

THROUGH THE MOON GATE

by

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Remora made camp in the high pass overlooking the Waste. She was still far above the sudden, frightening flatness that spread northward before her as far as she could see.

Off to her left, the sun was setting, a huge glowing coal kissing the horizon. It would be hot tomorrow, absolutely the wrong time to be crossing the Waste.

But what choice did she have? She forced herself to look down into the bleak, broken country. She had been born and raised in the Dales, surrounded by tree-shrouded mountains. She found her heart pounding at the thought of walking out onto that sere plane. It wasn't safe.

A thought trembled to the surface: *I'll go back*. Her clan tended herds, grazing them in the high valleys. *No, I won't go back to chasing smelly cattle around the mountain peaks!* She would not go back to being laughed at when she dared to mention her visions of the Old Ones.

She was short, stocky, and not at all pretty. Her face was weathered to a dark tan. Her hands were callused, and her legs lumpy with muscle. People looked at her and saw a worthless orphan, a drudge of doubtful parentage. Not even the wise woman considered her visions real.

"You put yourself above your station, Remora!" they'd

say. "Now haul that bucket of slop, and stop this nonsense."

No, she was not going back. She'd find Arvon and the Old Ones or die trying.

With that settled she gathered firewood, and skinned the birds she'd brought down with her sling. In the days she'd been working her way through the passes which had been known to her only in nebulous tales, she had gradually learned to set a secure and comfortable camp. But she bore the scars from several nearly fatal errors.

Thus, she built a large fire, and sat up late watching for hunting creatures. They said four-footed beasts roamed the edge of the Waste in packs. But this night, all was peaceful. Light from a large, full moon came flooding over the peaks around her, and she rose to stretch and answer the call of nature before rolling up in her blanket.

Moving off to her left, she rounded a large outcropping and tended to her needs. She was arranging her clothing when she noticed the soft chuckle of water over rocks. Her water skins were getting low, so she followed the sound thinking of the bright taste of fresh water.

Through a narrow cleft, she found where a thin stream dove down a crevice. Climbing a bit, she peeked over a boulder expecting to see the stream emerge. A watering hole would make good dawn hunting. But what she found set her gripping the sharp edges of stone under her hands until they hurt.

There, in a cup surrounded by steep, shrub-covered walls, was a place of the Old Ones.

A soft green carpet covered the ground. Huge undressed stones had once stood sentinel in a circle, but now most had fallen. Several stones still supported top pieces. It seemed like a building, but one that only defined an area rather than cutting it off from the elements. In the center of the stones lay a perfectly circular pool of water, glowing whitely under the fullness of the moon.

It seemed as if the few remaining stones somehow

focused the whiteness into the water, and Power gathered there.

She took a deep breath, only now realizing she had stopped breathing. Without actually deciding, she found herself edging over the lip of the cup. The pale light shimmered in sheets between the stones, forming a protective wall more formidable than any keep's stone battlements.

She circled, cautiously, resisting a silent call. On the far side, she came abreast of three standing stones forming a door. On the right pillar a glowing area pulsed strangely. Around its edge, runes marched in a circle. She couldn't read them, but something reached out to her murmuring a promise, pulling her heart to safety.

Just then, a night hunter cried on the peaks above, and Remora started violently, stumbled, and was inside the circle. Peace engulfed her. She padded over to the edge of the pool and knelt, searching her mind for a prayer. There weren't many. She had been excluded from any talk of moon magic, and she had never related to Gunnora who was worshipped by so many wives. Those Who Set the Flame didn't sound very wise to her.

In any event, this place was older than any of those. She placed her palms on the surface of the water, hardly surprised to find it warm and coated with a soft mist that refused to let her submerge her hands. "Let the powers that blessed this place flow forth in abundance to bless the world in light. May I find acceptance in your eyes."

On one level, she was embarrassed by how childish she sounded. But tears flowed, and her breath came in gasps as she mourned for all the years she had been starved for this.

The moon sailed overhead, the light pouring through her body as if she were as insubstantial as the mist that gripped her hands. Power went through her, soft, silken power.

And then she saw it. Huge and black, in the bottom of the pool, it undulated until the whole pool heaved with it. The edges were curved into wicked points. Then, as it loomed larger, it turned up to her the white face of a man.

She screamed.

Remora had never been given to screaming, but what came out of her now was the screech of pure terror.

