

FLITTED LIKE A SHADOW

The door opened to a landing in a dusty stairwell. A continuous roar echoed around them, reminding Andrew of the ore loader noise. Ezzar led them down one floor to another landing. She took Cortevail's biscuit from her pocket, along with a marker, and copied the mark on the biscuit onto the wall. Andrew watched the mark fade away to invisibility. "What is it?" he asked.

"A signal for the right kind of eyes," Ezzar said. "It fades at a fixed rate. Now we wait somewhere and come back here in exactly one day. Here." She gave the biscuit to Janny, who sniffed at it, licked it, and ate it.

They found an abandoned room a few deserted levels up away from the dust, and sat down on the floor among discarded crates to wait. Andrew watched Janny. She seemed capable of remaining absolutely motionless for hours at a time.

Occasionally she flitted across the room and out like a shadow, returning a few minutes later. He tried to stop her one time when she did this, but she promptly opened her coverall and urinated on the floor. Grendel gave a deep, soft laugh. After that, Andrew let her leave when she wanted to.

When she slept, her fingers curled and uncurled, and her head jerked back and forth as she dreamed. Andrew lay down beside her on the hard floor where she could feel his warmth. He drowsed off, and awoke to find her nestling against him. He put his arm around her and hummed a little song he had sung to all his children. He couldn't finish it; he broke down and started to cry. But she stayed, asleep, her knot-haired little head bobbing on his chest, as he regained control and breathed deeply once again.