

The Urth of the New Sun

by Gene Wolfe, 1931-

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Chapter I

The Mainmast.

HAVING CAST one manuscript into the seas of time, I now begin again. Surely it is absurd; but I am not. I will not be so absurd myself as to suppose that this will ever find a reader, even in me. Let me describe then, to no one and nothing, just who I am and what it is that I have done to Urth. My true name is Severian. By my friends, of whom there were never very many, I was called Severian the Lamé.

By my soldiers, of whom I once commanded a great many, though never enough, Severian the Great. By my foes, who bred like flies, and like flies were spawned from the corpses that strewed my battlefields, Severian the Torturer. I was the last Autarch of our Commonwealth, and as such the only legitimate ruler of this world when we called it Urth. But what a disease this writing business is! A few years ago (if time retains any meaning), I wrote in my cabin on the ship of Tzadkiel, re-creating from memory the book I had composed in a clerestory of the House Absolute.

Sat driving my pen like any clerk, recopying a text I could without difficulty bring to mind, and feeling that I performed the final meaningful act—or rather, the final meaningless act—of my life. So I wrote and slept, and rose to write again, ink flying across my paper, relived at last the moment at which I entered poor Valeria's tower and heard it and all the rest speak to me, felt the proud burden of manhood dropped upon my shoulders, and knew I was a youth no more. That was ten years past, I thought.

Ten years had gone by when I wrote of it in the House Absolute. Now the time is perhaps a century or more.

Who can say? I had brought aboard a narrow coffer of lead with a close-fitting lid. My manuscript filled it, as I knew it would. I closed the lid and locked it, adjusted my pistol to its lowest setting, and fused lid and coffer into a single mass with the beam.

To go on deck, one passes through strange gangways, often filled by an echoing voice that, though it cannot be distinctly heard, can always be understood. When one reaches a hatch, one must put on a cloak of air, an invisible atmosphere of one's own held by what appears to be no more than a shining necklace of linked cylinders. There is a hood of air for the head, gloves of air for the hands (these grow thin, however, when one grasps something, and the cold seeps in), boots of air, and so forth. These ships that sail between the suns are not like the ships of Urth.

In place of deck and hull, there is deck after deck, so that one goes over the railing of one and finds oneself walking on the next. The decks are of wood, which resists the deadly cold as metal will not; but metal and stone underlie them. Masts sprout from every deck, a hundred times taller than the Flag Keep of the Citadel. Every part appears straight, yet when one looks along their length, which is like looking down some weary road that runs beyond the horizon, one sees that it bends ever so slightly, bowing to the wind from the suns.

There are masts beyond counting; every mast carries a thousand spars, and every spar spreads a sail of fuligin and silver. These fill the sky, so that if a man

on deck desires to see the distant suns' blaze of citron, white, violet, and rose, he must labor to catch a glimpse of them between the sails, just as he might labor to glimpse them among the clouds of an autumn night. As I was told by the steward, it sometimes happens that a sailor aloft will lose his hold. When that occurs on Urth, the unfortunate man generally strikes the deck and dies.

Here there is no such risk. Though the ship is so mighty, and filled with such treasures, and though we are so much nearer her center than those who walk upon Urth are to the center of Urth, yet her attraction is but slight. The careless sailor drifts among the shrouds and sails like thistledown, most injured by the derision of his workmates, whose voices, however, he cannot hear. (For the void hushes every voice except to the speaker himself, unless two come so near that their investitures of air become a single atmosphere.) And I have heard it said that if it were not thus, the roaring of the suns would deafen the universe.

Of all this I knew little when I went on deck. I had been told that I would have to wear a necklace, and that the hatches were so constructed that the inner must be shut before the outer can be opened—but hardly more. Imagine my surprise, then, when I stepped out, the leaden coffer beneath my arm. Above me rose the black masts and their silver sails, tier upon tier, until it seemed they must push aside the very stars. The rigging might have been cobweb, were the spider as large as the ship and the ship was larger than many an isle that boasts a hall and an armiger in it who thinks himself almost a monarch.

The deck itself was extensive as a plain; merely to set foot on it required all my courage. When I sat writing in my cabin, I had scarcely been aware that my weight had been reduced by seven-eighths. Now I seemed to myself like a ghost, or rather a man of paper, a fit husband for the paper women I had colored and paraded as a child. The force of the wind from the suns is less than the lightest zephyr of Urth; yet slight though it was, I felt it and feared I might be blown away. I seemed almost to float above the deck rather than to walk on it; and I know that it is so, because the power of the necklace kept outsoles of air between the planks and the soles of my boots.

I looked around for some sailor who might advise me of the best way to climb, thinking that the decks would hold many, as the decks of our ships did on Urth. There was no one; to keep their cloaks of air from growing foul, all hands remain below save when they are needed aloft, which is but seldom.

Knowing no better, I called aloud. There was, of course, no answer. A mast stood a few chains off, but as soon as I saw it I knew I had no hope of climbing it; it was thicker through than any tree that ever graced our forests, and as smooth as metal.

I began to walk, fearing a hundred things that would never harm me and utterly ignorant of the real risks I ran. The great decks are flat, so that a sailor on one part can signal to his mate some distance away; if they were curved, with surfaces everywhere equally distant from the hunger of the ship, separated hands would be concealed from each other's sight, as ships were hidden from one another under the horizons of Urth. But because they are flat, they seem always to slant, unless one stands at the center. Thus I felt, light though I was, that I climbed a ghostly hill.

Climb it I did for the space of many breaths, perhaps for half a watch. The silence seemed to crush my spirit, a hush more palpable than the ship. I heard the faint taps of my own uneven footfalls on the planks and occasionally a

stirring or humming from beneath my feet. Other than these faint sounds, there was nothing. Ever since I sat under Master Malrubius's instruction as a child, I have known that the space between the suns is far from empty; many hundreds and perhaps many thousands of voyages are made there.

As I learned later, there are other things too. The undine I twice encountered had told me that she sometimes swam the void, and the winged being I had glimpsed in Father Inire's book flew there. Now I learned what I had never really known before: that all these ships and great beings are only a single handful of seed scattered over a desert, which remains when the sowing is done as empty as ever.

I would have turned and limped back to my cabin, if I had not realized that when I reached it my pride would force me out again. At last I approached the faint descending gossamers of the rigging, cables that sometimes caught the starlight, sometimes vanished in the darkness or against the towering bank of silver that was the top-hamper of the deck beyond. Small though they appeared, each cable was thicker than the great columns of our cathedral. I had worn a cloak of wool as well as my cloak of air; now I knotted the hem about my waist, making a sort of bag or pack into which I put the coffer.

