

TO: Matheson, Lucius; Governor's Secretary
Following the disappearance of Stalker 263, I attach the papers that were discovered. There is still no trace of Thorpe.
Day One I write what I see. I see a cell. It has stone walls and a door. The door is locked. I see a plate and fork. The plate is empty. I see this parchment, and a hand holding charcoal. I see these words. That is all I see. I write what I know. I will endure to hunt and kill with the sword and gun, until I am dust. I will obey the words of my Master, and the righteous ordinances of the Guild. I will destroy the witches who seek to oppose them. This oath I swear on the lives I have wrongly taken. I will endure. I will obey. I will destroy. That is all I know. I write what I feel. I feel nothing.
RRR
Day Two I write of what has just occurred. My Master brought me out of my cell. I walked behind her up a flight of stairs to a yard. She struck me in the face and bid me wait alone in the yard. A gate opened in a tall wall, and I saw a street with carriages going by. The rain fell, and my hood and cape became wet. A raven flew over the yard. The rain stopped. When the sun went down, the gate was closed. My Master appeared, and returned me to my cell. She told me I had done well. I sat down and wrote these words. When I finish I will hide the paper and charcoal in the hole behind the third brick on the seventh row.
RRR
Day Three My broken sword is hanging outside my cell. My Master told me she can find me through it. I must remember this, although I do not know what it means. I was taken to my sword this morning. My sword is very important. I know well that guns have their place, but it is the sword that smites the witch. The Instructor brought me from my cell and down a different set of stairs. The Instructor is smaller and older than my Master and requires a stick to walk as I do. He does not like me, and knows that I am murdering scum. He tells me so that I know it well. My Master was waiting. The room where she waited was long and low and full of torches and swords. The swords were broken. As my Master spoke, they shone brighter than the torches. My Master placed her sword next to many of these broken swords, until she found one that would be my sword. It had words written along its blade. The words are different to the words I write here, but I was able to read them. In this writing, the words say, "Die Thou, Unsung." My Master asked if I was reading them. I said I was. My Master asked if I knew what they meant. I said I did not. I have seen words written like those before. It hurts to think of them.
RRR
Day Four I have received my second branding. Spells were written on my back. It took most of the day. I felt pain. My Master told me that words have power. They can be spoken, or they can be written, or they can be read. Sometimes, words can be all three at the same time. Then they have a great power. That is why the words are placed on my skin. Placed there, they become words of great power. They will give me the strength I need to smite the witch, and protect me from his magics.
RRR

Day Five I am not the only one.
RRR
Day Six Yesterday I was late back to my cell from training. The Instructor trains me in sword and gun. He tells me I have never held a gun before. I do not know how he knows this. He is old and wise, so it must be true. He tells me I have held a sword before. I must ask my Master when this was. I do not remember it. After training ended, the Instructor told me I would join the other scum for training from now on. I did not know there were others like me. I did not want to forget this, but I am not allowed to write after the midnight gong has sounded, so could only write one line. Today there was more training with gun and blade. There was also training with words. The Instructor spoke and we listened. I learned of the Guild, and the Witchling Masters and the Witchling Stalkers. My Master is one of the Witchling Masters known as Handlers. Before she was a Handler she was an Apprentice. I am a Witchling Stalker. I do not know what I was before I was a Stalker. I

know well that all Witchling Stalkers are witches who have taken the lives of innocents with their magics and been caught by the Guild. For their crimes they are remade into Witchling Stalkers. Witchling Stalkers do not remember anything from before. I know well that the past is a slate the Guild burns clean. I do not remember my crimes, but know well they were hateful and wrong. I must atone. I will stop writing now. I feel tired.

