered a ghost with... solidity before.”

“Ah, you forget the nature of your wolf,” Isaiah replied. I wished he'd stop calling Harris “my wolf”. I don't own him. Don't want to. “Since he is of the shadows, as I am, I can touch him if my intentions are benign. As with Sr Yeoh there.” I looked briefly at Yeoh. The candles cast strange shadows on his face. “You, I cannot touch. Although other creatures of the night have done so, a mere ghost cannot do you harm.”

He was doing it again. I frowned. “What do you know about me?” He looked up at me briefly, his eyes shadowed.

“You are known,” said the old scholar. “I recognised you.” And my mind flipped back two years or more to the ancient guru, Mohan Das, not long before Harris had knocked another werewolf away from me. *They know you now*, he had said. *Your sight, and your actions, mark you, and they will recognise you.*

“Who summoned you?” I asked him, but he merely smiled and made no reply. For all I knew, he had summoned himself. But I got the strong idea that he was afraid of me. He wouldn't tell me his real name. Was it because he knew who I was? That's a good one. Da Silva, the phantoms' bogeyman.

Not wanting to go any further down that road, I turned to Yeoh. “And just what were *you* doing?” I asked him. “Following us?”

“I came to your home,” he said, “but you had just set out, you and the werewolf. I could see you were on the trail of something: I didn't want to intrude. So I followed you.”

“Why?”

“I had been thinking about what you said,” he replied. “And it occurred to me that if it’s true, that I put myself under a geas, then I’m bound in a way like the souls of your friends. So if you were to find a way to free them, you may also discover how to release me. So... I decided to offer you my help.”

The old surgeon finished his suturing, and dusted the wound with what looked like perfectly mundane sulphur.

“In doing what?” I asked Yeoh.

“Finding whatever you were looking for in the House of the Four Winds, capitão. How do you think I acquired my collection of manuscripts?”

I stared at him, and then began to laugh. Though it wasn’t really that funny. “Very well, Sr Yeoh. I’ll pay you a visit and we can discuss the matter.”

Isaiah cleared his throat, to attract my attention. Or, I should say, he made a throat-clearing noise. Since he didn’t have a physical throat to clear. I turned to him.

“You should treat the wound as a normal injury when he regains his human shape,” he instructed. “It should heal quickly.”

“He can slap a bandage on his own arse,” I said, and the wolf thumped his tail on the table. “Can you get down off there?”

Harris got stiffly to his feet, and looked round the small cluttered chamber. Evaluating a spring, I supposed. Then he shook his head, slowly and emphatically, a human gesture that suited a wolf not at all. I sighed, and lifted him down again. He gets heavier every time. Still, with a bit of luck that’ll be the last time I’ll have to do that. Shut up, da Silva. Tempting providence is never a smart move.

We made our way slowly back to my house. Harris’s “we’re-not-here” power still seemed to be working, for which I was grateful. Although any interested party could probably have tracked me without any trouble by the trail of smoke.

I gave him a blanket in the parlour, and he collapsed like the world’s biggest wolfskin rug in front of the settee. He’d begun to snore before I even shut the door on him.

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“Sr Pierce,” said Francisco Domingues Batista, looking at the Englishman’s business card with arched nostrils and a faintly puzzled air. “I know you by reputation, of course.” His tone managed to suggest that that reputation was not entirely savoury. He put the card down on a table so highly polished that it reflected both his fore-shortened form and the chandelier which hung precisely above its own centre.

Pierce looked round the room a little surreptitiously, although there was nothing to detect. It was a very overt room, not like, say, a library, which can itself take on the nature of an abditory. Even if it does not house such artefacts, and who can tell that at a first glance, or even a second? But this, which Batista appeared to be using as a study— despite a conspicuous lack of any kind of paperwork— had evidently been intended as a breakfast room.

It held only the polished table, two chairs with barley-sugar legs which matched it, and a small sideboard. Its walls were white, very plain save for four *azulejos* depicting personifications of the four continents, Europe, Africa, India, Asia. Tall windows opened onto a narrow wrought-iron balcony enlivened by a terracotta trough of canna lilies and salvia and a view worthy of a *miradouro* clear across to the ruined castle. The room was cool and pleasant.

Batista was also cool, but there was a rather unpleasant undercurrent to his haughty politeness. Pierce, however, took it as merely the familiar disdain endemic to Rio’s upper classes, and let it run off his back.

“I was rather hoping you could help me,” he said blandly, his English accent harshening the softer sounds of the tongue he had not been brought up to speak, the language of the navigators. Batista noticed this in passing, as only one more reason for contempt.

“And in what way would that be?” he inquired in his chill aristocratic tones, though he had no actual title.

“You may know I am a... collector,” Pierce said. “Of books, for the most part. And manuscripts.” Batista

inclined his head slightly, as if to imply that yes, he was aware of the fact as one is aware that tradesmen called at one's house, but did not require acknowledgement.

"I am not a collector of books," he pointed out.

"No, sir, of course I am aware of that fact," Pierce said hurriedly, all too aware of sweat running down his sides. He took off his spectacles and polished them, a diversion which is perhaps the only advantage of needing to wear glasses. "But, ah, I am reliably informed that you do have one extremely scarce volume in your possession." He could hardly believe that he was actually bearding the Brazilian in his den. Because if the man really was trying to work a spell from the *Book of Souls*, something only a tremendously powerful magus should be able to attempt... Well, it would be worth it to find out.

Before Batista could make any kind of reply, the door opened to admit his daughter. Pierce tried not to stare at her, although his glance naturally gravitated to the tall woman. If rumour was correct she might well have run him through with a fencing sabre, if she suspected any impertinence. He'd seen the result of one of her bouts of annoyance. Mind you, rumour also had it that she had challenged an army officer to a duel over a supposed insult, *and* fought him, *and* won. And come close to castrating him with her blade. Pierce crossed his legs nervously, and tried to focus on something harmless. Not her haughty face. Certainly not the fine banded agate which hung on her breast.

He stood up and bowed politely to hide his confusion.

"Oh, you have a visitor," she said. "I'll come back later."

Her father, pointedly neglecting to introduce Pierce to her, said "Later," and she withdrew, closing the door softly behind her. A moment later he turned to face Pierce again. "And what book might this be, Sr Pierce?"

Pierce, thoroughly intimidated, kept his voice level with an effort. "The book your ancestor, Vicente Batista, brought to Brazil in his sea-chest in the year 1500. The *Book of Souls*, by Estêvão Gonçalves."

Batista began to laugh. Pierce felt his face growing red. After a moment he turned on his heel and headed for the door.

"My dear Sr Pierce," Batista called him back between guffaws, "please accept my apologies. I'm truly sorry you've come all this way on a wild-goose chase. But really—! That rumour has been around for centuries. I had no idea anyone would take it seriously in this day and age. We are, after all, in the twentieth century now. A century, it is to be hoped, of rationalism." He wiped the corners of his eyes with a silk handkerchief, and resumed his decidedly unamused expression. "No, Sr Pierce, I don't have the *Book of Souls*. And if I did, I doubt if you could afford it." He rang the bell. "Eduardo will show you out."

The manservant's curly hair and coffee-coloured complexion implied he had accompanied Batista from Brazil, so Pierce saw no point in attempting to subvert him on the way out. He managed to recover sufficient composure to turn at the door and say to Batista, "Thank you for your time, sir."

"Sr Pierce," the other man said. The Englishman met his eyes, and rather wished he hadn't. There was something implacable in them that made him shiver through his nervous perspiration. "Who told you my address?"

"Ah, I don't remember offhand," Pierce lied, and knew that Batista knew he lied.

"Very well," he said coldly. "Good day."

"Good— good day, sir," stuttered Pierce, and scuttled off in Eduardo's wake.

The door in the high wall clanged shut behind him, and he found he was drenched in sweat. He felt like a mouse that has inexplicably been released by a cat after a session of play. Pierce shuddered. He would not have been surprised to see blood on his clothes.

Oh, the man had power, that was for sure.

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Lisbon has twenty miles of seafront. So I consider myself lucky to have secured a berth for *Isabella* within walking distance of home. I suppose Harris was glad of it too on this occasion. When I asked him how he was he scowled blackly and growled, "Sore ass." His air of wounded pride made me bite my lip to stop a smile that wanted to come.

But now he was gone, limping but otherwise none the worse for his wound. I'd despatched a grumbling Zé to the *pensão* where Montague Pierce was staying, with the address of the House of the Four Winds. *Isabella* had a new cargo to load when she was ready to receive it, but Harris and Ashley and Costa, the Second, were more than capable of seeing to that. Delegation. That's what being the skipper is all about. It's taken me years to perfect the art, mind you. But I expect my crew appreciate not having the Old Man breathing down their necks all the time.