The pool surface broke open and spewed forth the demon. It shot into the air, and right before her eyes folded its blackness back across itself, and somehow, before it splashed down into the pool, it became a man in a black cloak.

Remora clamped her lips shut and swallowed a whimper.

No one grew up in the Dales without hearing of the Wereriders and all kinds of tales of Were-magic. Shape-changing. It happened. It wasn't, she told herself, necessarily evil. But her feet wanted to run.

The moonglow faded rapidly out of the pool as if bled off. She was aware of the shimmering walls spread between the stones going dark and winking out. She knelt beside an ordinary pond, under ordinary moonlight, and watched a man in a heavy black cape thrashing weakly.

Flinching away from the edge of the water, she stared fascinated as the man coughed, spat, and fought. It was almost funny, except that it finally hit her that he was truly helpless. She watched with a frown pinching her face as the figure curled into itself as if in mortal agony, and then, with a strangled cry, sank again beneath the surface.

He can't swim!

She peeled off her tunic, yanked off boots, and, not bothering with her heavy winter trousers, dove into the pool.

It was very deep, and very cold. She hadn't expected the shock. A moment before the pool had been blood warm.

She managed not to gasp, and when she forced her eyes open, she discovered that the water was so crystal clear that the moonlight penetrated nearly to the bottom. She spotted first the unnatural white face and hands and kicking, she scooped the unconscious form into her arms.

Her well-muscled legs thrust them to the surface, and she towed her limp burden by his sodden cloak to the rim. By the time she'd jackknifed the limp figure over the lip of the

pool, she was wondering why she'd done such a foolish thing.

Before she could even consider throwing him back, he was coughing and sputtering. She crawled out of the water and heaved the now struggling man onto the greensward. "Take it easy, stranger. You breathed some water, that's all."

"That's all!" he managed. "To my kind, water can be deadly!"

"Then what in the Name of The Lady were you doing in there!" She was bending to wring out her trouser legs when it hit her that she'd understood him as if he were speaking her own dialect. But he was certainly no Dalesman.

He sat up, knees bent to prop his elbows. Regarding her with the same gaze she'd expect from a lord passing through her village, he challenged, "I might tell you if you'd tell me how I got in there!"

"I should tell *you* how you got in there!" She heard the furious indignation in her voice, and quailed, waiting for the lord to deliver one of those withering judgments that always came her way.

Instead, he cocked his head to one side, and asked, "You mean you don't know? You didn't do it?"

"Do what?" *Maybe I did.*

He looked about, and his face spoke clearly of inward bewilderment liberally laced with fear. He recited, half aloud, "I was flying along on my way to Denver. I had a midnight appointment with Irene. The snow pack was two feet deep. I was flying low because we were totally socked in. I remember—there was a Lear jet. I was knocked head over teakettle by the wash . . . then . . . Good God, this isn't Denver, is it?"

Remora hadn't followed all that, but the question was clear enough. "No, I don't think this could be Denver. I've never heard of any such place."

"Los Angeles? This is a movie set, right?"

She shrank away from his vehemence.

His lips worked, and his panic submerged as he reached

out to her. "Look, don't be afraid. I don't—I won't hurt you. I thank you for saving my life. You must be chilled."

She watched his lips, then his eyes. A hard knot in her chest warmed and let go. "I believe you—won't hurt me." *Stupid! I ought to run.*

A pack of hungry nightrunners yammered, voices echoing off the peaks. The stranger made a feeble attempt to wring out his cloak. She couldn't take her eyes off him. His skin was the color of moonlight, his eyes dark coals. His hair slicked back into a black cap, but it ended at the nape of his neck. His eyes met hers, and she felt his loneliness like a pain inside her.

"I have a campfire. Over there." She gestured with her chin. "We should get dried out." *Why did I say that?*

He followed her docilely. At the camp, she built up the fire and offered him a blanket while his clothes dried. "I don't own anything that would fit you."

"I don't suppose you would," he chuckled.

His voice soothed her in a way she'd never felt before. She tore herself away, and dragged out her spare clothes. When she'd changed, she returned to find him with the blanket twisted and folded about himself in a strange style, covering one shoulder and making a skirt about his waist. She wondered how he'd accomplished that, but silently bent to help him build a rack near the fire for their garments.

His were the strangest things she had ever seen. There were closures that just stuck together and made a tearing sound when parted. There were others that miraculously clung together and parted silently. And his cloak clasp displayed a huge red gem set around with clear ones that gathered the firelight. It must have been worth three fortunes.