RRR Day Seven

Many things happened today. I will write of them in the order in which they occurred. But first I will write about what has just happened. The Instructor entered my cell and found these papers and charcoal. He was angry and struck me many times. He wanted to know where I had got them from. He did not believe me when I told him. Then my Master appeared. My Master and the Instructor went away to speak. I have been ordered to stay in my cell until I am needed, but they left my cell door open. I went to the doorway and listened. I heard them talking in loud voices. I kept my feet in my cell, but leaned my head out. In this way I was not disobedient. I saw my Master poking the Instructor in his chest with her finger. She spoke quietly to him. I did not hear her words, but they were few and hard. The Instructor's face reminded me of the witch I will write of later, and he walked away. My Master read these papers. She told me I had done well. But I must write of the morning. This morning I was taken back down the flight of stairs by my Master. Instead of going to the hall with the swords she took me another way. I went down three more flights of stairs, and passed through three doors. My Master unlocked them and then locked them again when we had passed. My Master brought me to a room where there were others like me. There were four of them. They wore hoods and capes like mine. They had guns and broken swords. The swords had writing on them, but my Master has told me not to read that kind of writing again. Their skin was black and burnt. Mine is, too. I had not noticed until that time. I must ask my Master how we all came to be burnt. I joined the four in a circle around two witches. I know well that witches are a pestilence, and that their subversion arouses hatred against the learned men and women of zeal who tirelessly serve the offices of the Guild in the name of the Governor. One witch was a man. He did not look at us. He was young and dark-skinned, with chains on his hands and feet. The other witch was a woman. She was also young, with golden eyes and wore chains. She looked at us. We looked back. My Master asked if I knew her name. I said her name was witch. The woman did not look at us again. My Master was joined by the Instructor and by other Masters, men and women. The Master's Master arrived.

She had short red hair, and was dressed all in black like a raven. My Master has long, black hair, tied back. She wears faded, brown leathers lined with fur, like a dirigible pilot, and she has knives in her boots. The Masters spoke many words I will not write down. The man was sentenced to service, and taken to receive the first branding. Fear came into him, and he struggled. He was taken through a large, yellow door made of stone that was locked and barred with many bolts and seals. I believe I have seen that door before, but I do not remember when. It gave me a strange feeling in my skull when I looked at it, and an image of a maze came into my mind. The red-haired Master of Masters went with him. The Instructor told me the golden-eyed woman was not suitable for branding. I killed her with my broken sword.

RRR Day Eight

Today I served the Guild for the first time. I will write of that. Me and the four like me gathered in the yard. The night had been cold, and there was a white frost. We received the last branding, which is an iron collar. It is heated over a brazier of coals and then clasped in place. The spells written on the inside are burned into the flesh. I ignored the pain, as did the others like me. I have been burnt before, I know. I will endure. Then I went with my

Master into the city, through underground tunnels. My Master carried a torch, and I realized I did not need light to see in the dark places. It was then I realized I do not have any light in my cell, either, and that I have written all these words in darkness. Are there other things about me I do not know? How can I ask, if I do not know the questions? My Master talked of her work. She hunts rogue spell-casters, witches and those known as the Arcanists. My Instructor says they are all the same, but my Master rolled her eyes when I told her this. Her eyes are blue, like river ice. She wears hunter's kohl around them, to make them fierce. I will help her in this work. This is how I will atone. My Master talked of hunting. Most hunts are short affairs, and most prey are feckless and stupid. Such hunts are not sport, as only one side knows they are in a game. Some hunts go on longer. Such hunts can last for months, or even years, and the target is as much predator as prey. Such a hunt brings out the tiger in all who take part, and there is peril on both sides. She said that those who have hunted dangerous men and women long enough never care for anything else thereafter. She also said there is nothing so bittersweet as after the final chase, when the hunter stands victorious. I wanted to ask what these things meant, but my Master signalled for silence. We ascended to the city, where we walked the streets. Even in the busiest lanes, none came close to us. I asked who we were hunting. My Master laughed, which I had never seen her do, and said we hunted the past. She did not explain how that was possible. She said that sometimes prey would go to ground, and the hunter would need to wait them out, but that today we would not hunt anyone. Today was simply about getting my boiler running and making sure I did not blow a gasket. These are her exact words. I remember working with engines, and how boilers should be tested before they are connected to a drive-shaft. I am pleased that I understand this. My Master took me to several different places, and at some of these there were people she spoke to, and at others there were none. In certain empty places I felt the words written on my back squirm and read themselves through me. This happened in a cellar, and again at the top of a tower on a bridge, amid the scattered ruins of some machine. I told my Master of this, and she said it was normal. I was sensing the residue of past magics or the taint of long-gone witches. We went to a tall, thin house in a street of tall, thin houses where a woman lived alone. She was not a witch, and my Master spoke to her kindly, although the woman seemed anxious. They talked for a while, she short and round and my Master tall and thin like the house. I noticed that although it did not seem like it, everything she said to the woman was a question. When we left, I asked about the woman. My Master told me that the woman was decent. She made a living any

