

PROLOGUE

He glided through the noonday sunshine's oppressive heat, moving as if always cloaked in shadows, though the place had few, and as if even the ever-present dust could not touch him. The open market was crowded—it was always crowded—with yelling merchants and customers bargaining for every copper piece. Thieves were positioning themselves in all the best and busiest places, where they might cut a purse string without ever being noticed, or if they were discovered, where they could melt away into a swirling crowd of bright colors and flowing robes.

Artemis Entreri noted the thieves clearly. He could tell with a glance who was there to shop and who was there to steal, and he didn't avoid the latter group. He purposely set his course to bring him right by every thief he could find, and he'd pushed back one side of his dark cloak, revealing his ample purse—

—revealing, too, the jewel-decorated dagger that kept his purse and his person perfectly safe. The dagger was his trademark weapon, one of the most feared blades on all of Calimport's dangerous streets.

Entreri enjoyed the respect the young thieves offered him, and more than that, he demanded it. He had spent years earning his reputation as the finest assassin in Calimport, but he was getting older. He was losing, perhaps, that fine edge of brilliance. Thus, he came out brazenly—more so than he ever would have in his younger days—daring them, any of them, to make a try for him.

He crossed the busy avenue, heading for a small outdoor tavern that had many round tables set under a great awning. The place was bustling, but Entreri immediately spotted his contact, the flamboyant Sha'lazzi Ozoule with his trademark bright yellow turban. Entreri moved straight for the table. Sha'lazzi wasn't sitting alone, though it was obvious to Entreri that the three men seated with him were not friends of his, were not known to him at all. The others held a private conversation, chattering and chuckling, while Sha'lazzi leaned back, glancing all around.

Entreri walked up to the table. Sha'lazzi gave a nervous and embarrassed shrug as the assassin looked questioningly at the three uninvited guests.

"You did not tell them that this table was reserved for our luncheon?" Entreri calmly asked.

The three men stopped their conversation and looked up at him curiously.

"I tried to explain . . ." Sha'lazzi started, wiping the sweat from his dark-skinned brow.

Entreri held up his hand to silence the man and fixed his imposing gaze on the three trespassers. "We have business," he said.

"And we have food and drink," one of them replied.

Entreri didn't reply, other than to stare hard at the man, to let his gaze lock with the other's.

The other two made a couple of remarks, but Entreri ignored them completely, just kept staring hard at the first challenger. On and on it went, and Entreri kept his focus, even tightened it, his gaze boring into the man,

showing him the strength of will he now faced, the perfect determination and control.

“What is this about?” one of the others demanded, standing up right beside Entreri.

Sha'lazzi muttered the quick beginning of a common prayer.

“I asked you,” the man pushed, and he reached out to shove Entreri's shoulder.

Up snapped the assassin's hand, catching the approaching hand by the thumb and spinning it over, then driving it down, locking the man in a painful hold.

All the while Entreri didn't blink, didn't glance away at all, just kept visually holding the first one, who was sitting directly across from him, in that awful glare.

The man standing at Entreri's side gave a little grunt as the assassin applied pressure, then brought his free hand to his belt, to the curved dagger he had secured there.

Sha'lazzi muttered another line of the prayer.

The man across the table, held fast by Entreri's deadly stare, motioned for his friend to hold calm and to keep his hand away from the blade.

Entreri nodded to him, then motioned for him to take his friends and be gone. He released the man at his side, who clutched at his sore thumb, eyeing Entreri threateningly. He didn't come at Entreri again, nor did either of his friends make any move, except to pick up their plates and sidle away. They hadn't recognized Entreri, yet he had shown them the truth of who he was without ever drawing his blade.

“I meant to do the same thing,” Sha'lazzi remarked with a chuckle as the three departed and Entreri settled into the seat opposite him.

Entreri just stared at him, noting how out-of-sorts this one always appeared. Sha'lazzi had a huge head and a big round face, and that put on a body so skinny as to appear emaciated. Furthermore, that big round face was always, always smiling, with huge, square white teeth glimmering in contrast to his dark skin and black eyes.

Sha'lazzi cleared his throat again. “Surprised I am that you came out for this meeting,” he said. “You have made many enemies in your rise with the Basadoni Guild. Do you not fear treachery, O powerful one?” he finished sarcastically and again with a chuckle.