And I— I wouldn't say I had nothing to do. I had more than enough to occupy my mind. The trouble is, that's not what I need. Which is a course of action. Since I've never been able to sit around and do nothing. But I couldn't even make a plan until I heard from Pierce. Patience is a virtue: try and cultivate a bit, da Silva.

Emilia, unused to having me cluttering up the house, did her own delegating. She sent Caterina to entertain me until it was time for her lessons. Which is, in its way, more tiring than rushing round the midnight streets of Lisbon trying to keep up with a werewolf. Someone— I suspected Zé— had taught her to say "goddamn" in English. I tried, without much success, to persuade her not to air it in front of her mother. I say *without much success* because when Emilia returned to relieve me of my command, Caterina was bouncing up and down on the settee and singing it to a nursery-rhyme tune. The cause of maternal (and paternal) discipline was not advanced at this point. Emilia dissolved into laughter at the sight. And so, of course, did I.

You want a patriarch? Don't look at me.

Half past ten, and no sign of Pierce.

One of the nicest things about the house is its little brick-paved terrace, on top of the flat roof of the scullery. Emilia's furnished it with a wooden bench and a lemon tree in a pot, and there's one of those climbing plants with the magenta flowers crawling about it. It's a pleasant place to sit, with the clutter of mismatched buildings rising all around. The backs of houses, shuttered against the sun. Strings of washing: Lisbon bunting. Whitewashed walls, most peeling. A fig tree— I've never managed to find out exactly where that has its roots. And I can sit there in shirtsleeves and not bother with my eye-patch. A rare luxury. Already the morning was hot, but direct sun only touches the terrace in late afternoon.

I lit a cheroot and opened the *Mappa Mundi* volume at the pages that referred to the *Book of Souls*. Hoping, perhaps, that inspiration would strike.

*"The souls that shall be gathered are seven, because seven is a miraculous number..."*

And this was the spell that could unseat the world. Because it was against nature? Or was it because, working it, a sorcerer was creating something... taking on the power of a god? But that wasn't true. Whoever embarked on this spell was simply following a recipe, like a cook. Picturing that arrogant old man as a red-faced blaspheming toiler in a galley like João, *Isabella*'s cook, diminished his threat considerably. Worked for me.

The small print was giving me a headache, though. I sighed. Somewhere, a clock struck eleven. A couple of sparrows arrived and started pecking at the crumbs of the pastry I'd just eaten.

*"The soul of a venturer may only be released by a venturer. Against the armoured one, only the invulnerable may stand."*

It occurred to me then that these injunctions were quite specific. They were instructions as well as warnings. *"Against the armoured one, only the invulnerable may stand."*

Which meant I couldn't fight it. As I had no way of defeating the armoured figure the other night. Which may, or may not, have been the same thing. The venturer who could release Henriques Verdinho's soul would have to be some other voyager. But who could be invulnerable to something so solidly armoured? Who could not be injured? A ghost? But how could a ghost prevail, if it came to a fight? I lit another cheroot, and stared at the smoke.

John Yeoh, I thought abruptly. He existed in two worlds, but in neither. Half-living, half-dead. His strange self-inflicted limbo meant he was more real to a ghost like Isaiah than to an armoured guardian. I had been able to touch him, true, but then I have... odd talents.

Or if that failed, I thought mordantly, he could always shoot it.

I took the silver bullet, still wrapped in my handkerchief, out of my pocket, and stared at it. Could that be the

means to defeat the first guardian?

Now all I had to do was find the amulet. Oh, and persuade John Yeoh to go up against the armoured one. That would be fun.

Of course, I still had no idea how to release the souls from the amulets. And there was still no sign of Pierce. Frustrated, I picked up the book again.

*“The soul of a scholar may only be released by a scholar. Against the executioner, only the dead may stand.”*

Well, I thought, raising my eyebrow, last night I met a dead scholar. Who had even already been executed, to all intents and purposes. And Yeoh knew how to find him, too.

There are no such things as coincidences.

I sensed Emilia before I heard the tap of her stick on the bricks. Looked round with a smile that died when I saw her expression.

The *Mappa Mundi* slid to the ground as I jumped to my feet. “What is it? What’s the matter?” I asked, starting towards her.

She said worriedly, “Luís, your father should have telephoned by now,” and even through the stab of concern I thought, how strange, my father. “He’s never forgotten before. Do you think he’s all right?”

*The fourth soul shall be the soul of an artist. Oh, God.*

I put my arms around her, and she felt as frail as a bird. Her blouse couldn’t conceal the slenderness of her arms and shoulders. I felt her heart beating, the softness of her breasts, and the heat of her hands on my back.

“I’ll go and find out,” I said into her hair.

The home of my childhood. When I wore a map of Lisbon on the inside of my head. I’ve forgotten a lot, but more has come back to me since I returned to my native city. And I could never forget the way to this house. Although I hadn’t seen it for thirty years. My feet found it by entering an ancient groove, a tram-track of buried memory.

A squat house, with almost Manueline embellishments. Even the front door evokes memories. I rang the bell, not expecting a reply. But a trim little woman with a red nose and puffy eyes opened the door. Housekeeper, evidently.

“I’m sorry, Sr da Silva has been taken ill,” she snuffled, and a cold fist squeezed my heart. “The doctor is with him now.”

“He’s my father,” I blurted out, though I had not meant to say it. I don’t know why. The small woman’s mouth dropped open.

“Oh, blessed Virgin, come in, senhor capitão,” she said, and I thought: he even told his housekeeper about me. “I’m so sorry.”

The house was smaller than I remembered, and its smell was different: linseed oil rather than the odour of sanctity. I paused in the hallway, overwhelmed by memory and other things. Confused by familiarity. Even though I hadn’t thought of going there for thirty years.

But now it no longer housed my mother. Although her pale smoky ghost would be in her bedroom. Nor, at the moment, I thought bleakly, did the house hold my father. My father’s *body* didn’t hold my father. And the only ghost I saw was a fourteen-year-old Luís da Silva.

The housekeeper was staring at me. “Ah, excuse me,” I said. “Did you... find him, senhora? —I don’t know your name.”

“Sra Reinaldo— yes, I found him, in his painting room.” She gulped. “Cold as a fish, he was, poor man.” I saw a tear leak from her eye. He can still inspire affection in others. Meu Deus, she cares for him more than I do. Should that make me feel guilty? I don’t feel guilty. At least, I don’t think so. To be honest, I don’t know what I do feel. “The doctor’s in his room, if you want to go up,” she went on, and sniffed.

“Yes, thank you,” I said, a little distractedly. The fourth stair still creaked. So did the eleventh, dipping under my foot in a way it hadn’t when I was fourteen. Would he still use the same room? Of course. They’d slept in separate rooms all the time I could remember. What a terrible cold place their marriage had been, I thought. And

how lucky I am. I couldn't recall him ever touching my mother, let alone kiss her, heaven forbid. What would she be doing if she were still alive? Praying. Not a tear on her cold face. But his housekeeper could cry for him.

Shaking my head to try and clear it of memory's oppression, I opened the door. The doctor looked up, startled. He was a slight bald man of about my own age. His head gleamed as if just buffed. I felt alarmingly hirsute, conscious that my hair needed cutting. He stared at me, frowning. Well, I have that effect on some people.

"Er—" he cleared his throat, but it didn't deepen his voice at all. "Who are you?"

"I'm his son," I said. "What's the matter with him?" thinking, let it be something mundane. Praying, da Silva?

"I wish I could tell you, senhor," he replied, candidly. Good God, an honest doctor. "He's had a seizure of some sort. He's unconscious, as you see. Can't be woken. I hope that's simply a sign that his body is healing itself. But I'm sorry, I can't even guarantee that."

My father lay still in the bed, breathing noisily, almost aggressively. His chest rose and fell. But his soul was gone, imprisoned somewhere in jasper like a fly suspended in amber. There was nobody home. 10,560

## 4

A forest of masts. All the old-fashioned sailing ships seemed to have congregated together in one stretch of sea-front, like so many elderly ladies outside a church on a Sunday. The vessels creaked and muttered, as in some dying barquentine tongue understood by a decreasing few while the world changed around them. Seagulls whirled, screeching and brawling. Sailors chased them away, cursing, when they flew too close. Guano splattered the stones of the quay. Purposeful crowds went about their maritime business, taking no notice of landlubbers, shouting in a babel of languages from all the corners of the world.