She held it in the palm of her hand and asked, "Would you favor me with your name, lord?"

He cocked his head to one side. "I haven't been addressed that way in—" He seemed to catch himself. "The lands where my father ruled are far away, and the country

he ruled no longer exists. My current name is Dorian St. John, and you may call me Dorian.”

The sadness throbbing through that speech almost made her want to cry, and in a fit of needing to comfort him, she replied, “If it is your wish to be called Dorian, lord, then I shall call you Dorian.” She handed him back the clasp.

He took it and pinned it to the blanket, a wistful smile playing about his lips. With an effort, she asked, “Are you hungry?”

Taken aback, he answered, “How did you know?”

“I have some jerky here, and there’s a little—”

“Ah! Your forgiveness. I shall not take your food. Such an act is not permitted to my kind. May I ask how long you expect it to be until the sun rises?”

“Oh, half the night is not yet gone.”

His relief shocked her, but he distracted her by asking, “And your name? Would you favor me with such knowledge?”

In a rush of pleasure to be asked instead of commanded, she told him, “Remora. I served in Mistdale.”

He bowed, putting his head down to the level of her waist. “Remora of Mistdale, I am at your service.”

Her face went hot, and the tips of her ears burned. “Oh, no, I am nobody . . .”

“To me, you are She Who Saved My Life. Could you perhaps tell me how far it is to civilization?”

She waved back toward the south. “That way, about ten or maybe fifteen days’ travel, there’s Eroffkeep.”

He paced to the edge of the camp, where she had stood to look down at the Waste. As if the moonlight were enough to show him what she’d seen, he asked, “And down there?”

“The Waste. I’m going to cross it. But I’ve no idea how big it really is.”

He turned. “Alone? You’re going to cross that, alone?”

“Certainly, I’m going to cross it alone!” She turned her back and stirred the fire.

His chill hands closed over her shoulders and he turned her to face him. Looking down into her face, he breathed, "I meant no offense. Where I come from, even my kind would quail before such a barrier."

"I didn't quail from rescuing a demon from a pool of the Old Ones, did I?"

One elegant brow arched upward in Dorian's white face. "A demon? Is that what you thought? Then I owe you more than I ever knew." He tilted her chin up with one finger, and she felt the strength in him, strength that could crush her. But he held her gently as his voice caressed her. "And I have no right whatsoever to ask what I must ask of you. If I were the lord you thought me, or even the demon, I would offer to see you safely across the Waste. But I cannot do that, Remora."

His face lowered toward her, and his eyelids lowered in anticipated pleasure. She was sure he was going to kiss her on the neck, and she didn't know how she wanted to respond except that the thrill that warmed her prompted total surrender. *Idiocy!*

Her virginity might be a necessity in the kind of training she sought. She'd heard of such things, and not knowing what would lie ahead, she had guarded herself. She stiffened in his hold, knowing resistance was futile.

But he hesitated, whispering, "May I?"

She imagined his breath was cold on her skin. "Dorian, no. Please—no." But she did want it.

As he withdrew, she thought she saw something white and shiny concealed by the corners of his mouth. *Huge teeth?* But when his face was in moonlight again, she wasn't sure. He bowed. "Forgive my presumption."

Flustered again by the unaccustomed courtesy, she needed to escape. "I'm going to set some traps. At least we may have something to break fast on."

"Remora, I won't be joining you for breakfast." He delivered the news in the tone of a confession.

She inspected him anew. "You must have your own destination in mind. I do not hold you to any debt to me."

"I must somehow cope with the sun's rising. It's effect on me will be far more devastating than that of the water."

Cold needles of dread flashed across her skin. *Demon! Creature of the Dark.*

Her thought must have shown on her face, for he began to gather up his wet clothes. "Since it is clear that my presence distresses you, I will leave you now."

Guilt shot through her. If he was in fact a demon, she could not let him run loose. It came to her all at once that her very presence had activated a Gate—such a portal as one heard tales of. If he was just a man, she could not in conscience turn him out to wander and die alone. He had no food. He wore indoor shoes, and knew nothing about the countryside. Worse yet, he might not be here had she not gone into the Old Ones' place of Power.

"Please!" she called after his retreating back. "Don't go!" She ran after him.

He turned. "I will leave your blanket." His hand went to his waist.

