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“I look forward to seeing you when it is time to select your first task. Until then, we have arrived at the portal to Dragon’s Gate.”

Morgan nodded as they entered the portal’s courtyard, where a faint glimmering atop the raised dais advertised the presence of one of the strangest of mankind’s constructions. It was an object less tangible than a flame, perceived more in its effects than in substance. Being linked to a place roughly north of the Seat, it neither shed nor leeched light, as portals opening to the east or west were prone to do. If there was little more than that to see, there was far more to feel, for its very presence raised the small hairs on her arms, and teased the back of her neck like a lover. Or at least as a lover might, she imagined. The greatest impression, however, was that upon her mind. As keenly tuned to the skein of nature she had become, the portal struck her as a twisting impossibility of infinite proportions amidst which only two points were certain, and both vied for the same position.

Her mentor placed a hand on Morgan’s shoulder and squeezed reassuringly.

“I will contact you when I have arrived home. I look forward to your visit next month. Give my love to the others, and keep a healthy measure for yourself,” Morgan hugged Amber and gathered the twin to the pack slung over her shoulder. “I am sorry I could not stay for the celebration. I am sure it would have been grand.”

“It will be, and there will be celebration enough where you are going.”

“True,” Morgan slipped from the embrace pausing at the last to clasp hands with her friend and surrogate mother. “Farewell.” Amber nodded and bit her lip, blinking away tears. As she turned away, the girl in her curled up in the heart of the young woman she had finally become. With a deep breath, she took the few steps necessary to deliver her to the shattered continent.

The first time Morgan had traveled by way of portal, she had been an energetic ball of curiosity. The sensitivity that ten years of initiation had honed and trained had been naked and unbound, allowing her to glimpse something of the portal’s nature. It had taken much of her training to translate that experience into words she could use to question her elders about it. Even now, the answers she had received provoked much thought. It was far simpler to experience than to explain. On stepping into the portal, it appeared as if a fine, luminous mist suddenly surrounded her, while at the same time her body went numb and her mind pounded with the hammer of exhausted sleep. As when she fell asleep upright in her chair, she lurched back to wakefulness and stumbled forward out of the mist. Her heart raced as she remembered hanging, for an instant that seemed to last forever, over a terrible abyss. In her gut she sensed that she had literally gone nowhere, from which it seemed plausible enough that she might go anywhere her momentum might carry her. As near as she could tell the entire secret to the gates, apart from going nowhere, was to impart the momentum necessary for an object to resurface at the proper somewhere.

Not for the first time she hoped fervently that the trick of going nowhere was as difficult to accomplish as it was to comprehend. Otherwise she might fear slipping out of reality at every turn.

If nothing else, her experience with portals over the years had taught her how to traverse them without outwardly losing her composure. No one needed to sluice the dais upon her arrival, for which the portal sentries could hardly contain their gratitude. Stepping from the damp stone, over the grating that ringed it, she left the round courtyard and entered the city of Dragon’s Gate.