Out in the broad Tagus, the *Mar da Palha* glittered sunlight back to the sun. Closer to land, the Sea of Straw became the sea of garbage and detritus, and the gulls squabbled over fish-guts and scraps thrown overboard. As the sun rose, the water's stink grew riper. An inshore breeze picked the smell up and dispersed it democratically to sailor and landsman alike.

Half-running, drenched with sweat and desperation, Montague Pierce scanned the ships' names. He had only a vague idea where the one he wanted might be, for he had crossed the Atlantic on a steamship which berthed elsewhere. Fear lent his legs speed but could do nothing about the condition of his sedentary body. Gasping for breath, he stopped momentarily, but even exhaustion could not hold him still for very long. He looked nervously back over his shoulder; his neck ached from doing this.

At last, there was the ship he sought. Pierce breathed a prayer of thanks. And hoped it was true that what pursued him could not cross water without being invited.

"Ahoy the *Isabella*," he called, his voice cracking with strain.

A face appeared at the rail. "Yes?"

"Is Captain da Silva there?"

"No," said the crewman— boy, he realised a moment later. "Sorry."

"How about Sr Harris?" suggested Pierce in increasing desperation, glancing nervously behind himself again.

"I'll get him."

"May I come aboard?" Pierce implored.

"Come along," the boy said, and disappeared. Pierce wasted no time trotting up the gangplank, and breathed a sigh of relief as he set foot on deck. A couple of sailors eyed him curiously, but he was too far from regaining his composure to manage any greeting.

The boy reappeared, leading a limping Harris. "Right, Fil', thanks," said the red-haired American, and turned to Pierce. "The skipper ain't here, but I guess Felipe just told you that. What can we do for you, Mister Pierce?"

"I'm sorry to impose on you," the antiquarian said, taking off his spectacles and mopping his crimson face, "but I— I'm being followed."

"What by?" asked Harris, and Pierce thought: why didn't he say *who*?

"Nothing good," he replied, in the same vein. He eyed the mate narrowly, wondering how much he knew. There was no reason to suppose he would be privy to da Silva's private business, other than the fact that the pair of them had seemed somehow conspiratorial the previous day when he had bumped into the captain. "Did— did the captain mention a book to you at all?"

Harris laughed grimly, at least Pierce assumed it was a laugh. The tall American did not look amused. "Yeah, you could say that," he said. He leaned against the rail with a wince, and lit a cigarette. "Old tome called the *Book of Souls*, you talking about?"

"Yes," said Pierce, relieved, and put his glasses back on. They immediately steamed up again. "Well, I paid a call on its owner this morning."

"Did you, by God?" exclaimed Harris, eyebrows lifting. "Did he happen to take a pot-shot at you?" he added, sourly. Pierce shook his head, puzzled by the question. "Never mind. You reckon he sicced something onto you?"

"Something, yes," Pierce agreed. "He swore he didn't have the book, but I'm convinced he does. And when I left his house, something was... watching me. Not— it feels not human. I haven't seen anything. But since then, I've had this, this huge, *over-reaching* feeling of being followed." He looked down at his hands. "Call me crazy

if you like, but I thought I'd feel safer on a ship— over water.”

“And do you?” The antiquarian nodded. “Fil’,” Harris said to the loitering boy, “you know the way to the skipper’s house?”

“Yes, sir, I do,” replied the youngster smartly, looking eager at the prospect of an unexpected trip ashore.

The mate waved vaguely in the direction of the castle. “Need you to run there, and I mean run! Fetch the skipper here, soon as you can.”

“Claro,” said Felipe, and took off at speed.

Pierce watched him go with an inordinate feeling of relief. “Thank you,” he said.

“Don’t thank me,” retorted Harris, blowing a smoke-ring and regarding it with an air of satisfaction. “I ain’t done nothing.”

“On the contrary.” Pierce looked out to sea. “You believed me.”

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I should’ve seen it coming. Harris *told* me he’d sensed another demon, and I hadn’t thought to ask him if he knew where it had appeared. Next time, da Silva, listen to the werewolf. And don’t go charging off at half-cock.

Right now I’ve got something else to worry about. It’s personal now. Well— more personal. Batista had taken my father, and that meant he’d answer for it. Sooner or later. But now I was horribly conscious what the next soul on the list was.

*The fifth soul shall be the soul of a child...*

How can I protect Zé and Caterina?

Emilia found me sitting on the bed and contemplating the short sword I’d taken from the mysterious fighter outside the church. She looked at it with distaste, and lowered herself to sit beside me. I turned to look at her. Something I never tire of.

“What is it, Luís?” she asked, pushing hair off my brow. Reminding me I still hadn’t got round to visiting a barber.

“The soul of a child,” I replied. Her hand stilled.

“I was thinking that, too,” she said softly. “What can we do?”

“All I can ever do,” I said. “Fight back.”

She leaned her head into my shoulder, and I slipped my arm round her. “Yes,” she agreed, very quietly.

“Where’s Zé?” I asked.

“In his room.” That was a relief. “Studying.”

Meu Deus, a miracle. “How did you manage that?”

“Oh, I have my methods,” Emilia said.

Abruptly, I came to a decision. I’d had enough of Batista calling the shots. I wasn’t going to skulk behind walls like a man in a besieged city. “Get hold of Paciência for me, will you?” All I know about tactics can be summed up in two words: Attack first. “Ask her if she knows how to bind a demon.”

“Are you sure?” was all she said.

“I’m sure,” I told her. But it still felt like an irrevocable step. To go from summoning ghosts to summoning demons. That’s not necromancy, it’s black magic of the darkest sort. Never swear you won’t do something. You’ll only have to break your oath.

And now here I am, emulating the Venetian five years ago. Drawing a pentagram on the floor of Emilia’s workroom. Irresistibly reminded, too, of the English shipping agent Arkright, trying to confine the sorcerer’s box. Only to have it slide clear out of the pentagram when the ship rolled. Well, short of another earthquake— bite your tongue, da Silva!— nothing’s going to be doing any moving today.

“Blood,” Paciência had said, succinctly, in answer to my question. “Blood to call, and blood to bind. Blood and iron.”

In the still, stuffy room I was sweating heavily. Drops fell on the floor. I didn’t know if they would have any effect on a conjuration. They were, after all, salt water. But I kept them well clear of the figure I was inscribing.

All I'd ever seen told me you don't mess with demons. You want to take every advantage you can get.

This is your fault, I said to myself. This is all happening because twenty years ago you couldn't keep your mind out of your pants. But at twenty-four your mind is pretty much resident there. At twenty-four looking at the *sea* can get you aroused. If it hadn't been Dona Elvira it would've been someone else. Maybe, though, a woman with a brother who wasn't completely barmy.

Self-flagellation, da Silva, that's productive. Your mother would've approved. So consider— *Batista* would've done this anyway. Only with some other victim. One who might not have been able to fight back. So, perversely, I *am* in the right place at the right time. Ha. Work that one out.

At last I was done, and it was ready. No. Too soon. I think I was afraid. I know I was apprehensive. Which in itself is a feeble word. My hands were shaking slightly, and I was nauseous. If I could've thought of any alternative— any alternative at all— I would've taken it. But I couldn't. That's the problem.

Blood and iron. Get on with it, da Silva. I picked up the gladius. Not quite sure why I'd opted for that over my own knife, except that it was what it was. Cold iron, and a butcher's blade. It felt heavy, but balanced, in my hand. I rested the edge on my right wrist. Clenched my fist and looked at the blue lines the veins made.

Drew the blade swiftly across one of them before I could change my mind, sucked in a breath sharply at the pain. Let blood drip into the saucer I'd borrowed for the purpose. Well, borrowed is the wrong word too. I don't think Emilia will want to use it again, after this. Then I held the cut closed until it stopped bleeding, and bandaged it tightly.

After that I had to clean the sword, something which made me uncomfortable out of all proportion. To prevent blood being left outside the pentagram, Paciência told me, I had to lick the blade clean. Blood and iron taste the same, I found.

I placed the saucer carefully inside the five-pointed star I'd drawn. Holding it in my left hand, at arm's length. As I stood up my right knee cracked like a pistol-shot. Reminding me that I was human, perhaps. Like a Roman conqueror's slave whispering in his ear. Well, we're all slaves to our bodies. Can't avoid that one. Not that I really need reminding.

Prevaricating, I thought. Wiped the sweat off my face. I wasn't wearing my eye-patch. My palms were damp too, so I dragged them down my thighs. Can't put it off any longer.

Very softly, I spoke the name of the demon. "Gaziel," I said. The one who shakes foundations, Paciência had said. Raises storms and spectres. Rings bells at midnight. Inspires terror. No argument on that last one.

Nothing happened, but the air in the room thickened slightly.