She covered his hand with hers. "No. Wait until your clothes dry, at least." *He's just a man nearly frozen.*

He paused, a preternatural stillness overcoming him. Very quietly, as if it took great courage, he asked, "Do you mean that you may find a way to send me back?"

"Is that what you want?" A demon would want to stay.

"Yes."

"I believe you. I don't know why, but I do."

His hand slipped the cloak clasp free. "Send me back, and you may keep this."

Neave! I could buy all Mistdale for that! She searched his eyes. What demon would pay to be sent back before wreaking havoc across the land? Her hand closed over it, and he surrendered it willingly. She swallowed, throat dry. "Dorian, there is truth to be spoken."

"I know the pin's value. It's real. Keep it. It's yours."

Her hand closed over it and greed rose in her. What a life she could have! And she had prayed for abundance and the blessing of the Old Ones' Powers. She shook her head

to clear the avarice which tasted bitter on her tongue. "There is truth to be spoken," she insisted. "I may have brought you here—I'm not sure. The Gate might have opened even without me. But there is one thing every child of the Dales knows. A Gate works only one way. Nobody ever goes back."

It was so in all the tales. But is it really true?

"You won't even try?"

She forced the clasp back into his hand and folded his cold fingers over it. "Keep your wealth. I'll try the Gate with you once more. But you ought to learn to swim first."

He glanced at his sodden clothing. "I had forgotten. If there is a Gate, it must be at the bottom of that pool."

"No doubt. I can't believe it will function twice in one night—or even in one year. The moon has to be just right to activate the Power of the Old Ones." And she described what she had found by following the watercourse.

From the bemused expression on his face, she thought that the simplest things must be alien to him. "It must be terrible where you come from," she finished.

"It has its moments. But—no. On the whole it is beautiful." His eyes went unfocused, and he spoke in snatches as if remembering: "Snow-covered mountains, and houses with golden glowing windows . . . and off in the distance, the city, cupped in steep mountains . . . the streets outlined with chains of blue or amber lights on either side of a red stream and a white stream of pure light . . . the tall buildings patched with lighted windows . . . the blue lights of a copter pad . . . the winking flashes of red, yellow, and green traffic lights. There is sadness under the lights, and much tragedy—but no, it's not terrible. I suspect that here, it just may be terrible."

Colored lights. He came from a place of brightly colored light. He could not be evil. She threw her arms around him to console him. "Dorian, it's not terrible here. The world can be harsh, but it is also wonderful."

His arms went around her and she felt the soggy cloth of his garments against her back. He whispered in her ear, "If

it has many as beautiful as you, it has to be wonderful. But I am afraid, Remora, that I will find no rest here."

Beautiful. As me. She squirmed free and plucked his clothes from his arm. Spreading them over the makeshift rack again, she said, "As for rest, we can build up the fire and sleep safely enough."

"It is not the practice of my kind. But I will stay and guard while you sleep. I will be gone before the dawn."

The sun. She had forgotten what he'd said of the sun. "What kind are you? You look human."

"I was. Once. But that was long ago."

"What manner of creature are you now? Of the Light—or of the Darkness?"

The ghost of a frown creased his forehead. His hesitancy to claim the Light sent a quiver of dread through her, but before he could voice his answer, a wild yammering erupted from the pass behind them.

Dorian spun to face the approaching menace, falling into a wary crouch as he swept her behind him with one long arm.

Out of the darkness loomed a churning wall of scraggly gray beasts, gaunt and long-legged four-footers. "A pack!" she gasped, knowing they had no chance against this. The runners were long-snouted, with terrible fangs.

As the leaders hesitated before the watch fire, Remora grabbed Dorian's hand, pulling him back into the rocks. "This way! The Old Ones' pool. It's our only chance!"

Tugging his hand, she ran into the defile toward the Old Ones' circle. If the fire just held the beasts long enough!

Scratched and bruised, she reached the circle and ran for the entry, knowing somehow that to gain protection she had to enter there. At the archway, she found the waning moonlight casting a shadow over the right-side pillar, and in that darkness she could still see the glowing circle.

The runes were clearer, but they were moving more slowly, sluggish now as if running out of energy.

Behind them, the baying of the pack closed in, but it was broken by occasional snarls and indignant yelps as the

beasts fought among themselves. All of that faded from Remora's consciousness as she stared at the runes marching solemnly around the glowing circle. As they moved, they shifted and changed, and she fancied she could understand.