Gathering all my strength into my good leg, I leaped. Because I felt my whole being but a tissue of feathers, I had supposed I would rise slowly, floating upward as I had been told sailors floated in the rigging. It was not so. I leaped as swiftly and perhaps more swiftly than anyone here on Ushas, but I did not slow, as such a leaper begins to slow almost at once. The first speed of my leap endured unabated. Up and up I shot, and the feeling was wonderful and terrifying.

Soon the terror grew because I could not hold myself as I wished; my feet lifted of their own accord until I leaped half sidewise, and at last spun through the emptiness like a sword tossed aloft in the moment of victory. A shining cable flashed by, just outside my reach. I heard a strangled cry, and only afterward realized it had come from my own throat. A second cable shone ahead. Whether I willed it or not, I rushed at it as I might have rushed upon an enemy, caught it, and held it, though the effort nearly wrenched my arms out of their sockets, and the leaden coffer which shot past my head almost strangled me with my own cloak.

Clamping my legs around the icy cable, I managed to catch my breath. Many abuattes roamed the gardens of the House Absolute, and because the lower servants (ditchers, porters, and the like) occasionally trapped them for the pot, they were wary of men. I often watched and envied them as they ran up some trunk without falling and, indeed, seemingly without knowledge of the aching hunger of Urth at all. Now I had myself become such an animal. The faintest tug from the ship told me that downward lay toward the spreading deck, but it was less than the memory of a memory: once, perhaps, I had fallen, somehow.

I recalled recollecting that fall. But the cable was a sort of pampas trail; to go up it was as easy as to go down, and both were easy indeed. Its many strands provided me with a thousand holds, and I scrambled up like a long-haunched little beast, a hare bounding along a log. Soon the cable reached a spar, the yard holding the lower main topsail. I sprang from it to another, slimmer, cable; and from it to a third.

When I mounted to the spar that held it, I found I was mounting no longer; the whisper of down was silent, and the grayish-brown hull of the ship simply

drifted, somewhere near the limit of my vision. Beyond my head, bank after bank of silver sails rose still, apparently as endless as before I had mounted into the rigging. To right and left, the masts of other decks diverged like the tines of a birding arrowor rather, like row upon row of such arrows, for there were still more masts behind those nearest me, masts separated by tens of leagues at least. Like the fingers of the Increate they pointed to the ends of the universe, their topmost starsails no more than flecks of gleaming tinsel lost among the glittering stars. From such a place I might have cast the coffer (as I had thought to do) into the waste, to be found, perhaps, by someone of another race, if the Increate willed it.

Two things restrained me, the first less a thought than a memory, the memory of my first resolve, made when I wrote and all speculations about the ships of the Hierodules were new to me, to wait until our vessel had penetrated the fabric of time. I had already entrusted the initial manuscript of my account to Master Ultan's library, where it would endure no longer than our Urth herself. This copy I had (at first) intended for another creation; so that even if I failed the great trial that lay before me, I would have succeeded in sending a part of our world—no matter how trifling a part—beyond the pales of the universe. Now I looked at the stars, at suns so remote that their circling planets were invisible, though some might be larger than Serenus; and at whole swirls of stars so remote that their teeming billions appeared to be a single star. And I marveled to recall that all this had seemed too small for my ambition, and wondered whether it had grown (though the mystes declare it no longer grows) or I had.

The second was not truly of thought either, perhaps; only instinct and an overmastering desire: I wanted to mount to the top. To defend my resolution, I might say that I knew no such opportunity might come again, that it scarcely accorded with my office to settle for less than common seamen achieved whenever their duties demanded it, and so on. All these would be rationalizations—the thing itself was glorious. For years I had known joy in nothing but victories, and now I felt myself a boy again. When I had wished to climb the Great Keep, it had never occurred to me that the Great Keep itself might wish to climb the sky; I knew better now.

But this ship at least was climbing beyond the sky, and I wanted to climb with her. The higher I mounted, the easier and the more dangerous my climb became. No fraction of weight remained to me. Again and again I leaped, caught some sheet or halyard, scrambled until I had my feet on it, and leaped once more. After a dozen such ascents, it struck me that there was no reason to stop until I reached the highest point on the mast, that one jump would take me there, if only I did not prevent it. Then I rose like a Midsummer's Eve rocket; I could readily have imagined that I whistled as they did or trailed a plume of red and blue sparks.

Sails and cables flew past in an infinite procession. Once I seemed to see, suspended (as it appeared) in the space between two sails, an indistinct golden shape veined with crimson; insofar as I considered it at all, I supposed it to be an instrument positioned where it might be near the stars—or possibly only an object carelessly left on deck—until some minor change in course had permitted it to float away.

And still I shot upward. The maintop came into view.

I reached for a halyard. They were hardly thicker than my finger now, though every sail would have covered ten score of meadows.

I had misjudged, and the halyard was just beyond my grasp. Another flashed by.

And another, three cubits out of reach at least. I tried to twist like a swimmer but could do no more than lift my knee. The shining cables of the rigging had been widely separated even far below, where there were for this single mast more than a hundred. None now remained but the startop shroud. My fingers brushed it but could not grasp it.

Chapter II

The Fifth Sailor.

THE END of my life had come, and I knew it. Aboard the Samru, they had trailed a long rope from the stern as an aid to any sailor who might fall overboard. Whether our ship towed such a line, I did not know; but even if it did, it would have done me no good.

My difficulty (my tragedy, I am tempted to write) was not that I had fallen from the rail and drifted aft of the rudder, but that I had risen above the entire forest of masts. And thus I continued to rise, or rather, to leave the ship—for I might as easily have been falling head downward—with the speed of my initial leap. Below me, or at least in the direction of my feet, the ship seemed a dwindling continent of silver, her black masts and spars as slender as the horns of crickets. Around me, the stars burned unchecked, blazing with splendor never seen on Urth.

For a moment, not because my wits were working but because they were not, I looked for her; she would be green, I thought, like green Lune, but tipped with white where the ice-fields closed upon our chilled lands. I could not find her, nor even the crimson-shot orange disk of the old sun. Then I realized I had been looking in the wrong place. If Urth was visible at all, Urth would be astern. I looked there and saw, not our Urth, but a growing, spinning, swirling vortex of fuligin, the color that is darker than black.