Entreri only continued to stare. Indeed he had feared treachery, but he needed to speak with Sha'lazzi. Kimmuriel Oblodra, the drow psionicist working for Jarlaxle, had scoured Sha'lazzi's thoughts completely and had come to the conclusion that there was no conspiracy afoot.

Of course, considering the source of the information—a dark elf who held no love for Entreri—the assassin hadn't been completely comforted by the report.

“It can be a prison to the powerful, you understand,” Sha'lazzi rambled on. “A prison to *be* powerful, you see? So many pashas dare not leave their homes without an entourage of a hundred guards.”

“I am not a pasha.”

“No, indeed, but Basadoni belongs to you and to Sharlotta,” Sha'lazzi returned, referring to Sharlotta Vespers. The woman had used her wiles to

become Pasha Basadoni's second and had survived the drow takeover to serve as figurehead of the guild. And the guild had suddenly become more powerful than anyone could imagine. "Everyone knows this." Sha'lazzi gave another of his annoying chuckles. "I always understood that you were good, my friend, but never this good!"

Entreri smiled back, but in truth his amusement came from a fantasy of sticking his dagger into Sha'lazzi's skinny throat, for no better reason than the fact that he simply couldn't stand this parasite.

Entreri had to admit that he needed Sha'lazzi, though—and that was exactly how the notorious informant managed to stay alive. Sha'lazzi had made a living, indeed an art, out of telling anybody anything he wanted to know—for a price—and so good was he at his craft, so connected to every pulse beat of Calimport's ruling families and street thugs alike, that he had made himself too valuable to the often-warring guilds to be murdered.

"So tell me of the power behind the throne of Basadoni," Sha'lazzi remarked, grinning widely. "For surely there is more, yes?"

Entreri worked hard to keep himself stone-faced, knowing that a responding grin would give too much away—and how he wanted to grin at Sha'lazzi's honest ignorance of the truth of the new Basadonis. Sha'lazzi would never know that a dark elf army had set up shop in Calimport, using the Basadoni Guild as its front.

"I thought we had agreed to discuss Dallabad Oasis?" Entreri asked in reply.

Sha'lazzi sighed and shrugged. "Many interesting things to speak of," he said. "Dallabad is not one of them, I fear."

"In your opinion."

"Nothing has changed there in twenty years," Sha'lazzi replied. "There is nothing there that I know that you do not, and have not, for nearly as many years."

"Kohrin Soulez still retains Charon's Claw?" Entreri asked.

Sha'lazzi nodded. "Of course," he said with a chuckle. "Still and forever. It has served him for four decades, and when Soulez is dead, one of his thirty sons will take it, no doubt, unless the indelicate Ahdania Soulez gets to it first. An ambitious one is the daughter of Kohrin Soulez! If you came to ask me if he will part with it, then you already know the answer. We should indeed speak of more interesting things, such as the Basadoni Guild."

Entreri's hard stare returned in a heartbeat.

"Why would old Soulez sell it now?" Sha'lazzi asked with a dramatic wave of his skinny arms—arms that looked so incongruous when lifted beside that huge head. "What is this, my friend, the third time you have tried to purchase that fine sword? Yes, yes! First, when you were a pup with a few hundred gold pieces—a gift of Basadoni, eh?—in your ragged pouch."

Entreri winced at that despite himself, despite his knowledge that Sha'lazzi, for all of his other faults, was the best in Calimport at reading gestures and expressions and deriving the truth behind them. Still, the memory, combined with more recent events, evoked the response from his heart. Pasha Basadoni had indeed given him the extra coin that long-ago day, an offering to his most promising lieutenant for no good reason but simply as a gift. When he thought about it, Entreri realized that Basadoni was perhaps

the only man who had ever given him a gift without expecting something in return.

And Entreri had killed Basadoni, only a few months ago.

“Yes, yes,” Sha’lazzi said, more to himself than to Entreri, “then you asked about the sword again soon after Pasha Pook’s demise. Ah, but he fell hard, that one!”

Entreri just stared at the man. Sha’lazzi, apparently just then beginning to catch on that he might be pushing the dangerous assassin too far, cleared his throat, embarrassed.

“Then I told you that it was impossible,” Sha’lazzi remarked. “Of course it is impossible.”

“I have more coin now,” Entreri said quietly.

“There is not enough coin in all of the world!” Sha’lazzi wailed.