She was drawn deep into the center of the light until she saw with an inner knowledge divorced from ordinary sight. It was as if she *knew* this place as the builders had known it. Here was the Gate, and back there where the pack fought was the Way—a pass cut through the living rock of the mountains; the very pass she had used. But now it was crumbling and seemed a natural part of the landscape.

Off to her left had once been a small village perched atop and within the mountains. This whole region had been honeycombed with passages. Up ahead, on the other side of the Gate structure, was a cave that accessed the passages, a cave once used for food storage.

As she strained to make out what mysteries might be contained in that cave, the vision faded leaving only the knowledge that the stone circle was no longer a refuge. Its energies would not return for another century.

She came out of it with Dorian's hand clenched about her upper arm in a bruising grip. He was poised on the balls of his feet, peering back into the darkness as if he could see what approached. "Come *on*, Remora! Wake up!"

There was movement in the shadows behind them, and flashes of gleaming white teeth, glowing eyes. "This way!" she whispered, and yanked him along into the circle.

They skirted the pond which was cold and dark now. Behind them, the beasts gathered at the gateway, milling about in confusion, yammering as if gathering courage for a final assault. *The power will only last a few more moments.*

"Run!" she urged Dorian.

They skinned through a narrow slit between two uprights, and clamored up the other side of the cup that held the circle. Skidding, smothering yelps at twisted ankles and scraped shins, they climbed.

"Here!" she gasped. "It has to be here!"

"What has to be here?" asked Dorian, surveying the tumbled mess of boulders before them. Small twisted bushes, and stunted trees dotted the crumbled cliff. Outlined blackly against the moonlight, they seemed menacing.

With a shiver of foreboding, Remora scrambled frantically up the cliff, searching. "A cave mouth. It'll be safe. The runners won't go very deep into a cave."

"How do you know?"

I hope! "The circle told me."

He only nodded. Then he climbed straight up the side of a large boulder, topped it, and stood peering into the inky blackness above. His head swept right and left, like a hunting serpent.

She watched, overcome with the matter-of-fact way he had accepted her explanation. No one had ever done that before. She didn't pause in her search, scanning the jumbled shadows for a dark opening. She knew just what it had to look like, and that, she concluded later, was why she missed it.

"There! A cave!" His whisper was harsh with suppressed excitement. A moment later, she never knew how, he appeared beside her without a sound. "Come on, I'll help you."

Now, he chose a slanted path, cutting back and forth to find solid footing as if he could see perfectly. He gripped her arm above the elbow, and her fingers closed on his wrist. His strength was phenomenal. She felt as if he levitated her up the difficult rises. And he wasn't even panting when they reached a small, wedge-shaped hole between two boulders.

It wasn't anything like the spacious entry she had seen. But then neither was the broken cliff.

They wriggled through the hole and found the space opened out around them. Only then did she think that they should have brought some dry wood to build a fire in the cave mouth to discourage the runners until dawn drove them away. Failing so much, they could still have used a brand or two from the fire to make a torch. *Stupid!*

"Well, there's no choice. We'll have to go that way."

"I can't see a thing."

"But you can smell, can't you?"

There was a repellent odor lingering on the air. "Something probably denned here. Let's hope it's not home."

He took a cautious step forward, holding onto her fingers to pull her along into the dark. Their feet crunched something foul as they stepped. "Bats!" he spat.

"What?"

"I don't know what you call them, but they're harmless. That's not what I smell." His face flashed whitely as he glanced back toward the dim glow of the entry. "I don't want to go down there."

"There should be a long tunnel that opens out into a large chamber, and another tunnel on the other side that leads out to the open air beyond."

He took another cautious step forward. "The circle told you?" His tone was not the slightest bit mocking.

"The Old Ones, who built the circle . . . I know what it was like when it was built and used. They stored food in this cave."

"How long ago was that?"

"Uncounted centuries."

"Then that can't be the smell."

As they ventured forward, picking their way carefully over the dung, she felt the shudder of revulsion rippling through him. Her own gorge was rising, and she gagged.

"Maybe we won't have to go very much farther. The stench has to repel the creatures chasing us."

"Maybe." *If not, it'd be better to face the relatively clean death the beasts would give than to go on into that!*

Still, she was not ready to give up her life—her chance to find Arvon. *Evil can be vanquished. I hope.*

Her ears told her they were in a narrow tunnel now. Progress became a nightmare of endurance. She clenched her jaw, her breath hissing between her teeth, feet leaden.