It was like some vast eddy or whirlpool of emptiness; but circling it was a circle of colored light, as though a billion billion stars were dancing. Then I knew the miracle had passed without my notice, had passed as I copied out some stodgy sentence about Master Gurloes or the Ascian War. We had penetrated the fabric of time, and the fuligin vortex marked the end of the universe. Or its beginning. If its beginning, then that shimmering ring of stars was the scattering of the young suns, and the only truly magical ring this universe would ever know.

Hailing them, I shouted for joy, though no one heard my voice but the Increate and me. I drew my cloak to me and pulled the leaden coffer from it; and I held the coffer above my head in both my hands; and I cast it, cheering as I cast it, out of my unseen cloak of air, out of the purlieu of the ship, out of the universe that the coffer and I had known, and into the new creation as final offering from the old. At once my destiny seized me and flung me back. Not straight downward toward the part of the deck I had left, which might well have

killed me, but down and forward, so that I saw the mastheads racing by me. I craned my neck to see the next; it was the last.

Had I been an ell or two to the right, I might have been brained by the very tip of the mast. Instead I flashed between its final extension and the starsail yard, with the buntlines far out of reach. I had outraced the ship. Enormously distant and at a different angle altogether, another of the uncountable masts appeared. Sails sprouted from it like the leaves on a tree; and they were not the now familiar rectangular sails, but triangular ones.

For a time, it seemed I would outrace this mast too, and then that I would strike it. Frantically, I clutched at the flying jib stay. Around it I swung like a flag in a changing wind. I clung to its stinging cold for a moment, panting, then threw myself down the length of the bowsprit, for this final mast was the bowsprit, of course, with all the strength of my arms. I think that if I had crashed into the bow, I would not have cared; I wanted nothing more, and nothing else, than to touch the hull, anywhere and in any way.

I struck a staysail instead, and went sliding along its immense silver surface. Surface indeed it was, and seemed all surface, with less of body than a whisper, almost itself a thing of light. It turned me, spun me, and sent me rolling and tumbling like a wind-tossed leaf down to the deck. Or rather, down to some deck, for I have never been certain that the deck to which I returned was that which I had left.

I sprawled there trying to catch my breath, my lame leg an agony; held, but almost not held, by the ship's attraction. My frantic panting never stopped or even slowed; and after a hundred such gasps, I realized my cloak of air was incapable of supporting my life much longer. I struggled to rise. Half-suffocated though I was, it was almost too easy. I nearly threw myself aloft again.

A hatch was only a chain away. I staggered to it, flung it wide with the last of my strength, and shut it behind me. The inner door seemed to open almost of itself. At once my air freshened, as though some noble young breeze had penetrated a fetid cell. To hasten the process, I took off my necklace as I stepped out into the gangway, then stood for a time breathing the cool, clean air, scarcely conscious of where I was—save for the blessed knowledge that I was inside the ship again, and not wandering wrack beyond her sails. The gangway was narrow and bright, painfully lit by blue lights that crept slowly along its walls and ceiling, winking and seemingly peering into the gangway without being any part of it. Nothing escapes my memory unless I am unconscious or nearly so; I recalled every passage between my cabin and the hatch that had let me out onto the deck, and this was none of them. Most of them had been furnished like the drawing rooms of chateaus, with pictures and polished floors.

The brown wood of the deck had given way here to a green carpeting like grass that lifted minute teeth to grip the soles of my boots, so that I felt as though the little blue-green blades were blades indeed. Thus I was faced with a decision, and one I did not relish. The hatch was behind me. I could go out again and search from deck to deck for my own part of the ship. Or I could proceed along this broad passage and search from inside. This alternative carried the immense disadvantage that I might easily become lost in the interior. Yet would that be worse than being lost among the rigging, as I had been? Or in the endless space between the suns, as I had nearly been? I stood there vacillating until I heard the sound of voices. It reminded me that my cloak

was still, ridiculously, knotted about my waist. I untied it, and had just finished doing so when the people whose voices I had heard came into view.

All were armed, but there all similarity ended. One seemed an ordinary enough man, such as might have been seen any day around the docks of Nessus; one of a race I had never encountered in all my journeyings, tall as an exultant and having skin not of the pinkish brown we are pleased to call white, but truly white, as white as foam, and crowned by hair that was white as well. The third was a woman, only just shorter than I and thicker of limb than any woman I had ever seen. Behind these three, seeming almost to drive them before him, was a figure that might have been that of a massive man in armor complete. They would have passed me without a word if I had allowed it, I think, but I stepped into the middle of the corridor, forced them to halt, and explained my predicament. „I have reported it,“ the armored figure told me. „Someone will come for you, or I shall be sent with you. Meanwhile you must come with me.“ „Where are you going?“ I asked, but he turned away as I spoke, gesturing to the two men.

„Come on,“ the woman said, and kissed me. It was not a long kiss, but there seemed to be a rough passion in it. She took my arm in a grip that seemed as strong as a man's. The ordinary sailor (who in fact did not look ordinary at all, having a cheerful and rather handsome face and the yellow hair of a southerner) said, „You'll have to come, or they won't know where to look for you, if they look at all. It probably won't be too bad.“ He spoke over his shoulder as he walked, and the woman and I followed him.

The white-haired man said, „Perhaps you can help me.“ I supposed that he had recognized me; and feeling in need of as many allies as I might enlist, I told him I would if I could. „For the love of Danaides, be quiet,“ the woman said to him. And then to me, „Do you have a weapon?“ I showed her my pistol. „You'll have to be careful with that in here. Can you turn it down?“ „I already have.“ She and the rest bore calivers, arms much like fusils, but with somewhat shorter though thicker stocks and more slender barrels. There was a long dagger at her belt; both the men had bolos, short, heavy, broad-bladed jungle knives.

„I'm Purn,“ the blond man told me. „Severian.“ He held out his hand, and I took it, a sailor's hand, large, rough, and muscular. „She's Gunnie.“ „Burgundofara,“ the woman said. „We call her Gunnie. And he's Idas.“ He gestured toward the white-haired man. The man in armor was looking down the corridor in back of us, but he snapped, „Be still!“ I had never seen anyone who could turn his head so far. „What's his name?“ I whispered to Purn. Gunnie answered instead. „Sidero.“ Of the three, she seemed least in awe of him. „Where is he taking us?“

Sidero loped past us and threw open a door. „Here. This is a good place. Our confidence is high. Separate widely. I will be in the center. Do no harm unless attacked. Signal vocally.“

„In the name of the Increate,“ I asked, „what are we supposed to be doing?“ „Searching out apports,“ Gunnie muttered. „You don't have to pay too much attention to Sidero. Shoot if they look dangerous.“ While she spoke, she had been steering me toward the open door.