The second time of calling. "Gaziel," I said again. Muted thunder growled, charging the air with electricity. I felt my hair prickle. My skin felt tight, as if it found me difficult to contain inside it. Mouth as dry as a desert. Sweat ran down my face, into my eye. I wiped it away.

Third time. Final time. "Gaziel."

Inside the pentagram, the blood in the saucer shivered, as if someone was shaking it with increasing violence. Thunder still muttered, somewhere. In the earth's core, perhaps.

Pressure pounded in my head, pulsing to my heartbeat. The shuddering of the blood took on the same rhythm, and a powerful ache ran down my arm. Curls of steam began to rise from the saucer, and the scent of a hot wind filled the room. The steam grew thicker, curled into a pillar of mist, whirling like a waterspout. My hand was slippery on the grip of the sword. My head felt as if it was about to burst.

Something beat at the air, blew my hair back from my face like a force ten gale, screamed like a hurricane in the rigging. Lashed at me like a scourge. Wanted to flay the skin from my body, the flesh from my bones. The soul from my mind. Or wherever it resides.

And the mist began to take on a form. I clenched my teeth, swallowed on rising nausea. The form thickened, clotting, solidifying as I watched, and pressure battered and buffeted me like a vile stinking wind from all sides, through all my senses. There was a sandstorm whirling in my head, abrading the inside of my skull.

Raising a sorcerer is hard. They fight you. It's like trying to steer a ship under full sail in a hurricane, always

supposing you could do such a thing without losing all the canvas. But this was worse. Much worse. Because what I was trying to control was so *other*, so completely alien, that I had no point of reference. Except one single, small piece of knowledge that kept the storm from overwhelming me entirely.

I knew its name. Something impelled me to say it again.

“Gaziel!” I shouted, and such was the storm-noise I could barely hear my voice. Again: “Gaziel!” That was five times. Five, Paciência said, the number of justice. Five senses. Five points of the pentagram.

The demon was imprisoned in the figure. Summoned by my blood. It was there for me to command. And I don’t know which horrifies me more, its presence or that other single fact.

Unlike the other demon I had encountered, it had no fixed form, was somehow plastic. Mostly, it was vaguely human in shape, if having two arms, two legs and a head are the criteria. But it also gave the impression of being winged without having visible wings. It ought to have had great spreading bat-wings, as it wore the face of a bat, splay-nosed and needle-fanged. Yet all this was for show, maybe only put on for my benefit. Masking some groin-shrinking foulness within that I was grateful I couldn’t see and remember in nights to come. All my other senses were aware of it, though, and I had to fight myself to stand and face it when everything was yelling *run!* at me.

The demon lunged at me, face looming large, twice the size of a man’s. I pointed the sword at it, and it flinched back.

“Human,” it said, and the voice screamed in my skull and echoed off endless cliffs in my mind. I wouldn’t have been surprised to feel blood running from my ears, at that voice. “Why have you summoned me?”

“To do what I command,” I shouted, near breathless with the impulse to flee, using Paciência’s formula and hoping like hell that it would work. Well, quite literally.

Its face bulged and pulsed. “By what right?” it howled, and I wanted to stop my ears, but I had to keep holding the sword out in front of me. Wouldn’t have done any good, anyway. I was sure of that. Because I wasn’t hearing it with my ears.

“By blood and by iron.” I steadied the sword with both hands, not quite managing to control their shaking. Sweat ran down my face. The demon thrashed to and fro in the pentagram, like a mastiff on a chain. Around me, the room shivered slightly, and a sprinkling of plaster fell from the ceiling. I thought of earthquakes. Some other time, I would speculate about that.

“Whence came the blood?” it screamed. “How came you by the cold iron?”

“The blood is mine,” I said, words coming to me unbidden now, “the sword mine by right of combat.”

Screeching, it slashed at me with taloned fingers, but was still confined. As long as I held my ground, it couldn’t escape. As long as I held my ground! Yes, that’s the trick. I wanted to shrink into a corner and hide. I knew I couldn’t. I concentrated on holding the sword as steady as I could. My arms were beginning to ache. I swallowed on nausea again.

“I am bound by your blood, human,” the demon acknowledged, and I would have breathed a sigh of relief if I’d had any breath to spare. It stilled, apparently waiting.

This was the tricky bit. Well, relatively speaking. Calling it, binding it, holding it— took strength and nerve. Which were holding out. Just. Covering all the possibilities, though, took cunning. I had needed all the help Paciência could give me.

“You must swear,” I said hoarsely, “to do no harm to any human of this blood, neither to body, nor to soul, neither to injure nor to steal. Nor initiate such harm by others. Nor aid others to inflict it. Not in the past, not in the present, not in the future.”

The demon opened its reeking maw and hissed at me viciously. The stink made me wince. “You ask too much!” it roared. I almost gave back a pace, but instead gripped the sword harder. The cut in my wrist stung.

“You must swear,” I insisted.

“And what will you give in exchange?” the demon bellowed in its clanging voice, enveloping me in a mephitic cloud. It’s not real, I told myself, swallowing.

“Your release,” I said tightly. The demon did not reply at once. It became still, and then began to swell like a bladder inflating. It grew until it bulged against the confining pentagram. The pounding in my head grew worse. I wasn’t sure how much longer I could deal with this.

And neither was the demon. Cunningly, it said, “All I have to do for that is wait, human. Until you tire. Until you drop your blade. Until your mortal body fails.”

I advanced towards the pentagram with the sword extended. I could see my hands shaking. There was a sensation of flies walking all over my body. I felt sick to my stomach, my teeth wanted to chatter, and sweat poured off me in streams. I clenched my jaw.

“I don’t think so,” I forced out, and jabbed it with the point of the blade. It screeched like a train whistle magnified a thousand times, and thrashed about in its prison. *Meu Deus*, I thought, can it break out even now? “Swear it.”

“I swear by the blood with which you summoned me,” its voice hammered. “I swear it by the iron and the fire that shaped it. I swear by earth and air, earthquake and tempest. That I know and recognise this blood and will do no harm to its bearers, neither in the past, nor in the present, nor in the future.”

Every word came out like a blow. It fought against speaking its oath, struggling against me until every muscle in my body was quivering with the strain. It was like trying to hold onto a sail full of storm-wind singlehanded. But I still controlled it. Barely. Commanded it. And it had no choice but to do what I told it. To swear the oath.

My knees wanted to give way from sheer exhaustion. Between sweat in my eye and tiredness flaring round my sight, I could barely see any more. But at last the demon spat out the final word, and glared at me, its jaws snapping.

“Then go back to the place you came from,” I said. All I could manage was a whisper.

It gave a shrieking roar that had to be the loudest noise I’ve ever heard, and disappeared. Air rushed in to fill up the space it had occupied with a rushing boom that knocked me off my feet, the aftershock of its shout still echoing in my head. For moments I was sure I’d been permanently deafened.

Rather unsteadily, I hauled myself to my feet, mopped my face with my sodden shirt, and lit a cheroot. Stretched a few overstressed muscles. After a minute, I knelt down and began to erase the pentagram from the floor. The saucer’s shattered remains lay confined in the central pentangle. No trace of blood, but I swept them up carefully all the same.

The room felt peculiarly empty now the demon was gone. I didn’t know if Harris might have been able to sense anything, but I certainly couldn’t detect any trace of its presence. Which I thought was odd. Something like that ought to leave a permanent taint.

I couldn’t have fought that, I admit. It was the most powerful thing I’d ever encountered. The realisation was more than sobering.

Feeling damp and sore and weary right down to my bones, I unlocked the door and walked shakily through. Back to reality. Leaned against the door and closed my eye, only to be interrupted by the noise of someone banging frenziedly on the front door. I was in no state to answer it, not wanting to alarm the neighbours, but Zé clattered past me, hardly sparing me a glance. Probably used to his father looking like someone who’s just been keel-hauled, I thought.

He flung the door open and dashed outside, and it was only then that I realised something was wrong. Really quick on the uptake there, da Silva. But binding demons slows you down a little. I sighed, pushed myself away from the wall, and followed in Zé’s wake.

Saw him kneeling outside in the narrow street next to the still form of his fellow ’prentice and friend Felipe. Whose face was white as ash. Whose chest rose and fell regularly. But whose body, I could tell from there, no longer contained his soul.

The demon, deprived of Zé and Caterina, had turned to the nearest child and stolen his soul instead.

Oh *merda*.

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Father Ánibal Jerónimo was concerned. He had not known the priest he replaced very well. Fr Pereira now lay unconscious—his cold pallid body not even admitting to the possibility of consciousness—in the infirmary, where a tiny wizened nun patiently dripped water into his slack mouth, running a finger down his throat to make him swallow. The hospital smell, comprised in fairly equal parts of ether, blood, disease, carbolic and stale vomit, had soon driven Fr Jerónimo away, which shamed him a little. But he was not primarily concerned, at the moment, with weaknesses of the flesh. Even his own.