She forced her mind to narrow down to the image of the way out that had to lie ahead of them. It had to be there

still. Just keep going, she told herself, and we'll get there somehow. I'm not going to let this stop me.

She had nearly lost touch with everything else but that one determined thought when they rounded a curve, and suddenly found themselves in a wide chamber. But now it was filled with a sickening bluish glow, and the odor became a vile miasma that gagged Remora. She couldn't breathe.

She'd barely glimpsed the walls of the cave, festooned with shapeless lumps of something foul, when Dorian turned and pushed her back. "God! Let's get out of here. We can't get through that!"

Retreating into the dark, she clung to him for a moment, digging in her heels to stop the huge man in his tracks. His arms came around her in a protective gesture, and something in her responded sharply. But this was not the time for that. She pushed away. "Listen. We can't go back. The way out has got to be ahead."

"Better the wolves than *that*. Something ghastly has grown out of whatever the Old Ones left here. Besides, that was so long ago that the other tunnel may have been crushed by now. Something has changed this place. I mean, you don't ordinarily store food where the walls drip water!"

She thought about it. The mountain had shifted. He was right. "We can't go back," she repeated. "It's not long until dawn. Maybe if we wait here?"

He cast a glance toward the softly glowing turn in the passage. "I can't. Whatever happened here, Remora, it was an evil thing. I cannot—I *will* not abide here."

That spoke to something so deep in her she found herself retreating before him despite her resolve. And in that defeat, she also found a leap of triumph in her breast, a relief of a tension she'd forgotten was there. *He's not of the Dark! If he was, he'd have found that place like home.*

At a wider spot in the tunnel, he squeezed by her, his blanket-clad body against hers, and she felt him trembling. Something here repelled him even more strongly than it did

her. When he took the lead again, he drew her along with such speed that she was hard put to keep from stumbling.

The way back seemed longer than the way in. Eventually, though they heard the disconsolate baying of the pack, echoes multiplying their numbers.

At last, he paused. Putting both huge hands on her shoulders, he brought his face close to hers so she could feel his cool breath on her face. "You wait here. If they smell you, they'll attack. There's a chance—maybe it's an outside chance, but worth a try—that I can send them away even before dawn. I'm willing to risk it, but you've got to give me time. Wait until I call you."

His instruction was delivered in that calm, commanding tone she had obeyed all of her life. She whispered, "Very well," and stopped herself before adding *lord*. "Dorian. Be careful. You don't know how vicious they can be."

"On my world, there are creatures much like these called wolves. When they're hungry, very little will stop them."

"Oh, these runners are hungry. They're always hungry. And they love human flesh."

"Good. Then I may have an advantage."

And then he was gone into the darkness.

She waited. Her ears brought her nothing except the snuffling and arguing of the pack. Once he was beyond arm's reach, she heard not a whisper of movement from Dorian.

She waited an eternity, and there was nothing. Her mind showed her Dorian lying unconscious, fallen in the dark. Then she saw the runners, catching his scent, and attacking his helpless form, not even baying their triumph as the man was unconscious and hardly more than carrion. The constant murmuring of the pack she heard could be them feeding. Vision or imagination? She'd never *seen* anything from current time before, but then most people who *saw* did see in the present, too. She had to go check.

It took less courage to creep toward the pack than it had to stumble into that horrible odor. Bracing one hand on the wall, she shuffled and groped toward the entry.

The last rays of the setting moon combined with the first hint of false dawn made the entry seem bright before Remora's eyes. As she neared the end of the tunnel, where it opened into the wider chamber inside the entry, she made out Dorian's form, prone at the mouth of the tunnel, just as she'd *seen*. His head was toward the entry, his feet to her, and his face was buried in his elbow. Beyond his head, not three body-lengths away, gray shapes paced and wheeled, grumbling but not feasting on Dorian. But he'd said the sun's rays were deadly to his kind. With his ability to see in the dark, she didn't doubt that sun would hurt his eyes.

As she crept up to Dorian's feet, the pack became more agitated. Milling faster, they edged toward him, threatening growls rumbling as teeth bared. She saw his chest rise. *He's not dead!* A runner snapped at her, snarling.