Now Idas said, „Don't worry, there probably won't be any,“ and stepped so close behind us that I stepped through it almost automatically. It was pitch dark, but I was immediately conscious that I no longer stood on solid flooring

but on some sort of open and shaky grillwork, and that I was entering a place much larger than a common room. Gunnie's hair brushed my shoulder as she peered past me into the blackness, bringing with it the mingled smells of perfume and sweat. „Turn on the lights, Sidero. We can't see a thing in here.“

Lights blazed with a yellower hue than that of the corridor we had just left, a jaundiced radiance that seemed to suck the color from everything. We stood, the four of us crowded together in a compact mass, upon a floor of black bars no thicker than a man's smallest finger. There was no rail, and the space before us and below us (for the ceiling just above us must have supported the deck) would have held our Matachin Tower. What it now held was an immense jumble of cargo: boxes, bails, barrels, and crates of all kinds; machinery and parts of machines; sacks, many of shimmering, translucent film; stacks of lumber. „There!“ Sidero snapped. He pointed to a spidery ladder descending the wall.

„You go first,“ I said. There was no rushing toward me, we were not a span apart, and thus no time for me to draw my pistol.

He seized me with a strength I found amazing, forced me back a step, and pushed me violently. For an instant I teetered at the edge of the platform, clawing air; then I fell. Doubtless I would have broken my neck on Urth. On the ship, I might almost be said to have floated down. Yet the slowness of my fall did nothing to allay the terror I felt in falling. I saw ceiling and platform revolve above me. I was conscious that I would land on my back, with spine and skull bearing the shock, and yet I could not turn myself.

I clutched for some support, and my imagination fervently, feverishly conjured up the flying jib stay. The four faces looking down at me—Sidero's armored visor, Idas's chalk-white cheeks, Purn's grin, Gunnie's beautiful, brutal features—seemed masks from a nightmare. And surely no waking unfortunate flung from the top of the Bell Tower had so long in which to contemplate his own destruction. I struck with a jolt that knocked out my breath. For a hundred heartbeats or more I lay gasping, just as I had panted for air when I had at last regained the interior of the ship. Slowly I realized that though I had suffered a fall indeed, it had been no worse than I might have suffered in falling from my bed to the carpet in some evil dream of Typhon.

Sitting up, I found no broken bones. Bundles of papers had been my carpet, and I thought Sidero must have known they were there and that I would not be hurt.

Then I saw beside me a crazily tilted mechanism, spiky with shafts and levers. I got to my feet. Far above, the platform was empty, the door that led to the corridor closed. I looked for the spidery ladder, but all except the uppermost rungs were obscured by the mechanism. I edged around that, impeded by the unevenly stacked bundles (they had been tied with sisal, and some of the cords had broken, so that I slipped and slid over documents as I might have over snow), but greatly aided by the lightness of my body. Because I was looking down to find my footing, I did not see the thing before me until I was actually peering into its blind face.

Chapter III

The Cabin.

MY HAND went to my pistol—I had it out and leveled almost before I knew it. The shaggy creature seemed no different from the stooped figure of the salamander that had once nearly burned me alive in Thrax. I expected it to rear erect and reveal the blazing heart within. It did not, and until too late I did not fire. For a moment we waited motionless; then it fled, bouncing and scrambling across the boxes and barrels like an awkward puppy in pursuit of the lively ball that was itself.

With that vile instinct every man has to kill whatever may fear him, I fired. The beam—potentially deadly still, though I had reduced it to its lowest strength to seal the leaden coffer—split the air and set a solid-looking ingot to clanging like a gong. But the creature, whatever it was, was a dozen ells away at least, and in another moment it had disappeared behind a statue swathed in protective wrappings. Someone shouted, and I thought I recognized Gunnie's husky contralto. There was a sound like a singing arrow, then a yell from another throat. The shaggy creature came bounding back, but this time, having regained my senses, I did not shoot. Purn appeared and fired his caliver, swinging it like a fowling piece.

Instead of the bolt I expected, it shot forth a cord, something flexible and swift that looked black in the strange light and flew with the singing I had heard a moment before. This black cord struck the shaggy creature and wrapped it with a loop or two, but seemed to produce no other result. Purn gave a shout and leaped like a grasshopper. It had not occurred to me before that in this vast place I could leap myself just as I had on deck, but I imitated him now (mostly because I did not wish to lose contact with Sidero before I had revenged myself) and nearly dashed out my brains against the ceiling.

While I was in the air, however, I had a magnificent view of the hold beneath me. There was the shaggy creature, which might have been fallow under Urth's sun, streaked with black yet still skipping with frantic energy; even as I saw him, Sidero's caliver blotched him more. There was Purn nearly upon him, and Idas and Gunnie, the latter firing even as she ran in great leaps, from high place to high place across the jumbled cargo. I dropped near them, climbed unsteadily atop the tilted breach of a mountain carronade, and hardly saw the shaggy creature scrambling toward me until it had bounced almost into my arms.

I say „almost“ because I did not actually grasp it, and certainly it did not grasp me.

Nevertheless, we remained together—the black cords adhered to my clothing as well as to the flat strips (neither fur nor feathers) of the shaggy creature. A moment after we had tumbled from the carronade, I discovered another property of the cords: stretched, they contracted again to a length less than the first, and with great force. Struggling to free myself, I found myself more tightly bound than ever, a circumstance that Gunnie and Purn found highly amusing. Sidero crisscrossed the shaggy creature with fresh cords, then told Gunnie to release me, which she did by cutting me free with her dagger.

„Thank you,“ I said. „It happens all the time,“ she said. „I got stuck onto a basket like that once. Don't worry about it.“ Led by Sidero, Purn and Idas were already carrying the creature away.

I stood up. „I’m afraid I’m no longer accustomed to being laughed at.“ „One time you were? You don’t look it.“ „As an apprentice. Everyone laughed at the younger apprentices, especially the older ones.“ Gunnie shrugged. „Half the things a person does are funny, if you come to think of it. Like sleeping with your mouth open. If you’re quartermaster, nobody laughs. But if you’re not, your best friend will slip a dust ball into it. Don’t try to pull those off.“ The black cords had clung to the nap of my velvet shirt, and I had been plucking at them. „I should carry a knife,“ I said. „You mean you don’t?“ She looked at me commiseratingly, her eyes as large, as dark, and as soft as any cow’s. „But everybody ought to have a knife.“ „I used to wear a sword,“ I said.

