

## VOICE IN THE BRAIN

Marra opened her eyes wide and sat up. The morning sun shone red-orange in the window. Deen stood in the doorway, fully dressed, smiling, her natural dark golden color replacing the ashen smudginess of her long illness. “Good morning,” Deen said. “I’m better. A lot better. I’ve never felt so good, not since I was thirty.”

“That woman? Where is she?”

“She was gone when I got up.”

Marra got out of bed and balanced uncertainly on her feet. She seemed to weigh only half as much as usual. Her limbs cut the air, her joints swung free as they had not done for a long time. But she’d been sick. “What... I... Are we dead or something? I feel like a child.”

Good morning. The voice came from the base of Marra’s brain. She jumped and looked around. It sounded like a woman, with odd male undertones.

“Who’s there?”

Deen cocked her head. “So you’ve got one too. Or is it the same as mine?”

“What?”

“A voice. Mine’s called Oortonel. What’s yours?”

“I don’t know what you mean. What’s going on?”

I am called Aoriver.

“What? Oh, it says it’s Orrivar.” Marra shrugged. “But— ”

Aoriver.

“Sorry, I mean... Aoriver. Where are you?”

I’m part of you. And Oortonel is part of... What is her name?

“Deen’s her name. How did you get here? What are you?”

Portaluca brought us to you. She said you needed healing.

“Deen, that woman...”

“No trace of her.”

“Where did your, ah, people come from?”

A sound like a chuckle from within. We no longer remember that. But the place where I, myself... constituted was a triple sun that danced mightily — your kind named it Algol. Al-Ghoul. The Demon Star.

“Demon? Are you like that?”

Like what?

“Demons.”

Your kind give many names to meanings, and then you squabble over those names. We use names as playthings.

“You’re evading my question.”

It has no answer.

“Hmm. I’m sure it does, when the time comes.”

Maybe you will think so. But we will keep you healthy. All you need to do is feed us from time to time. Not often, every few years.

“What do you eat?”

You will understand. When the time comes.