Flinching, she realized she was about to cause the very vision she had feared. And when they finished with Dorian, they'd turn on her. Before she could do anything, Dorian gathered himself and rose soundlessly to his full height. His white face was frozen in a forbidding mask as he snarled out of the side of his mouth, "Idiot! I told you to wait! They're not wolves, but I almost had them!"

As he said this, the leader of the pack leaped into the air, hurtling at her. Rooted to the spot, she braced herself to die, but her hands came up to ward those awful teeth away from her throat. Suddenly she was staring into Dorian's partially blanketed back.

She felt rather than saw the animal's impact on Dorian, and heard something issue from Dorian's throat that wasn't at all human. And then he was pushing forward into the pack.

Dorian heaved the pack leader among his fellows and snarled at them in a command that could not be disobeyed.

Dorian continued to advance, animals whirling about his knees, venturing to snap at his heels and the edges of his cloak. He grabbed the leader by the scruff of the neck and threw him toward the entry, snarling commands.

One of the runners dared snap at Dorian's hand, gouging the flesh beneath the thumb. Instead of withdrawing the injured member, Dorian made a fist and punched the offending animal in the nose. It whimpered and retreated.

At that, the leader slunk toward the entry, and the pack followed, bellies to the ground, tails between their legs. Slowly, as the sun rose outside, the animals lowered their front paws over the lip of the cave mouth, found purchase, and, one by one, crawled out into the daylight they hated.

Dorian, still trembling, lips compressed, blocked their access to Remora, driving them out into the light.

And the sun rose. Relentlessly the light increased.

But Dorian refused to give ground. Occasionally he had to lash at one of the reluctant runners. By the time the last had crawled out onto the tumbled mountainside, the sun had obliterated the stars, and diffuse light reached almost to Dorian's feet. Dorian edged back, squinting at the glowing triangle of the entry.

"Let me look out. The light must hurt your eyes."

He let her edge by and crawl to the lip of the cave. The last of the runners picked their way carefully down the broken cliff face. They had the skill and grace of the mountain-born, and she found herself hoping she'd not have to face anything like them out on the Waste.

When the last stragglers were down, they ran in circles baying their defiance, and then they took off into the dawn.

"It's all right," she called back. "They're gone."

When there was no answer, she turned to find him still as a statue in the same spot where she'd left him. Her shadow stretched out behind her, but sunlight had crept onto his legs. His face and hands seemed to glow in the light.

He was staring at his hands. The spot where he'd been bitten was unmarred. Not even a drop of blood remained.

He knelt, moving slowly like a person in shock, not quite sure if his body was still real. He thrust his hands into a puddle of light as if he expected they'd dissipate in smoke. Nothing happened.

A puzzled frown creased his brow, and he opened the other hand in the light, palm up. His cupped hands caught the light as if it were water. Worried, Remora wriggled back into the cave and stood. "Come on, Dorian, we have to find you a place to spend the day."

He didn't move, and she went to lift him up and urge him back into the darkness. If this was what a little light did to him, she didn't want to see what would happen in full sun. "Come on, I'll help you."

He came to his feet, staring at his hands. Then his eyes rose to her face. "Remora! The sun . . ."

"You told me. It's not good for you. It's all right. I know you're of the Light now."

He took her by the shoulders. "It doesn't hurt! Didn't you see! It doesn't hurt. The sun here must be different!"

She frowned. "The sun is the sun."

He padded over to the entry and knelt, worming up to the lip as she had done. His bulk filled the little triangle, cutting off the light, but his voice came back to her with a joyous shout—"It doesn't hurt! It doesn't burn!"

Then his feet disappeared over the lip, as he went out headfirst as the animals had done.

Thinking he'd fallen, she scrambled to the lip to peer out again, and found him clinging to the boulders outside the cave. He had reversed handily and his head was now level with hers. "Remora, come! Let's dance in the sunlight! I'm going to love your world!"

If it gave him the freedom of the day, she could understand that. "All right, give me some room."

But he didn't move. His eyes had gone to her scratched and bleeding hands, ravaged by the night's heedless flight. His tongue danced over his lips, which seemed parched and cracked. He whispered, "One thing, though, hasn't changed."

Quivering, his lips clamped shut and his mouth narrowed into a thin line. His eyes moved up to meet hers, and she felt his hunger lance through her like a hot knife.

Behind that peculiar sensation came a call that stirred

her to untold depths. Her lips parted and she could hardly breathe with the need that seized her. She knew only that she had to come into his arms or life would be intolerable forevermore. She started to move, to answer that call.