„After a while I gave it up, except for ceremonies. When I left my cabin, I thought my pistol would be more than adequate.“ „For fighting. But how much do you have to do, a man who looks like you do?“ She took a backward step and pretended to evaluate my appearance. „I don’t think many people would give you trouble.“ The truth was that in her thick-soled sea boots she stood as tall as I did. In any place where men and women bore weight, she would have been as heavy too; there was real muscle on her bones, with a good deal of fat over it. I laughed and admitted that a knife would have been useful when Sidero threw me off the platform. „Oh, no,“ she told me.

„A knife wouldn’t have scratched him.“ She grinned. „That’s what the whoremaster said when the sailor came.“ I laughed, and she linked her arm through mine. „Anyway, a knife’s not mainly for fighting. It’s for working, one way or another. How’re you going to splice rope without a knife, or open ration boxes? You keep your eyes open as we go along. No telling what you’ll find in one of these cargo bays.“

„We’re going in the wrong direction,“ I said. „I know another way, and if we went out the way we came in, you’d never find anything. It’s too short.“

„What happens if Sidero turns out the lights?“ „He won’t. Once you wake them up they stay bright until there’s nobody to watch. Ah, I see something. Look there.“ I looked, suddenly certain she had noticed a knife during our hunt for the shaggy creature and was merely pretending to have found it now. Only a bone hilt was visible. „Go ahead. Nobody’ll mind if you take it.“

„That wasn’t what I was thinking about,“ I told her. It was a hunting knife, with a narrowed point and a heavy saw-backed blade about two spans long. Just the thing, I thought, for rough work.

„Get the sheath too. You can’t carry it in your hand all day.“ That was of plain black leather, but it included a pocket that had once held some small tool and recalled the whetstone pocket on the manskin sheath of Terminus Est. I was beginning to like the knife already, and I liked it more when I saw that.

„Put it on your belt.“ I did as I was told, positioning it on the left where it balanced the weight of my pistol. „I would have expected better stowage on a big vessel like this.“ Gunnie shrugged. „This isn’t really cargo. Just odds and ends. Do you know how the ship’s built?“ „I haven’t the least idea.“ She laughed at that. „Neither does anyone else, I suppose. We have ideas we pass along to each other, but eventually we usually find out they’re wrong. Partly wrong, anyway.“

„I would have thought you’d know your ship.“ „She’s too big, and there are too many places where they never take us, and we can’t find for ourselves, or get into. But she’s got seven sides; that’s so she’ll carry more sail, you follow me?“

„I understand.“

„Some of the decks—three, I think—have deep bays. That’s where the main cargo is. They leave the other four with wedge-shaped spaces. Some’s used for odds and ends, like this bay. Some’s cabins and crew’s quarters and what not. But speaking of quarters, we’d better get back.“ She had led me to another ladder, another platform.

I said, „I imagined somehow that we would go through a secret panel, or perhaps only find that as we walked these odds and ends, as you call them, became a garden.“

Gunnie shook her head, then grinned. „I see you’ve seen a bit of her already. You’re a poet too, aren’t you? And a good liar, I bet.“

„I was the Autarch of Urth; that required a little lying, if you like. We called it diplomacy.“

„Well, let me tell you that this is a working ship; it’s just that she wasn’t built by people like you and me. Autarch—does that mean you run the whole Urth?“

„No, I ran only a small part of it, although I was the legitimate head of the whole of it. And I’ve known ever since I began my journey that if I succeed, I won’t come back as Autarch. You seem singularly unimpressed.“

„There are so many worlds,“ she told me. Quite suddenly she crouched and leaped, rising into the air like a large blue bird. Even though I had made such leaps myself, it was strange to see a woman do it. Her ascent carried her a cubit or less above the platform, and she might honestly have been said to have floated down upon it.

Without thinking, I had supposed the crew’s quarters would be a narrow room like the forecastle of the Samru. There was a warren of big cabins instead, many levels opening onto walkways around a common airshaft. Gunnie said she had to return to her duty, and suggested I look for an empty cabin. It was on my tongue to remind her I had a cabin already, which I had left only a watch before; but something stopped me. I nodded and asked her what location was best—by which I meant, as she understood, which would be nearest hers. She indicated it to me, and we parted. On Urth the older locks are charmed by words. My stateroom had a speaking lock, and though the hatches had needed no words at all and the door Sidero had flung open had required none, the olive doors of these crew compartments were equipped with locks of the same kind.

The first two I approached informed me that the cabins they guarded were occupied. They must have been old mechanisms indeed; I noticed that their personalities had begun to differentiate. The third invited me to enter, saying, „What a nice cabin!“ I asked how long it had been since the nice cabin had been inhabited.

„I don’t know, master. Many voyages.“

„Don’t call me master,“ I told it. „I haven’t decided to take your cabin yet.“ There was no reply. No doubt such locks are of severely limited intelligence; otherwise they might be bribed, and they would surely go mad soon. After a moment the door swung open. I stepped inside. It was not a nice cabin compared with the stateroom I had left. There were two narrow bunks, an armoire, and a chest; sanitary facilities in a corner.

Dust covered everything to such a thickness that I could readily imagine it being blown from the ventilating grill in gray clouds, through the clouds would be seen only by a man who had some means of compressing time as the ship compressed it; if a man lived as a tree does, perhaps, for which each year is a day; or like Gyoll, running through the valley of Nessus for whole ages of the

world. While thinking of such things, which took me much longer to meditate upon than it has taken me just now to write about them, I had found a red rag in the armoire, moistened it at the laver, and begun to wipe away the dust.

When I saw that I had already cleaned the top of the chest and the steel frame of one bunk, I knew that I had decided to stay, however unconsciously. I would locate my stateroom again, of course, and more often than not I would sleep there. But I would have this cabin as well. When I grew bored, I would join the crew and thus learn more about the operation of the ship than I ever would as a passenger.

There was Gunnie too. I have had women enough in my arms to have no conceit about the number—one soon comes to realize that union cripples love when it does not enhance it—and poor Valeria was often in my thoughts; yet I hungered for Gunnie's affection. As Autarch I had few friends save for Father Inire, and Valeria was the only woman. Some quality in Gunnie's smile recalled my happy childhood with Thea (how I miss her still!) and the long trip to Thrax with Dorcas.