Entreri didn’t blink. “Do you know how much coin is in all the world, Sha’lazzi?” he asked calmly—too calmly. “Do you know how much coin is in the coffers of House Basadoni?”

“House Entreri, you mean,” the man corrected.

Entreri didn’t deny it, and Sha’lazzi’s eyes widened. There it was, as clearly spelled out as the informant could ever have expected to hear it. Rumors had said that old Basadoni was dead, and that Sharlotta Vespers and the other acting guildmasters were no more than puppets for the one who clearly pulled the strings: Artemis Entreri.

“Charon’s Claw,” Sha’lazzi mused, a smile widening upon his face. “So, the power behind the throne is Entreri, and the power behind Entreri is . . . well, a mage, I would guess, since you so badly want that particular sword. A mage, yes, and one who is getting a bit dangerous, eh?”

“Keep guessing,” said Entreri.

“And perhaps I will get it correct?”

“If you do, I will have to kill you,” the assassin said, still in that awful, calm tone. “Speak with Sheik Soulez. Find his price.”

“He has no price,” Sha’lazzi insisted.

Entreri came forward quicker than any cat after a mouse. One hand slapped down on Sha’lazzi’s shoulder, the other caught hold of that deadly jeweled dagger, and Entreri’s face came within an inch of Sha’lazzi’s.

“That would be most unfortunate,” Entreri said. “For you.”

The assassin pushed the informant back in his seat, then stood up straight and glanced around as if some inner hunger had just awakened within him and he was now seeking some prey with which to sate it. He looked back at Sha’lazzi only briefly, then walked out from under the awning, back into the tumult of the market area.

As he calmed down and considered the meeting, Entreri silently berated himself. His frustration was beginning to wear at the edges of perfection. He could not have been more obvious about the roots of his problem than to so eagerly ask about purchasing Charon’s Claw. Above all else, that weapon and gauntlet combination had been designed to battle wizards.

And psionicists, perhaps?

For those were Entreri’s tormentors, Rai-guy and Kimmuriel—Jarlaxle’s Bregan D’aerthe lieutenants—one a wizard and one a psionist. Entreri hated them both, and profoundly, but more importantly he knew that they

hated him. To make things worse Entreri understood that his only armor against the dangerous pair was Jarlaxle himself. While to his surprise he had come to cautiously trust the mercenary dark elf, he doubted Jarlaxle's protection would hold forever.

Accidents did happen, after all.

Entreri needed protection, but he had to go about things with his customary patience and intelligence, twisting the trail beyond anyone's ability to follow, fighting the way he had perfected so many years before on Calimport's tough streets, using many subtle layers of information and misinformation and blending the two together so completely that neither his friends nor his foes could ever truly unravel them. When only he knew the truth, then he, and only he, would be in control.

In that sobering light, he took the less than perfect meeting with perceptive Sha'lazzi as a distinct warning, a reminder that he could survive his time with the dark elves only if he kept an absolute level of personal control. Indeed, Sha'lazzi had come close to figuring out his current plight, had gotten half of it, at least, correct. The pie-faced man would obviously offer that information to any who'd pay well enough for it. On Calimport's streets these days many were scrambling to figure out the enigma of the sudden and vicious rise of the Basadoni Guild.

Sha'lazzi had figured out half of it, and so all the usual suspects would be considered: a powerful arch-mage or various wizards' guilds.

Despite his dour mood, Entreri chuckled when he pictured Sha'lazzi's expression should the man ever learn the other half of that secret behind Basadoni's throne, that the dark elves had come to Calimport in force!

Of course, his threat to the man had not been an idle one. Should Sha'lazzi ever make such a connection, Entreri, or any one of a thousand of Jarlaxle's agents, would surely kill him.

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Sha'lazzi Ozoule sat at the little round table for a long, long time, replaying Entreri's every word and every gesture. He knew that his assumption concerning a wizard holding the true power behind the Basadoni rise was correct, but that was not really news. Given the expediency of the rise, and the level of devastation that had been enacted upon rival houses, common sense dictated that a wizard, or more likely many wizards, were involved.

What caught Sha'lazzi as a revelation, though, was Entreri's visceral reaction.

Artemis Entreri, the master of control, the shadow of death itself, had never before shown him such an inner turmoil—even fear, perhaps?—as that. When before had Artemis Entreri ever touched someone in threat? No, he had always looked at them with that awful gaze, let them know in no uncertain terms that they were walking the path to ultimate doom. If the offender persisted, there was no further threat, no grabbing or beating.