way she could, hand to mouth, sometimes crossing the line, but not enough to rouse the Guild. It had all been too raise enough scrip to send her son back through the Breach, and away from this life. But her son had been killed by a wolf my Master had once hunted, a wolf who had turned man-killer without warning. My Master said that the woman had not wanted to seeme, not even to spit in my eye. She seemed disappointed at this. Later she returned me to the cells beneath the Guild Academy. I do not think my Master was talking about a real wolf. In the old woman's house, I saw myself in a mirror for the first time. I was curious to see what I look like. As my Master and the woman talked, I removed my hood and face cloth. My head is bare and burned all over, and the skin scarred and pale. I do not recognize my face. It is possible no one would. I have a deep wound on my head, which is well healed. It runs all the way around my head, from back to front, in a circle. I do not remember how I was cut there, or when. The woman with the golden eyes frightens me. She is in my cell, and will not

go away. RRR Day Nine During the night my Master came for me. I took Die Thou, Unsung from its hook outside my cell and received my handgun and ammunition from the Instructor. When we assembled in the yard, I could smell smoke on the air. It was cold and the stars were sore to look at. We went through the city to the river where a fire burned. A building had fallen, its façade turned to rubble. A crater outside suggested explosives. I wanted to examine the crater, but my Master led me into the ruined building. It had been a teahouse, which in this part of town, my Master said, means a whorehouse. Behind it, a connected warehouse burned. The fire was too fierce to approach, although other Guild agents were present and their mechanical forms enabled them to enter the fire. I told my Master that witches were here. The writing on my back told me so. My Master waved my words away and spoke with two men, both of them also Masters. She returned and told me this was a waste of time, and our business lay elsewhere. I asked what that business was. She did not answer. I asked who the witches were, and why we did not hunt them. She told me they were Three Kingdoms, and that other Masters hunted their kind. I asked if the Three Kingdoms had different witches and different magics. She shook her head, and told me I asked too many questions. Everything I see is a question waiting to be asked. A question unasked is like a puzzle unsolved. We travelled on foot to Dockmast Four, and from there by tethered aircar out over the Quarantine Zone, along the newly-repaired Sourbreak line. We did not go all the way to Sourbreak Station, and my Master called a halt at an unmanned Dockmast deep inside the Quarantine Zone. The Guild Guard who crewed the aircar's guns asked my Master how long we would be stopped there, and when we would be leaving. She ordered them to await our return. I saw fear come into them. They fetched more ammunition for their guns, and strung heavy netting around the portholes. We descended the dockmast stairs. At the bottom my Master opened a heavy, iron door and we passed through into an unlit street. My Master locked the door. The key sounded loud in the silence. There were many deep clawmarks in the metal around the lock. "No lights, not here," my Master told me. "You must be eyes for both of us." She spoke quickly, her voice low, and gave me directions. I followed them carefully, past buildings of many different ages and styles. All lay in ruins. My Master made no sound as she walked, but I could not move as she did, and the scrape of my boots echoed. The writing spoke its warnings. Small things stirred as we passed, or large things that stirred slowly. Die Thou, Unsung felt eager in my hand. At one corner, the writings spoke of the ruined pillars down a street to our left. My Master put a hand on my shoulder and we waited. We waited a long time, for what I do not know, and then at her whispered word hurried past the ruined pillars.

We reached the destination without further incident. My Master was breathing hard as she opened a hidden doorway in a timber and plaster wall. Steps led down. She closed the door behind us. Warning me to step where she did, my Master took every second step and then, near the bottom, every third. We stopped before another door, and my Master told me to open it. Having no key I pushed at the door. My hand tingled briefly, and then I heard a click and it swung open. A suite of rooms lay beyond. The ceilings were low, the walls tiled in brown brick glaze and broad arches led from room to room. Yellow anbaric lights on the walls sparked into life as my Master flicked a switch. The furnishings were rich, but without prettiness or female embellishment, as one would expect in a bachelor's apartments. The rooms held no clear purpose, and as we walked through them I saw many tables spread with papers and contraptions of glass and silver whose functions were not obvious. I saw writing desks