It had been a journey I had counted mere exile at the time, so that each day I had hurried forward. Now I knew that in many ways it had been the summer of my life. I rinsed the rag again, conscious that I had done so often, though I could not have told how often; when I looked about for another dusty surface to wipe, I found that I had wiped them all. The mattress was not so easily dealt with, but it had to be cleaned in some fashion—it was as filthy as everything else had been, and we would surely want to lie upon it occasionally.

I carried it onto the walkway overhanging the airshaft and beat it until it yielded no more dust. When I had finished and was rolling it up to take back into the cabin, the wind from the airshaft brought a wild cry.

Chapter IV

The Citizens of the Sails.

IT CAME from below. I peered over the twig-thin railing and as I peered heard it again, filled with anguish and a loneliness that echoed and re-echoed among the metal catwalks, the metal tiers of metal cabins. Hearing it, it seemed to me for a moment that it was my own cry, that something I had held deep inside me since that still-dark morning when I had walked the beach with the aquastor Master Malrubius and watched the aquastor Triskele dissolve in shimmering dust had freed itself and separated itself from me, and that it was below, howling in the faint, lost light.

I was tempted to leap over the rail, for then I did not know the depth of that shaft. As it was, I flung the mattress through the doorway of my new cabin and descended the narrow winding stair by jumping from one flight to the next. From above, the abyss of the shaft had seemed opaque, the strange radiance of yellow lamps beating upon it without effect. I had supposed that this opacity would vanish when I reached the lower levels—but it solidified instead, until I was reminded of Baldanders's chamber of cloud, though it was really not so thick as that.

The swirling air grew warmer too, and perhaps the mist that shrouded everything was only the result of warm, moist air from the bowels of the ship mixing with the cooler atmosphere of the upper levels. I was soon sweating in my velvet shirt. Here the doors of many cabins stood ajar, but the cabins themselves were dark.

Once, or so it seemed to me, the ship must have had a more numerous crew, or perhaps had been used to transport prisoners (the cabins would have done well as cells, if the locks were differently instructed) or soldiers. The cry came again, and with it a noise like the ringing of a hammer on an anvil, though it held a note that told me it rang from no forge, but from a mouth of flesh. Heard by night, in a fastness of the mountains, they would have been more terrible than the howling of a dire-wolf, I think. What sadness, dread, and loneliness, what fear and agony were there! I paused for breath and looked around me.

Beasts, so it seemed, were confined in the cabins farther down. Or perhaps madmen, as we of the torturers had confined pain-crazed clients on the third level of the oubliette. Who could say that every door was shut? Might not some of these creatures be unconfined, kept from the upper levels by mere chance or their fear of man? I drew my pistol and made sure it was at its lowest setting and that it had a full charge. My initial glimpse of the vivarium below confirmed my worst fears.

Filmy trees waved at the edge of a glacier, a waterfall tumbled and sang, a dune lifted its sterile yellow crest, and two score creatures prowled among them. I watched them for a dozen breaths before I began to suspect that they were confined nonetheless, and for fifty more before I felt sure of it.

But each had its own plot of ground, small or large, and they could no more mingle than could the beasts in the Bear Tower. What a strange group they made! If every swamp and forest on Urth were combed for oddities, I do not believe such a collection could be assembled. Some gibbered, some stared, most lay comatose.

I holstered my pistol and called, „Who howled?“ That was only a joke made to myself, yet a response came a whimper from the rear of the vivarium; I threaded my way through the beasts, following a narrow nearly invisible track made, as I soon afterward learned, by the sailors sent to feed them. It was the shaggy creature I had helped catch in the cargo bay, and I beheld him with a certain warmth of recognition. I had been so much alone since the pinnacle had carried me from the gardens of the House Absolute to this ship that to meet even so queer a being as he was seemed the second time almost a reunion with an old acquaintance. Then too, I was interested in the creature himself, since I had assisted in his capture. When we had pursued him, he had appeared almost spherical; now I saw that he was in fact one of those short-limbed, short-bodied animals that generally live in burrows—something like a pika, in other words. There was a round head atop a neck so short that one had to take it on faith; a round body too, of which the head seemed a mere continuation; four short legs, each ending in four long, blunt claws and one short one; a covering of flattened, brownish-gray hairs.

Two bright black eyes that stared at me. „Poor thing,“ I said. „How did you ever get into that hold?“ He came to the limit of the invisible barrier that enclosed him, moving much more slowly now that he was no longer frightened.

„Poor thing,“ I said again. He reared upon his hind legs as pikas sometimes do, forelegs nearly crossed over his white belly. Strands of black cord still streaked the white fur.

They reminded me that the same cords had stuck to my shirt. I plucked at what remained of them and found them weak now, some crumbling under my fingers. The cords on the shaggy creature seemed to be falling away as well.

He whimpered softly; instinctively, I reached out to comfort him as I would have an anxious dog, then drew my hand away, fearful he might bite or claw me. A moment later, I cursed myself for a coward. He had harmed no one in the hold, and when I had wrestled with him, there had been no indication that he was trying to do more than escape. I thrust a forefinger into the barrier (which proved no barrier to me) and scratched the side of his tiny mouth.

He turned his head just as a dog would have, and I felt small ears beneath the fur. Behind me, someone said, „Cute, ain't it?“ and I turned to look. It was Purn, the grinning sailor. I answered, „He seems harmless enough.“

„Most are.“ Purn hesitated. „Only most die and drift off. We only see a few of 'em, that's what they say.“

„Gunnie calls them apports,“ I remarked, „and I've been thinking about that. The sails bring them, don't they?“ Purn nodded absently and stretched a finger of his own through the barrier to tickle the shaggy creature.