His concern was centred on the library of São Rafael. He considered it a dangerous place, a repository of too much knowledge. Fr Jerónimo belonged to an organisation known as *Verbum Dei*, the Word of God, which did not approve of the collection of occult texts. Or, indeed, of any other writings of which the Church would disapprove. Which, to his narrow asceticism, was a pretty wide compass. Heresy was a real and present danger to Fr Jerónimo. He would have been at home with auto-da-fé.

The young priest was also disturbed by the appearance of da Silva on the scene. Having come to the conclusion— from empirical evidence— that Fr Pereira had suffered a seizure in the library, he wanted to know how the captain had found him there. And that begged a lot of other questions. How had he known of the library in the first place? He did not look like a seeker after arcane knowledge. Although Fr Jerónimo was well aware that appearances could be deceptive. He played on his own lanky youthfulness enough.

Maybe more importantly, how had he found his way there? São Rafael's arcane defences against prying eyes made him profoundly uneasy, not least because they barred his own unaccompanied passage to the library.

Nobody seemed to know very much about da Silva. He didn't attend Mass, though his wife did. Nor did he go to confession. Which should have been understandable, since as a ship's captain he was at sea much of the time. Fr Jerónimo chose to interpret it as sinister. This was mainly because the man had alarmed him at their last meeting. He did not know why. It made him uncomfortable. That it was simply due to the fact that other people he encountered bowed to his authority, despite his youth, did not occur to him. And having decided that there was something wrong about the captain, Fr Jerónimo's subconscious was already entrenched in the belief that he was somehow responsible for Fr Pereira's strange illness.

He arrived at da Silva's house in time to see him stoop to lift an unconscious boy from the street and carry him indoors.

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I laid Felipe carefully down on Zé's bed, and met Emilia's gaze. She looked at me bleakly. "Zé, run for the doctor," I said, and for once he didn't argue.

"Mother of God, Luís, what have we done?" whispered Emilia. I put my arms round her, conscious of being sweaty and dishevelled and exhausted beyond measure. She leaned into me. She smelled of floral-scented soap.

"I'll get him back," I said. "And the others."

And then someone else knocked at the door. I sighed. Emilia patted my back.

"I can go," she assured me, and started to make her careful way downstairs. "You go and make yourself presentable." Presentable. Not a word that springs easily to the lips in describing me. Well, I could try.

Felipe had come to fetch me, evidently. I washed and changed my clothes hurriedly. Anxious both for him and to get back to *Isabella* to find out what required my presence. What could my officers not handle? Surely not more souls... Get a grip, da Silva. It won't be so soon. And what makes you so sure of that? I asked myself.

Assuming Emilia would have got rid of the caller, I was startled to find her sitting talking to the infant priest who was Fr Pereira's stand-in. He had the blazing eyes of a zealot, which made my heart sink. And he radiated hostility. Or so it seemed to me. Maybe I was sensitised by my encounter with the demon. I felt my face freeze into a scowl.

"This is Fr Jerónimo," Emilia said to me, her voice carefully neutral. I wondered what he could have said to annoy my easy-going spouse so comprehensively. In such a short time, too. That takes real talent.

"Father," I said, pulling out a cheroot and lighting it. More to irritate him than anything else, since he looked like the sort of pinched ascetic who would disapprove on principle. Or, at least, looked as if he'd grow up to be

one. “Any news about Fr Pereira?”

He looked startled, but recovered well. “There’s no change in his condition,” he said. “I came to speak to you, senhor capitão.”

“I have an urgent errand,” I told him, not wanting to sit there and be preached at when I was needed elsewhere. “If you can talk and walk, come along.”

The priest shot Emilia a minatory glance— I’ll have to ask her about that, later— and bounded to his feet. “Very well,” he said.

I crossed to Emilia, kissed her hair, and said, “I won’t be long.” She squeezed my hand.

“Be as long as you have to,” she said softly. “Take care.”

Outside, the sun was travelling down the sky, but the heat was still fierce. A feeble ineffectual breeze blew eddies of small rubbish— torn paper, dried-up leaves— round my legs. It had no effect on the hovering ghosts, which were even less substantial. The priest’s aura was stronger. He was sweating, and smelled like it.

“Well, Father?” I said peremptorily. “What can I do for you?”

“I came,” he said, “to save your soul.”

Hardly what I’d been expecting. But then I couldn’t say what I *had* been expecting. I raised an eyebrow at him, but he was staring straight ahead. The cut on my wrist stung. I blew out smoke. “And what makes you think it needs to be saved?” I asked.

“When was the last time you confessed your sins?” he countered, evenly. “Or even attended Mass?”

A furious anger threatened to rise up my throat. I fought it down. I’ve got no intention of letting him bait me, I’ve got more important things to do. “Fr Pereira knows my reasons.”

“I am not Fr Pereira,” he said tartly.

“That’s pretty obvious,” I snapped back, and stepped over an insistent cat that wanted to entwine my ankles. Five minutes in the sunlight, and I was feeling damp already. I slung the butt of my cheroot to one side, aiming it through a grandmotherly ghost with a phantom wart on the end of her nose.

He rounded on me, his face red and pinched. “You people never understand what you’re doing!” he burst out. “Why can’t you see the devil’s works for what they are?”

I put a placatory hand on his arm, and he flinched away and made the sign of the cross at me. This irritated me immensely.

“What d’you mean by that?” I asked coldly.

Breathing heavily, he whispered, “I mean that infernal library! It should have been burnt to the ground long ago.”

“If you start out burning books,” I pointed out, scratching absently at my cheekbone, “you end up burning people.”

“People whose souls will burn in hell anyway,” he retorted. A sad-eyed ghost drifted through him, insubstantial as a mist.

“Fr Jerónimo,” I said, stepping in front of him and lighting up another cheroot, “what exactly are you accusing me of?”

“Heresy. Blasphemy,” he spat. “Apostasy.”

Well, I couldn’t really argue with him there. “Then why bother?” I asked impatiently.

“You stink of evil,” he replied, low-voiced and intense. “But you can still repent of your sins. God will forgive you. Renounce the devil—” I’d had enough of this. I took hold of his arm again, this time in a grip he couldn’t break, and spoke in his ear.

“You don’t know what you’re talking about,” I said. “I’ve fought what you call the devil in more ways than you can possibly imagine. You know who a demon would devour, Fr Jerónimo?” I went on, savagely. “Given a choice between you on your knees praying your head off and a sinner with the will to fight back? Try it some day. You’ll find out there’s not much cause to have faith in the power of prayer.” I flung him aside and marched off, through a dense cluster of drifting ghosts thronged where a roof had fallen in on them more than a century and a

half before.

Which, of course, he couldn't see at all.

Harris met me at a limping run. "We got trouble, skipper," he said.

Still irritated by the priest, I said grimly, "Tell me something I don't know." He stopped in his tracks and stared at me until I wanted to ask him whether I'd grown an extra head.

"Another," he said at last. "He's taken another."

"I know. It was Felipe." And it was my fault. But I'd had no option, and I'd do the same again. I make decisions. It's part of my job. I don't expect everything to be easy— hell, I don't expect *anything* to be easy— or every decision to be easy to live with. Right now I'm in the midst of a war, and that means sacrifices have to be made. Right. Lecture over, da Silva. At least Felipe, like my father, like Ortigão, like Fr Pereira, like Verdinho, stand a chance. If, of course, I can find out how to release them. Which I have to do.

"Goddamnit," Harris said, "—And that ain't all." Still watching me carefully. I scratched my cheekbone in annoyance.

"Harris, unless my hair is on fire, d'you mind not staring at me?"

He shook himself and looked away. I searched for a cheroot. The humidity under my eye-patch stood at around ninety per cent.

"We got your bookseller friend on board," Harris said.

I raised my eyebrows. "Pierce?" So that's where he ended up.

"Yeah. Seems he paid a call on this Batista fellow." I stopped with a cheroot halfway to my mouth.

"He did what?" Yes, I can ask stupid questions just as well as the next man.

"You better ask him yourself," said Harris, gesturing towards *Isabella* where I could see a Pierce-shaped figure hunched unhappily at the rail. "Chucking up like a sick baby," he added, with that mystified superiority sailors feel towards people prone to mereado. "We're in harbour, for God'sakes."

Lighting the belated cheroot, I went on board, saying "Carry on, Mister Ashley" hastily to the First, who seemed to be winding himself up towards a fully-fledged ceremonial of some kind. He really ought to be in the navy. My informality irks his regimental soul.