stained with ink, and many boxes of nibs and rolls of spare paper. I saw one table entirely covered with drawings of mazes and labyrinths, and another empty but for a small, wooden puzzle box. Mixing jars and bottled compounds filled a nested set of boxes on a side table. I saw machines and devices, wired together in elaborate arrays not unlike the cable network we had made use of. A stand held a glass helmet studded with inwardly pointing rods and what looked like chisels. I saw one device with heavy rollers that smelled of printer's ink. In a back room, the component parts of a Stirling engine lay disassembled in neat rows. Most of all, I saw books and journals of all kinds, most arranged in bookshelves but many piled on tables and on the rugs, some closed and some pinned open, some printed and some handwritten. I saw intricate illustrations and rough etchings, brilliant color plates and crude hand printed pamphlets. "This was the den of a rogue known as Damian Ravencroft," my Master told me, stopping to examine the titles of a stack of journals piled on a tall stool. She waved one of the books at the rooms surrounding us. "What do you make of him?" I understood she meant me to deduce facts about the man from the way he lived. I told my Master I saw many books. "Which tells you what?" I replied that Mr. Ravencroft liked to learn. "He was a magpie. He hoarded. This was his nest." She waved the book again. "What else?" I spoke of the device with rollers. It printed words. He wished to share what he learned with others. "He loved being the center of attention. He loved spreading rumors and raising awkward questions. Questions tempt lies. Lies tempt unrest. What else?" I thought of the chess board, the drawings of labyrinths and the puzzle box. I said that he liked games. My Master nodded. "In that we agree. He liked games. He liked winning them most of all." She swept some papers off a high-backed armchair and sat down. "Damian Ravencroft was an oddity, even among the witches we hunt. He did not live among others of his kind, but they sought him out, even here, among the perils of the Quarantine Zone. If I heard his name from one witch I caught I must have heard it from a hundred. Damian Ravencroft had told them what an arcane device was for, and how it worked. Damian Ravencroft had translated some ancient runes for them. Damian Ravencroft can get them passage through the Breach. The good Doctor Ramos himself had occasional need to consult with none other than Damian Ravencroft. Damian Ravencroft had travelled everywhere, seen everything and could probably dance on the head of a pin while he did it." She stood, with a snort, and began turning out papers from a series of pigeon holes. "There are two sides to every story, and one must be careful who one trusts in times like these. Some in the Guild said he was just a rogue like any other. Others thought there was something different about this one. Some said he was the head of a great underground network working against the Guild, a cunning, dangerous man who posed a potent threat. A master criminal with connections in all the wrong places. Others thought he was cunning and dangerous, yes, but in a different way. He was a seeker of knowledge. An inquiring mind. His greatest desire was to see his knowledge of magic and arcana spread as far and as wide as possible, shared out so that a pauper

could know as much as a king. A true democracy of the learned. Some thought that was even worse. Others," she paused, "were not so sure." She paced over to a marble-topped chess table and moved the pieces around on the board without purpose. "Most so-called Arcanists care nothing about other people. They are in it for themselves. Their powers flare up, they go on a spree and we knock them down." She toppled a row of pawns over one by one as she spoke. "Feckless and stupid. But Ravencroft seemed like something new, something I hadn't seen before. A man who imagined something bigger than himself." She

picked the king up and put it back beside the queen on the first row. "And so the name of Damian Ravencroft continued to be heard, but the man himself, despite years of searching by the Guild, remained hidden." "And then it all changed. The wolf bared his fangs." My Master's face became hard when she spoke these words. "In the space of a month he killed three people. Murdered them. Witnesses saw it. He had never killed anyone before, but those three lives put him on my list. I hunted him. So did many others, but I knew him better. Or thought I did. He ran, which told me all I needed to know. It was the most dangerous hunt of my life, but finally I ran him to ground. Here, in his lair. I don't know why I'm telling you this. It doesn't mean anything to you." She shook her head, and picked the queen up from the chess board. She placed a finger on the king, leaning it over. "He confessed, readily. He was unrepentant. He wanted me to know what he had done, the power he commanded. He left me with no choice, and I gave him no mercy." She toppled the king over, and turned slowly, staring at the room. "And so we are left with questions, which lead only to lies." She tossed the queen away into a corner, and left to examine the other rooms. I did not understand all of this, and that irks me, but I recount it here as best I can recall. I returned to the wooden puzzle box I had seen earlier. It sat alone on a table, on a white cloth. It was made of a dark wood I cannot name, and inlaid with a lighter wood in intricate curling patterns. As I look at it now, here in my cell, I think those patterns form a labyrinth. I try and trace a route through it, but it shifts and changes, and I lose my place. I have tried to open the puzzle box many times, but have failed so far. I will continue. My Master has not said anything about the puzzle box, and I assume she does not mind that I took it. In any event, the golden-eyed woman said I should. I was going to finish writing there, but I remember one other thing that happened before we returned to the air network. My Master was looking at a collection of old bones set in a glass case. There was writing carved on the bones, writing that gave me a strange feeling when I looked at it. I asked what the bones were. My Master replied that they looked like memory charms, powerful ones, but could serve no purpose she could tell. Some of the head bones had been carved with what looked like more labyrinths. She said she would return here, until every one of Damian Ravencroft's puzzles were solved, and then burn everything, as he had been burned. I asked if the bones were the remains of Mr. Ravencroft's three victims. My Master looked distant for a moment, lost in thought, and then told me that they were not, and that the bones were much older and probably bought from a supplier of such things, but that I had finally asked a good question. My Master told me her name while we rode back in the air car. She is called Bellaventine Thorpe. RRR Day Ten I know well that Witchling Stalkers do not sleep, but last night I dreamt. I will write about the dream. I was looking down on myself, at the scar that circles my head, and it became a stone circle in the floor of my cell. I have seen this circle before, and it had writing around it. I recalled some of what was written around the circle. In the dream, writing appeared, growing like snakes across the floor. I could not remember any more, and the writing remained incomplete. The woman with golden eyes was in my cell. The blood from where I killed her dripped onto the floor. She told me I had to complete the writing around the circle.