„Adjacent sails must be like two large mirrors. They're curved, so somewhere—in fact, in various places—they must be parallel, and the starlight shines on them.“ Purn nodded again. „That's what makes the ship go, as the skipper said when they asked about the wench.“

„I once knew a man called Hethor who summoned deadly things to serve him. And I was told by one called Vodalus—Vodalus was not to be trusted, I'll admit—that Hethor used mirrors to bring them. I've a friend who works mirror spells too, though his are not evil. Hethor had been a hand on a ship like this.“

That captured Purn's attention. He withdrew his finger and turned to face me. „You know her name?“ he asked. „The name of his ship? No, I don't think he ever mentioned it. Wait... He said he'd been on several. (Long I signed on the silver-sailed ships, the hundred-masted whose masts reached out to touch the stars.)“

„Ah.“ Purn nodded. „Some say there's only one. That's something I wonder about, sometimes.“

„Surely there must be many. Even when I was a boy, people told me of them, the ships of the cacogens putting into the Port of Lune.“

„Where's that?“

„Lune? It's the moon of my world, the moon of Urth.“

„That was small stuff, then,“ Purn told me. „Tenders and launches and so forth. Nobody never said there wasn't a lot of little stuff shuttling around between the various worlds of the various suns. Only this ship here and the other ones like it, allowing that there's more than the one, they don't come in so close, generally. They can do it all right, but it's a tricky business. Then too, there's a good bit of rock whizzing around, close in to a sun, usually.“

The white-haired Idas appeared carrying a collection of tools. „Hello!“ he called, and I waved to him.

„I ought to get busy,“ Purn muttered. „Me and that one are supposed to be taking care of 'em. I was just looking around to be sure they were all right when I saw you, uh, uh...“

„Severian,“ I said. „I was the Autarch—the ruler—of the Commonwealth; now I’m the surrogate of Urth, and its ambassador. Do you come from Urth, Purn?“

„Don’t think I’ve ever been, but maybe I have.“ He looked thoughtful. „Big white moon?“

„No, it’s green. You were on Verthandi, perhaps; I’ve read that its moons are pale gray.“

Purn shrugged. „I don’t know.“ Idas had come up to us by then, and he said, „It must be wonderful.“ I had no notion of what he meant.

Purn moved away, looking at the beasts. As if we were two conspirators Idas whispered, „Don’t worry about him. He’s afraid I’ll report him for not working.“

„Aren’t you afraid I’ll report you?“ I asked. There was something about Idas that irritated me, though perhaps it was only his seeming weakness. „Oh, do you know Sidero?“

„Who I know is my own affair, I believe.“

„I don’t think you know anyone,“ he said. And then, as if he had committed a merely social blunder, „But maybe you do. Or I could introduce you. I will, if you want me to.“

„I do,“ I told him. „Introduce me to Sidero at the first opportunity. I demand to be returned to my stateroom.“

Idas nodded. „I will. Perhaps you wouldn’t mind if I came there to talk with you sometime? You—I hope you’ll excuse me for saying this—you know nothing about ships, and I know nothing about such places as, ah...“ „Urth?“ „Nothing of worlds. I’ve seen a few pictures, but other than that, all I know are these.“ He gestured vaguely toward the beasts. „And they are bad, always bad. But perhaps there are good things on the worlds too, that never live long enough to find their way to the decks.“

„Surely they’re not all evil.“

„Oh, yes,“ he said. „Oh, yes they are. And I, who have to clean up after them, and feed them, and adjust the atmosphere for them if they need it, would rather kill them all; but Sidero and Zelezo would beat me if I did.“

„I wouldn’t be surprised if they killed you,“ I told him. I had no desire to see such a fascinating collection wiped out by this petty man’s spite. „Which would be just, I think. You look as though you belong among them yourself.“

„Oh, no,“ he said seriously. „It’s you and Purn and the rest who do. I was born here on the ship.“

Something in his manner told me he was trying to draw me into conversation and would gladly quarrel with me if only it would keep me talking. For my part, I had no desire to talk at all, much less quarrel. I felt tired enough to drop, and I was ravenously hungry. I said, „If I belong in this collection of exotic brutes, it’s up to you to see I’m fed. Where is the galley?“

Idas hesitated for a moment, quite plainly debating some sort of exchange of information—he would direct me if I would first answer seven questions about Urth, or something of that sort.

Then he realized I was ready to knock him down if he said anything of the kind, and he told me, though sullenly enough, how to get there. One of the advantages of such a memory as mine, which stores everything and forgets nothing, is that it is as good as paper at such times. (Indeed, that may be its only advantage.) On this occasion, however, it did me no more good than it had when I had tried to follow the directions of that lochage of the peltasts whom I met upon the bridge of Gyoll. No doubt Idas had assumed I knew more of the

ship than I did, and that I would not count doors and look for turnings with exactness. Soon I realized I had gone wrong. Three corridors branched where there should have been only two, and a promised stair did not appear. I retraced my path, found the point at which (as I believed) I had become lost, and began again. Almost at once, I found myself treading a broad, straight passageway such as Idas had told me led to the galley.

I assumed then that my wanderings had sent me wide of part of the prescribed route, and I strode along in high spirits. By the standards of the ship, it was a wide and windy place indeed. No doubt it was one that received its atmosphere directly from the devices that circulated and purified it, for it smelled as a breeze from the south does on a rainy day in spring. The floor was neither of the strange grass I had seen before nor of the grillwork I had already come to hate, but polished wood deeply entombed in clear varnish. The walls, which had been of a dark and deathly gray in the crew's quarters, were white here, and once or twice I passed padded seats that stood with their backs toward the walls. The passageway turned and turned again, and I felt that it was rising ever so slightly, though the weight I lifted with my steps was so slight I could not be certain. There were pictures on the walls, and some of these pictures moved—once a picture of our ship as it might have been limned by someone far distant; I could not help but stop to look, and I shuddered to think how near I had come to seeing it so.

Another turn—but one that proved not to be a turn, only the termination of the passageway in a circle of doors. I chose one at random and stepped into a narrow gangway so dark, after the white passage, that I could hardly see more than the lights overhead. A few moments later, I realized that I had passed a hatch, the first I had seen since reentering the ship; still not wholly free from the fear that had gripped me when I saw that terrible and beautiful picture, I took out my necklace as I strode along and made certain it had not been damaged. The gangway turned twice and divided, then twisted like a serpent. A door swung open as I passed, releasing the aroma of roast meat. A voice, the thin and mechanical voice of the lock, said, „Welcome back, master.“ I looked through the doorway and saw my own cabin. Not, of course, the cabin I had taken in the crew's quarters, but the stateroom I had left to launch the leaden coffer into the great light of the new universe aborning only a watch or two before.

Chapter V

The Hero and the Hierodules.

THE STEWARD had brought my meal and, finding me not in my stateroom, had left it on the table.

The meat was still warm under its bell; I ate it ravenously, and with it new bread and salt butter, celeriac and salsify, and red wine. Afterward I undressed, washed myself, and slept. He woke me, shaking me by my shoulder. It was odd, but when Ithe Autarch of Urthhad boarded the ship, I had scarcely noticed him, though he brought my meals and willingly saw to various little wants; no doubt it was that very willingness which had unjustly wiped him from my attention.