There was only quick death.

The uncharacteristic reaction surely intrigued Sha'lazzi. How he wanted to know what had so rattled Artemis Entreri as to facilitate such behavior—but at the same time, the assassin's demeanor also served as a clear and

frightening warning. Sha'lazzi knew well that anything that could so unnerve Artemis Entreri could easily, so easily, destroy Sha'lazzi Ozoule.

It was an interesting situation, and one that scared Sha'lazzi profoundly.

Part 1

STICKING TO THE WEB

I live in a world where there truly exists the embodiments of evil. I speak not of wicked men, nor of goblins—often of evil weal—nor even of my own people, the dark elves, wickeder still than the goblins. These are creatures—all of them—capable of great cruelty but they are not, even in the very worst of cases, the true embodiment of evil. No, that title belongs to others, to the demons and devils often summoned by priests and mages. These creatures of the lower planes are the purest of evil, untainted vileness running unchecked. They are without possibility of redemption, without hope of accomplishing anything in their unfortunately nearly eternal existence that even borders on goodness.

I have wondered if these creatures could exist without the darkness that lies within the hearts of the reasoning races. Are they a source of evil, as are many wicked men or drow, or are they the result, a physical manifestation of the rot that permeates the hearts of far too many?

The latter, I believe. It is not coincidental that demons and devils cannot walk the material plane of existence without being brought here by the actions of one of the reasoning beings. They are no more than a tool, I know, an instrument to carry out the wicked deeds in service to the truer source of that evil.

What then of Crenshinibon? It is an item, an artifact—albeit a sentient one—but it does not exist in the same state of intelligence as does a reasoning being. For the Crystal Shard cannot grow, cannot change, cannot mend its ways. The only errors it can learn to correct are those of errant attempts at manipulation, as it seeks to better grab at the hearts of those around it. It cannot even consider, or reconsider, the end it desperately tries to achieve—no, its purpose is forever singular.

Is it truly evil, then?

No.

I would have thought differently not too long ago, even when I carried the dangerous artifact and came to better understand it. Only recently, upon reading a long and detailed message sent to me from High Priest Cadderly Bonaduce of the Spirit Soaring, have I come to see the truth of the Crystal Shard, have I come to understand that the item itself is an anomaly, a mistake, and that its never-ending hunger for power and glory, at whatever cost, is merely a perversion of the intent of its second maker, the eighth spirit that found its way into the very essence of the artifact.

The Crystal Shard was created originally by seven liches, so Cadderly has learned, who deigned to fashion an item of the very greatest power. As a further insult to the races these undead kings intended to conquer, they made the artifact a draw against the sun itself, the giver of life. The liches were consumed at the completion of their joining magic. Despite what some sages believe, Cadderly insists that the conscious aspects of those vile creatures were not drawn into the power of the item, but were, rather, obliterated by its sun-

like properties. Thus, their intended insult turned against them and left them as no more than ashes and absorbed pieces of their shattered spirits.

That much of the earliest history of the Crystal Shard is known by many, including the demons that so desperately crave the item. The second story, though, the one Cadderly uncovered, tells a more complicated tale, and shows the truth of Crenshinibon, the ultimate failure of the artifact as a perversion of goodly intentions.

Crenshinibon first came to the material world centuries ago in the far-off land of Zakhara. At the time, it was merely a wizard's tool, though a great and powerful one, an artifact that could throw fireballs and create great blazing walls of light so intense they could burn flesh from bone. Little was known of Crenshinibon's dark past until it fell to the hands of a sultan. This great leader, whose name has been lost to the ages, learned the truth of the Crystal Shard, and with the help of his many court wizards, decided that the work of the lichs was incomplete. Thus came the "second creation" of Crenshinibon, the heightening of its power and its limited consciousness.

This sultan had no dreams of domination, only of peaceful existence with his many warlike neighbors. Thus, using the newest power of the artifact, he envisioned, then created, a line of crystalline towers. The towers stretched from his capital across the empty desert to his kingdom's second city, an oft-raided frontier city, in intervals equating to a single day's travel. He strung as many as a hundred of the crystalline towers, and nearly completed the mighty defensive line.