Suddenly, as fast as it had come, it was gone.

“No. I won’t.”

In moves so fast they blurred, he went straight down the cliff, heedless of the broken terrain. She knew she could never catch him, but she backed back into the cave as fast as she could, reversed, and dangled her feet over the lip of the entry until she found purchase. By the time she reached the bottom, he was out of sight. There was no sign of his passage, and in desperation, she raised her voice and called out, “Dorian! Dorian! Don’t go!”

She listened to her words echo and wondered why she didn’t want to be free of him. Still, he’d saved her life, and now she realized it had been done at no small risk to his own. He hadn’t known he could bully the runners into leaving, and he’d known dawn was close. He’d thought the sun would kill him, and even so, he’d defied that death to chase the pack from her. “Dorian! Don’t go! Please! Dorian!”

She made her way back to the circle, and found him sitting beside the pond bathing his hands. He glanced up, and she saw he had water cupped in his hands. The look of desperation on his face frightened her, but she was too far away to do or say anything when he abruptly thrust his face into his hands and drank—as if taking poison.

His throat convulsed with forced swallowing, and again his pale oval face raised to hers. She stood rooted to the spot until he caved in, and curled up clutching his stomach.

He started to vomit, and she ran toward him. Her foot turned on a rock and she stumbled sideways. After that, she went carefully, and by the time she reached him, he was bent over, sobbing quietly. The mess on the turf before him reeked in a way she’d never known vomit to. “You’re ill. Dorian, trust me—I’ll take care of you.”

He shook his head.

"Look, you've had a nasty shock just getting here, a bad chill, and then the runners. Come back to camp and I'll make you some broth."

He shook his head again, and gathered himself up.

She tried to help him to his feet, talking as one would to someone delirious with fever, but he cut her off. He grabbed her hands and pulled them up between them, as if to show them to her.

As a confession wrenched from one in the throes of great remorse, words came from him, one at a time. "Remora, it isn't broth I crave. It's blood. Your blood. My kind live on the blood of humans."

He flung her hands down, turned, and strode off.

She stood in shock, adding up all the clues that had lain before her through the night. *Blood*. She shuddered. How could any creature of the Light live on blood?

And yet.

He had wanted her blood. He had wanted it from the moment they'd met. He had been hungry when he came through the Gate. And he had never, ever, made one move to take what he hungered for. She remembered the look on his face when he'd swallowed the water. *He'd hoped that, too, was over.*

"Dorian!" She ran after him. "Dorian, stop." She caught him at the edge of the cup that held the circle. Pulling him to a halt, she made him turn to face her. "I owe you my life. Is it my life that you want?"

"No! No, I will never harm you. I gave that pledge when you saved me from the water. I have saved your life, and we're even, no? You go your way, and I'll go mine."

"See me safely across the Waste," she challenged, "as you said would be proper, and you can have some of my blood."

Stunned, he just stared at her.

"The sun won't harm you. You can travel the Waste to Arvon. There are still Old Ones there. Maybe they can find a way to help you learn to eat normal food again."

"Old Ones? Alive?"

"Maybe. I've heard people say they know people who've seen them. They're supposed to live very long lives—centuries even. I'm going there to learn from them."

"Centuries?" He repeated avidly.

"Dorian, come with me."

"Across the Waste?" His face turned in that direction.

"Why not? Where else in this world have you got to go?"

"Well . . ."

It all seemed so clear to her. They had to go together. She glanced back at the circle, knowing that the Great Powers ruled there. What they brought into a life couldn't easily be refused. All at once, she raised her bleeding hands to his mouth, commanding, "Drink!"

His resistance cracked. His tongue came out to lick her wounds, and she trembled at the gentleness she sensed through that touch. His hands rose to hers, and his eyes came to focus on her own. Warm thrills coursed through her nerves, promises too sweet to ever be fulfilled. But this time, there was no raw compulsion behind it.

Sometime later, he lowered her hands, put one arm around her shoulders, and urged her back toward camp. "Not like this. Come, and I'll show you how it's done. You won't be disappointed, Remora. I promise."

Afterword

I chose to tell of the first vampire to be swept into the Witch World because at the time Andre asked for the contribution, I was ruminating over a vampire novel. I was reading and studying about the phenomenon, much taken with Yarbrow's St. Germaine and other "good" vampires in the current literature. I had selected for my novel a particular theory of