"Da Silva, thank God you're here," Pierce exclaimed, shaking my hand in a limply relieved sort of way. His palm felt unpleasantly moist, like a small animal. "Did your Mister Harris tell you about my follower?" There was a sheen of sweat on his brow, but I didn't know whether it was from heat or seasickness.

"No, he didn't," I said. "He did say you went to see Batista, though." Although you must be mad. "What happened?"

"He's got the book, I'm sure of it," Pierce said. He was looking distinctly green about the gills. I tried to direct my smoke away from him, but the wind blew it straight back again. And isn't *that* a metaphor for life, I thought, sourly.

"He didn't tell you so, did he?" The antiquarian shuddered.

"Oh no," he said. "They were playing games."

"They?" Of course. He would know who the woman was. I kicked myself for not asking him before. Wake up, da Silva!

Pierce punctuated the conversation by turning abruptly, leaning over the rail, and adding his own contribution to the garbage in the water. A moment later, he wiped his mouth on a crusty handkerchief and continued.

"Batista and that mad daughter of his." Daughter, I thought, nodding. So now I know. Much good it does me.

"Mad?" I repeated. Good God, I was in danger of sounding like an Englishman. Or at least like the feed to a vaudeville comedian.

"Oh, well, you don't know, do you? I keep forgetting I'm not in Rio. God. Her name's Teresa. Teresa Graça Batista. She's as crazy as he is. Bit too fond of swordfighting."

I finished my cheroot and flung the butt over the side. "You mean she—?"

"Fences," Pierce supplied, with a croak of a laugh. "With a sabre. You don't... insult her. Oh no. Or you find

yourself in a field at dawn.”

“Mother of God,” I said, thinking about the tall woman. The armoured figure slipped into my mind. What if they were one and the same? But how could that be? “What were you saying about being followed?”

“He sent something after me. I don’t know what it was but it scared me half to death.” The antiquarian swept his gaze along the quayside again. I realised he had been doing this all through our conversation. Scanning the shore nervously, unceasingly. Except when he had turned aside to throw up, of course. “It’s out there, I can still feel it. I’m safe here, though, I think. I don’t believe it can cross water.”

Sanctuary, I thought. Pierce must be pretty scared if he was braving seasickness for a feeling of security. “Are you sure?” I asked.

“No,” said Pierce, “but I still feel safe here.”

With a sigh, I realised I wouldn’t be able to get home any time soon. Nor get to see John Yeoh, which I’d intended to do today. And by tomorrow night Batista might have six out of the seven souls— I *have* to see Yeoh. He’s got to get that bloody book out of the House of the Four Winds tonight. I pulled out my watch and looked at the time, although I could tell just as well from the sky. It was something for my hands to do. Yes, Harris could go, and get back safely. Yeoh would recognise him in his human shape.

“Wait here,” I said to Pierce. “Will you be all right for ten minutes?”

He managed a shaky smile. “The Captain is aboard— the ship is whole. I’ll be all right.” That sounded a bit metaphysical, but I didn’t have time to go into it.

“Angelotti,” I called, seeing him nearby, “find Signor Harris and ask him to join me in my cabin. Then ask Signor Ashley to break out a glass of brandy for Signor Pierce here.” Pierce looked round at his name: I had been speaking veneziano, impenetrable even to most Italians. I’m not quite sure why. Angelotti speaks perfectly serviceable English. Bizarre, but serviceable.

When I got to my cabin, which even after just a couple of days smelt musty, salt-tainted. I poured myself a brandy as well. Harris came in after a minute, and I pointed to the decanter. He shook his head. He doesn’t drink much. If at all. I suppose a drunken werewolf is not the most desirable thing to have around.

“You look like hell, skipper,” he said without any preamble, “and you’ve been awful close to one of them demons.”

Close. Yes, you could say that. Now I understood why he had been staring at me. He knew I’d crossed the line. Damn it. I thought briefly of just sticking to the topic of Felipe. But I owed Harris more than that. Honesty, da Silva.

I scratched my eyebrow and said, “That’s because I summoned one.”

“Christ up a tree!” he exclaimed. “What the hell for?”

“To protect Zé,” I said, rubbing the back of my neck. Damp hair. Get it cut. “And Caterina. The soul of a child... The last one took my father.”

Harris blinked, and his eyes looked lupine for a second. “Jesus. I didn’t know, skipper. He’s really gunning for you, ain’t he, this Batista fellow? But why’d he wait so long?”

That was my biggest question, as well. “I don’t know,” I said, shrugging my shoulders. “Maybe he wasn’t skilful enough before. Or not powerful enough.”

“I guess.” He didn’t sound convinced. But I couldn’t think of any other explanation. At the moment, however, it wasn’t my most pressing concern.

“Harris, you remember what John Yeoh said last night?”

“John Yeoh, that’ll be the Chinaman?”

Oh yes. They hadn’t exactly been introduced. “That’s him.”

He paused, thinking. Took out his cigarettes and lit one, absently. “Yeah,” he said slowly. “Far as I can recall, he offered to do a bit of burglarizing for you.”

“I need you to go and take him up on that,” I said.

“Right, skipper. How do I find him?” Direct action. I like that. Harris doesn’t beat about the bush. Although

I don't know whether it's because he's a werewolf or because he's an American. I gave him the address of Yeoh's shop.

"Go with him, if you want." Harris shot me a sardonic look.

"Uh-huh, silver bullets and all?"

"You'll heal," I said, raising an eyebrow.

"Wasn't you got shot in the butt," he pointed out, a trifle acidly. True. I lit a cheroot and pointed it at him.

"You mind your... butt, then," I said, and he barked one of his unsmiling laughs.

"I'm on my way," he said, getting to his feet with an exaggerated limp. "Skipper?"

"Yes?" I asked, expelling smoke.

"What is it with this Yeoh fellow? That old ghost said he was living in the shadows... like me. What's he turn into?"

"I don't think he turns into anything." Although a cat-burglar would be useful. "He's just been around a hell of a long time. He'll tell you about it if he feels like it, I suppose. Now bugger off, or you won't get back."

He turned at the door. "You going to look after your tame bookseller?" I nodded. "Right, see you later." Delegation. Like I said.

As soon as he had gone, I got rid of the eye-patch. The cabin was hot and stuffy, as if the bulkheads had sucked up the day's accumulated heat. There was, also, a sense of oppression in the air. It was not—quite—like thunder. I wondered whether it was a loitering sense of Pierce's pursuer. Or just a hot day in Lisbon.

It's easier to think on the water. The gentle motion of the ship was soothing. Except to people like Pierce, of course, I thought. I finished my brandy, considered pouring another, and decided against it. At least for the moment. Put my feet on the desk. The chair creaked. Every muscle I had, and some I didn't know I had, ached slightly, and the cut on my wrist felt sore. I peered at the bandage somewhat suspiciously, but there didn't seem to be anything wrong with it. Da Silva, medical expert.

If Yeoh could get hold of the *Book of Souls*, I wondered, would it stop Batista in his tracks? Or did he have all the spells memorised? Hell and damnation. Wish I hadn't thought of that. Have to hope for the former. It's about time things started going my way. But at least I've taken the initiative from him just this once. Even if it's only temporary. I regretted poor Felipe, of course. But I'm selfish enough to be glad it wasn't Zé. Or Caterina.

The task was still depressing, though. Even if the *Book of Souls* told me what I needed to know I still had to find the amulets before the souls could be released. I wondered whether Paciência's spell of finding could help. If she had been able to use the mutilated *Mappa Mundi* to locate the book's missing pages, perhaps she could use an unconscious person to discover where his stolen soul might be. Does she have enough power to do that? Finding souls has to be in a different league to searching for misplaced ear-rings.

And then there was the question of overcoming the guardians. Even supposing John Yeoh agreed to help with Verdinho, Isaiah with Fr Pereira, the other instructions in the spell were just as specific. Against a guardian, only a specific person could stand. And only that person, presumably, could release the imprisoned soul.

A venturer who was invulnerable. A dead scholar. A lover... I couldn't remember the lover's guardian. What else was there? I pulled the *Mappa Mundi* from my pocket and opened it.

*"The soul of a lover shall be gathered by the demon Bitru and stored in an amulet of beryl. And the guardian of that soul shall be the castrator. And the soul of a lover may only be released by a lover. Against the castrator, only one who cannot be unmanned may stand."*

The castrator. There's a word that makes you cross your legs. Então, I don't know any eunuchs, so that rules that out. Damned thing's as cryptic as the answers Paciência's finding spell turned up. Where am I going to find all these people? And how persuade them to help? I stared at the book, perhaps hoping that the answers would materialise there.