I told her I was sorry I had killed her. She walked into the circle and disappeared. I did not awake, but I was aware the dream had ended. I spent the rest of the night trying to open the puzzle box. I failed. The wooden patterns on the puzzle box are definitely a labyrinth, but try as I might I cannot make progress and solve the maze. It changes and I lose my place every time. The Instructor came by shortly before the morning gong. I asked if he could assist with

the puzzle box. He looked around my cell, but did not look at the box, which I was holding up to him. He spat through the hatch in the door, and told me there was something wrong with me. I do not believe this is so. I feel well. I will endure.

RRR Day Eleven Today was spent training with gun and sword. My Master told me to write about whatever I want, so I will write about her. My Master is like the puzzle box. I look at her and think I understand, but every time I look closer I get lost. She came to me during training and ordered me away from the others. She was unsteady on her feet, and slurring her words. She smelled of brandy. I was glad to go, as the Instructor was being very hard on me. To begin with she was angry with me, and shouted at me. She delivered many insults. Then she quietened and stopped talking for a while. Finally, she told me she was right about me. She told me the other Masters were starting to question her judgement, but that she knew she was right. She repeated it several times, and I did not reply. I did not know how to. Her final comment, before returning me to the training, was that the only things she did not understand were how, and why. I think I am a puzzle box to my Master. I do not think she enjoys puzzles as much as I do. I had the dream-that-was-not-a-dream again. I remembered more of the words around the circle on the floor. What will it mean when I remember them all?

RRR Day Twelve Today I failed the Guild and, more importantly, my Master. I am ashamed, and know well that I must always obey my Master in all things. So why can I not? Is there something wrong with me? We were running a rogue witch to ground, in an area of the New Construction near the Penitence Viaduct. His name was Marco Bonatti. I later learned that he had been visited by the Guild seeking information about a murder at a guesthouse in Arble Street. Thinking he was going to be accused of the crime (he was not) Bonatti killed the Guard officers and fled. His use of arcane witchery in doing so was what set my Master on the hunt. We picked up his trail without difficulty. The writing on my back found him as a needle finds a lodestone, but he had been reckless in his use of his powers, and had left more than just magical traces. Anyone who had got in his way was dead. Each of them had been torn apart, either by claws or teeth. I later learned that Bonatti's switchcraft enabled him to send forth the tribal drawings and other tattoos on his body in physical form. The trail led to the viaduct. It has not been used since Hollow Marsh Pumping Station was commissioned, and has fallen into ruin in many places. Much of the New Construction area has stone from the viaduct in its foundations. The trail led like a glowing path through the ruins, but my Master could not follow it as clearly as I could, and she fell behind. Her sword and Die Thou, Unsung were still connected, of course, and she could follow me anywhere. I was able to surprise Marco Bonatti and get close to him, but before I could strike he tried to use his witchcraft. I felt a surge of energy like a great wave, and saw the macabre creatures inked on his arms writhe and coil.