But alas, the sultan overreached the powers of Crenshinibon, and though he believed that the creation of each tower strengthened the artifact, he was, in fact, pulling the Crystal Shard and its manifestations too thin. Soon after, a great sandstorm came up, sweeping across the desert. It was a natural disaster that served as a prelude to an invasion by a neighboring sheikdom. So thin were the walls of those crystalline towers that they shattered under the force of the glass, taking with them the sultan's dream of security.

The hordes overran the kingdom and murdered the sultan's family while he helplessly looked on. Their merciless sheik would not kill the sultan, though—he wanted the painful memories to burn at the man—but Crenshinibon took the sultan, took a piece of his spirit, at least.

Little more of those early days is known, even to Cadderly, who counts demi-gods among his sources, but the young High Priest of Deneir is convinced that this "second creation" of Crenshinibon is the one that remains key to the present hunger of the artifact. If only Crenshinibon could have held its highest level of power. If only the crystalline towers had remained strong. The hordes would have been turned away, and the sultan's family, his dear wife and beautiful children, would not have been murdered.

Now the artifact, imbued with the twisted aspects of seven dead lichs and with the wounded and tormented spirit of the sultan, continues its desperate quest to attain and maintain its greatest level of power, whatever the cost.

There are many implications to the story. Cadderly hinted in his note to me, though he drew no definitive conclusions, that the creation of the crystalline towers actually served as the catalyst for the invasion, with the leaders of the neighboring sheikdom fearful that their borderlands would soon be overrun. Is the Crystal Shard, then, a great lesson to us? Does it show clearly the folly of

overblown ambition, even though that particular ambition was rooted in good intentions? The sultan wanted strength for the defense of his peaceable kingdom, and yet he reached for too much power.

That was what consumed him, his family, and his kingdom.

What of Jarlaxle, then, who now holds the Crystal Shard? Should I go after him and try to take back the artifact, then deliver it to Cadderly for destruction? Surely the world would be a better place without this mighty and dangerous artifact.

Then again, there will always be another tool for those of evil weal, another embodiment of their evil, be it a demon, a devil, or a monstrous creation similar to Crenshinibon.

No, the embodiments are not the problem, for they cannot exist and prosper without the evil that is within the hearts of reasoning beings.

Beware, Jarlaxle. Beware.

—Drizzt Do'Urden

Chapter 1

WHEN HE LOOKED INSIDE

Dwahvel Tiggerwillies tiptoed into the small, dimly lit room in the back of the lower end of her establishment, the Copper Ante. Dwahvel, that most competent of halfling females—good with her wiles, good with her daggers, and better with her wits—wasn't used to walking so gingerly in this place, though it was as secure a house as could be found in all of Calimport. This was Artemis Entreri, after all, and no place in all the world could truly be considered safe when the deadly assassin was about.

He was pacing when she entered, taking no obvious note of her arrival at all. Dwahvel looked at him curiously. She knew that Entreri had been on edge lately and was one of the very few outside of House Basadoni who knew the truth behind that edge. The dark elves had come and infiltrated Calimport's streets, and Entreri was serving as a front man for their operations. If Dwahvel held any preconceived notions of how terrible the drow truly could be, one look at Entreri surely confirmed those suspicions. He had never been a nervous one—Dwahvel wasn't sure that he was now—and had never been a man Dwahvel would have expected to find at odds with himself.

Even more curious, Entreri had invited her into his confidence. It just wasn't his way. Still, Dwahvel suspected no trap. This was, she knew, exactly as it seemed, as surprising as that might be. Entreri was speaking to himself as much as to her, as a way of clarifying his thoughts, and for some reason that Dwahvel didn't yet understand, he was letting her listen in.

She considered herself complimented in the highest way and also realized the potential danger that came along with that compliment. That unsettling thought in mind, the halfling guildmistress quietly settled into a chair and listened carefully, looking for clues and insights. Her first, and most surprising, came when she happened to glance at a chair set against the back wall of the room. Resting on it was a half-empty bottle of Moonshae whiskey.

"I see them at every corner on every street in the belly of this cursed city," Entreri was saying. "Braggarts wearing their scars and weapons like badges of honor, men and women so concerned about reputation that they have lost sight of what it is they truly wish to accomplish. They play for the status and the accolades, and with no better purpose."

His speech was not overly slurred, yet it was obvious to Dwahvel that Entreri had indeed tasted some of the whiskey.

"Since when does Artemis Entreri bother himself with the likes of street thieves?" Dwahvel asked.