They didn't, of course. But then the thought struck me. "*One who cannot be unmanned*" could equally mean a woman. A woman who—Meu Deus. Paciência's own daughter was Ortigão's lover. Could she do it? Could any woman? I drew in a breath. Found my cheroot had burned out, so lit another. Returned to the book.

*“The soul of an artist shall be gathered by the demon Belphegor and stored in an amulet of jasper. And the guardian of that soul shall be the destroyer. And the soul of an artist may only be released by an artist. Against the destroyer, only a creator may stand.”*

Emilia. Emilia could save my father.

If I could contemplate asking Paciência’s daughter, I couldn’t avoid asking my wife. Especially as she’s the only other artist I know.

*“The soul of a child shall be gathered by the demon Gazel and stored in an amulet of malachite. And the guardian of that soul shall be the corruptor. And the soul of a child may only be released by a child. Against the corruptor, only the innocent may stand.”*

The innocent. Well, that depends on how innocent Zé is. I don’t think I was particularly innocent at his age. But then I’d had to grow up more quickly.

And if not Zé, Caterina. My eight-year-old daughter.

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Harris was a hunter, if not in human form then in his soul. So, although he didn’t know Lisbon very well and had never, despite da Silva’s best efforts, got to grips with Portuguese, he found John Yeoh’s shop without much difficulty.

Yeoh was sitting outside, apparently reading a book. *Son of a bitch ain’t reading. He’s watching me. Knows who I am, right enough.* Harris recognised him neither by sight, which was negligible when he was wolf, nor by smell, which was of little significance to his human shape. He knew him by that other sense which those whom Isaiah had identified as “of the shadows” develop. Likewise, he supposed, Yeoh did him.

“You Mister Yeoh?” he asked casually, looking at clocks disinterestedly. “Name’s Harris. ’Spect you remember me.”

“Oh, yes, Mister Wolf,” said Yeoh without raising his head. “Where is your captain?”

“Busy,” replied Harris, laconically. “Sent me to ask you for that favour.” Yeoh looked up, his eyes shadowed, and then returned his gaze to his book.

“And what would that be?”

“Fetching a book, I guess.”

“Somehow you seem to be more suited to the word ‘fetch’ than I,” said the other sharply. Harris winced.

*Whoa, back off! What’d I say?* The American eyed him warily, and then offered him a placatory cigarette, which Yeoh accepted silently and offered a match.

“Need it tonight,” Harris said. “The old bastard’s gathering souls like they was going outa fashion.”

With a silent sigh, Yeoh closed his book, saving his place with a silken marker. “Very well,” he said. “What is the name of this volume?”

“The *Book of Souls*,” said Harris. He eyed the other curiously. “Mind telling me how you’re gonna manage it? ’Cause that place is sealed up tighter’n a... uh, seems pretty well defended against the likes of—”

“Of us?” Yeoh supplied pleasantly. “Us being? people with a half-life?”

*You said it, not me.* “I guess.” Harris sighed, and shrugged his shoulders. “Just curious, y’know.” *Jesus, he’s prickly. How does the skipper find these people, anyhow? He found me more or less marooned in Goa. But this fellow?*

“I don’t think I’m going to share that information with you, Mister Wolf,” said Yeoh. “Tell your captain he will have the book in the morning.”

Harris knew a dismissal when he heard it. “Right,” he said, hiding his annoyance, and slouched off crossly down the street.

When he was out of sight, John Yeoh put him out of his mind— although he was well aware that Harris was loitering not far off— and turned his attention back to the book in his lap. He opened it at the marker and read the words, “*My bed is so empty that I keep on waking up: as the cold increases, the night wind begins to blow. It rustles those curtains, making a noise like the sea: O that those were waves which could carry me back to you.*”

His eyes grew distant with memory. The past lapped over the present, and deep down inside him a tiny spark of hope began to sputter faintly.

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I resumed my eye-patch with a sigh. There's no avoiding the damn thing. Emilia did try and interest me in getting a glass eye when it first happened. But really that was a lost cause from the outset. It's bad enough sometimes people fixating on the patch (you can tell by the glazed stare) without displaying what's underneath it. If that's vanity, well, too bad, it's vanity. Least of my worries, at this moment.

Someone had found Pierce a box to sit on, and he was leaning back against the rail with such a beatific expression on his face that I wondered just how much brandy Ashley had given him. His face wasn't relaxed, however, even though he had his eyes closed.

Our paths'd first crossed twenty years before. I, at forty-four, am very well aware that I'm a different person now. Although I still *feel*, if not twenty-four, at least no more than thirty-four. Pierce's age is difficult to tell. He's probably ten years older than me, but the blond hair and beard, as I said, don't show the grey so much. Although he's grown a lot more lines on his face. Haven't we all? But for all I knew, his life had been so uneventful that he'd hardly changed at all inside. One thing was certain. He hadn't had a demon rip open his eye and leave him with every ghost that ever met an untimely death as his companions.

"Pierce," I said quietly. He opened his eyes and gave me a tipsy smile. I raised an eyebrow. "How are you feeling?"

"Better," he replied. "It's still out there. It can't get to me. And this *aguardente* is marvellous for sea-sickness."

I would shoot Ashley, I thought, if he's given him the good stuff. Not that you can expect an Englishman to know the difference. Pierce possibly doesn't count on that score, being sort of an honorary *brasileiro*. Ah well. Shouldn't begrudge it, I suppose. Except that when you run out in Ceylon or wherever and have to replace it with palm toddy, you really regret squandering the stuff. Still, at home I can stock up, so that's all right. I shook myself, irritated at expending thought on something so trivial, and lit up.

It was getting dark. I wondered where Harris was. Although I hadn't expected him back. He wouldn't be able to resist finding out what exactly Yeoh was going to do.

Pierce had closed his eyes again. I felt momentarily sorry for him, thrown into a maelstrom of intrigue outside anything he'd ever experienced.

Because of what I was going to do next.

"You want to get rid of this thing, I imagine?" I said to him. He opened his eyes and gave me a puzzled look. Partly from brandy, I suppose. "You can't stay here for ever." The English and their siege mentality.

"No, I suppose not," he said after a pause. "What are you going to do?"

"We have to draw it out," I told him. "Which means you'll have to go ashore."

Panic rushed across his face, palpable as seasickness. "But I came here to be safe!"

"You'll be safer after we get rid of it," I pointed out, trying for reassurance. Yes, well. I didn't know what Batista might have sent after him. I was only guessing I could dispose of it. Hoping. Confidence, da Silva. Inspire the man with confidence.

Fat chance.

"I'm sorry—" Pierce choked. Another English trait, apologising for no reason. I felt like slapping him. Restrained myself. Not the way to inspire trust. Scratched my eyebrow instead.

"Listen, Pierce," I said. "I've dealt with this sort of thing before." Batista hadn't sent anything so dire as a demon after the man, or Harris, for one, would've sensed it. So I guessed it would be something I could kill. They fight dirty, some of these lesser nasties. But at least they fight. And they die. "You'll be all right. All you need to do is stand on the quay until it shows up, then get back on board as fast as you can and leave it to me."

He looked a little happier at this. Not much. But a little. I saw his Adam's apple move as he swallowed. "Very well," he said, pushing himself to his feet. "Shall we do it now?" So he did have courage, of a sort. I respected that. He may have been scared spitless, but he was willing to act as bait.

I slung the remains of my cheroot into the water. "Why not?"

"Let's go, then," said Pierce, and walked towards the gangplank. He was a trifle unsteady on his feet. That might have been lack of sea legs or excess of brandy. He looked round to make sure I was following, and I gave him what I hoped was a reassuring grin. My grins don't always come out as I expect, though. Still, if it looked menacing, he could interpret it as menacing to his pursuer. *Oxalá*.

As soon as he set foot on shore, though, he began to shake. I put a hand on his shoulder. I could hardly say "don't worry", but "It'll be all right," sounded confident enough. So I said that instead. He nodded, obviously not trusting himself enough to speak.

Whatever it was that pursued him, only Pierce could sense it. I hoped, suddenly, that it wouldn't turn out that only he could *see* it, or I would be up the creek without a paddle.

I needn't have worried. As the sun dipped below the horizon, I saw the drifting ghosts begin to mill around as if something had disturbed them. My scalp prickled. I unsheathed my knife. I thought it was only the demons that could panic them. Could I be wrong about Pierce's pursuer? Could Harris have missed it?

And then there was no more time to think.

It came from above, and I nearly missed it, jumping to one side just in time.