Then there was a sound in my head like the tide going out a long way over a pebbled beach. His power drained away into nothing, and the writing on my back read and wrote and spoke itself all at once. He tried again, but the sea was vast and empty and nothing he had could fill it up. His energies poured into the void. I stood before him on the dry beach and felt his despair. I raised Die Thou, Unsung, speaking its name to the witch Bonatti so that he would know his fate. I could not strike. The woman with the golden eyes knelt before me, not Marco Bonatti. "Die Thou," I said. I was still frightened of her. "Unsung." She spoke. "No. You alone will sing of me." Marco Bonatti writhed in anguish, pinned like a fly in amber as he awaited my strike. I lowered my sword. The woman was gone. My Master arrived and I helped her restrain the witch Bonatti so that he could be taken for questioning. My Master did not

she spoke to me of what had happened until after he had been placed in an iron Witch Cage to nullify his poison, and the Guild Guard had taken him away. She asked if it had been my intention to capture or kill him. I replied he had been a danger to others, and I had intended to kill him. "But you did not." "No," I replied. I offered no explanation. I was concerned that if I mentioned the woman with the golden eyes, my Master would agree with the Instructor that there was something wrong with me. Why did I not strike the witch Bonatti? I cannot say. I just could not. My Master did not ask for an explanation. She just nodded, as if she agreed with something I had not said. Then she told me that we would pay a visit the next day to the Guild morgue. I asked what would happen to the witch Bonatti. My Master told me that he was an ideal candidate for being made into a Witchling Stalker. I asked if this would be done. "Not in all cases, but we are short on numbers. The Sourbreak disaster didn't help, of course. We lost quite a few there. I expect Mr. Bonatti will be joining you for training soon enough, once we have put him to the question. He won't be Mr. Bonatti any more, of course." "How is it done?" I asked. My Master sighed, with a half-smile. "You never could stop asking questions." We walked a while before she spoke again. "The magic involved is some of the oldest and most potent the Guild possesses, and I do not know it myself. Sonnia Criid, the Master of the Handlers, takes the witch alone into the Yellow Crypt. I have never been in there. Once inside, Lady Criid uses that place to burn out whatever magic is within the witch. How it is done exactly, I do not know. All the witch's power is lost, along with their memories and personalities, leaving behind a bottomless pit inside the witch. The new Stalker now acts as a lightning rod, attracting and exhausting all magic near it, and it is what makes you such an effective tool against your former comrades. While you last." "RRR" Day Thirteen I have seen my Master look at me many ways. Sometimes I see anger or disappointment, sometimes hatred. Tonight, when she returned me to my cell after the visit to the morgue, there was something new. She looked at me like a tiger. In the morning she had come for me as usual. She had an unusual sense of energy about her, as if nothing could happen quickly enough. My Master asked me to recall the short, round woman she had taken me to see a few days ago. She asked if the woman had looked poor to me. I recalled that the house was clean and the woman had food and drink to offer my Master. Her clothes were well-mended. I replied she did not look poor. We went to the Guild morgue, beneath the monolithic Guild headquarters. There, she spoke to the head of the morgue briefly, a Dr. McMourning, and he passed us to one of his assistants.

She led my Master and I into a long hallway lined with rough wooden cabinets. My Master gave the assistant a list of three names, two male, one female. My Master tapped her fingers on a cabinet until the assistant returned with three brown folders, secured with string. Each bore an "Autopsy" stamp on the front, as well as a warning that the subject's remains were magically contaminated. On the way to the morgue, my Master had explained that the bodies and effects of those killed with magic were often retained by the Guild School of Surgeons, in case the Witch Hunters had need of them. My Master demanded to be taken to the remains. The assistant, a girl who seemed tired and bored, led us to a sub-basement level, and through a series of metal doors. The air grew colder with each door, until our breath fogged. The assistant took a heavy coat from a hook and put it on. My Master had to unlock the last door, which had the Witch Hunter's sigil upon it. Beyond, a series of connected halls held row after row of locked caskets of varying sizes. Frost covered them, and crunched underfoot. The assistant consulted books of records. This took a while, due to the heavy gloves she wore. I