Entreri stopped pacing and glanced at her, his face passive. "I see them and mark them carefully, because I am well aware that my own reputation precedes me. Because of that reputation, many on the street would love to sink a dagger into my heart," the assassin replied and began to pace again. "How great a reputation that killer might then find. They know that I am

older now, and they think me slower—and in truth, their reasoning is sound. I cannot move as quickly as I did a decade ago.”

Dwahvel’s eyes narrowed at the surprising admission.

“But as the body ages and movements dull, the mind grows sharper,” Entreri went on. “I, too, am concerned with reputation, but not as I used to be. It was my goal in life to be the absolute best at that which I do, at out-fighting and out-thinking my enemies. I desired to become the perfect warrior, and it took a dark elf whom I despise to show me the error of my ways. My unintended journey to Menzoberranzan as a ‘guest’ of Jarlaxle humbled me in my fanatical striving to be the best and showed me the futility of a world full of that who I most wanted to become. In Menzoberranzan, I saw reflections of myself at every turn, warriors who had become so callous to all around them, so enwrapped in the goal, that they could not begin to appreciate the process of attaining it.”

“They are drow,” Dwahvel said. “We cannot understand their true motivations.”

“Their city is a beautiful place, my little friend,” Entreri replied, “with power beyond anything you can imagine. Yet, for all for that, Menzoberranzan is a hollow and empty place, bereft of passion unless that passion is hate. I came back from that city of twenty thousand assassins changed indeed, questioning the very foundations that had built the framework of my existence. What is the point of it, after all?”

Dwahvel interlocked the fingers of her plump little hands and brought them up to her lips, studying the man intently. Was Entreri announcing his retirement? she wondered. Was he denying the life he had known, the glories to which he had climbed? She blew a quiet sigh, shook her head, and said, “We all answer that question for ourselves, don’t we? The point is gold or respect or property or power . . .”

“Indeed,” he said coldly. “I walk now with a better understanding of who I am and what challenges before me are truly important. I know not yet where I hope to go, what challenges are left before me, but I do understand now that the important thing is to enjoy the process of getting there.

“Do I care that my reputation remains strong?” Entreri asked suddenly, even as Dwahvel started to ask him if he had any idea at all of where his road might lead—important information, given the power of the Basadoni Guild. “Do I wish to continue to be upheld as the pinnacle of success among assassins within Calimport?”

“Yes, to both, but not for the same reasons that those fools swagger about the street corners, not for the same reasons that many of them will make a try for me, only to wind up dead in the gutter. No, I care about reputation because it allows me to be so much more effective in that which I choose to do. I care for celebrity, but only because in that mantle my foes fear me more, fear me beyond rational thinking and beyond the bounds of proper caution. They are afraid, even as they come after me, but instead of a healthy respect, their fear is almost paralyzing, making them continuously second-guess their own every move. I can use that fear against them. With a simple bluff or feint, I can make the doubt lead them into a completely erroneous position. Because I can feign vulnerability and use perceived advantages against the

careless, on those occasions when I am truly vulnerable the cautious will not aggressively strike.”

He paused and nodded, and Dwahvel saw that his thoughts were indeed sorting out. “An enviable position, to be sure,” she offered.

“Let the fools come after me, one after another, an endless line of eager assassins,” Entreri said, and he nodded again. “With each kill, I grow wiser, and with added wisdom, I grow stronger.”

He slapped his hat, that curious small-brimmed black bolero, against his thigh, spun it up his arm with a flick of his wrist so that it rolled right over his shoulder to settle on his head, complimenting the fine haircut he had just received. Only then did Dwahvel notice that the man had trimmed his thick goatee as well, leaving only a fine moustache and a small patch of hair below his lower lip, running down to his chin and going to both sides like an inverted “T”.

Entreri looked at the halfling, gave a sly wink, and strode from the room.

What did it all mean? Dwahvel wondered. Surely she was glad to see that the man had cleaned up his look, for she had recognized his uncharacteristic slovenliness as a sure signal that he was losing control, and worse, losing his heart.

She sat there for a long time, bouncing her clasped hands absently against her puckered lower lip, wondering why she had been invited to such a spectacle, wondering why Artemis Entreri had felt the need to open up to her, to anyone—even to himself. The man had found some epiphany, Dwahvel realized, and she suddenly realized that she had, too.

Artemis Entreri was her friend.