

My grandfather has never been the praying type, but today I think he's praying. I can't think of any other reason he'd be sitting alone in this dim chapel. He's not on the radio, or consulting with flunkies, or looking at battle maps. He's just sitting there in a pew, staring straight ahead at the patch of broken plaster where the icons of the Pisces and the other fish-gods should be.

It's cool down here beneath the remains of the city, in the thick-walled crypt; even though I try hugging myself for warmth, my fingers are cold against my bare arms. I don't know how he can stand it — stale air, no sun, not even a glimpse of the sea. It's giving me the creeps. I'm longing to leave, but I'm the one who wanted this meeting, so I have to wait as long as he makes me. Gjacinta, my cousin, stands behind me and makes no sound, except once when she shifts her rifle on her hip, letting out the slightest clink of metal. Earlier I tried asking her how she's doing, but all I got was a curt nod, no eye contact.

At long last my grandfather sits forward, then gets to his feet and stands in the center aisle. Even if he's losing, war agrees with him. Whenever I see him, I swear he's getting stronger, taller and ruddier and haler, sucking up energy from the fighting. Today, with his Garion Federation—colors bandanna around his head, he looks like a pirate.

Looking past me, he says to Gjacinta, "Send her in."

"The Elder says you can go in now," Gjacinta tells me.

"Yeah, I got that."

I start to close the heavy wooden door of the chapel behind me, but she snaps, "Leave it open." I'm unsettled by how jumpy they are. She frisked me before she brought me this close to him, and I mean thoroughly: stripped me, checked all my orifices, tugged on my teeth before letting me get dressed again. Now, she follows me into the chapel and stands off to the side, gun at the ready.