could see myMaster was having trouble remaining patient."There are no remains for any of those three names," thegirl said when she had finished."Then what was collected at the scene?" my Masterasked."Ashes. We discard those." The girl was sniffing with thecold."How were the bodies identified?" my Masterdemanded. The assistant turned to her books, but myMaster pushed her aside and did it herself. "Personaleffects", she said when she was done. She swore. "Ishould have seen this sooner."She did not speak to me for the rest of the day....I am not supposed to be writing this now, as the midnightgong has sounded, but I believe I should.I had the dream-that-was-not-a-dream again, and I havenearly remembered all the writing on the circle. It isalmost complete.The woman with the golden eyes was here. She told methat the only key to a labyrinth is a map of the labyrinthitself. She told me I already have it.I asked the woman what her name was. She told me shedid not know. I asked what it was like to be dead. Shesaid the woman she looked like was dead, but that shewas not that woman, and that I should think of her as anaide memoire. I asked why she looked like the deadwoman. She replied that that was up to me. I told her Iwas sorry, anyway.RRRDay FourteenMuch has happened. I think much more is about to happen. I am about to open the box. If this does notwork, if it all goes wrong, then whomever is reading this— whoever you are – you will read this, and mockwhatever is left of me, but I risk it all for what I believein. Remember that.The morning gong sounded, but it was midday beforeBel came. She was fully dressed in her faded aviatorleathers with the fur trim, and she was armed. A tiger'sheart, wrapped in a woman's hide. She stood in my celldoor, staring at me for some time. One half of her facewas chalked pure white. Over the top, she had drawn askull's stark lines in black hunter's kohl. She lookedfearsome."Is there something you require of me?" I asked."The game is drawing to a close. I think I know the how,just not the why. So this is last time I will come for you,"she said."Am I going somewhere?""If you're leaving, it won't be with me. But I will bewaiting for you." "Why would I leave?"

"Because you'll have done what you came for. Whateverit was. I hope it was worth it." "I did not come here. I was caught."She smiled. It lent her eyes a terrible aspect. "Were younow?"She left. I have not seen her since.I spent the rest of the day in my cell.I returned to the puzzle box. I still could not understandwhat the golden-eyed woman had meant when she said Ialready had the key to open it.Then the dreams returned. That is, I thought they weredreams. They are memories.I saw a man with dark glasses standing on a platform atMalifaux Station. He met with a young man and hismother, a short, round woman. He gave them both money,and the young man got on a train. This happened twicemore, with another man, and a woman. I hope they arewell.I saw a crypt with yellow walls. Inside a circle on the floorknelt a man, bruised but defiant. I was that man, once.Outside the circle stood a woman with hair like fire.Around the circle was the oldest of magics, the Guild'smost jealously-guarded secret, written in the stone floor. Iheard a sound like the tide going out a long way on apebbled beach, and realized I was the tide. Everything Iwas drained away into a void. The oldest of magics burnedbrightly all around me, and I burned with them. The firstbranding.I saw myself, only a few days ago, a golden-eyed womanlying dead before me. She will not have died unsung. I willmake the Guild pay for her death at my hands.Back further into memory. I saw myself, unburned. I wasin a room with dark furnishings, and anbaric lightsglimmered on the walls. I placed my head in a glass deviceof my own invention and it cut me, like a surgeon would,a single, clean cut all the way around. While aetheric fieldsshielded me from pain, I directed the machine withthought and gesture. Chisels with

soulstone tips wrote words in the living bones of my skull. Some words have power. They can be spoken, or they can be written, or they can be read. Sometimes, words can be all three at the same time. Then they have a great power. That is why the words were carved on my skull. Placed there, they become words of great power. They gave me the protection I needed from the stone circle to come. I saw myself in the same room, fashioning a puzzle box from thought alone. I knew what was inside that box now. I was. All my knowledge, all my memory, all my power. Once I open the box, it will return to me. The chisels carved a witch-maze in my head with their soulstone fingers. In my cell, I touched my burned scalp. Words beneath the skin. In the bone. Words much more powerful than anything written on my back, or on the collar around my neck. The fingers of my left hand followed the lines of the witch-maze etched beneath the flesh, while the fingers of my right followed the lines of the labyrinth on the puzzle box. I had my key, and it had been with me all along. The puzzle box unlocked. I dived back into memory one last time. I saw a crypt with yellow walls. Inside a circle on the floor knelt a man, bruised but defiant. I am that man. I looked upon the oldest of magics written on the stone around me, that which no man has ever seen and lived to remember. The Guild's most powerful, most secret magics. I remember them all. Tigress Bel was right about me. I have what I came for. It is time to go.