The twilight made it difficult to see. Or maybe it was half-made of shadows anyway. Essentially, I suppose it was a jaguar, although it seemed to be shaped like a man. It stood upright, but moved like a big cat, graceful and predatory. I saw claws as long as my thumb flex in and out from its stubby fingers.

Having missed its spring, it went down into a half-crouch and growled. The growl was subterranean, echoing in my bones and my brain with the urge to flee. It ran a shiver down my back in the hot evening air.

I advanced towards it, knife extended. The blade felt very light in my hand after the weight of the gladius. My palm was slippery with sweat. Pierce's pursuer went on growling. Then it opened its mouth and roared.

And sprang, launching itself from powerful thighs. I thrust the knife straight up into its path, raking a long furrow down its chest. The clawing hands—paws?—missed me, but its falling weight nearly wrenched the blade out of my hand. I gave with the momentum, clutching the knife desperately, following the jaguar-thing, but I was completely wrong-footed and my next wild slash missed it by a mile.

It twisted round, impossibly fast, and its hand/paw caught me a glancing blow on the side of the head that made my teeth rattle. I actually saw stars for a second, and pivoted instinctively, unsighted, to dodge any follow-through. It was so close I felt the moving air of its passage as it sprang by me. I stuck out one foot to trip it up, and it crashed to the ground, only to roll immediately and bounce back upright to face me. In hot pursuit, I was too close to back off in time, and smelt its fœtid breath as I drew back the knife and punched the blade upwards under its ribcage, straight into the heart. If it had one.

Or if it hadn't been so inhumanly fast that the blade only got to penetrate a couple of inches before it sprang back with a yowl of pain. Well, at least it could be hurt. I felt blood running down my face. The left side, fortunately.

Panting, the jaguar-thing circled me. I wasn't having any of that. I was out of breath too, and damn nearly exhausted, mentally as well as physically. I jabbed the knife at it, and it backed a pace, then turned and leapt in Pierce's direction.

Who, I now saw, had not retreated back on board, but was loitering on the gangplank, watching the proceedings.

I charged in pursuit, and cut the creature off not ten feet from Pierce, standing in front of him. It jumped straight for us, but it would have to go through me to get to its quarry. And I wasn't moving. We crashed to the ground together with an impact that drove all the breath out of my lungs, but I had managed to get my knee between us as we fell and levered it off me. Rolled over on top of it and severed its windpipe. Breath and blood fountained out, its last breath a dying whistle, and its arms flopped loose to the ground by its sides, claws convulsing in and out like a dying wasp's sting. I knelt beside it, trying to get my own breath back. I was pretty sure it was dead. But you can't always tell with these things.

Pierce came hurrying towards me, his face gleaming white. "Are you all right?"

"Stay back," I said breathlessly, but he was staring at the body.

"My God," he exclaimed, "it's Eduardo." I turned my head to see, and found the jaguar-thing had changed into the body of a dark man in his thirties. With his head nearly severed. I stood up slowly, disregarding the new ghost boiling up out of the corpse.

"Eduardo?" I repeated.

"He's one of Batista's servants."

Was one of Batista's servants, I amended. And now there's a very dead and extremely inconvenient corpse lying on the quayside. One who had, apparently, been murdered. A lot of supernatural creatures dissolve when they're dead. Werewolves aren't among their number. Neither, it seemed, are were-jaguars. If that's what the late Eduardo had been. But I wasn't sure. He hadn't been a true cat, not in the way that Harris was a wolf. He'd merely given the impression of being one. Possession, more likely. It all comes back to possession. To slavery, in one form or another. I hate that. Loathe the very idea.

I'm damned if I'm going to waste any more time on him. I said irritably, "Well, I wish he'd bloody well go back to Batista."

And the body vanished. I felt my jaw drop open, and hastily closed it again.

"How did you do that?" Pierce exclaimed.

"I haven't the remotest idea," I replied. My head throbbed, reminding me I needed to break out the holy water. "Come on, let's get out of here." Not being one to look gift horses in the mouth. Or jaguar-creatures, for that matter. Nothing if not pragmatic, da Silva.

I was already light-headed when I got back to my cabin, and though Pierce was prattling away I didn't hear a single word. Sight was coming in waves, hearing a fragmentary thing. I found my shaving mirror and sat down at my desk. Or rather, fell into my chair.

"Don't you have a doctor on board?" I heard Pierce ask, from somewhere in the Indies. Ha, I thought vaguely. I'm not fool enough to let O'Rourke anywhere near me when I need any doctoring doing.

"S all right," I said, slurring a little. There was only a small cut above my eyebrow, though it had bled a lot. As such things always do. It was already swollen and beginning to suppurate, but the holy water would get rid of the infection. I located the flask in my desk drawer, and soaked a handkerchief in it before attempting to clean the cut. I didn't trust my hands not to shake and tip the whole lot down my neck. The holy water burned briefly, and then the cut was clean. The blurriness in my head cleared quickly, although the ache didn't.

Pierce watched this with the slightly disbelieving air of a man at a conjuring show. Right now, I didn't feel like explaining. Or sawing a woman in half, either. I pressed the bridge of my nose briefly, trying to ease the pounding in my head. It didn't work. I found a cheroot instead, and lit it. Inhaled gratefully. If the smoke made Pierce ill, that was too bad.

"What just happened?" he asked finally, in plaintive tones.

Finding a second glass, I poured brandy for both of us. "Holy water," I said. "Better than carbolic. At least in cases like these."

"But that... thing only just cut you," he said.

"Yes, well, that's what happens." I blew smoke out. "We can't endure their touch. Just as silver will kill them. Only we can clean up with holy water." So that's an advantage. One of the few. Nice to know there's one thing I can rely on. "Anyway, Pierce, it's gone now. You should be safe." For now.

He took a large gulp of brandy. I thought he had the right idea there, and followed suit. "But what if he sends something else?" he objected.

"Quite frankly," I said. "I shouldn't think he'd bother. No offence, but he probably thinks you're beneath his notice." I really didn't know why he'd taken the trouble in the first place. Unless the late Eduardo was indulging in a little freelance stalking. And in that case, why— how— had his body vanished?

"But you killed it." Thank you, Pierce, I had noticed. I scratched my cheekbone. "Don't you think that

might... annoy him?"

I exhaled through my teeth. "You can stay on board, if that's what you want," I said. God knows, we've enough room. And getting emptier by the minute.

"I'd feel safer," he said, looking relieved. Though why he had this conviction that Batista's sendings couldn't cross water. I didn't know. It hadn't ever stopped anything else from coming aboard uninvited. Though that wasn't quite true, was it? Now I came to think about it, there'd always been a reason for past incidents. The box Arkright brought on board, for instance. Perhaps they did need an invitation, or a bridge of some sort. I ran a hand through my damp hair.

"Take the 'prentices' cabin for tonight," I said. I could work out what to do next when morning came. At the moment I was too tired to think straight.

"Thank you," Pierce said. "And thank you for... what you did." I smiled wearily. I was also too tired to say "*nada*". It wasn't true, anyway.

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John Yeoh closed the book of poetry and put it in his pocket. Then he got up out of his chair and walked to the corner of the street, where an even narrower alley dog-legged away out of sight, and called softly, "Mister Wolf?"

A moment later, an abashed-looking Harris emerged and grumbled, "How'd you know I was there?"

Yeoh smiled. "I felt you," he replied. "Also, I knew you wouldn't go away."

"Huh," said Harris, and stuck his hands in his pockets like a schoolboy caught in the act. And despite himself, he looked up nervously at the sky.

"You will no doubt be more comfortable indoors," Yeoh suggested. "You are quite welcome to use my shop to... change." He gestured at the open door.

"Well, that's mighty civil of you." Harris looked at the other man curiously. "You change your mind, then?"

"About what?" Yeoh asked, picking up his chair and heading indoors. Harris padded after him.

"Letting me tag along."

"I cannot stop you tagging along," said Yeoh. "But you will not be able to follow me once I reach the house." He shut the door and pulled a blind down to cover the glass, then turned the key in the lock.

"Why?" inquired Harris, mulishly. The other gave him a long steady look.

"Because I am going to fly, Mister Wolf."

Harris scowled. It was unanswerable. Since *he* couldn't fly. After a moment, he said, "D'you mind not calling me that? Name's Harris."

"Ah, but your soul is wolf-shaped," said Yeoh.

As if to underline that, a familiar pain lanced through Harris, and he screwed his eyes shut in reaction. Yeoh, watching, saw his face seem to shift momentarily into something that was not yet wolf, no longer human, and then back again. Beads of sweat popped out on the American's forehead. He opened his eyes on a shuddering breath.

"Jesus, that was a bad one," he muttered.

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