Now that I myself had been a member of the crew, it was as though he had turned to show another face. It looked down at me now, blunt-featured yet intelligent, the eyes bright with suppressed excitement. „Someone wishes to see you, Autarch,“ he murmured.

I sat up. „Someone you felt you should wake me for?“ „Yes, Autarch.“ „The captain, perhaps.“ Was I to be censured for going on deck? The necklace had been provided for emergency use, but it seemed unlikely.

„No, Autarch. Our captain’s seen you, I’m sure. Three Hierodules, Autarch.“

„Yes?“ I fenced for time. „Is that the captain’s voice I hear sometimes in the corridors? When did he see me? I don’t recall seeing him.“

„I’ve no idea, Autarch. But our captain’s seen you, I’m sure. Often, probably. Our captain sees people.“

„Indeed.“ I was pulling on a clean shirt as I digested the hint that there was a secret ship within this ship, just as the Secret House was within the House Absolute. „It must interfere with his other work.“

„I don’t believe it does, Autarch. They’re waiting outside—could you hurry?“ I dressed more slowly after that, of course. To draw the belt from my dusty trousers, I had to remove my pistol and the knife that Gunnie had found for me. The steward told me I would not need them; so I wore them, feeling absurdly as though I were going to inspect a reconstituted formation of demilances.

The knife was nearly long enough to be called a sword. It had not occurred to me that the three might be Ossipago, Barbatus, and Famulimus. As far as I knew, I had left them far behind on Urth, and they had most certainly not been in the pinnace with me, though of course they possessed their own craft. Now here they were, disguised (and badly) as human beings, just as they had been at our first encounter in Baldanders’s castle. Ossipago bowed as stiffly as ever, Barbatus and Famulimus as gracefully. I returned their greetings as well I could and suggested that if they wished to speak to me, they were welcome in my stateroom, apologizing in advance for its disorder.

„We cannot come inside,“ Famulimus told me. „However much we would. The room to which we bring you is not too far away.“ Her voice, as always, was like the speaking of a lark. Barbatus added, „Cabins like yours are not as safe as we might wish,“ in his masculine baritone.

„Then I will go wherever you lead me,“ I said. „Do you know, it’s truly cheering to see you three again. Yours are faces from home, even if they are false faces.“

„You know us, I see,“ Barbatus said as we started down the corridor. „But the faces beneath these are too horrible for you, I fear.“

The corridor was too narrow for us to go four abreast; he and I walked side by side, Famulimus and Ossipago side by side behind us. It has taken me a long time to lose the despair that seized me at that moment. „This is the first time?“ I asked. „You have not met me before?“

Famulimus trilled, „Though we do not know you, yet you know us, Severian. I saw how pleased you looked, when first you came into our sight. Often we have met, and we are friends.“

„But we will not meet again,“ I said. „It’s the first time for you, who will travel backward through time when you leave me. And so it’s the last time for me. When we first met, you said, ‘Welcome! There is no greater joy for us than greeting you, Severian,’ and you were saddened at our parting. I remember it

very well—I remember everything very well, as you had better know at once how you leaned over the rail of your ship to wave to me as I stood upon the roof of Baldanders's tower in the rain."

"Only Ossipago here has memory like yours," Famulimus whispered. "But I shall not forget."

"So it's my turn to say welcome now, and mine to be sad because we're parting. I've known you three for more than ten years, and I know that the hideous faces beneath those masks are only masks themselves—Famulimus took hers off the first time we met, though I did not understand then that it was because she had done so often before. I know that Ossipago is a machine, although he is not so agile as Sidero, who I am beginning to believe must be a machine too."

"That name means iron," Ossipago said, speaking for the first time. "Though I do not know him."

"And yours means bone-grower. You took care of Barbatu and Famulimus when they were small, saw to it that they were fed and so on, and you've remained with them ever since. That's what Famulimus told me once." Barbatu said, "We are come," and opened the door for me.

In childhood, one imagines that any door unopened may open upon a wonder, a place different from all the places one knows. That is because in childhood it has so often proved to be so; the child, knowing nothing of any place except his own, is astonished and delighted by novel sights that an adult would readily have anticipated.

When I was only a boy, the doorway of a certain mausoleum had been a portal of wonder to me; and when I had crossed its threshold, I was not disappointed. On this ship I was a child again, knowing no more of the world around me than a child does. The chamber into which Barbatu ushered me was as marvelous to Severian the manto the Autarch Severian, who had Thecla's life, and the old Autarch's, and a hundred more to draw upon as the mausoleum had been to the child. I am tempted to write that it appeared to be underwater, but it did not. Rather we seemed immersed in some fluid that was not water, but was to some other world what water was to Urth; or perhaps that we were underwater indeed, but water so cold it would have been frozen in any lake of the Commonwealth.

All this was merely an effect of the light, I believe—of the freezing wind that wandered, nearly stagnating, through the chamber, and of the colors, tints of green shaded with blue and black: viridian, berylline, and aquamarine, with tarnished gold and yellowed ivory here and there shining sullenly. The furnishings were not of furniture as we understand it. Mottled slabs of seeming stone that yielded to my touch leaned crookedly against two walls and were scattered across the floor.

Tattered streamers hung suspended from the ceiling and, because they were so light and the attraction of our ship hardly felt, seemed in need of no suspension. So far as I could judge, the air was as dry here as in the corridor; yet the ghost of an icy spray beat against my face.

"Is this strange place your stateroom?" I asked Barbatu. He nodded as he removed his masks, revealing a face that was at once handsome, inhuman, and familiar. "We have seen the chambers your kind makes. They are as disturbing to us as this must be to you, and since there are three of us" "Two," Ossipago said.

„It does not matter to me.“

„I'm not offended, I'm delighted! It's the greatest of privileges for me to see how you live when you live as you wish.“ Famulimus's falsely human face was gone, revealing some huge-eyed horror with needle teeth; she pulled that away as well, and I saw (for one last time, as I then believed) the beauty of a goddess not born of woman. „How fast we learn, Barbatus, that these poor folk we'll meet, who hardly know what we know best, know courtesy as guests.“

If I had attended to what she said, it would have made me smile. As it was, I was far too busy still in looking about that strange cabin. At last I said, „I know your race was formed by the Hierogrammates to resemble those who once formed them. Now I see, or think I see, that you were once inhabitants of lakes and pools, kelpies such as our country folk talk of.“

